

HIDDEN NEW YORK

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The Knickerbocker Hotel: Where Manhattan's Elite Played

The Iconic Knickerbocker Hotel Where Fitzgerald, Rockefeller Partied Returns in Fall 2014 to its Gilded Glory



Secret Passageway to the Knickerbocker Hotel at the Times Square Subway Station

Exiting the Times Square subway station yesterday, I noticed an obscure doorway bearing a masonry plaque "Knickerbocker" that looked like it had been boarded up for years. Could it be that this once led to the iconic Knickerbocker Hotel? The city's subways began construction in 1900 and retain certain oddities of the past such as this one hidden doorway, which once connected the Times Square subway station to the rear lobby of the Knickerbocker Hotel, which operated from 1906-1920, through a corridor lined with settees and heraldic banners.

Although the passageway has since been severed, the façade of the fifteen-story Beaux-Arts hotel built by John Jacob Astor (1864-1912) remains largely in tact.

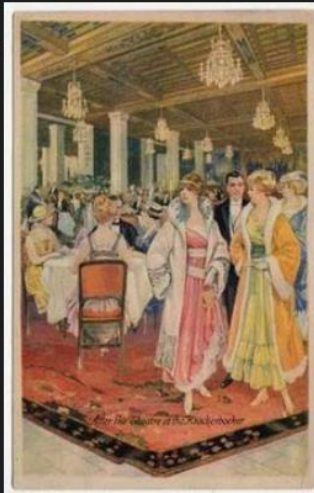
The Knickerbocker Hotel was a fashionable hotel of its time, with a popular Knickerbocker bar which has been called the "Forty-second Street Country Club" because of the wealthy patrons that frequented it. The bar is said to have been the birthplace of the modern martini. A New York Times article celebrating the hotel's opening commented on its opulence, including the "tapestries and beamed ceiling" modeled after the French Chateau de Fountainbleau in the main dining room which accommodated 2,000 guests. The hotel had 556 sleeping rooms which rented on average for \$3.25 per day. Enrico Caruso, a world famous opera singer, was a long time resident of the hotel. F. Scott Fitzgerald is said to have once went on a three-day bender there, and John D. Rockefeller and his friends from Wall Street ordered martinis from the cocktail bar. Fitzgerald opens the second chapter of his 1920 novel *This Side of Paradise* with a scene at the bar. "The Knickerbocker bar, beamed upon by Maxfield Parrish's jovial, colorful 'Old King Cole,' was well crowded," Fitzgerald writes. The "Old King Cole," a thirty-foot 1906 oil painting by artist Maxfield Parish, was commissioned by Astor for the Knickerbocker bar. The painting has since been moved to the St. Regis Hotel in midtown Manhattan where it currently hangs as the focal point of a lobby bar.

Prohibition laws enacted in 1919 slowed the hotel's business in its restaurants and bars and the building was converted to office space in 1920. In December 2011, FelCor Lodging Trust purchased the building and is currently restoring it to a 330 room four-plus star hotel which will open in early fall of this year under the Knickerbocker name.

Stephen Schafer, Vice President of Investor Relations at FelCor, told Hidden New York that the new Knickerbocker Hotel will keep the same exterior but add a completely new interior. "The entire exterior will remain the same and we have already completed the restoration work, which was minimal since the building was in good condition. The interior was gutted and taken down to floor plates, so the interior will be completely new." Schafer also said the calling card of the hotel will be a 3,000 square foot rooftop space open to the public that will be "the only outdoor, rooftop bar where you can watch the ball drop on New Year's Eve or watch the hustle of Times Square."



Knickerbocker Hotel today



Knickerbocker Hotel Dining Room

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B Memphis-to-Manhattan

Lawyer by day, New York City connoisseur by night. I love learning about NYC and its past. - Kevin Schubert

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