

THE HISTORIC STRATER HOTEL PRESENTS



ROOM 323: GUSTAF NORDENSKIOLD

TRAVELER, SCIENTIST & EXPLORER AND WRITER
FROM SWEDEN
1868-1895



WHAT WAS HE DOING AT THE STRATER HOTEL?

You might never have ever heard of this man, but if you have ever thought to visit Mesa Verde, you share something in common with him, and your reason for being in this room is far more pleasant than his was! In 1891, on a world tour for the sake of his health, the young Gustaf came to the area west of Durango in search of the ancient civilization known to have inhabited Mesa Verde. Upon his arrival, he discovered that nobody had yet published a scientific description of the cliff dwellings, and he set out to do so. Vandals were looting and selling artifacts from this area, and Gustaf sought to preserve them by collecting and preparing

them for shipment to a Scandinavian museum. Locals, even in those days, did not look kindly on a foreigner taking anything of perceived value out of the country. He was taken into "house arrest" in this very room at the Strater Hotel, as the local jail had burned up in a fire the year before. "Must be stopped at once," the newspaper said. Should he be lynched? He was charged with the devastation of the cliff dwellings.

The telegraph he sent his father read "much trouble some expense no danger". The Nordenskiöld family in Sweden was well known and respected, and he had powerful alliances in the U.S. This became an inter-

national incident, involving the Attorney General and the Secretary of State who were supporters of Gustaf's cause. Gustaf was pardoned and returned to Sweden to publish the very first scientific account of Mesa Verde. He made a great contribution to the history of the Southwest, and gave Mesa Verde international recognition. Today Gustaf's collection of Mesa Verde artifacts is the largest collection outside of the U.S, residing in the National Museum of Finland.

Gustaf, like his sister, died from tuberculosis on June 26, 1895 while he was traveling by train, just before his 27th birthday.

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- *Gustaf's father, Nils Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld discovered the Northeast Passage.*
- *Gustaf graduated from the Uppsala University in Stockholm in 1889 with degrees in mineralogy and chemistry.*
- *It was once believed that Tuberculosis could be cured by travel to an arid climate.*
- *Gustaf collected over 600 historical treasures and artifacts, including a mummified corpse, and packed them into 15 crates and two barrels for shipment from Mesa Verde to Sweden.*
- *He took over 150 photographs of Mesa Verde after his house arrest was over with a camera he ordered from overseas.*
- *The books he published were named **The Cliff Dwellers of Mesa Verde**, and **Southwestern Colorado: Their Pottery and Implements**.*
- *The population of Mesa Verde was once 200 residents. There were a total of 217 sleeping and storage rooms, and 23 ceremonial rooms.*

THE WEATHERILLS

When Gustaf arrived at Mesa Verde, he met up with the five brothers who discovered the area. The Weatherill Men were cowboys who were originally in search of lost cattle, when they came upon the dwellings of which they soon named. They worked with Gustaf to collect the findings. In turn, he taught them how to carefully extract relics, keeping things most people would have thrown away: dust, wood ash, and dried human excrement. He showed them how to use a mason trowel instead of a spade to dig carefully. They all shared a respect and love of the place, and awe of their discovery.

To learn more, go to page 185 of the book **The Strater Hotel Story**, available for sale at the front desk. Also available on Amazon, **Nordenskiöld of Mesa Verde - A Biography**. Enjoy a video featuring Durango's own Duane Smith at www.pbs.org/nationalparks/parks/mesa-verde/