

THE HISTORIC STRATER HOTEL PRESENTS
ROOM 400: THOMAS W. SEFTON,
“THE CHIEF”

THOMAS W. SEFTON, OCTOBER 8, 1917-NOVEMBER 7, 2006.
BORN IN NEW YORK. ORPHANED AT 2 MONTHS OLD. ADOPTED BY HELEN & JOSEPH SEFTON, JR.
MUCH LOVED BY THE STRATER HOTEL OWNERS, STAFF, AND DURANGO LOCALS.

HOW DID HE COME TO THE STRATER HOTEL?

A very well known and highly respected gentleman who loved the Strater Hotel was Tom Sefton, owner of the San Diego Trust and Savings Bank, a nearly two billion dollar business. He contributed money to the Durango Police Force and enjoyed riding around with them, earning his nickname, “The Chief”.

Rod Barker said that Tom was a warm and caring fellow who was viewed as a member of the Strater family. He would stay for months at a time and while here would come down for breakfast each morning and take the time and effort to learn the names of nearly every hotel staff member. He had a head for names

and soon knew more local Durango residents by name than most natives. Because of this, he became one of the most beloved visitors in Durango. He not only knew names of individuals but also the names of spouses and children, and even the businesses they worked for.

Although the family business was started by Tom’s grandfather, he had no free pass to the executive ranks. He never felt entitled and earned everything he got. He developed his own successful philosophy of business that he passed along to Rod Barker who ended up owning and successfully managing the Strater Hotel. Tom’s first job in the bank was as a messenger. He was

paid only half of what the other messengers were paid. After 13 years of hard work, he was promoted to Vice President. Thereafter, he was put in charge of the entire bank empire. With Tom at the helm, the bank grew to include 53 branches with assets of 1.4 billion dollars.

Tom had a shooting range on the top floor of the bank “so that everyone would know how to shoot straight in case of a robbery.”



CHIPMUNKS AT THE STRATER?

Tom would frequent the Strater along with his son Harley, staying for months at a time from the late 1960’s until his death in 2006. Their special room was 400. He loved Colorado and also had a cabin up in the La Plata Mountains, west of town. Tom’s love for the outdoors and nature was

instilled in his son Harley as well. As a young boy, Harley loved to catch chipmunks that he found in the woods by the cabin. One day, Harley had an impressive catch of 7 or 8 of the little fellows and decided to show them to his friends in town. They were in a little wire covered box with a trap door. While away from the room a young housekeeper accidentally bumped open the

door and they all escaped from the box and proceeded to run around the room and down the 4th floor hallway. This got the attention of the entire Strater staff, also running around with boxes attempting to catch all the critters. It was quite a scene with several women safely standing on chairs to avoid being touched by the chipmunks!

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- *In 1951 Tom married Donna Knox, the daughter of San Diego’s mayor. They had one daughter and two sons.*
- *Tom loved trains. He had a model train collection consisting of some 7000 toy trains and accessories. Today his collection can be viewed at the California State Railroad Museum in Sacramento, CA.*
- *Tom invited friends over for private screenings of Laurel & Hardy comedy classic movies. He had a large collection of L&H paraphernalia.*
- *His early passion was for flying and he logged many hours in small planes after enrolling in a San Diego flight school.*
- *Tom served in the Army Air Corps during World War II. He left active duty as a Captain in 1946 and remained in the Air Force Reserve until 1960.*
- *As a lifelong animal lover, Tom contributed consistently to the San Diego Zoo and collected pets with the same fervor he showed for trains. He had Japanese Koi, goldfish, frogs, dogs, ducks, chickens, hamsters, guinea pigs, a goat, mice, rabbits and a lamb named Gertrude.*
- *Tom often sported cardigan sweaters.*