



## THE US GRANT

# *A Journey of Grandeur*

History begins thousands of years ago with the Kumeyaay Tribes of Indians who lived peacefully and quietly in small villages throughout the San Diego region from areas of Baja to north of Escondido and including what is now downtown San Diego. The Kumeyaay first encountered Europeans with the arrival of Juan Cabrillo who anchored his ship in San Diego Bay in **1542** before setting off to the north for exploration of a wild and untamed California. Life for these local tribes grew steadily worse as Spanish acquisition approached and the eventual Mexican-American wars of **1848** decreased their population from 30,000 to 3,000. By 1850, treaties had been negotiated with 18 California Tribes to set aside land but were never ratified by the United States Senate as a result of opposition by the State of California.

In **1875**, President Ulysses S. Grant passed an executive order setting aside 640 acres of land in Dehesa Valley in East County for the Kumeyaay Tribes. In **1891**, the United States government officially recognized the sovereign status of these California Indian tribes by passing the “Act for the Relief of the Mission Indians”.

On **April 15th, 1867**, after a long journey south, the San Francisco steamer “*Pacific*” set anchor in San Diego Bay at the foot of Fifth Avenue, currently the location of the magnificent San Diego Convention Center. Among the weary passengers carried to land from the ship on the backs of the crew was San Francisco merchant, Alonzo E. Horton. Gazing across the bayside property encrusted with sagebrush and fleas, Horton exclaimed “*I Have Found Heaven on Earth*”. With a keen vision of the future, Alonzo Horton paid \$265.00 on **May 10<sup>th</sup> of 1867** at an auction for 960 acres for what is now downtown thus sealing his destiny as the “Father of New Town San Diego”. At that time, the hub of San Diego was located north in what is now called “*Old Town*” a colorful collection of historic buildings dating to the Spanish Rancheros and filled with shops and restaurants. In a development strategy designed to maximize real estate sales, Horton laid out a grid of streets one forth the size of standard city blocks with no alleys so he would have more corner lots to sell.

In **1870**, Horton opened San Diego’s first luxury hotel, The Horton House situated across from the main town square on D Street (now Broadway) between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Avenues. This 3 story wood structure was the finest accommodation south of Los Angeles and operated under the Horton Family until **August of 1895** when it was purchased for \$56,251 by Fannie Chaffee Grant, wife of Ulysses S. Grant Jr. and the only daughter of a wealthy Colorado Senator. Mrs. Grant Jr. had encouraged her husband to move west with their 3-daughters after Ulysses’ suffered multiple financial setbacks in banking investments with his father. Fannie also suffered from respiratory ailments so the move to California allowed the family an opportunity to start fresh on several levels. In **1897**, Mrs. Grant drew a will deeding the Horton House to her husband to secure its ownership in the Grant Family.

After 35 years in operation, The Horton House was demolished on **July 12, 1905** to make way for the dreams of Ulysses Grant Jr. to build a luxury hotel in memory of his father, the 18<sup>th</sup> President of the United States and a Civil War hero. Among those in attendance as the Horton House was torn down was 91 year old Alonzo Horton. He, along with two other dignitaries who had originally helped him lay the first cornerstones, were the first to remove two ceremonial bricks at the beginning of the demolition of his prize hotel. Work progressed on the hotel until **April 6, 1906** when the San Francisco earthquake wreaked havoc on that great city and paralyzed the west coast construction industry as all building supplies were routed north to rebuild the stricken town. Coupled with financial troubles, work on the US Grant stopped completely until **1908** when financier Louis J. Wilde came to the rescue and assembled a group of financial backers and construction was resumed.

In **1909**, the white Italian marble arrived for installation on the almost finished Grand Staircase and the final construction contract was signed confirming that full completion was at hand. Wilde later became one of San Diego's first mayors who actively promoted downtown development. So influential was Wilde that the main boulevard bisecting the city was widened at the west side of the hotel so that guests would enjoy a better view of the bay and sunsets over Point Loma.

