

*THE HISTORIC STRATER HOTEL PRESENTS*

## ROOM 221: THE TURNER FAMILY

Five generations of courage, enterprise, and community leadership helped shape Durango and southwestern Colorado.



*John Charles Turner*



*Emma Turner*

Beginning with John Charles Turner's arrival in the San Juan Mountains in the 1860s, the family built deep roots and became influential in ranching, banking, insurance, real estate, education, civic development, and philanthropy. Their legacy includes: helping secure the Durango and Silverton railroad, advancing Fort Lewis College, strengthening local industry, and supporting community projects which continue to benefit the region today.

The Turner Family's enduring influence and commitment to Durango make Room 221 a fitting tribute to their remarkable heritage. Their story is not only a chapter of local history, but also a testament to the pioneering spirit that defines the region.

John Charles Turner was born in England in 1834 and came to America as a child. After his father, a Pinkerton detective, died in the line of duty, John headed west and

joined the famed Baker Party in the San Juan Mountains, enduring a harsh winter at Baker's Bridge before serving with the 1st Colorado Cavalry in the Civil War. Afterward he traveled the frontier, married Emma Stephens in New Mexico, and served as sheriff in Colfax County. When Ute lands in the Animas Valley opened for settlement, John and Emma moved their young family north, drawn by the region's beauty and opportunity.

In 1876, John and Emma homesteaded one hundred sixty acres five miles north of Durango, carving a life out of untouched land. John was a respected community leader, serving as Road Overseer, La Plata County Sheriff, and later County Commissioner. Known for hard work, fairness, and steady judgment, he helped shape the early civic foundations of La Plata County while ranching and raising his family. When he died in 1902, John was laid to rest in the historic Animas City



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Cemetery near the early townsite he had helped build. Emma is still by his side.

### JOHN WILLIAM TURNER

John W. Turner continued the family's legacy of courage, resourcefulness, and civic service. Born on September 16, 1877, in a log cabin, he lost a leg at age seven in a hunting accident, but he adapted quickly. John worked as a printer for Durango Democrat publisher David Day, married Josie Hillman, and took over the family ranch in 1902.



*John William and Josephine Turner*

He married Josephine Trembl on December 8, 1900. They had two children, Richard and Bonnie.

John W. became a major force in Durango's financial life. He founded the Turner Investment Company in 1904, expanded into the real estate and automobile lending. The business was later located in the Strater Hotel where the Diamond Belle Saloon is today.

He served as Director of the Chamber of Commerce, Director of the Colorado New Mexico Fair Association, a City Council member, and La Plata County Treasurer. In 1935 he helped establish KIUP, the area's first radio station, whose inaugural broadcast came from the Strater Hotel. He later co-founded Turner Industrial

Bank, which supported small businesses, ranchers, and car buyers.

John W. died in 1962 and was remembered as a forward looking community builder whose word was his bond and whose business insight shaped Durango for generations.

### RICHARD WILLIAM TURNER

Richard Turner, the third generation of Turners in Durango, carried on the family's strong financial legacy. Born June 10, 1902, he sold newspapers and delivered groceries as a youngster. He worked as a bookkeeper for Turner Securities before serving as a pilot in the Army Air Corps during World War Two. After the war he continued flying, often transporting patients to Denver and Albuquerque.

Richard married Claudine Bowen, daughter of L. W. Bowen, Superintendent of the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad, whose lines stretched across the west. Its local route between Durango and Silverton has since become the region's largest tourism attraction (the Durango and Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad). They had three sons: Richard W. Turner, Jr. (Nick), Roderick, and John W. Turner, II.

Dick and his father established the Turner Industrial Bank of Durango, later part of Wells Fargo, and acquired the Bank of Ignacio. He incorporated the Bank of Durango and became its Director in 1968. Multiple generations worked together at the bank. When he passed at age 85, Dick was still serving as president of the Turner Investment Company.



*Richard William and Claudine Turner*





### **RICHARD WILLIAM TURNER, JR. (NICK)**

Nick Turner was born June 6, 1927, and began as a bookkeeper for Turner Investment Company before serving in the Navy Air Corps. He returned to join his father and grandfather at Turner Industrial Bank and was named Young Man of the Year by the Colorado Association of Finance Companies.

A gifted financial entrepreneur, Nick was involved in numerous companies including Easy Credit Corporation, Turner Securities, Turner Insurance, and several regional banks. He played a major role in persuading the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad to keep the Durango to Silverton line operating, a decision that had profound impact on both towns.

He helped convert Fort Lewis College from a two-year to a four-year institution, worked to establish Bodo Industrial Park, and arranged financing for the expansion of the Purgatory ski area.

Nick and his wife, Wanda, had three children: Susanne, Jayne, and Richard W. Turner, III (Pete).

### **RODERICK LEWIS TURNER (ROD)**

Rod was born in Durango on December 9, 1931. As a boy he and his brother, John, earned money raising chickens and rabbits, selling eggs, and delivering newspapers throughout town.

Rod learned to fly at the original airport located on the mesa above town where Fort Lewis College is today. He joined the Civil Air Patrol and later served in the Coast Guard with his younger brother, John.

Upon returning home Rod worked with his family in the Turner Insurance Company, Turner Industrial Bank, and Ignacio State Bank. He later left the family businesses to operate the Southwest Data Institute, a local business college that focused on serving rural residents and the Southern Ute Tribe.

He founded the Rod Turner Real Estate Company, becoming active in both commercial and residential development. Rod was also a dedicated member of the Electra Lake Sporting Club and the Hundred Club of Durango, which supports families of first responders injured or killed in the line of duty. Known for his quiet generosity, he often helped new business owners and offered support to people in need when others would not.



*Nick, John, and Rod Turner at Electra Lake north of Durango, CO (circa 1937).*

Rod and his wife, Robin, were married 67 years and had four children: Jack, Jim, David, and Laurel.

### **JOHN WILLIAM TURNER II**

John was born May 15, 1933, in Durango, the youngest son of Dick and Claudine.

As boys, he and his brother Rod were inseparable, delivering newspapers together and trying their hand at various childhood businesses. They shared a love of hunting, skiing, and spending time outdoors.

Following the family tradition, John became a pilot and enlisted in the Coast Guard alongside Rod. Stationed in Port Angeles, Washington, both served as radio operators and were fluent in Morse Code.

After returning to Durango, John worked in the family's insurance and banking businesses. He later established his own bank, operated a cattle ranch, and sold mobile homes.

John and his first wife, Marilyn, had four children: John III, Ted, Julie, and Tim. He later married Jeannie McDonald, with whom he had two daughters, Shannon and Stephanie.

