



## MARRIOTT SYRACUSE DOWNTOWN

### MARRIOTT SYRACUSE DOWNTOWN: A HISTORY

A member of Historic Hotels of America, Marriott Syracuse Downtown occupies a landmark 1924 building with a rich legacy as the city's first "modern" hotel – grand in both scale and ambition. Guests today are, in fact, living history, as the same halls and rooms they occupy have hosted close to a century of noteworthy events and a long list of famous visitors.



#### **A grand dame rises**

The early 1920s were a time of rapid growth for the city of Syracuse, which had become a major manufacturing center. The city's smaller inns were no longer sufficient to accommodate the influx of commerce and tourists to New York's "Central City" and in 1921, a planning committee began talks to develop a large modern hotel. Architect William Stone Post of George B. Post and Sons drew up plans for a 600-room hotel with three towers, 11 stories, and a footprint that would encompass an entire city block. Construction began in 1922 and on August 16, 1924, Hotel Syracuse opened its doors.

Each of the new hotel's guest rooms had a private bath. Within its substantial walls were 24 retail shops, several dining venues, and expansive meeting and event facilities, including a magnificent ballroom. At a cost of almost \$7 million, it was, at the time, one of the city's largest-ever construction projects. Rooms rented for \$3 a night and up.

#### **Famous visitors**

A highlight of Hotel Syracuse's grand opening was a photo op with Jackie Coogan – already a veteran Hollywood star at age nine. And Coogan was just the first of many luminaries to pass through the hotel over the decades. Charles Lindbergh came to Hotel Syracuse in 1927 while on tour celebrating his trans-Atlantic flight. From there, the list grew to include, among many more, George Gershwin, Elvis Presley, John Lennon, and the Rolling Stones; Presidents Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy and Jimmy Carter; and Paul Newman, who filmed scenes from 1977's *Slap Shot* in the nearby Onondaga War Memorial Auditorium.

#### **The center of Syracuse social life**

After several years of financial decline in the Great Depression, 1933's New Deal brought the beginning of relief, leading to several new additions to the hotel. These included a bar that debuted with the end of Prohibition; the elegant Art Moderne-style Rainbow Lounge in 1938; and, a few years later, the revamping

of the former main dining room into a supper club. Named for its exotic Middle Eastern-style mural, the Persian Terrace quickly established itself as the hub of Syracuse nightlife, hosting swing-era greats like Cab Calloway, Benny Goodman and Glenn Miller.

In 1946, the hotel debuted the Cavalier Room – a men’s-only lunch spot, providing “the leisurely service and masculine foods that men enjoy at luncheon.” At breakfast and Saturday lunch, rules were relaxed to admit women.

### **A mural for the centuries**

In 1948, as the city celebrated 100 years, Hotel Syracuse sponsored a centennial-themed art contest. The winning design, a 40-foot-wide mural depicting scenes from early Syracuse history up to the Civil War, was the entry of Syracuse University fine arts professor Carl Roters. The expansive mural was installed above the registration desk until the 1980s, when it was concealed behind mirrored panels in a renovation. Rediscovered during the restoration process leading to Marriott Syracuse Downtown’s opening in 2016, it has been brought back to its original glory and presides over the lobby once again.

### **Peace, love and disco librarians**

The cultural revolution of the 1970s brought a change in clientele to Hotel Syracuse. John Lennon and Yoko Ono celebrated his 31<sup>st</sup> birthday in a suite there, along with friends Eric Clapton, Ringo Starr, Phil Spector, and Allen Ginsberg. In 1973, one floor was transformed into housing for students at nearby Syracuse University while they awaited completion of a new dorm. And in 1974, the hotel’s coffee shop was replaced by a discotheque, “The Library,” which featured 7,000 books and waitresses dressed in an anachronistic mix of miniskirts and Edwardian blouses.

### **Uncertain times and a landmark designation**

In 1980, two sky bridges were constructed, one to connect the hotel to a new parking garage and the other to a new, 197-room hotel tower, part of a \$18.5-million expansion that also included the creation of a new Imperial Ballroom (now the Finger Lakes Ballroom).

The 1990s and early 2000s saw several changes in ownership and two bankruptcies. Ironically, it was during this time of flux that Hotel Syracuse gained landmark status, listing first with the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Historic Hotels in 1995 and, in 2008, with the National Register of Historic Places. The hotel closed later that same year as the nation entered a severe recession.

### **Renaissance**

In 2014, with the city of Syracuse flourishing once again, the shuttered hotel caught the attention and imagination of Edward M. Riley, a fifth-generation Syracusan and Syracuse University alumnus. A developer and architect with deep experience in historic hotel restoration, Riley purchased the hotel on July 3, 2014 and began the painstaking process of restoring it to its former glory, enlisting hospitality architect and fellow alumnus Mario LaGuardia of New York’s MLG.



Guest accommodations were expanded in line with modern expectations, bringing the room count down from 600 to 261. All 600 guest room doors, however, were retained in accordance with historic preservation rules. Also left intact and restored:

- The guest rooms' "coffin" doors, which once opened to a compartment in which guests left laundry for cleaning.
- One guest room, the 400-square-foot **Historical Room**, restored to reflect the classic furnishings and style of the hotel's origins.
- The second-floor **lobby**, with its 20-foot ceilings and columns, original chandelier, and 1940s mural.
- The historic **Grand Ballroom** on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor, along with its crystal chandeliers, hand-painted arched ceiling depicting clouds against a blue sky, and two-story windows.
- The **Persian Terrace**, complete with its expansive arched windows, tromp l'oeil ceiling, and hand-laid herringbone wood dance floor.
- A one-of-a-kind **antique wine cabinet** that was uncovered in pieces during the hotel's restoration and restored by local craftsmen at Harden Furniture board by board and is the centerpiece of the Private Dining Room.
- Details of the hotel's historic **barbershop**, transformed into the bar at Eleven Waters restaurant.

On June 15, 2016, after two years of painstaking work and a \$76-million investment, the historic hotel reopened, taking its place once again as the grand dame of Central New York hotels. On August 19, 2016, the hotel adopted the Marriott flag and became known as Marriott Syracuse Downtown.

### **About Marriott Syracuse Downtown**

Located in one of the area's most historic buildings, the new 261-room Marriott Syracuse Downtown opened in fall 2016 after a major renovation to restore the hotel to its original glory. Conveniently situated just minutes from all that downtown Syracuse has to offer, from its many businesses to numerous entertainment venues and cultural sites, the hotel is an ideal destination for business and leisure travelers alike. The hotel's stylish interiors combine history and modernity – with original features dating back to 1924 and new furnishings designed by local Stickley furniture. In addition to the hotel's restaurant, Eleven Waters, and its casual gathering spot, The Cavalier Room, Marriott Syracuse Downtown offers a choice of 23 event rooms that include expansive, state-of-the-art meeting venues and facilities for up to 1,330 guests. All main floor meeting rooms, as well as the Finger Lakes Ballroom, meet the discerning standards of International Association of Conference Centers (IACC). The hotel is located at 100 E. Onondaga Street and is managed by Crescent Hotels & Resorts. For more information, call (315) 474-2424 or visit [marriottsyracusedowntown.com](http://marriottsyracusedowntown.com).

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**CONTACT:** Anneliese Cassalia/ Gerard McTigue  
Eric Mower + Associates  
315-413-4236/ 212-284-9936  
[acassalia@mower.com](mailto:acassalia@mower.com) /gmtigue@mower.com