

# HOTEL HISTORY

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In 1839, travelers' first sight as they crossed the Mississippi River into Dubuque was a hotel building on the corner of 2nd and Main. This old "Julien Hotel" survived a fire, hosted famous guests such as Abraham Lincoln, "Buffalo Bill" Cody and Mark Twain, gained notoriety thanks to Al Capone and was ultimately purchased by the current ownership in 1962. Now 170 years later, after a \$30 million interior renovation and exterior restoration, the Hotel Julien Dubuque has redefined elegance through the blending of its rich history with modern luxury and style.

## IT BEGAN AS THE WAPLES HOUSE

Since 1839, a hotel or inn has occupied the corner of Second and Main—the present site of the Hotel Julien Dubuque. The original structure, four stories high, was called the Waples House and was named after its owner, Peter Waples, a wealthy Dubuque merchant. It was the first building visible to the travelers entering Dubuque from across the Mississippi. The Waples House was furnished extravagantly and was known far and wide for its gourmet cuisine.

## REMODELED AND RENAMED

In 1854, the hotel was enlarged, remodeled, and renamed the Hotel Julien after the city's namesake Julien Dubuque. This reconstruction doubled the hotel's capacity. In 1889 the old section of the hotel was remodeled in order to complement the new addition. Shortly before the turn of the century, the City of Dubuque rivaled Chicago in size and was fast becoming an important center for trade and commerce. The Julien was the focal point of this bustling economy and gained recognition as a gathering place for the city's rich and famous.

In 1913, the hotel was ravaged by a fire, which left little in its wake. Construction of the current hotel began at once and by 1915, what was then called the Hotel Julien Dubuque, was again open for business.

In 1962 the Julien was purchased by Louis H. Pfohl and, after extensive remodeling, became the Julien Motor Inn with its modern and refined atmosphere. During this remodeling phase, many interesting and historic artifacts were incorporated into the décor, including the stained glass in the restaurant. In addition, a giant mirror was added to the Julien's lobby that had been salvaged from the Ziegfeld Theatre in New York City. The mirror was renowned as the place where every performer, including W.C. Fields and Will Rogers, caught the last glance at their costume before they walked onto the Ziegfeld Follies' stage.

## REBIRTH OF THE HOTEL

Inspired by the renaissance of Dubuque's downtown, especially the Old Main District in which the Julien is located, and the ongoing development at the Port of Dubuque, in late 2007 the descendants of Louis Pfohl began a second extensive renovation of the historic hotel, beginning with an exterior restoration of stonework and windows. The hotel was later closed for a complete renovation of all interior spaces. The Hotel Julien Dubuque had its grand reopening in September 2009.

A considerable \$30 million investment, the renovation has restored the classic grandeur of the 1915 original Hotel Julien with all the modern amenities and sophisticated refinement guests expect from a contemporary hotel experience.



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## TIMELINE

**1839** Written histories of Dubuque indicate that there has been a hotel or inn on the same corner of Main and Second Streets since 1839.

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**1843** Built in 1843 the four-story Waples House (the first structure that bore the name Julien) was probably the first building visible to travelers as they crossed the Mississippi to Dubuque.

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**1854** The Waples House was purchased by partners Burton and Finlay and was renamed the Julien House in 1854 after undergoing an extensive remodel and addition to the hotel, doubling the capacity to 80 rooms.

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**1859** A young Abraham Lincoln was said to have spent a day and a night at the Julien in the spring of 1859 while working as a lawyer on behalf of the Illinois Central Railroad.

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**1874** The Julien was purchased by W.W. Woodworth in 1866 for \$30,000, who began a seven-story Romanesque brick and terra cotta addition to the hotel in 1874. Additional renovations to the hotel in 1889, 1893, and 1908 brought modern conveniences such as an elevator and electric lights.

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**1913** A tragic fire struck the elegant guesthouse just before midnight on Monday, April 7, 1913. It was believed that no one was lost in the inferno.

Realizing the need for a large, modern hotel a group of local investors (the Dubuque Hotel Company) led by local businessman W. H. Day began making plans to rebuild on the existing site.

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**1914** Construction of the new hotel began in earnest on February 25, 1914 with a target completion date of December of that year. As the previous building was destroyed by fire, the new structure of "concrete and steel" was designed to be fireproof, an attribute that was nearly always noted in newspaper articles and advertisements for the new hotel.

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**1915** Although newspapers reported the property was said to be nearing completion by late December of 1914, Hotel Julien Dubuque's Grand Opening did not occur until Sunday, September 12, 1915.

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**1927** Although no documented accounts confirm Al Capone's ownership in the Hotel Julien Dubuque, there are eye-witness reports that confirm Capone frequented Dubuque and is speculated to be the "Unnamed Chicago Interests" holding shares in the Dubuque Hotel Company.

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**1962** Louis Pfohl purchased the hotel in 1962 and closed it a few years later to begin a massive remodel. The remodel took nearly five years to complete with the grand opening celebration held in 1970. The hotel's name was also changed to the Julien Motor Inn, which was reflective of the rise of the American car culture.

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**2007** Inspired by the renaissance of Dubuque's downtown, the third generation of the Pfohl family made a \$30 million investment and began a second extensive renovation of the historic hotel, beginning with an exterior restoration of stonework and windows. Six months later the hotel was closed for a complete renovation of all interior spaces.

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**2009** In September of 2009, the Hotel Julien Dubuque reopens and restores the classic grandeur of the 1915 original Hotel Julien.



# HOTEL HISTORY

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## 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 (now home to the Bricktown entertainment venue and restaurant) 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.



# HOTEL HISTORY

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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?

## THE REAL “CAROLINE” OF CAROLINE’S RESTAURANT

Caroline (Rhombert) Fischer was the great-great-grandmother to the three cousins who today manage the Fischer Companies and the Hotel Julien Dubuque. She was a driving force and businesswoman much ahead of her time and the inspiration for the name of the hotel’s restaurant.

Caroline’s husband, Louis, was a partner in the Fischer ice business. When Louis died in 1875 from pneumonia contracted after a fall into the Mississippi River while cutting ice, Caroline took over his ice business, becoming one of Iowa’s first businesswomen. A young widow at 31 with five young children to care for, Caroline was a hard worker. She eventually bought out her partners, invested in downtown and riverfront property, and brought her family into the business that still exists today.

Caroline is said to have followed her ice deliverymen around town in her own horse and buggy to be sure her men were “doing their work properly.” The many taverns to which they delivered would offer drinks to the drivers, in an effort to persuade them to leave a little extra ice. On occasion, upon finding the drivers passed out in the ice wagon, Caroline would drive the team of horses and wagon back to the ice storage warehouse herself with her own horse and buggy in tow.

In 1878, long before the Fischer Company owned the Hotel Julien Dubuque, the Fischer Wheeler & Co. ice business had a contract with the Julien to supply ice to the guesthouse, then under management of W.W. Woodworth. The three-year contract was for “all the ice necessary” for \$25 a month or \$300 for the entire year.

Caroline’s daughter played a large part in running the business. Even while in high school Julia helped Caroline with the company books. Dubuque High School had two courses when Julia attended, a two-year business course and a four-year Latin/scientific course. Julia completed both courses concurrently while earning a teaching certificate, graduating in 1886 as valedictorian at the head of her class. Julia taught at Dubuque’s Prescott School, working nights and weekends for her mother Caroline.

Located in view of the Ice Harbor, where the Fischer family business started, Caroline’s Restaurant is a tribute to the Fischer/Pfohl family matriarch.

