

THE HISTORIC STRATER HOTEL PRESENTS

ROOM 409: JAMES W. JARVIS

AKA BIG JIM JARVIS; 1877—1968

HEAD OF HIS FAMILY AT A YOUNG AGE

This pioneer of the Southwest was born October 17, 1877, in the Wet Mountain Valley of Colorado, near Silver Cliff. His family raised livestock and traded with the Indians, moving to Aztec, New Mexico, in 1888. At the age of 14 James became the head of the household which included his 90 year old grandfather, three sisters, and mother. His father, George, left the family accompanied by a young woman the family had taken in, possibly to buy or sell sheep in South American. George never returned and young James was in charge. His family operated Aztec's first hotel and Jim rode the mail between Farmington and Durango becoming the driver of 4 and 6 horse freight teams. He was fearful of the Utes and one day fell from his horse when his appendix burst. He was nursed back to health by the Utes, who after saving his life, won an important place in his heart.

Jim operated a trading post at Largo, NM and bought sheep from the Navajos and drove them to Durango to sell. Jim outfitted the "Hyde Exploration Expedition" that excavated and developed the ruins at Pueblo Bonito in Chaco Canyon. With the popularity of the automobile, the livery stable he owned became Durango's first automobile dealership and garage, selling Cadillacs and Studebakers until 1939.

His long life filled with spirit and energy helped propel Durango into a vibrant town with his impact felt to this day.



SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- *Married Ida Ethel Ferguson in Aztec, NM, in 1900. She was from a pioneer ranching family in Aztec.*
- *When he retired from his Studebaker agency to pursue other endeavors, he was the longest continuous dealer in the U.S. He also had the distinction of selling the first Studebaker in CO.*
- *Big Jim was fluent in the Ute and Navajo languages.*
- *Jarvis served on the Durango City Council 1909-1916. As an alderman in charge of the police department, he headed a raid which ended gambling in Durango's 36 bars.*
- *The Jarvis children were Irvin, Vernon (Pinky), Louise and Jentra. Both sons preceded him in death.*

THE MOTION PICTURE INDUSTRY COMES TO DURANGO

"What do those birds in Hollywood have that I don't? I'll bet they don't have the stuff in their noggins for a real life story that I haven't already lived". Thus began Jim Jarvis's foray into the motion picture business. Jim was the ultimate movie maker who produced, wrote, directed, and starred in "Small Town Vamp" a racy film shot right on Main Avenue and the adjoining streets. The film bug that captured Jarvis began when Warner Brothers asked him

to help out on a western they were shooting in Dolores. He was hired for his fluency in the Navajo language to make sure the local Indians hired for the picture were following directions. Big Jim soon decided he could make films as well as anyone; thus began the Durango Film Producing Company. A few short films and one other full length feature, *Love of a Navajo*, were filmed before Jarvis was on to other business ventures. Eventually all of Jarvis' films had

to be destroyed because of the flammable nature of the old celluloid from which they were made. His contribution led the way for several blockbusters to be filmed here, including *City Slickers*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *Around the World in Eighty Days*, and *Across the Wide Missouri*, starring Clark Gable. The Strater Hotel has hosted many of the stars and crew of these films and others while being filmed in the area.