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# COOK-WITTER REPORT

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## The State House Inn: Back To The Future

**A** new chapter began in the history of the 40 year old State House Inn earlier this summer when it welcomed guests again with a whole new look. Eight million dollars was spent over 18 months getting it ready for its June 21 opening day. The renewal of this hotel is unique in that this fairly young building has been listed on the Springfield Historic Sites Register. The application process began in the fall and winter of 2001 and concluded with Springfield's mayor signing the papers designating the State House Inn a Springfield Historic Site on May 22, 2002. Approximately 50 buildings have been placed on the Springfield Historic Sites Register. The State House Inn, however, marks the first time a building less than 50 years old was placed on the Register. About 20 of the capital city's buildings are nationally landmarked. According to Marshall Lemme of Springfield's Office of Planning and Economic Development, the Historic Sites Commission has maintained a policy of reserving Springfield Historic Site status for buildings over 50 years old based upon their significant historical, archaeological or cultural background. However, the State House Inn's designation is related to its unique architectural style.

The State House Inn was built in the International Style, which achieved its greatest popularity during the 1950s and 1960s. According to Joe Jeter, managing partner and construction manager of the hotel, "the city recognized

they could lose a significant piece of 1960s architecture." He thinks that local developers most likely saw a run-down hotel whereas he saw a hotel across from the capitol complex. He also recognized that downtown Springfield lacked any mid-tier hotels. The landmark application paperwork explains that the American International Style was conceived for people who travel by car as the car became the popular mode of transportation in post-war years. The State House Inn represented the next generation of (motor) hotel that was not dependent on a train station or other form of public transportation for the success of the property. The International Style embraced the new technologies of combining Metal & Glass (among other things) as well as clean, simple geometric lines. The motor hotel reference and the architecture are not necessarily interrelated. For mid to high rise buildings in the 1950s, American International Style was a popular style. Mies Van Der Rohe made the style famous with the Seagrams Building in New York. Other Springfield examples include the Saint George Building on Monroe Street built in the mid 1960s and the Illinois Building built in 1950 on the State Fairgrounds.

Now called the Quality Inn and Suites, State House, the hotel is located in Springfield's first and oldest tax increment financing (TIF) district. TIFs are usually created "to help local governments restore run-down areas or economically sluggish parts of town." The State House Inn qualified for special financial assistance



*A postcard from the State House Inn - Circa 1960s. The pool was long ago turned into part of the parking lot. - Picture courtesy of Lincoln Library's Sangamon Valley Collection.*



*Photo courtesy of Joe Jeter at the Quality Inn & Suites, State House.*

after receiving its designation as a Springfield Historic Site. The city now owns the façade of the building, but the hotel owners must maintain it. Also any exterior changes or changes in landscaping can not be made without first getting approval from the city of Springfield.

When the State House Inn opened the first time, it was with great fanfare and tremendous publicity. The original 100+ unit State House Inn opened at a cost of over \$2 million on March 24, 1961 with Governor Otto Kerner and other dignitaries in attendance. In addition to the guest rooms, the State House Inn featured banquet and convention rooms, a restaurant and cocktail lounge, as well as a swimming pool. The State House Inn was the first example of a true motor hotel in downtown Springfield. Originally, plans had been drawn in 1958 for a sprawling three-story structure to be built on the 1<sup>st</sup> and Adams site, across from the State Armory. However, according to Chicago and Springfield investors led by Chicago attorney Maurice Levy, not enough land could be obtained for that kind of building. So plans were then drawn up for a seven-story structure to be built of aluminum window-wall construction on the east and west sides and masonry on the rest. The hotel was built on the site of a parking lot that was leased to a bowling alley (the Bowl), which sat opposite the new hotel. The newspaper reports touted the forthcoming structure as an “ultra-modern motel.”

Visitors could already visit the Medallion Room and Le Bistro dining room and cocktail lounge weeks before the State House Inn even opened. The March 26, 1961 *State Journal-Register* included a special four-page section showcasing the contractors and designers behind the look

of the new hotel. The article stated that in the Medallion Room “guests may, with a little effort, imagine themselves in a Paris salon. LeBistro...is also unmistakably French in atmosphere and color.”

