



Kal's Kaleidoscope



During the Roaring 20s, the country was awash in giggling flappers, bootleg whisky, and red-hot jazz. Folks shed their Victorian yokes, and embraced the new freedoms and conveniences that were sweeping the countryside. Henry Ford had perfected his Model T, made it affordable to

millions, and those millions put the peddle to the metal, and hit the road. One of their favorite watering holes was the "Riviera of America" - the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

The 1920s were flush times for the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The rich and fashionable came from as far north as New York and Chicago. To accommodate the hordes of tourists that arrived for the 1926/1927 winter season,

three grand hotels shot up within sixty days of each other: the Tivoli and the Edgewater Gulf Hotels in Biloxi, and Gulfport's Markham Hotel. They joined the ranks of other existing hotels: Biloxi's Buena Vista and White House Hotels, the Biloxi Hotel, and Gulfport's Great Southern Hotel. The three new hotels caused a stir with the locals and tourists alike.

When the Tivoli Hotel opened in 1926, the newspapers of the day praised her beauty, and reported that "a whirl of dancing, a kaleidoscopic blaze of color, and a musical festival of barbaric jazz" had enlivened that event. When I did dinner theater there in the late 70s, I was amazed at how much of that original, 1920s ambience still existed. The hotel's lobby was striking, with a huge, barrel-vaulted ceiling covered by delicate, Adam-esque plasterwork. That plasterwork was even more evident in the Wedgewood Ballroom. Chandeliers of gilt and bronze, dripping with strings of crystals, lit the blue-and-white room, while at one end, a vast marble fireplace, crowned by a ten foot mirror, still reflected the

ghosts of the elegant dancers that had once danced the night away under those same chandeliers.

But much of that lovely splendor had evaporated by the late 80s. The Tivoli, like multitudinous old hotels across the country, had "fallen upon hard times," as the old-timers say. Junkies and cheap, ladies of the night had replaced her once fashionable guests. By the time the Biloxi Grand Casino barge slammed into the hotel during Katrina's early hours, the old Tivoli's "kaleidoscopic blaze of color" had long faded, and the "barbaric jazz" had long since ceased to play.

The jewel in the crown of Coastal hotels was the stately Edgewater Gulf Hotel. As a child of 13, I often stayed there with my grandmother, who was

a private nurse to a pair of elderly, rich sisters from Jackson, Mississippi. While she tended to their personal medical needs, I was free to roam, and roam I did. The Edgewater's lobby was a vast, regal room. Plush, Persian rugs covered its marble floor. Stylish, bronze-and-brass reception tables, capped with

thick, variegated-marble tops, graced the lobby. Huge, brass chandeliers hung over each of the three tables. In style, those light fixtures were a cross between Art Nouveau and Art Deco, each sporting a glittering crown of tulip-shaped, iridescent globes. Her elevators had French doors instead of solid ones. You could stand in front of one, and watch fashionably dressed men

and women being whisk up and down to their fashionable destinations. One long hall, whose towering arched windows overlooked the Gulf, was like a Palm Court of sorts. Comfortable rattan and whicker furniture greeted the guests, flowering potted plants filled the air with a delectable scent, and overhead, a billowing cas-

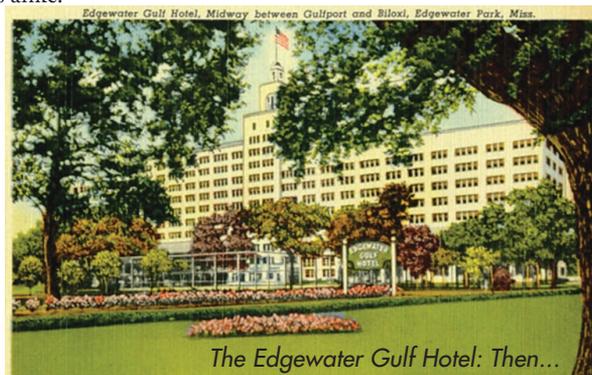


The Tivoli Hotel: Then...

THE TIVOLI HOTEL, ON THE BEACH, BILOXI, MISSISSIPPI



The Tivoli Hotel Site: Now



The Edgewater Gulf Hotel: Then...



The Edgewater Gulf Hotel Site: Now

cade of striped cloth covered the ceiling. The Edgewater's lush, manicured lawn swept south toward the beach, and was covered by ancient oaks, whose loving arms protected the guests from the blazing afternoon sun. For those of you who have been to the Tower of Terror in Disney World, you can conjure up a vision of what the grand, old Edgewater Gulf Hotel looked like - minus the fake cobwebs of course!

By the late 60s, when it was decided to close the hotel, the Edgewater had not fallen into decline, as had some of her Coastal sisters. True, some of the spit and polish was gone, but that only added to her patina - a patina layered with Old-World elegance and plushness. It was a sad day indeed when the old girl was imploded to make way for the new Sears store at the Edgewater Mall, which had been named in honor of the old hotel. When the blasting crew hit their detonators, the huge tower-section collapsed as planned. But the rest of the vast hotel stood strong, as if saying, "I'm just not ready to go!"

Of all the things that I most remember about the Markham Hotel, its tasteful, mahogany-paneled lobby with its acres of terrazzo flooring tops the list. The terrazzo tiles gave the lobby a distinctive sound - people's shoes clicked, their voices echoed. The lobby was also home to the grand staircase, which swept upward in a swirl of terrazzo and wrought iron. When the hotel opened in 1927, the dining room was located on the mezzanine, which was at the top of the grand staircase. The dining room, resplendent with starched table clothes, lacy palms, and sparkling silver, commanded a grand view of the glistening Gulf. And lordling over the lobby, the grand staircase, and the dining room was a ubiquitous hotel clock, which kept the rich and fashionable on time. Up yet another set of terrazzo steps, was the Crystal Ballroom - all white and gold leaf, with a barrel-vaulted ceiling graced by vast chandeliers of crystal and gilt. Many's the time that I spent in that grand room, attending some wedding reception or banquet. But the Markham Hotel had another claim to fame - its swimming pool. Fringed by multi-colored Spanish tiles and lush with palms and ferns, the pool was covered by a ceiling of intricate latticework. Entwined within the lattice were water nozzles, that, when turned on, transformed the swimming pool into an Amazon rainforest of sorts. Mighty cool to a young boy of ten!!

Of all the grand hotels that opened in the halcyon days of 1926/1927, only the Markham Hotel is left to carry on the grand tradition of her long lost sisters. Her fate? Due to the vast damage she experienced during Katrina, only time and money will tell. But if she IS demolished, then the Mississippi Gulf Coast will have lost yet another link to its past. And how many links do we have left? How much of our past are willing to lose? Again . . . only time and money will tell.

Please remember to keep our troops in your prayers.

May God bless, and keep a song in your heart.

Anthony Wayne Kalberg

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