

# BICENTENNIAL EDITION

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## Imperial Hotel Recalled as Mark of Elegance in Grangeville

By Karen Symons  
The Imperial Hotel, a mystery to those of us who never saw it, and a memory to those who did, was a mark of elegance that the town of Grangeville is without now. Practically every small town one roams through, there is a relic hotel of past elegance that denoted the town's splendor in the "good old days." The Imperial, now a parking lot for IGA, does not stand for us as a reminder of days gone by; perhaps pointing us in a more progressive mode of living and building.

The hotel burned in 1966. It had been remodeled and

kept up, all the more reason why it is sad it is gone. Not a relic, but a touch of class.

Its stationery proclaimed it "North Idaho's Best Hotel, 85 Outside rooms, 30 with Private Bath, Hot and Cold Water in Every Room", said the 1909, personalized letterhead.

The Imperial Opening, slated as the "Event of The Season Will Occur Tuesday Night," it was heralded in the June 10, 1909 issue of the Idaho County Free Press.

"\$75,000 Hostelry Opening; Everything in

readiness for Banquet and Ball."

"Next Tuesday, June 15, will be a day long to be remembered by Grangeville as on that date the Imperial Hotel will be formally opened to the public. Due to the push and energy which has characterized the business men of this city, Grangeville is today the proud possessor of a modern brick hotel of three stories, hot and cold water in every one of the eighty-four sleeping rooms, baths and all modern conveniences, in fact, the Imperial, as it will be known, will compare with

any hotel in the state of Idaho and is as well arranged and furnished as the best in the Northwest. "The cost of the ground and building is in the neighborhood of \$75,000 and this does not include the furnishings which required another investment of \$25,000. "On Tuesday night of next week, Landlord and Lady Tamblin will open this modern hostelry to the public with a fine banquet and ball and no doubt will be a large one. Every effort is being put forward to make this an event long remem-

bered by Grangeville and nothing will be left undone in carrying out this object."

After the event was over and the hotel in full business, the Free Press carried a follow up of the opening festivities.

"The opening of the Imperial Hotel held on Wednesday night was among the leading events of Grangeville society for years and also marks an epoch in the annals of the business circles of this city. An elegant five course dinner was served at the banquet and the ball was held in the spacious room formerly

occupied by Messrs. Vollmer and Scott directly across the street. A large crowd was in attendance, practically every business house in the city being represented. An excellent musical program was provided by the Riggs orchestra. Lack of time and space prevents a detailed account of the noteworthy affair but suffice to say the manner in which the opening was conducted has elicited many compliments for Landlord and Landlady Tamblin."

The building was built of bricks, made at a Grangeville brick yard,

located near the gun club now.

Originally managed by Lorana C. and E.A. Tamblin, the hotel was owned by stockholders. In 1915 Mrs. R. R. Reilly (later to become Mrs. Charles Campbell) took over the management. After three years, she bought the hotel from the stockholders and it stayed in her family until it burned, according to her daughter-in-law, Mrs. Florence Reilly.

The traffic through the hotel in its heyday was large. Salesmen, visiting merchants, doing now what is taken care of by a phone call would stay an evening in the Imperial. Traffic on the North-South highway was a source of income, as the Imperial was the only hotel in town, besides a smaller one across the street. There were no motels.

The hotel was the Greyhound Bus stop for many years, catering to weary traveler's hungry and tired bodies. It was also the freight terminal.

The staff consisted of four chambermaids, two cooks, usually Chinese, three eight-hour shift clerks, and a janitor.

The building, the only three-story one in town, was heated by wood. This heater would cut the wood down half it into logs, stack it into long racks, chop it, push it through a door to the basement, stack it again, then carry it to the furnace.

In 1935, the heating was changed over to coal, with a radiator in every room, Mrs. Reilly said.

The basement was heated by a large fish tank that had trout in it. It was a large circular tank and the people would visit and feed the fish. After chlorination of the water, the trout could not survive, so gold fish were placed in the tank and grew very large from the constant attention from school children and hotel visitors.