On **October 15th, 1910**, a vast majority of San Diego's 20,000 residents assembled for the Grand Opening of the Harrison Albright designed 437-room US Grant Hotel. At a then staggering cost of \$1.9 million, the hotel included 350 rooms each with private baths and received worldwide acclaim for its grandeur and modern conveniences. Among the lavish amenities was garden terrace above the lobby, the Palm Court that is now the site of the Hotels Grand Ballroom. Also featured were a magnificent 9<sup>th</sup> floor ballroom with twin garden terrace on both the west and east wing roofs (long since converted to guest rooms) and the Bivouac Grill (now the Pavilion Ballroom). The lower level included two large salt-water swimming tanks fed by a waterline running down Broadway to the bay. There were shower baths, ladies hair drying rooms and lockers, disrobing apartments, billiards and more. On the ground floor, a lavish marble and onyx "Ladies Foyer" provided these guests their own private access to the hotel via its own vestibule.

Coinciding with the opening of the US Grant, a new electric fountain was dedicated in Horton Plaza, across from the hotel. This gift to the citizens of San Diego, designed by famed architect Irving Gill was in commemoration of the opening of the grand hotel and still stands today. Thomas Edison supervised the electrical installation of this unique fountain.

For the gala opening festivities, guests dined on such extravagant items as Medallions of Caviar, Consommé Royal, and Sweetbreads Sous Clouche. Angelotti's Hungarian Orchestra played *Stars & Stripes Forever* recently written by a new young composer, John Philip Sousa. Guests danced to the strains of *The Beautiful Blue Danube* written by another new composer, a young Mr. Strauss. All this and more were enjoyed at the extravagant price of \$5.00 per guest. Absent from the festivities was Ulysses Grant Jr. who was called away on business in New York but sent a telegram of congratulations.

Having been a widower for several years with the passing of Fannie in **1909** almost one year earlier to the day of the hotel's opening, Ulysses Grant Jr. secretly re-married a young San Diego widowed socialite named Miss America Workman Will. In **1913** the two moved into a 6<sup>th</sup> floor suite at the hotel until **1919**. That same year, Mr. Baron Long an Indiana entrepreneur and co-developer of the Agua-Caliente Hotel and Spa in Tijuana, acquired partial interest and ownership in the hotel. Long effectively controlled the property during the 1920's and 1930's and made the best use of his association with Agua-Caliente during the Prohibition era.

During this same period, Long had interests in the Biltmore in Los Angeles and the two properties were sometimes marketed together. Mr. Long also held ownership on many large parcels of ranch land in the region one of which was later purchased by the Los CoOjejos Band of Indians for re-settlement. In **1915**, the world came to San Diego with the opening of the Pan-Pacific Exposition built on a site of barren mesas east of downtown. This collection of Spanish Renaissance structures is now home to beautiful Balboa Park and hosts the largest collection of museums in a single urban setting in the United States. Dignitaries of the exposition stayed at the US Grant while enjoying the celebration of the opening of the Panama Canal for which the exposition was designed to commemorate.

On **September 19th, 1919**, President Woodrow Wilson addressed a crowd of over 50,000 in Balboa Stadium (now part of City College) and marked the first time a US President utilized a loudspeaker in a public venue. Following the address, the President and Mrs. Wilson attended a banquet in their honor at the US Grant. In the late **1930's**, station KFWW began radio broadcasts from massive twin towers erected on the roof of the hotel that were, at that time, the largest on the west coast.

In **1927**, Baron Long proudly re-opened the elaborately redesigned lower level of the hotel, which featured the Italian Room (now the Crystal) with its own private entrance from Third Avenue.

Also unveiled were the Louis XVI Room (now the Regency) and the Plata Real Club (formerly the Bivouac Club) and now the Pavilion. The Georgian room played host as the Men's Smoking Lounge and remains today a signature venue.