The State House Inn opened to great acclaim but by the 1990s, it had fallen into an extended period of decline. Joe Jeter found the hotel to be almost uninhabitable when it was initially purchased in December of 2001. “The roof leaked, and the mechanical systems were failing.” Jeter believes that remodeling is often more difficult than dealing with new construction and found that particularly to be true with this project.

The Quality Inn & Suites, State House observed a quiet or “soft” opening in June, with mostly family and friends in attendance. Only 18 months passed from the time of purchase, designing, and contracts, to the June 21<sup>st</sup> opening day. During the renovation process, a million pounds of debris was hauled away. “From a construction manager’s point of view, the State House Inn was the single most challenging project I’ve ever done. In essence this is a brand new building in a 40 year old shell” states Jeter. The exterior walls were replaced with new aluminum and glass walls, and none of the original curtain wall remains. About \$500,000 was spent to make the walls more energy efficient and soundproofed so that guests won’t hear the traffic outside or trains a few blocks away. The lobby received a whole new look also, which includes a new \$40,000 terrazzo floor. It’s light and spacious with a fireplace, and in the afternoon, a guest can find a piano being played near the No Name Bar, the hotel cocktail lounge. Basically, Joe Jeter refers to the public spaces like the lobby rating a 5-star with the guest rooms



*Photo courtesy of Joe Jeter at the Quality Inn & Suites, State House.*

achieving a solid 3-star.

London Turner, an interior designer based out of San Francisco, spent a whole year working on this project full-time. He provided most of the design aspects of the hotel, the landscape design, and most of the guest room furniture, and fabric selections. The custom built furniture he chose was inspired by famous designers from the 50's and 60's. "It is not typical hotel furniture, and these pieces of furniture won't be found in any other hotels," Jeter stated with pride. "There is a mixture of vintage art and furniture with new pieces." Jeter refers to the style as eclectic, whereas the design of the original State House Inn was perhaps more classic. We tried to do something unique here." Another interior design firm assisted with some aspects of the project.

A local Springfield firm, Bruce Ferry and Associates did the architectural work. Jeter purchased some furniture from Ferry as he is an avid collector of mid-century furniture. All the conference rooms contain paintings by Elizabeth Ferry, the project architect's daughter. According to Jeter, their state-of-the-art conference rooms are the first in Springfield to be soundproofed.

Joe Jeter firmly believes that a good guest room needs to be clean, quiet, comfortable and dark. He believes he has achieved all of these with this renovation project. "A lot of what makes people comfortable is subliminal; it's the subtle touches like a coffee maker in your room, rounded shower rods so your arms don't rub against the liner, or a 27 inch rather than 25 inch t.v." "Basically, I tried to think like a guest when renovating the hotel." "Where we could have cut a corner, we left the corner on.

Jeter says that they are trying to be a premiere business hotel in Springfield. As part of that effort, the lobby, cocktail lounge, business center, and all guest rooms are equipped with free high-speed Internet access. Jeter believes that the renovated Quality Inn and Suites, State House is possibly the most modern hotel in Springfield. Some bugs in the new computer systems are still being worked out. And Jeter states that occupancy rates go up every week. Recently, they experienced 100% occupancy rates during the week of the State Fair and during the Route 66 Mother Road Festival weekend. So far Jeter says they have been receiving positive feedback and repeat business, a sure sign of success. The hotel's Web site at [www.thestatehouseinn.com](http://www.thestatehouseinn.com) contains detailed information about the hotel and a great assortment of photos of the Quality Inn & Suites, State House.



## Another Inn Worth Checking Into



The Inn at 835 and the State House Inn are the only places catering to overnight guests that are designated Springfield Historic Sites. Both have undergone significant

changes but have managed to maintain their own distinct character. One of the Inn at 835's many offerings is that of bed and breakfast. The Inn is located at 835 South Second just a few blocks from the capitol and near the neighborhood once known as Aristocracy Hill. The Inn at 835 was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1995. About that same time, the Inn also received its designation as a Springfield Historic Site.

