

A PERSONAL REMINISCENCE OF A GRAND OLD HOTEL -- THE HASSAYAMPA INN

By Elisabeth Ruffner

Prescott citizens have saved the Hassayampa at least twice in the past. My family stories include a bank failure in 1926 which included deposits made as a result of community fund raising for the building of the hotel. Citizens came to the realization that a hotel of the nature planned would be essential to the welfare of the community.

Efforts of the community over seven years beginning in 1920 directed by the indefatigable Grace Sparkes, Secretary of the Yavapai County Chamber of Commerce, resulted in a formal opening on November 19, 1927 with a gala dinner dance featured in a special edition of the *Prescott Journal-Miner*: Dateline November 20, 1927. "...The first community hotel in Prescott is a monument to the people who have paid for it and who put in their time building it."

Tom Mix was the first official guest and he resided in the hotel a number of times while he was making movies in the Prescott area. Many Prescott families enjoyed the social milieu created around the hotel and the movie people. Tom Mix gave one little boy a colt which was named "Mixie".

The Hassayampa is truly a community asset and has been the scene of many a gala celebration from New Year's Eve dinner parties, to luncheons decorated with flowers flown from the Hawaiian Islands to wedding receptions and balls. As a watering spot, the bar has attracted resident and visitor alike. The lobby has seen political rallies and art shows and the restaurant under famous chefs has attracted diners from the world over.

A second "saving" took place in the 1970s when one in a succession of owners concluded he would demolish the building to make way for progress. The citizens of Prescott once again came forward and initiated listing of the properties in the state register of historic places in 1976 and in the National Register in 1979. Although these listings require no action of a property owner the very position in the registers as properties worthy of preservation draws attention and assigns value even though primarily psychological.

Successive owners have respected the property and have benefitted from Prescott citizens' services in planning and design. A major renovation resulted in a nomination for an honor award from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Arizona's Governor's Award in 1985.

Today the grand hotel is owned and operated by dedicated people with standards of elegance and quality she so richly deserves.