

Nobody Asked Me, But...No. 174: Hotel History: Chelsea Hotel (1884); My Five Published Books; Attorneys Take Note

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by Stanley Turkel, CMHS

Stanley Bard, manager and part owner of the Chelsea Hotel in Manhattan for more than 40 years, passed away on February 14, 2017 at 82 years of age. His obituary in the *New York Times* by Sam Roberts called Bard “a Robin Hood of innkeepers who nurtured talented writers and artists and tolerated assorted deadbeats...”

The history of the Chelsea Hotel, before, during and after the Bard family’s operation is so fascinating and unique that I will quote selectively from my book “Built To Last: 100+ Year-Old Hotels in New York” (AuthorHouse 2011):

The Chelsea Hotel (1884)

The Iconic Artist Hideaway, Like No Other

The Chelsea Hotel is world-renowned as a residence for artists, writers, actors, and other characters who live on the cutting edge of society. The Chelsea has always been a center of artistic, cultural and bohemian activity. Built as one of the city’s first cooperative apartment houses in 1884, the Chelsea became a hotel in 1905. The Chelsea’s architect was Philip Hubert of Hubert and Pirsson.

This was no ordinary architectural firm. Philip Gengembre Hubert, a French-American, used his mother’s maiden name upon emigrating to the United States. He was a broad-based, creative man who financed his architectural studies with the income from his many patents one of which was for the first self-fastening button which he sold to the U.S. Army. In 1879, Hubert formed a partnership with James L. Pirsson and together they created the cooperative experiment, known as the Hubert Home Clubs. Their first project was the Rembrandt, a Home Club residence for artists on West 57th Street adjacent to the yet-to-be-built Carnegie Hall.

In “*New York, New York: How the Apartment House Transformed the Life of the City (1869-1930)*” Elizabeth Hawes writes,

“To the members of a Home Club, Hubert, Pirsson and Company proposed sharing far more than the controversial common roof. Under the terms of a cooperative home association, as it was formally known, tenants- “a number of gentlemen of congenial tastes, and occupying the same social positions in life”- formed a club, or joint stock company, to share the cost of land and a building, with each associate receiving a proprietary lease on a suite appropriate to his investment, and with an excess of suites to be rented to pay the mortgage and running expenses...”

In concept, Hubert Home Clubs were designed for the wealthy. Hubert had learned from experience that people of limited means could not enter into an arrangement that called for assets and economic risks. His first building, plain but substantial structure in a neighborhood of clerks, had been planned for the moderate middle classes, but it filled with well-to-do entrepreneurs.

Hubert Home Cooperative Clubs, therefore, were regarded as suitable replacements for private houses. Hubert was an enthusiastic supporter of the economist Henry George who challenged the accepted economic theory with his best-selling book *Progress and Poverty* in 1879. Hubert’s designs for cooperative apartment buildings included many new ideas:

- The first fireproof plaster blocks to reduce the chance of fire
- A self-propelling elevator
- Cold-air boxes to preserve food
- A fireproof mansard roof
- A summer roof garden where fountains and sprinklers kept tiles cool
- A device for burning vegetable refuse
- Bedsteads that were designed with steampipes in place of slats which were connected to steam coils for heat
- Bulk purchases of ice and coal to save money for tenants

Hubert’s Chelsea Hotel is a 12-story bearing-wall structure which has been called Victorian Gothic but its style is hard to define. It was the tallest building in New York until 1899. The most prominent exterior features are the delicate floral filigree iron balconies from the foundry of the Cornell Brothers on Center Street. The Chelsea was elaborately designed with gables, dormers and wide red brick chimneys. Inside, the chosen materials were polished hardwood floors and doors, marble and onyx. The original Chelsea had a barbershop, restaurant, maid service, artists studios, a large roof garden and one hundred apartments, seventy owned by cooperators and thirty rented out. Evening concerts were held in the summer in the fireproof roof garden.