Owned by Court and Karen Conn since 1994, the three-story Inn at 835 has undergone a complete transformation that took three years to accomplish. Previously known as the Bell Miller Apartments, the Conns converted six 2000 sq ft apartments and two sleeping rooms into 14 guest rooms with private baths and created six meeting rooms. After extensive renovation that involved refinishing all the woodwork and walls, among other things, the Inn at 835 opened its doors as a bed and breakfast in May of 1997.

The Inn was built in 1909, designed by leading Springfield architect George Helmle during the Arts and Crafts movement. Originally, the Inn was built in the Classical Revival style for the purpose of luxury apartments for upper class Springfield tenants. Bell Miller, the developer, was a well-known Springfield florist around the turn of the century.

The Inn's location certainly seems to have helped in one area of business. Court Conn notes that "it [the Inn] is usually quite full during the legislative season; it's so convenient to the capitol." More information about the history of the Inn at 835 and what services the Inn has to offer can be found at Court and Karen Conn's Web site at [www.innat835.com](http://www.innat835.com). The Web site also includes details about the Conn's catering business, which was initially started by Court Conn's father. Describing the uniqueness of their place, Court Conn states "There just aren't a lot of inns like ours in the area."



## New Lincoln Statue Unveiled

The unveiling of a new statue titled “Lincoln the Surveyor” occurred on October 4<sup>th</sup>. It was the first addition of a statue at Lincoln’s New Salem State Historic Site in the last 35 years. “Lincoln the Surveyor” depicts a 25 year old Abraham Lincoln with his surveyor’s compass and staff. The statue was commissioned by the Illinois Professional Land Surveyors Association (IPLSA) to commemorate the time Lincoln spent in New Salem working as a deputy surveyor of Sangamon County, a position he held from 1833 to 1837. Lincoln lived in New Salem during this four year period and taught himself the skill of surveying.

According to Bob Church, executive director of IPLSA, the \$130,000 needed for the sculpture was raised by his association. The unveiling ceremony occurred at 6 PM before New Salem’s annual Candlelight Tour. Bob Church presided over the event that included such speakers as David Hedrick, Site Superintendent of Lincoln’s New Salem State Historic Site and artist and sculptor John McClarey. Maynard Crossland, director of the Illinois Historic

Preservation Agency accepted the statue from the IPLSA at this time. Bob Church said that an estimated 1,500 people were present for the occasion.

Decatur sculptor John McClarey created the statue based on a drawing by the late Lloyd Ostendorf and his brother Ned. Lloyd authored and illustrated several books about Lincoln. McClarey has focused primarily on Abraham Lincoln as the subject of many of his sculptures. They can be found in numerous museums, as well as at the Lincoln Home National Historic Site and in the Henry Horner Lincoln Collection at the Illinois State Historical Library.

Lincoln’s actual surveying equipment can be viewed at New Salem’s Visitor Center. The statue can be found at the entrance to New Salem Village between the visitor center and the souvenir shop. Lincoln’s New Salem State Historic Site is located about 20 miles northwest of Springfield on Illinois 97.



Picture courtesy of the Illinois Professional Land Surveyors Association.

## Director Chosen For Presidential Library and Museum

Governor Blagojevich recently announced the director of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum. Richard Norton Smith, a prominent presidential historian, has been chosen to lead the facility, which will eventually house the State of Illinois’ 47,000 item Abraham Lincoln collection. At this point, the Library is set to open in the spring of 2004 and the Museum later in the year. Smith has held directorships at a number of presidential libraries over the years including the Herbert Hoover, Dwight Eisenhower, Gerald Ford, and Ronald Reagan. He currently directs the Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics at the University of Kansas. Richard Norton Smith will assume his new position on December 1.



*Reference material about the historical background of the State House Inn and Inn at 835 was provided by the Sangamon Valley Collection, Lincoln Library.*