Mr. Campbell built a natural washed rock fireplace in the lobby. The rooms were filled with mahogany furniture bought from the Crescent in Spokane. There were no closets in the earlier days of the hotel, but merely hooks for hanging clothes on. The beds were flat-sprung with hair mattresses.

After World War II, the building was extensively remodeled. All the furnishings were gathered in the dining room and sold, Mrs. Reilly said.

The wiring and plumbing was redone, now each room had a private bath. Closets were built in each of the spacious rooms to better accommodate the trade. The rewiring took care of the light bulb dangling from the ceiling on a single cord.

The entrance was moved from the corner to the side. The ceilings were lowered and the lobby remodeled. The carpentry was done by Bill Campbell.

The legendary fish tank was removed. The rooms were refurnished with new beds and furniture out of Seattle.

In the March 3, 1966 edition of the Free Press, heart-breaking headlines told the news of IMPERIAL HOTEL FIRE LOSS ESTIMATED A HALF MILLION.

"Damage, estimated as high as \$500,000 was suffered by one of Grangeville's few remaining landmarks last Wednesday evening when fire destroyed the roof, top floor and a portion of the second floor of the Imperial Hotel.

"The fire was first discovered when persons in the dining room smelled smoke and noticed lights flickering. By the time firemen arrived the basement was full of smoke and flames. The blaze was believed to have started from electrical wiring, however a definite cause has not yet been determined.

"Mrs. Charles R. Campbell, former owner of the hotel and mother of the present owners, Marion Reilly and Mildren Martin, said Monday no plans had yet been made as to whether the hotel would be rebuilt. Insurance adjusters were in Grangeville Thursday and Friday of last week, but no exact amount of damage was given.

"Firemen fought the blaze from inside the building as long as possible and it at first appeared the fire would be controlled, however, the flames reached a laundry chute and climbed to the third floor and the roof of the building. It was more than two hours from the time of the alarm before the fire finally broke through the roof and it became apparent the building would be lost.

"Even then firemen refused to give up and continued to pour water onto the roof and into the third floor windows. By continually soaking carpeting and mattresses on the third floor the fire was contained there and managed to get into the second floor only at two rooms.

"There was considerable fear the fire would spread to adjoining buildings but it was never allowed to flame up. The absence of any wind eased the job of the firemen in containing the blaze.

"Furniture from the hotel lobby was saved as was the stock and most of the furniture from the Imperial Club located in the southwest corner of the street floor. Also saved was the large antique clock located in the lobby. (The clock is now on display at the First Security Bank and belongs to Gerald Walker.)

"When it became apparent the local supply of oxygen would be exhausted, Frank Hill of Grangeville Air Service, made an emergency trip to Lewiston where the Fire Department there supplied nine tanks. The local supply however, proved sufficient.

"Mrs. Florence Reilly, daughter-in-law of Mrs. Campbell, and operator of the hotel, said about half the rooms were filled when the fire broke out, however,

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# Remodeling of Imperial Hotel Went on Up Through Fire in Building

(Continued from previous page) local citizens fought the blaze through the night, working in shifts the latter hours, and at 6:30 a.m. left two men to watch for any flameup and went for much needed rest.

"One of my most sincere regrets is for the loss of jobs for the 20 people employed at the hotel," Mrs. Campbell said.

"The hotel had been remodeled several times, the last only about five years ago. The dining room, closed for several years, was renovated and reopened in 1962.

"Firemen and several

days of the hotel could be heard.

"The building was constructed in 1910 and has served travelers through the area ever since."

On Saturday, August 6, 1966, an auction was held at the Koczynski Warehouse of items saved from the fire. It would continue for two days if necessary. Rebekah Lodge served lunch. Buck Paul was the auctioneer, and Neil Fales was the clerk.

On March 10, 1966, it was reported that "HIGH WINDS tumbled the third story front

wall of the fire weakened Imperial Hotel onto the sidewalk Tuesday evening about 6:20. There has been some fear the walls might fall and the sidewalk had been kept blocked off since the fire February 23. It was feared the west wall of the building might collapse in the wind and Howard's IGA closed earlier than normal to preclude possible injury to customers."

