Court Hotel.

Owner E. Jean Campbell

1923

A mix of students and working women lived at “the Martha.” Many appreciated the camaraderie of shared meals, and the hotel’s quiet courtyard. A set evening curfew, and only allowed “gentlemen callers” on Sunday and Wednesday evenings, and then only in the lobby.

Although times were changing, young unmarried women still appreciated low-cost housing, the comfortable overstuffed furniture gave “the impression of home.”

The building originally included 133 single and double rooms with private baths, a large formal dining room, and a multi-level lobby with a reception desk, fireplace, and French doors that led to a quiet landscaped courtyard. Most of the rooms housed residents, but Campbell kept 40 rooms open for visitors who came from around the Pacific Northwest and the world. Christian Scientists were regular visitors when in town on church business, and the hotel was a favorite respite for Navy officers during World War II. One long-time resident recalled “belonging to a large family of well-bred people who made the ‘court’ their home.”

Running the hotel was a family affair. While E. Jean Campbell was responsible for the hotel’s style and hospitality, it was her mother’s skill in the kitchen that expanded the hotel’s reputation. Sarah Oneal’s collection of recipes, and her talent for making savory soups, and sweet jellies and jars, brought many diners to the Campbell Court for delicious reasonably priced meals. For special occasions and holidays there was often a pianist or singer entertaining dining room guests.

After 20 years as the proprietor of the Campbell Court, E. Jean Campbell sold the hotel and retired in 1943. The business continued under other ownership until the building was sold to Multnomah College in 1961 for use as a dormitory. When Campbell died that same year at the age of 87, her legacy was her talent for hospitality, taste, and the ‘right’ thing that made the Campbell Court one of the best addresses in Portland.”

Martha Washington Hotel

1969-1983

In 1983, a group of concerned citizens, many of them wives of prominent Portland businessmen, formed the Portland Women’s Union. Their mission was to help “self-supporting women to help themselves” by providing housing, assistance, and guidance to young single women moving to Portland to work. In 1983, the Portland Women’s Union dedicated the original Martha Washington Hotel for Women at SW 8th and Montgomery. Residents of “the Martha” had to abide by house rules that governed how rooms were kept, set evening curfew, and only allowed “gentlemen callers” on Sunday and Wednesday evenings, and then only in the lobby.

In 1969, the Portland Women’s Union purchased the Campbell Court Hotel, and moved the Martha Washington Hotel for Women to a new home. Although times were changing, young unmarried women still appreciated low-cost housing, the camaraderie of shared meals, and the hotel’s quiet courtyard. A mix of students and working women lived at “the Martha.” Many of them were new to town and considered the hotel a “good place to come to, to make friends.” There were still rules, however:

no bathrobes or hair curlers were allowed in the dining hall, and male visitors were still restricted to the first floor.

Occupancy levels at the Martha Washington significantly declined and rental income could not meet operational costs. After intense debate, the Portland Women’s Union sold the hotel to the Rajneesh Investment Corporation in 1983. They used the proceeds from the sale to fund their newly formed charitable foundation, the Portland Women’s Foundation, and continue to award grants to social service programs that provide women with educational programs and safe secure community housing.

Hotel Rajneesh

1983-1986

The religious cult of the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh settled in several locations in Oregon in the early 1980s. The Rajneesh Investment Corporation purchased the Martha Washington Hotel in 1983. Renamed the Hotel Rajneesh, the building became the home to the hotel’s staff as well as several other Rajneesh businesses in Portland. Visitors on their way to and from the city of Rajneesheepolis in Central Oregon often stayed at the hotel overnight. The general public could rent single or double rooms by the day, and residents still had their meals in the dining room.

Many Oregonians did not welcome the activities of the Bhagwan and his disciples. Rumors circulated that homeless people brought in from other states to vote in contested elections in Antelope, Oregon stayed at the hotel. In early August 1983, a man from California checked into the Hotel Rajneesh under a false name with the intent of causing harm with pipe bombs he brought with him. One bomb seriously injured the man when it exploded in his 4th floor room, and two more exploded later setting off a two-alarm fire that damaged the building.

In the aftermath, the building underwent substantial renovation and new furnishings were added throughout the hotel. A bakery, Mexican restaurant, and a walk-in medical clinic began operating in the Hotel Rajneesh, but the interior layout of the building remained virtually unchanged from the original. With the demise of the Rajneesh sect in the state, the building was again sold.

Multnomah County Restitution Center

1986-2008

Multnomah County purchased the Hotel Rajneesh in 1986. The Multnomah County Sheriff’s Office used the former Martha Washington as a restitution center and an alternative to incarceration. The MERC was designed to replace the work release center operated out of the Troutdale Jail. The selection of participants and some details of how the facility would be run were determined by a unique arrangement between the Sheriff’s Office and a Citizen’s Advisory Committee.

During that same period, the Department of Community Justice operated a Drug and Alcohol Treatment program at the facility. After declaring the property surplus, the County pushed for the creation of affordable housing at the site that culminated with the conveyance of the property to the Housing Authority of Portland. Extensive renovations in 2001 fulfilled the promise of providing affordable housing, restored the name Martha Washington, and continued the building’s legacy as a place to call home for future generations of residents.