

= Shamrock Hotel =

The Shamrock was a hotel constructed between 1946 and 1949 by wildcatter Glenn McCarthy southwest of downtown Houston , Texas next to the Texas Medical Center . It was the largest hotel built in the United States during the 1940s . The grand opening of the Shamrock is still cited as one of the biggest social events ever held in Houston . Sold to Hilton Hotels in 1955 and operated for over three decades as the Shamrock Hilton , the facility endured financial struggles throughout its history . In 1985 , Hilton Hotels donated the building to the Texas Medical Center and the structure was demolished on June 1 , 1987 .

= = Design and construction = =

Designed by Fort Worth architect Wyatt C. Hedrick , the eighteen @-@ story building with a green tile pitched roof and 1 @,@ 100 rooms was conceived by McCarthy as a city @-@ sized hotel scaled for conventions with a resort atmosphere . The hotel was located in a suburban area three miles (5 km) southwest of downtown Houston at the acute southwest corner of Main Street and Bellaire Boulevard (West Holcombe Boulevard after 1963) . At the time , this was on the fringes of countryside and was meant to be the first phase of a much larger indoor shopping and entertainment complex called McCarthy Center , anchored alongside the planned Texas Medical Center . At the hotel 's north side was a five @-@ story building containing a 1 @,@ 000 @-@ car garage and 25 @,@ 000 @-@ square @-@ foot (2 @,@ 300 m2) exhibition hall . To the south was the hotel 's lavishly landscaped garden designed by Ralph Ellis Gunn , a terrace and an immense swimming pool measuring 165 by 142 feet (43 m) described as the world 's biggest outdoor pool , which accommodated exhibition waterskiing and featured a 3 story @-@ high diving platform with an open spiral staircase . Construction was completed for about \$ 21 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 (equivalent to over \$ 200 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 in 2007) .

Politician and entrepreneur Jesse H. Jones privately warned McCarthy that business travelers would be reluctant to stay at a hotel three miles south from downtown Houston . Hotel industry executives flatly warned McCarthy the project would not be profitable . He publicly replied , " I went into the oil business in 1933 when everybody said I was a damn fool . Now they 're saying it again about my hotel . "

The 5 @,@ 000 @-@ square @-@ foot (460 m2) lobby was paneled in burlled mahogany with added trim heavily influenced by Art Deco , a design movement which had been popular during the 1920s and 30s . McCarthy ordered furnishings and decor in 63 shades of green , a nod to his ancestral Ireland . Hedrick 's architectural firm had reportedly been the third @-@ largest in the US , however his conservative design for the building 's exterior along with its lavish interiors by Robert D. Harrell of Los Angeles drew wide criticism , notably from Frank Lloyd Wright who while being shown the completed facility before it opened , pointed at the lobby ceiling and said to Fay Jones , " That , young man , is an example of the effects of venereal disease on architecture . " Wright also called the Shamrock " an imitation Rockefeller Center " (which had been completed ten years earlier) . McCarthy claimed the decor represented " the best of all periods . " Time magazine described it as " eclectic . " The building 's structural design has since been characterized as " more robust and sturdy than sleek and futuristic . "

= = Historic grand opening = =

The hotel opened with fireworks displays on St. Patrick ? s Day 1949 . Two thousand Houstonians paid \$ 42 a person to have dinner at what was widely publicized as ? Houston ? s biggest party " which cost an estimated one million dollars . The party was attended by over 150 Hollywood celebrities including Ginger Rogers , Hedda Hopper , Robert Preston and Errol Flynn along with noted Los Angeles business executives and reporters , some of whom were flown in to Houston International Airport on a customized Boeing 307 Stratoliner airplane which McCarthy had bought only days earlier from Howard Hughes . Many more were brought in by train on a chartered Santa

Fe Super Chief . With a crowd estimated at 50 @, @ 000 gathering outside the hotel , newspaper boys dressed in black tie handed out commemorative editions of the Houston Post as guests arrived that evening . The party became very overcrowded , with three thousand people milling in the hotel 's public areas , a thousand more than had been foreseen . Houston mayor Oscar F. Holcombe and his wife sat in a hallway for two hours after his chair was stolen . " It was the worst mob scene I have ever witnessed , " Holcombe said later . The festivities became so raucous that a radio broadcast from the hotel by actress , singer and World War II pinup girl Dorothy Lamour was cut off by the network ; assuming he was off @-@ air , NBC audio engineer Raoul Murphy uttered an expletive heard live nationwide and dead air greeted the audience for a very long twenty seconds . Due to the numerous broadcast difficulties , Lamour reportedly fled the stage in tears .

