

REMINISCENCES OF EARLY DAYS IN NOGALES

Contributed by Jean Walker, July 10, 2025

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HOTEL TO GIVE PLACE TO A MODERN HOSTELRY SUGGEST BY DEMOLITION OF THE MONTEZUMA

Accosting Pioneer A. L. Peck of Nogales, Arizona, the editor of "The International" asked for reminiscences with the Nogales of the time the Montezuma Hotel was erected; and he found that worthy citizen a veritable mine of accurate and interesting information, which goes to make a very readable story:

Said Mr. Peck: "The Montezuma Hotel was built by Swan P. Nelson in 1887. I am confident of that for I and my bride were among the first guests registered in the new hotel in March, 1887. It was known then as the Nelson Hotel. At that time it was a two-story stone building with a Mansard roof under the eaves of which were some of the rooms-the third floor. It filled about one-half of the present frontage, on the north end.

"Joe Carbon and myself had a corral and feed yard in the lot on the north, and for a time a part of space back of the hotel was included in our premises. The firm name was Carbon & Peck. Later we extended our corral by occupying premises northward, and vacating the Nelson Hotel part. When the Breen building was built, on the premises occupied now by the Sonora Bank & Trust Company and Joe Berk's Modern store, an archway in the middle of the building led through into our corral.

"Among those who officiated for Nelson as clerk and bar tender were Clem McNair and Jim Blades. (Now get McNair's name correct: It was "Clem" not "Slim" as has been published.

"After John Nelson died, about 1900, the hotel passed to George Christ, who changed the name to Montezuma. In a vacant space on the south end of the property, Christ erected a one-story frame building which housed the kitchen and dining room. Christ conducted the hostelry several years, and then it passed to ownership of Robert Williams, who had conducted the Florence Hotel, in Pinal county, several years preceding. Williams took over the hotel about 1907. Bo J. Whiteside came to Nogales with Williams, and was his factotum several years-so long as he conducted the business. Mrs. Williams who was an accomplished caterer, set one of the best hotel tables in Arizona.

"Louis lager acquired the Montezuma from Williams, and the famous hostelry continued under lager management many years. Mrs. lager having been an accomplished hotel woman, and she was a good second to her husband, who was the first class Boniface. They tore away the frame

building on the south, and extended the main structure to fill all the space to the Brickwood property after they had acquired the Santa Rita Hotel at Tucson the lagers employed Mamie Donoghoe to conduct the Montezuma in their interest.

“Some years ago lager put the Montezuma into a corporation, which now owns the property, and with which present negotiations are had.

“Of those who were in Nogales when the Montezuma was completed and started as the Nelson Hotel,” and are yet alive, I can recall Capt. L. W. Mix, Thos. D. Cassanega, John Wilson, Pat Hannan, Charles Taylor, John C. Glissan, Doctor H. W. Purdy, T. L. Brown, Ignace Burgoon and myself. Theo Gebler and Doctor W. F. Chenoweth came here in 1888.

“The list of those who have ‘passed over’ would be much longer. I can recall John T. Brickwood, Chrlas Beck, W. N. Cumming, D. J. Cumming, L. Ephraim, J. D. Cumming, Doctor A. a. Doherty, Ramon Vasquez, Tom Johnes who had a hotel where the international drug store is now, James B. Mix, Louis Proto, Anton Proto, George w. Atkinson of Calabasa. Without doubt there could be added many names but they are beyond my recollection at the present moment.

“Doctor Purdy tells me that when the foundation of the old Nelson Hotel was laid, a number of intimates who played poker considerably, wrote their names on

a white chip, each, and deposited the six chips so inscribed in a small box underneath the corner stone of the structure. The receptacle contained also a few Mexican coins, and other articles. The deposit was put under the northeast corner. In demolition of the structure that collection should be secured and preserved. As recalled by Doctor Purdy the six chip contributors were Alexander Wambold, George Kitt, Col C. D. Poston, James Anderson, Frank Lawrence and himself. The genial medico is the sole surviving member of the sextette.”

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