The apartments were large (from three to twelve rooms) and decorated according to the desires of the individual tenants. Servants quarters were available but few apartments had full kitchens. Christopher Gray, the eminent architectural historian wrote in his *New York Times* Streetscapes column (February 15, 1998):

“In 1885, the *Real Estate Record and Guide* said that many of the apartments were owned by tradesmen and suppliers on the project “who were persuaded” to take them in lieu of money- apparently under duress...The bloom of the co-op movement wilted in 1885 as several failed, and new legislation severely restricted construction of tall apartment houses... Around 1900 the building began to shift toward transient occupancy and the writer O. Henry stayed there for a short time in 1907. In 1912, Titanic survivors with second-class tickets stayed at the Chelsea for a few days.”

The Chelsea has a roster of famous guests like no other hotel in the United States. Because of its long list of famous guests and residents, the hotel has a singular history, valued both as a birthplace of creative modern art and by personal tragedies in the public news.

For example, Sir Arthur C. Clarke wrote “2001: A Space Odyssey” while staying at the Chelsea and poets Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso and Martin Matz chose it as a suitable environment for intellectual discussions. It is also known as the place where the Irish writer Dylan Thomas died of alcohol poisoning on November 9, 1953 and where Nancy Spungen, girlfriend of Sid Vicious of the Sex Pistols, was found stabbed to death on October 12, 1978. Charles R. Jackson, author of “The Lost Weekend” committed suicide in his room on September 21, 1968.

The Chelsea Hotel has provided a home for the following:

- Literary Artists: Mark Twain, William S. Burroughs, Arnold Weinstein, Leonard Cohen, John Patrick Kennedy, Quentin Crisp, Gore Vidal, Tennessee Williams, Jack Kerouac (who wrote “On the Road” there), Robert Hunter, Brendan Behan, Eugene O’Neill, Simone de Beauvoir, Robert Oppenheimer, Jean-Paul Sartre, Thomas Wolfe, Jan Cremer and Rene Picard. Arthur Miller and Marilyn Monroe lived at the Chelsea as a married couple. “The Chelsea, whatever else it was, was a house of infinite toleration.” Arthur Miller once wrote.
- Actors and Film Directors: Stanley Kubrick, Shirley Clarke, Dave Hill, Milos Foreman, Lillie Langtry, Ethan Hawke, Dennis Hopper, Eddie Izzard, Kevin O’Connor, Uma Thurman, Elliott Gould, Elaine Stritch, Jane Fonda, Edie Sedgwick and Sarah Bernhardt.
- Musicians: Much of the Chelsea’s history has been shaped by the following musicians who stayed there: The Grateful Dead, Tom Waits, Patti Smith, Virgil Thomson, Bob Dylan, Alice Cooper, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, Canned Heat, Rufus Wainwright, Abdullah Ibrahim, Vasant Rai, Madonna, Falco, Ryan Adams, The Fuse, Michael McDermott and The Libertines.
- Visual Artists: The Hotel has collected and displayed the work of many visual artists including Jackson Pollack, Larry Rivers, Robert M. Lambert, Brett Whiteley, Christo, John Sloan, Arman, Richard Bernstein, Francisco Clemente, Ching ho Cheng, David Remfry, Philip Taaffe, Michele Zalopany, Ralph Gibson, Rene Shapshak, Robert Mapplethorpe, Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, Robert Crumb, Jasper Johns, Claes Oldenburg, William De Koonig, John Dahlberg and Henri Cartier-Bresson. Painter and ethnomusicologist Harry Everett Smith lived and died at the Chelsea in Room 328. The painter Alphaeus Philemon Cole lived there for 34 years until his death in 1988 at age 112, when he was the oldest living man. Bohemian abstract and Pop art painter Susan Olmetti creates paintings outside on the sidewalk during her frequent summer residences at the hotel.
- Fashion Designers: Charles James, one of the best-known couturiers of the 1940s and 1950s, lived at the Chelsea from 1964 until he died of pneumonia in 1978; New York fashion designer Zaldy who was Michael Jackson’s chief costume designer for the London “This Is It” show and who designed the shroud for Jackson’s coffin.
- Andy Warhol Superstars: Warhol directed “Chelsea Girls” in 1966, a film about his factory regulars and their experiences at the Chelsea. Some of the Warhol scene regulars included Edie Sedgwick, Viva, Ultra Violet, Mary Woronov, Holly Woodlawn, Andrea Feldman, Nico, Paul America and Brigid Berlin. Valerie Solanas shot Warhol at the Factory at 33 Union Square, just a few blocks from the Chelsea.