**April 1927** marked the completion of Charles Lindberg's "*Spirit of St. Louis*" airplane built at the Ryan Aeronautical Company in San Diego. Lindberg made his accommodations at the US Grant during this period before making his historical flight from New York to Paris on May 21st, **1927**. A replica of his plane now hangs in Terminal Two of the San Diego International Airport at Lindberg Field. In **1929**, at the age of 77, Ulysses S. Grant Jr. passed away while still in residence at the hotel. His widow, America Workman Will Grant remained in the hotel until her death in **1942**.

The Great Depression of **1930** brought hardship to many and guests of the Grant were greeted with a sign mounted on the Broadway entrance reading

*Good Morning!*  
*Breakfast is now ready in the coffee shop.*  
*Ham, Eggs, Hash Brown Potatoes and Coffee*  
*29 cents*

With the end of Prohibition on **March 5th, 1933** San Diegans staged a wild party at the hotel with huge crowds spilling on to the sidewalks while the hotel band played *Happy Days are Here Again*.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt opened the California Pacific International Exposition in Balboa Park on **October 2, 1935** and later addressed the national media from the 11<sup>th</sup> floor radio station atop the US Grant Hotel where he also stayed. With on the onset of World War II, the hotel was pressed into service in **1940** as portions of the guest accommodations were used as quarters for servicemen and their families. Due to constant crowding, blankets were sold in the lobby for persons willing to sleep in the hallways.

San Diego had become a key military base for the Navy and Marine Corp. and security to guard the United States against attacks from the Japanese included secret bunkers built along the bluffs of Point Loma and mandated citywide blackouts. The former Plata Real Club was now called "The Little Club" and became San Diego's hot spot and a place to put aside the stress and fears of the war while enjoying lively swing bands and saucy singers from Hollywood.

With the end of World War II, the hotel and San Diego entered a 'status quo' era of casual business and leisurely travelers. Many World War II servicemen and their families retired to San Diego and the new developments of east and North County. **1956** saw the visit of Ulysses S. Grant IV, son of the hotels original developer, who stayed at his Grandfather's namesake property.

**1956** ushered in the boom of tourism in San Diego and the hotel jumped into the mix by expanding its meeting space and renovating the hotel. The famous Palm Court was removed from the roof of the lobby and replaced with the spacious and modern Palm Ballroom. The famous fountain from the courtyard was relocated to the Agua-Caliente Racetrack and the palm trees were planted at the Del Mar Fairgrounds. A total hotel renovation unveiled a modern 50's style property conducive to the automobile traveler and family vacationer. During an **October 1960** visit to San Diego, First Lady Mamie Eisenhower attended a fashion show in the fashionable Palm Ballroom.

By the late **1960's** the Grant Grill, which opened in 1951, still prohibited women from dining in the restaurant before 3:00 PM. On **June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1969**, six women stage an "invasion" of the Grill at lunch changing forever the assumed privacy of this men's only lunch club. The order of the day for all six women was the Grant Grill's famous Mock Turtle Soup – still a standard today. In **1995**, the women were reunited at the Grant Grill to receive and acknowledge a plaque in their honor to commemorate their courage.

In **1979**, at 69 years old, both the hotel and downtown San Diego had fallen on hard times. The managing director of that era included marketing efforts for extended stay accommodations to the retired socialites of San Diego as an alternate to retirement housing. Slated for the wrecking ball, the hotel was purchased by Christopher Sickles of the CDS Grant Corporation who quickly announced plans for a major renovation. In July of that same year, the US Grant received recognition and admission in the *National Register of Historic Sites*, the first hotel in San Diego to achieve such an honor. After 72 years of operation, the US Grant closed its doors in **August 1982**. While deciding on plans of the hotel, Sickles allowed the Navy to use the building for military housing for almost a year. When the city of San Diego announced plans for a massive inner city re-development project encompassing 12 city blocks, Sickles also announced plans for an unprecedented \$80+ million renovation to coincide with the development of the Horton Plaza Shopping and Entertainment complex. The Plaza opened in **1985** immediately winning numerous architectural awards and heralding the rebirth of downtown.

