



Four Hundred Years of Hospitality, and Still Going...

Santa Fe - When Santa Fe was founded in 1607, official records show a *fonda*, or inn, was among the first business established. But, it wasn't until two centuries later, when Captain William Becknell completed the first successful trading expedition from Missouri to Santa Fe – which came to be known as **The Santa Fe Trail** - that the original adobe hotel, literally “at the end of the trail,” came into its own.

With the establishment of this major trade route, “**La Fonda**” became a magnet for trappers, merchants, soldiers, politicians, and gamblers. The discovery of gold in the Ortiz Mountains, south of town in 1828, added to the colorful folk who sought out the inn's pleasant lodgings, fine food and hospitality. When New Mexico was proclaimed a Territory of the United States in 1848, a lavish Victory Ball was held at La Fonda, attended by the cream of Santa Fe society.

Shortly thereafter, the Inn was purchased by new owners and re-named **The U.S. Hotel**. In 1867, the hotel was sold again and became **The Exchange Hotel**, and it would remain under that name for the next sixty years. The hotel offered *modern* comfort and convenience, warm meals, a livery attendant, and a corral. The guest list from those early days read like a historical *Who's Who* – Kit



Carson, William T. Sherman, Ulysses S. Grant and President Rutherford B. Hayes. And rumor has it that Sheriff Pat Garrett spent a night at the hotel after killing the notorious Billy the Kid.

The Exchange Hotel fell on hard times and was demolished in 1919, but with a definite flair. As part of a Liberty Bond rally after World War I, citizens razed the building with an army tank crashing into the adobe walls following each sale of a \$100 bond. The city fathers secured funds and an architect – Rapp, Rapp and Henderson – and the current La Fonda was built.



In 1925 the hotel was purchased by the Santa Fe Railway, which then leased it a year later to the Fred Harvey Company. Harvey then hired Santa Fe architect John Gaw Meem and designer/architect, Mary Jane Colter to develop La Fonda Hotel into a Harvey House. For more than 40 years, from 1926 until 1968, La Fonda flourished as a successful Harvey House, delighting guests with lavish furnishings and art, wonderful food and true Santa Fe hospitality. And of course, there were the famous Harvey Girls. Then in 1968 the hotel was purchased by Sam and Ethel Ballen of Dallas, Texas and ceased to be a Harvey House. **La Fonda on the Plaza** and a new era began...



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