

Sir Walter Hotel ^[1]

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Lobby of the Sir Walter Hotel. Courtesy of North by Laura Young Baxley, 2006Carolina Office of Archives and History, Raleigh.

The [Sir Walter Hotel](#) ^[2], built in 1922 on Raleigh's Fayetteville Street, was part of a large boom in Raleigh's development during the 1920s. Gen. Albert Cox and Josephus Daniels's Capitol Construction Company built the hotel for \$750,000. B. H. Griffin, owner of the famed [Yarborough House](#) ^[3] across the street, became a partner and ran the hotel. For many years the Sir Walter Hotel was the preferred location for political gatherings, weddings, debutante balls, and parties of all types. The Sphinx Club, a "gentlemen's retreat," thrived in the hotel as well. Political campaigns and associated events, such as the Jefferson-Jackson Dinner, always took place in the hotel. In the 1960s, the hotel's role as "third chamber of the legislature" and "in" place for social gatherings declined with the expansion of the legislative building in Raleigh and the emergence of the [Velvet Cloak Inn](#) ^[4] and other hotels.

The Sir Walter Hotel can boast its share of intriguing stories and memorable events, perhaps the most publicized of which was the [Kluckhorn murder case](#) ^[5] of 1955. From his hotel room in the Sir Walter, [Richard Kluckhorn](#) ^[6], a textbook salesman, shot and killed Bernice Seawell of Arlington, Va, on 13 May of that year. It was later discovered that he had been "dry firing" with his gun, which went off accidentally, hitting Seawell in the parking lot across the street. Kluckhorn was convicted of involuntary manslaughter.

In 1964 the Sir Walter Hotel was sold to a corporation headed in part by John A. Williams. Williams bought out his partners and in 1967 donated the hotel to the state. The state sold the hotel in 1969 to [Plaza Associates](#) ^[6], which traded the hotel, along with other properties, to Kidd Brewer for the land on which [Crabtree Valley Mall](#) ^[7] was developed. By 1979 the Sir Walter Hotel had been converted into subsidized housing apartments, and it continues to serve this function. It is currently owned by the Raleigh-based partnership Sir Walter Associates.

References:

Bess Ballentine and Nell Joslin Styron, "Tales of the Sir Walter," *The State* 48 (September 1980).

Ballentine and Styron, "Tales of the Sir Walter: Part II," *The State* 48 (October 1980).

James Vickers, *Raleigh, City of Oaks: An Illustrated History* (1997).

Additional Resources:

Sir Walter Raleigh Hotel, National Park Service: www.nps.gov/nr/travel/raleigh/sir.htm ^[8]

Subjects:

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[Great Depression \(1929-1941\)](#) ^[10]

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Origin - location:

[Raleigh](#) ^[16]

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Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.^[17]

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