

Nobody Asked Me, But... No. 172: Hotel History: Bibles in Hotel Rooms

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For the past one hundred years, if you opened the nightstand drawer in almost any hotel room in the U.S., you would find a bible placed there by an evangelical organization known as Gideon's International. The oldest Christian business professional men's association, the Gideons have been around for more than one hundred years and have been placing bibles in hotel rooms for almost that long. A recent survey by STR found that the percentage of hotels that offer religious materials in guestrooms has dropped over the past decade from 95% in 2006 to 79.9% in 2016.

The Gideons got their start in a hotel room on September 14, 1898, in Boscobel, Wisconsin. The manager of the Central Hotel asked traveling salesman John H. Nicholson of Janesville, Wis., and Samuel E. Hill of Beloit, Wis., to share a room in a crowded hotel, which was hosting a lumbermen's convention. When the two men discovered that they were both Christians, they read the bible and talked about starting a Christian traveling men's association. On July 1, 1899, the two salesmen, joined by a third, William J. Knights, met in Janesville and founded Gideon International.

The Gideons first put bibles at the front desk of the hotels its members stayed in, but it was not until 1908 that they began to place bibles in all hotel rooms. Within 20 years of the first placement of a Gideon bible in a hotel room, the Gideons distributed one million bibles. Because the Gideons so quickly became associated with hotel room bibles, the

organization has, at times, had to remind its members that the bibles are but a means to an end, not an end in themselves. The sole purpose for the group is to win men, women, boys and girls “to a saving knowledge of the Lord, Jesus Christ through personal witnessing” and the distribution of bibles.

According to its website (www.gideonsinternational.org), the Gideons have distributed two billion bibles in more than 100 languages to 200 countries, territories and possessions across the globe. Evangelical churches of many denominations support the Gideons’s work of distributing bibles, not only to hotels but also to hospitals and doctors’ offices, jails and prisons, elementary and high schools, colleges and military bases.

Of course, the bedside bible has seen its share of non-religious use. In many cases, motel guests have desecrated the pages and used them as a scratchpad. Ready at hand, it provides a handy repository for all sorts of items that should normally stay out of view. In a pinch thieves use it to hide their money. It’s a perfect place to hide a couple of marijuana joints and makes a great container for a revolver if you carve out the pages.

When the bibles are taken or become too worn, the local Gideon branch will replace them at no charge. Often when a new hotel opens, bibles are given to the housekeeping department which places one in each room. The covers of the New Testaments distributed by the Gideons are color-coded based on which groups they are meant for. Some properties have begun offering other religious books in their hotel rooms, such as The Book of Mormon in Marriott properties or Buddhist religious texts in Nikko properties.

In 2007, Scandic Hotels announced it would remove bibles from its 130 hotels. A spokeswoman said, “We have traditionally had the bible/New Testament available at our local rooms. But all religions are welcome at Scandic so as of today we encourage all our hotels to remove the bible from their rooms.”

In New York City’s Soho Grand Hotel, bibles have never been offered. Similarly, the Borgata Hotel Casino & Spa in Atlantic City declined to accept bibles from Gideon.

On July 1, 1999, *USA Today*, in an article, “Gideon Bible Reflects How Hotels Have Fallen Behind The Times” wrote:

“A lot has changed on the religious canvas, but this aspect of hotel decoration has not kept up. For example:

- Detroit has one of the largest Muslin populations in the United States. Yet, both the Ritz Carlton and Hyatt Regency Hotels place only the Gideon Bible in their drawers.
- Middlesex County, N.J., has seen one of the highest influxes of Indians and Pakistanis in the Northeast. Their religion is generally Hindu or Muslim. Yet, neither the Sheraton nor the Clarion Hotels in Edison, N.J., stock the sacred religious literature of

Muslims or Hindus.

- Major hotels in the metropolitan New York region, with a Jewish population equal to that of Tel Aviv, generally provide only the Christian version of the bible.”

Despite this growing diversity, not all faiths desire such a widespread distribution. In an article by Edwin McDowell of the *New York Times*, Abdul-Rahman Osmam, the senior imam of the Islamic Center of New York, expressed his concern about placing the Muslim Koran in motel rooms: “Guests may take it into the bathroom or some other improper place.” He explained that most Muslims memorize the opening chapter.