On **December 15th, 1985** the US Grant officially reopened with a re-dedication on **January 9th, 1986** and a grand ball on **January 11th**. In attendance at the ball, owner Christopher Sickles entertained San Diego pioneer families including the Luce, Evans, Fletcher and Cowling Families.

Menu items included the famous Mock Turtle Soup, Prawns Ulysses and Veal Medallions Madeira. The famous Grant Grill re-opened on **January 20th** of that same year and assumed its role as the city's power lunch spot. Traditional Afternoon Tea service returned to the grand lobby and elegance reigned supreme at 4<sup>th</sup> and Broadway.

Among the many changes from the re-opening, the Grant now featured 285 spacious accommodations, many of which are suites. In addition to guest room changes, a modern infrastructure of plumbing, heating electrical and air conditioning was completed. Restoration of original features and enhancements of grand spaces created the glittering Grand Lobby of today and the beautiful Grand Ballroom, formerly the Palm Ballroom.

Over 1000 yards of silk and damask and 1400 yards of cotton wall coverings were imported from France and England for the project. Eight types of decorative wood were integrated including Black Maple used in the Horton Rooms, Carpathian Elm Burl used in the elevator cabs, Red Alder to line the walls of Georgian Room and American Walnut for the Wine Cellar. Elaborate stonework was installed including 150 tons of marble that was purchased from countries including Spain, South America, Italy and Greece. A single one-ton block of black marble was used in the Grant lounge alone costing over \$50,000.

Although its restoration was acclaimed, financial difficulties troubled the hotel since it re-opening and on **December 31st, 1993**, Annapolis Maryland based Grand Heritage Hotels International acquired the property. A \$1 million refurbishment of public space and meetings rooms was completed by early **1994**. That same year, the hotel became the 104<sup>th</sup> member of the elite *Historic Hotels of America Program* under the auspices of the congressionally chartered *National Trust for Historic Preservation*.

In **1995**, the Grant Grill won an unprecedented fifth consecutive Gold Medallion Award of Excellence as San Diego's finest hotel dining room. **1995** also saw the hotel featured in the book "Great American Haunts" published by British Author Robin Mead. Stories of supernatural sightings (usually of Fannie Chaffee Grant) include the Crystal and Regency Rooms on the lower level. **December 31st, 1999** marked the hotels passing into the next millennium at the stately age of 89. Former President Jimmy Carter attended his Naval Academy Class of 1947 reunion at the US Grant in the fall of **2000**.

In June of **2001**, Wyndham International purchased the US Grant and \$5 million in up-grades were completed by the end of the year. **2003** saw the hotel play host to Tiffany, Forbes and Cannon among others during one of the NFL's most successful Superbowls in history. At kick-off time on **January 26th** the temperature on the field at Qualcomm Stadium was a beautiful 75 degrees.

On **December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2003**, the Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Indians purchased the hotel for \$45 million dollars and this unique parcel of land came full circle with land ownership returning to its original ancestors. In an opulent setting amidst the back-drop of the grand lobby's magnificent chandeliers, the regal US Grant marked the closing of her doors for only the second time in 94 years on January 31, 2005 with an elegant luncheon attended by San Diego's most important civic and hospitality leaders. Now embarking on a multi million-dollar project to enhance the already magnificent property, the hotel has assembled an international team of designers, architects and craftsmen who will ensconce the hotel in a cloak of elegance and luxury that cannot be found nor replicated in the region. By **2006**, the hotel will re-open and debut in the Starwood Hotels Luxury Collection, currently numbering less than a dozen in North America. By joining the likes of The Palace in San Francisco, The Phoenician in Arizona and The Princeville in Hawaii, The US Grant, built by a son to honor his father, and now owned by a nation who settled the land on which she reigns, will set the standard of hospitality and grandeur for all of Southern California.