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The Albert Pick Co.

by

Mike Prero

Anyone who's been collecting Hotels for awhile is familiar with the Albert Pick Co. It established a string of hotels from the Midwest to the East Coast early on. Indeed, before its demise in the 1960s, it represented America's oldest hotel family.

In 1846, a young Austrian immigrated to this country. He was only 20 years old. America was only 59 years old, itself, but it was already a land of great promise. He had left behind him his home Eickhorne, Austria, his family, and the family china and glassware business. Albert Pick traveled westward to a pioneer outpost called Chicago.

The Chicago of 1846 was a bustling shipping and portage town of less than 30,000. Located on swampland, its streets were often no more than mud. James Polk, the 11th president, was in office; there were 28 states in the Union; the country could boast a population of 23 million.

Young Pick found employment as a clerk with the Austrian consulate, but soon saw that there could be a market for Austrian china and glassware in Chicago's hotels and restaurants. He became an importer, and in 1857 he found the Albert Pick Company, located in a four -story frame building on Randolph Street, near Franklin Street.

Albert, already married, watched his company expand as Chicago grew. More business meant more work, and more work meant greater demands. He wrote his younger off to war as a Union Army drummer boy of 16.

In 1864, Charles returned to the Albert Pick. Co. as a salesman and soon married the daughter of a Chicago physician. Eventually they had five children, including a son whom they named Albert. That Albert would be the father of Albert Pick, Jr. *[you need a score card to keep all the Alberts straight here!]*.

In 1871, everything changed. The Albert Pick Co. was wiped out by the great Chicago fire. But, like the mythological Phoenix, the Picks literally arose from their own ashes and started over again. Charles eventually bought the business from his older brother, and, in 1884, Albert left school at 15 to work for his father.

Eight years later, Albert married, and in that same year of 1892, he, in turn, bought the business from his father. Over the next 30 years, Albert Pick built up the business to the point where it became known as the largest hotel equipment house in the country. He was also instrumental in organizing, financing, and promoting numerous hotel operations, and helped a number of other future hotel barons get started. In 1926, the Albert Pick Co. was sold to a group of New York investment bankers and became known as Albert Pick Co., Inc. At the same time, Albert, together with his brother, brother-in-law, and son (Albert Pick Jr.) organized a chain of seven hotels into the Pick Hotels Corporation.

Albert Pick died in 1955, but Albert Pick Jr. had, in the meantime, become president of the hotel chain. By 1957, when the family celebrated its 100th anniversary, it was the third largest hotel chain in the U.S., and prospects for continuation of the Albert Pick dynasty looked good as Albert Pick III announced plans for carrying on the family businesss as soon as his military service was completed. But, it was not to be. The Pick Hotels Corporation went out of business in the 1960s, probably due to finding themselves saddled with aging hotels located in downtown areas (such as the company's flagship hotel, the Congress, in Chicago) as the emphasis rabidly shifted to motels located outside of city centers. The company had actually already seen the writing on the wall and become the first major hotel chain to enter the motel field on a large scale in the late 1950s. It boasted eight motels located in seven different states, but it couldn't compete with such burgeoning giants as Best Western and Holiday Inn. The Bass family bought part of the Pick chain to put with their Americana chain. Despite 100 years, the Albert Pick hotels disappeared in the twinkling of an eye.

There is no listing on Albert Pick Hotels, but Hotel collectors certainly are familiar with Albert Pick Hotel covers. Ralph Brann reported having 204 different such covers in 1993. My interest in the topic comes from the Albert Pick manumark, though, since I collect such manumarked covers and maintain a listing of such. Currently, there are 239 listed.