

# THE CAPONE CONNECTION



The Hotel Julien became known as one of the finest hotels in the Midwest and hosted many grand banquets and famous guests. But of all the personages said to have stayed in the Hotel Julien, none has aroused more curiosity and speculation than the notorious Chicago gangster Al Capone. Local lore alleges that when things got “hot” in Chicago, Capone would travel with his entourage to Dubuque, hiding out in the Hotel Julien. He reportedly made use of a nearby underground garage to hide his cars and further conceal his presence in Dubuque. Some say he even owned the hotel at one point.

Letters from the private records of Louis Pfohl, who purchased the property in 1962, corroborate accounts of Capone not only staying at the hotel, but owning it as well. “When I took over the Julien in 1962 there were two people who were familiar with the situation;” Pfohl wrote, “The story I heard was that when Capone came to town he took over the entire eighth floor and that his guards were stationed at all stairways and elevators. The hotel employees would bring the food up on the elevator and give it to the guards, but they could not go on the floor.” The eighth floor would give Capone’s lookouts an excellent view of the Wagon Bridge (later replaced by the Julien Dubuque Bridge) in the event that the “feds” or rival gangs might cross the Mississippi from Illinois. In one letter; Pfohl also writes that Capone once owned the Hotel Julien. “I have a postcard which shows the three hotels that the syndicate owned, two in Chicago, one of which was Capone’s headquarters, and the other the Julien.” The postcard shows illustrations of the Hotel Julien along with the Hotel Pershing and the Hotel Metropole. The Metropole once served as Capone’s Chicago headquarters. He later moved his headquarters to the nearby Lexington Hotel, the building that later revealed a series of secret passages and the now infamous “Capone’s Vault” opened on live television by Geraldo Rivera in 1986. All three hotels - the Pershing, the Metropole, and the Lexington are all now demolished.

A retired employee of the Hotel Julien, Mrs. Iva Whitney recounted her experiences at the hotel, including witnessing Capone’s comings and goings, in a 1970 Telegraph Herald interview and article. Working in housekeeping Whitney began in 1916, the year following the hotel’s opening, and retired in 1963, a year after Pfohl purchased the property. She said of Capone and his entourage, “There were always five of them together. They were nice to you.” The question of whether Capone ever owned the hotel might not be answered by Mrs. Whitney’s account, but her report does lend some credibility to the claim. “He (Capone) came, looked through the books, and left,” she said.

Likewise, no historical records confirm Capone’s ownership of the hotel, but there is evidence that points in that direction. A.A. Cooper (Jr), son of the wealthy businessman and owner of Cooper Wagon Works (located at Main Street and Third Street) was the foremost investor in the Dubuque Hotel Company when the corporation was formed in 1913. Reportedly, Cooper began buying stock from other investors as early as 1915, increasing his advantage as the majority stockholder and securing his position in subsequent years as president of the board of directors.

Cooper used this advantage in later years to take over management of the hotel and allegedly pay his wife, son and daughter a salary “for no services rendered.” When minority stockholders sued the Coopers in 1927, the family countered that “the plaintiffs in the action...in the Dubuque Hotel company are not in fact the real parties in interest but represent unnamed Chicago interests who have purchased the minority stock in the hotel company.” “Unnamed Chicago interests?” Interesting.



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The case was thoroughly detailed in the newspapers, including spirited cross-examination and testimony on the stand by Mrs. Cooper; and then suddenly dismissed. An agreement was reached in which an associate representing the “Chicago interests” purchased the Cooper stock in the hotel company, having already secured options on the stock of some other minority stockholders.

Were Al Capone and associates in fact the so-called “Chicago interests” that leveraged the buy out of the Dubuque Hotel Company and the purchase of the Hotel Julien? We may never know.

That’s why in 2009 the Hotel Julien returns to an era of living large with our Capone Suite. This suite is private, spacious, and full of luxury, just as Al Capone himself would have liked it. Tucked away on the second floor far away from other guests, the room’s vintage theme is rich with “Old Hollywood glamour” and boasts a large built-in vault. Was it Al’s?