The Houston Chronicle 's society editor wrote that the event was " bedlam in diamonds " . Life called it " ... the most dazzling exhibition of evening dresses and big names ever seen in Texas . Everyone had to concede it was quite a party and quite a hotel . " The grand opening of the Shamrock is still cited as one of the biggest social events in Houston ? s history .

= = Operation = =

The Shamrock initially had a staff of 1 @, @ 200 managed by George Lindholm , who had been recruited from the socially prominent Waldorf @-@ Astoria hotel in New York . There were 23 different employee uniforms . Guests signed the register in " grass @-@ hued " green ink and their luggage was carried by bellhops wearing emerald green , lemon trimmed uniforms past a portrait of McCarthy in the elevator lobby to air @-@ conditioned , green @-@ hued rooms each with generously framed abstract art on the walls , push @-@ button radios (including recorded music from an elaborate in @-@ house system through which an operator played extended @-@ length phonographic records) and television , all somewhat rare amenities for a hotel at the time . Over a third of the rooms had kitchenettes . Celebrity singers (including Lamour) performed in the hotel 's nightclub , called the Emerald room . From 1949 to 1953 the Shamrock hosted a network radio program called Saturday at the Shamrock carried by the American Broadcasting Company , then the only nationally broadcast scripted radio program produced outside New York or Los Angeles .

However the Shamrock soon began experiencing persistent problems with occupancy rates and was seldom if ever full . McCarthy had spent lavishly , then borrowed heavily against his assets (including the hotel) to leverage a series of risky investments and his cash reserves quickly dwindled . Within a year Lindholm quietly resigned . In 1952 McCarthy defaulted on a loan and the hotel was acquired by Equitable Life Assurance Society . That same year author Edna Ferber described the Shamrock as the " Conquistador " in her novel Giant (and it was later briefly featured in the 1956 film adaptation directed by George Stevens) . Despite financial troubles the resort @-@ like Shamrock with its restaurants , bars and swank shops had become a popular gathering place for local society and was characterized as " Houston 's Riviera " during the early 1950s . The Shamrock 's private and sleek Cork Club was noted as the site of many oil deals (and reportedly , fist fights) , along with performances by singer Frank Sinatra . In 1953 singer Patty Andrews of the Andrews Sisters launched her brief solo career in the hotel 's still somewhat fashionable Emerald room nightclub .

= = = Shamrock Hilton = = =

In 1954 the Hilton Hotels Corporation assumed management of the hotel and bought the property at a discount from its construction costs in 1955 but also struggled to find a profitable model for the huge facility , later shown to be isolated from both downtown Houston and its growing system of freeways . Moreover the Shamrock was overwhelmed by competition from many much smaller , cheaper and automobile @-@ friendly motels . A low two @-@ story " lanai " wing in the form of a motel was added next to the swimming pool in 1957 . Meanwhile affluent suburban home buyers bypassed the area and the planned shopping and entertainment center was never built (although McCarthy 's concept influenced the successful Houston Galleria which opened near an intersection

of freeways on the city 's west side in 1970) . In about 1965 the first Trader Vic 's restaurant in Texas was launched at the Shamrock where it did business until 1980 . The hotel remained popular for Houston social events such as debutante balls , barbecues and business meetings , continuing operations as the Shamrock Hilton until 1986 , by which time even its local reputation had long since faded .

= = Demolition = =

During a severe local recession in 1985 the 36 @-@ year @-@ old hotel , still the second largest in Houston but by then in need of extensive refurbishing and refitting , was in effect donated to the Texas Medical Center . In March 1986 a protest rally was held by historic preservationists including McCarthy and the hotel opened its last annual St Patrick 's Day party to the public . That evening , some people who had been at the opening night party in 1949 reportedly attended a semi @-@ formal event in the hotel 's Emerald room . A few employees had been with the hotel since its first year of operation . The building was demolished 1 June 1987 (McCarthy died 18 months later) and the land was paved over as a surface parking lot . The Institute of Biosciences and Technology , a component of the Texas A & M Health Science Center has since been built on the site and ironically , along with fountains and some landscaping on the northeast grounds , the hotel 's multi @-@ story parking garage was retained .

= = Residents = =

Maxine Mesinger and her family

= = Programs / Menus = =