More recently, some new hotel brands have opted not to place bibles in their bedside nightstands:

-two years ago, Travelodge hotels in Great Britain removed bibles from their rooms “in order not to discriminate against any religion,” the company said. Still, the hotels kept copies at the front desk where guests could borrow them on request

-the parent company of Travelodge, the Wyndham Hotel Group, said the company does not require bibles in any of its 15 hotel brands worldwide

-At Marriott International, which was founded by a devout Mormon, a decision was made this year to keep bibles and Book of Mormon out of four new brands, AC, Moxy, Protea and Edition hotels

-InterContinental Hotel Group, the giant British company that operates the Holiday Inn brand, does not require managers of its more than 5,000 hotels in nearly 100 countries to put bibles in each room.

On December 4, 2016, in the *Los Angeles Times*, Hugo Martin wrote, “More Hotels Are Checking Out of the Bible Business”:

“When the ultra-hip Moxy Hotel opens in San Diego, next year, the rooms will be stocked with the usual amenities – an alarm clock, hair dryer, writing desk and flat-screen TV.

But you won’t find a Bible in the nightstand.

Marriott International, the world’s largest hotel company, supplies a Bible and the Book of Mormon in the rooms of every other hotel in the franchise. But the company has recently decided that no religious materials should be offered at two of its newest millennial-oriented hotel brands, Moxy and Edition hotels.

“It’s because the religious books don’t fit the personality of the brands,” said Marriott spokeswoman Felicia Farrar McLemore, explaining that the Moxy and

Edition hotels are geared toward fun-loving millennials.

Marriott's decision mirrors others in the industry who are quietly phasing out the long-held tradition of stocking religious material in hotel rooms..."

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These days, when the world's bestselling book is immediately available on one's personal digital device, a hotel room without a bible will hardly be noticed.

About Stanley Turkel's Books

- [Great American Hoteliers: Pioneers of the Hotel Industry](#) (2009)
During the thirty years prior to the Civil War, Americans built hotels larger and more ostentatious than any in the rest of the world. These hotels were inextricably intertwined with American culture and customs but were accessible to average citizens. Stephen Rushmore writes in the Foreword: "Drawing from more than 40 years of industry experience including managing some of the largest New York City hotels, Turkel captures the spirit of each of these pioneers and relates their achievements to important lessons that we can learn from."
- [Built To Last: 100+ Year-Old Hotels in New York](#) (2011)
These thirty-two featured hotels have defied the passage of time for a variety of reasons, many explicable, some beyond explanation, all miraculous. Bjorn Hanson, Ph.D. writes in the Foreword: "Stanley Turkel is unique in his passion about the history of the United States lodging industry; he pursues and shares this passion by compiling information about great hoteliers and hotels for articles, updates for his clients, and this, the second of his two hotel books."
- [Built To Last: 100+ Year-Old Hotels East of the Mississippi](#) (2013)
All the eighty-six hotels featured in this book have unique and singular stories describing their creation, survival and revival. The book contains eighty-six antique postcard illustrations and a Foreword by Joseph McInerney, President and CEO Emeritus of the American Hotel & Lodging Association.
- [Hotel Mavens: Lucius M. Boomer, George C. Boldt and Oscar of the Waldorf](#) (2014)
Hotel Mavens tells the interesting stories of the following pioneers and the hotels they built and operated:
 - *Lucius Boomer, one of the most famous hoteliers of his time, was Chairman of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel Corporation.*

- *George C. Boldt who was the genius of the original Waldorf-Astoria. It was said of him that he made innkeeping a profession and, more than any man, was the creator of the modern American hotel.*
- *Oscar of the Waldorf was the superstar of his time and one of the stalwarts who managed both the original and the current Waldorf-Astoria.*

Sam Roberts in the [New York Times](#) wrote:

*"Nostalgia for the city's caravansaries will be kindled by Stanley Turkel's **Hotel Mavens: Lucius M. Boomer, George C. Boldt and Oscar of the Waldorf**".*

The fact-filled book by Mr. Turkel, an industry consultant, explains, among other things, the history of the hyphen (recently excised) in the name of the Waldorf Astoria, which inspired a mid-block street and even a song.

