

# The History of The Senate Luxury Suites.

## A Look Back...

The Senate Luxury Suites sits on land rich in Topeka history. On this site, famous pioneer railroad builder, Chief Engineer and later General Manager and Vice President of Santa Fe Railway, Albert A. Robinson built a magnificent home that became the center of the city's "social life." Mr. Robinson was responsible for 4,000 miles of the railroad's expansion. His mansion, constructed around 1886, was a design masterpiece of custom woods, glass and fabrics. After the deaths of Robinson and his wife, the home was sold and dismantled in 1922.

A few years later, Mrs. Nelle E. Peters, an architect from the Kansas City area, designed the existing buildings. The age of the apartment house had arrived in Topeka. The majority of the city's older apartment buildings date from this decade and were located on the downtown's west side, in the vicinity of 10<sup>th</sup> and Topeka Blvd. As stated in an article of the *Daily Capital*, Topeka's newspaper, May 30, 1928, most of the development was mainly that of multiple family dwellings. These were "being constructed on the most modern plan, embodying the finest architectural design and utmost convenience as found in the big apartment houses of Kansas City, Chicago, and New York." All of which, upon their opening, had a waiting list of prospective renters.

Topekans considered the "ritzest" to be the Capper Court Apartments. Three women were responsible for the design and management. Not only was it very unusual at that time for women to be involved in the business world, but it is interesting that these women were prominent in their fields. Mrs. Nelle E. Peters, who designed apartment houses in Kansas City's Country Club Plaza area, was the architect. Mrs. Z. L. Peterson of Kansas City was the owner and developer, and Mrs. W. L. Hinson managed the apartments. Having obtained permission from Kansas' two senatorial leaders Arthur Capper and Charles Curtis (who later became Vice President of the United States), to name the buildings for them, the most prestigious apartments opened in mid June of 1928. The Senate building followed a year or two later.

The Capper and Curtis buildings were built facing each other and being L-shaped formed a large courtyard. Each featured a two story ornate foyer with wood beamed ceilings arching overhead and heraldic emblems gracing the walls. The Curtis building foyer still boastfully displays the coat of arms emblem with the letters CC on it, depicting its name sake Charles Curtis. It also has the original pegged wooden steps leading from the foyer to the guestrooms.

Other unique architectural characteristics of the buildings include the stucco walled hallways with their inset mirrors, arched entry doors and guestroom doorways, wrought iron stair railings and opulent moldings. Each apartment featured a built in “Murphy” style bed that was concealed with French Doors. Above the entrance of both the Senate and Curtis buildings there is a central tower connecting the two wings of each building. The towers not only provide a focal point for each building, but provide for uniquely shaped balconies as well.

For many years the Capper Court Apartments, which included the Senate, Curtis and Capper buildings, were considered very “swanky” and the most illustrious of multifamily dwellings. As time consumed their graceful beauty, the “grandames” of Topeka settled into faded elegance. Newer and more “modern” apartment houses sprang up in the growing suburbs. Tudor was no longer considered the epitome of modern. The architecture of the ‘60s and ‘70s was definitely more streamlined. In the mid ‘80s there was an honorable attempt by a Wichita, KS developer to rescue and rehabilitate the old buildings. Although some renovations were completed, the project was halted due to financial problems. In the late ‘80s, a Topeka contractor was able salvage a page in history continuing where the project had left off.

Thus, after three and a half years of refurbishing, The Senate Luxury Suites emerged. Opening in the fall of 1991, the Senate and Curtis buildings were beautifully resurrected as Topeka’s most prestigious European style hotel. Although the Capper building no longer exists, the enchanting style of the original complex is consistent throughout our facility. Our courtyards are graced with lovely landscaping and life size bronze sculptures. Ensclosed in the retaining wall surrounding our property are stone gargoyles that were unearthed during excavation. They are believed to have been part of the A. A. Robinson estate. The Senate Luxury Suites offers the ultimate in charm, comfort, convenience and security. Locally owned and operated, we feel we have been able to capture the traditional flavor of luxurious living that was so prevalent in that bygone era.

So come *Taste the Suite Life* and experience our nostalgic charm, affordable luxury and *Home Away From Home* hospitality.