On March 17, 1966, the hazardous building was taken care of.

"NO LONGER can the

Imperial Hotel be called the tallest building in Grangeville. After high winds caused the front portion of the third story wall to collapse into the street last week the remainder of the fire weakened wall was removed to avoid possible injury to persons walking below it to the adjoining building. The job was accomplished by Haener Equipment Co., of Grangeville."

On June 15, 1967, the death knoll was rung for the Imperial.

"By the end of this week the Imperial Hotel will be only a memory and the spot where it has been standing for some 55 years gave the appearance of a missing tooth on Main street.

"Destruction of the burned out remains began June 7 and at press time Wednesday had been reduced to a pile of rubble, some of which will be used to fill and level the property.

"Pete Grant of Lewiston, crane operator on the job, said two more days should see the job finished up.

"Workmen were busy Wednesday removing the remainder of the West wall by hand down to the point where it becomes a common wall with Howard's IGA Foodliner.

"For the last week, sidewalk superintendents have watched the building come down. Many of them reminiscing about earlier days and events that had taken place in the building.

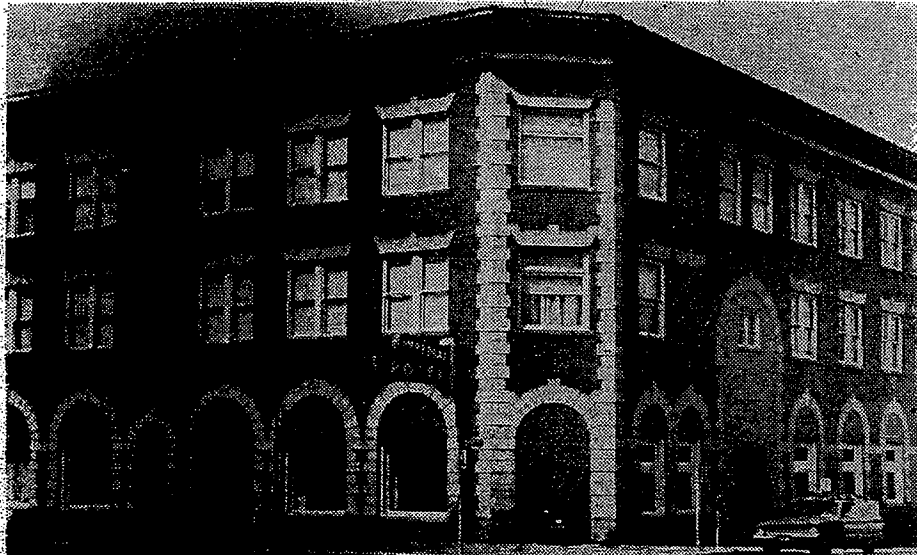
"Prior to the fire in February, 1966, the Hotel was used by many salesmen on regular trips through the

area as well as many tourists stopping over or passing through Grangeville. Since that time motels have had to take up the slack and on many occasions accommodations for travelers have been extremely scarce.

"Although several rumors have passed around as to what would be done with the property, Paul Eimers, attorney for the owners, reports that no plans are in the offing and no deals pending for use of the property."

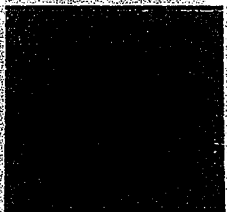
A beautiful piece of Grangeville's history had passed into non-existence, due to nature's fire and man's machine.

The actual beauty of the hotel is etched on community-member's memories. We can only guess what it must have been like from the photographs and newspaper articles about it. In that way the Imperial Hotel has stolen a piece of immortality.



THE IMPERIAL HOTEL, now the parking lot of IGA, was built in 1909. The entrance was originally where the mailbox stands in this picture. It was remodeled after World War II

and the entrance was moved to the left. Fire destroyed the building in 1966.—Free Press Photo



THE LOBBY of the Imperial Hotel featured a natural washed-rock fireplace and a circular fishtank that once held trout, then goldfish. This is an early picture of the lobby before any remodeling was done.—Free Press Photo