- [Great American Hoteliers Volume 2: Pioneers of the Hotel Industry](#) (2016) Lawrence P. Horwitz, Executive Director, Historic Hotels of America, writes in the Foreword: *"This book is an excellent history book with insights into seventeen of the great innovators and visionaries of the hotel industry and their inspirational stories."*

These important and largely unknown biographies include Stewart William Bainum, Curtis Leroy Carlson, Cecil Burke Day, Louis Jacob Dinkler, Eugene Chase Eppley, Roy C. Kelley, Arnold S. Kirkeby, Julius Manger, Robert R. Meyer, Albert Pick, Jr., Jay Pritzker, Harris Rosen, Ian Schrager, Vernon B. Stouffer, William Cornelius Van Horne, Robert E. Woolley, and Stephen Allen Wynn.

All of these books can be ordered from AuthorHouse by visiting www.stanleyturkel.com and clicking on the book's title.

If You Need an Expert Hotel Witness:

For the past twenty-four years I have served as an expert witness in more than 40 hotel-related cases.

My extensive hotel operating experience is beneficial in cases involving:

- hurricane damage and/or business interruption cases
- slip and fall accidents
- wrongful deaths
- fire and carbon monoxide injuries
- franchise/franchisor disputes

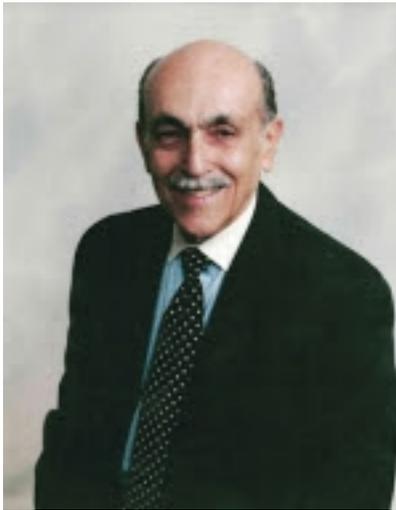
- management contract disputes

I have been designated as the 2015 and 2014 Historian of the Year by Historic Hotels of America, the official program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Don't hesitate to call me on [917-628-8549](tel:917-628-8549) to discuss any potential litigation support assignments.

Tags: [stanley turkel](#), [hotel history](#), [nobody asked me](#)

About Stanley Turkel



Stanley Turkel was designated as the 2015 and the 2014 Historian of the Year by Historic Hotels of America, the official program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. This award is presented to an individual for making a unique contribution in the research and presentation of hotel history and whose work has encouraged a wide discussion and a greater understanding and enthusiasm for American History.

Turkel is a well-known consultant in the hotel industry. He operates his hotel consulting practice serving as an expert witness in hotel-related cases, providing asset management and hotel franchising consultation. He is certified as a Master Hotel Supplier Emeritus by the Educational Institute of the American Hotel and Lodging Association.

Stanley Turkel is one of the most widely-published authors in the hospitality field. More than 275 articles on various hotel subjects have been posted in hotel magazines and on the Hotel-Online, BlueMauMau, HotelNewsResource and eTurboNews websites. Two of his hotel books have been promoted, distributed and sold by the American Hotel &

Lodging Educational Institute (“Great American Hoteliers: Pioneers of the Hotel Industry” and “Built To Last: 100+ Year-Old Hotels East of the Mississippi”). A third hotel book (“Built To Last: 100+ Year-Old Hotels in New York”) was called "passionate and informative" by the *New York Times*. His fourth hotel book was described by the *New York Times*: “Nostalgia for the City’s caravansaries will be kindled by Stanley Turkel’s... fact-filled... “Hotel Mavens: Lucius M. Boomer, George C. Boldt and Oscar of the Waldorf”. In his fifth hotel book, “Great American Hoteliers Volume 2: Pioneers of the Hotel Industry”, Lawrence P. Horwitz, Executive Director, Historic Hotels of America writes in the Foreword:

“The author, Stanley Turkel is a great story teller.... This book is about risk takers, dreamers, inventors, entrepreneurs, innovators, visionaries, leaders and motivators. This is a collection of stories about hotel pioneers with a passion for inventing new ways to create demand for their product.”

All of these books can be ordered from the publisher (AuthorHouse) by visiting www.stanleyturkel.com.

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