Films:

- Arena TV series Chelsea Hotel (1981) an edition of the popular BBC arts documentary series
- Nine ½ Weeks (1986) by Adrian Lyne
- Sid & Nancy (1986) by Alex Cox
- Léon: The Professional (1994) by Luc Besson
- Midnight In Chelsea (1997) directed by Mark Pellington, a video to a track from the 1997 Jon Bon Jovi solo album Destination Anywhere
- Pie in the Sky: the Brigid Berlin Story (2002) features a reunion between former resident Brigid Berlin and the artist Richard Bernstein at the Hotel.
- The Interpreter (2005)
- Party Monster: The Shockumentary (1996) various people are mentioned to have lived in the hotel
- Chelsea Walls (2001) A movie about a new generation of artists living at the hotel.
- Hotel Chelsea (2009) A horror film about a Japanese couple staying at the hotel.

Books:

- Chelsea Horror Hotel: A Novel by Dee Dee Ramone
- Take the Cannoli: Stories From the New World by Sarah Vowell
- Sex by Madonna
- Legends of the Chelsea Hotel: Living with the Artists and Outlaws at New York’s Rebel Mecca by Ed Hamilton
- Netherland by Joseph O’Neill
- The Chelsea Girl Murders by Sparkle Hayter
- Ghost, A firsthand account into the world of paranormal activity by Katherine Ramsland
- Revelations, A Blue Bloods Novel by Melissa de la Cruz

On November 21, 1983, Maureen Dowd wrote in the *New York Times*,

“...The Victorian-Gothic hotel, which is registered as a national historic landmark, has a long history as a refuge for the creative. Mark Twain once held court in the opulent dining room. O’Henry checked in often, using a different name each time. In Room 829, Thomas Wolfe produced “The Web and the Rock” and “You Can’t Go Home Again,” often pacing the hallways for inspiration.....William Burroughs wrote

“Naked Lunch” there. The poet Edgar Lee Masters lived at the Chelsea for more than 20 years....”

At the center of the hotel’s Bohemian mood is Stanley Bard, the manager, who inherited his job and his passion for the Chelsea from his father, David who ran the hotel for many years. “There is not another building in the world that caters to this many creative people, There’s some mystique within these walls that helps people produce art.”

Mr. Bard takes a tolerant approach, fostering the feeling of an artist’s colony. He often lets his tenants, many of whom are down and out or up and coming, put off paying rent for months and even years. “I don’t ever want the Chelsea to turn into a normal place just in business to make money”, he said. “I want to keep the atmosphere kooky but nice, eccentric but beautiful.”

In 1946, David Bard, Joseph Gross and Julius Krauss jointly owned and managed the hotel until the early 70s. With the passing of Gross and Krauss, Stanley Bard, son of David Bard, assumed the management. At that time, the Bard family owned 58% of the hotel. The Chelsea was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1977. The switch in management is the culmination of a power struggle related to Stanley Bard’s efforts to increase his control among the shareholders who own the hotel. Under Stanley Bard, it became famous as a haven for artists and creative performers, and he was known to subsidize artists who were down in their luck... “This took 50 years of nurturing and development,” Mr. Bard said. “Everyone respected it- the cultural community, the people living there. That’s hard to create.”

In 1966, the Hotel Chelsea was designated as a Landmark by the Landmarks Preservation Commission which found that the Hotel Chelsea has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further found that, among its important qualities, the Chelsea Hotel was one of the pioneer Victorian Gothic apartment houses, that its unique array of balconies is an extremely attractive feature, and that it has always been noted as the home of famous writers and artists such as Thomas Wolfe and Dylan Thomas.

My Five Published Hotel 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: “Stanley Turkel is one of the best writers I know at capturing our history – the “old” – and infusing it with new life and relevance.”

- [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.

Attorneys Take Note:

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
- franchisee/franchisor disputes
- management contract disputes

Don't hesitate to call me on 917-628-8549 to discuss any hotel-related litigation support assignments.

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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 325 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 and clicking on the book title.

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