

The
ROYAL
SONESTA
STEPHEN F. AUSTIN



1 The Stephen F. Austin Royal Sonesta Hotel was named after Stephen F. Austin, revered as the “Father of Texas”. Originally issued to be named “The Texas,” the Austin community, spearheaded by the Business and Professional Women’s Club of Austin, rallied behind a change in appellation for one that resonated more profoundly with local appeal. The change was adulated by the public, who were fond of the finalized namesake and passionately invested \$600,000 in its creation.

2 The image to the left is from 1924, prior to the construction of the additional five floors and the demolition of the Longhorn Garden. The middle image is from 1938, when the hotel underwent construction for the additional five stories. The image to the right is from 1947, standing at the height the hotel remains at today.

3 Throughout its history, the hotel has played a pivotal role in the political theater of Texas. The first guest to register at the hotel when it first opened was the governor of Austin, Patt M. Neff.

4 Federal Bureau of Investigation Director J. Edgar Hoover speaks before an audience at the Stephen F. Austin Hotel in downtown Austin as part of a fundraiser for the United Fund campaign of Austin and Travis counties. After receiving an introduction by then-Senator Lyndon B. Johnson, Hoover speaks about the 'inspiring experience' of visiting Texas and how it correlates to the values of the United Fund's cause.

5 This is an Austin American Statesman article from May 18th, 1924, released one day prior to The Stephen F. Austin hotel’s opening day and outlining the new hotel’s offerings and T.B. Baker’s hotel legacy. To meet the needs of the growing Austin community, Theodore Baker “T.B.” Baker, the President of Baker Hotels, opened The Stephen F. Austin Hotel. T.B. took advantage of the city’s pre-Depression boom and the death of surrounding hotel and conference centers by introducing the hotel to the Austin public. Today, the hotel stands as the second oldest historic landmark hotel in Austin.

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- 6 The image to the left showcases the Stephen F Austin welcome desk circa the 1930s and the right from the 1960s.
- 7 This letter from 1959 was a typed letter from the Hotel Manager, John Powell, to a guest coming for the Legislative session, Mr. Truett Latimer. The letter is to confirm his reservation request for a date in March and was at a rate of \$3.60 which was a 10% discount off the “minimum rate” of \$4.00 for members of the House and Senate.
- 8 The Stephen F. Austin Hotel originally rose ten stories and was capped by a rooftop ballroom terrace known as “the Longhorn Garden.” The expansive Longhorn Garden was bound by 125 windows and supported by vine-covered beams. In 1938, Austin’s skyline underwent a transformation as five more stories were added to the site, which resulted in the demolition of the Longhorn Garden. This elevated the hotel to the status of Austin’s tallest building with 375 guestrooms.
- 9 Over the years, the hotel has garnered great attention from Hollywood. Universal Studios, the Texas Film Commission, and Troublemaker Studios, have collaborated with the hotel. In the first week the hotel reopened in 2000 following renovations, a scene in “Miss Congeniality” with Sandra Bullock was filmed in the hotel’s ballroom. The hotel was also featured in the movies “Grindhouse” and “Machete.”
- 10 In the 1970’s the hotel changed owners twice. The last of these owners was the Bradford Hotels chain out of Minneapolis. The changes desired by Bradford Hotels to the hotel were found to be very offensive to the community, which may have contributed to the community’s interest in historic structures. The extensive changes were both interior and exterior to modernize the hotel. The public outcry almost caused the hotel to be zoned historic but didn’t have enough votes at the time. The hotel was later designated a Historical Landmark in 2002. Stephen F’s Bar, formerly known as the Hippopotamus Lounge and piano bar during the Bradford Hotel times, was the talk of the town. The only outdoor second-story bar in town, the eclectic piano bar featured a Buddha fountain, a golden hippopotamus, live macaws and cockatoos, doormen, a fish tank, and much more. The Hippopotamus Lounge encapsulated the splendor of Old World elegance and graciousness with contemporary charm and breathtaking grandeur.



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ADDITIONAL FACTS:

In our case, we also have some original postcards from the hotel in the 1920's and then from the late 1930's after the hotel added five floors and some vintage matchbooks from years past.

We also have some original menus from the hotel from the Hotel Stephen F. Austin with prices that range from 15 cents to as high as \$3.00 for a Sirloin Steak.

This vintage floral soap trinket dish was provided to the guests of The Stephen F. Austin Hotel.

The Hotel was a part of Affiliated National Hotels which was considered the Host to the Nation and boasted to have hotels along the Gulf Coast, throughout Texas, north to the Nation's Capital and in the Mid-West where you could find the same fine service and quality in hotel accommodations when you chose one of their hotels as your choice for greater comfort.

The Stephen F. Austin has had a long-standing partnership with the beautiful and historic Paramount Theatre next to the hotel. Over the years, the hotel has had many entertainers and special guests stay with them when they are performing at the theatre. These are a few original programs from the Paramount Theatre.