

Small Hotel, 1900-1940

by Loren K. Wiseman

This represents a small hotel in a small town near a railroad or riverside in the first decades of the 20th Century. Places like this were typically run by a family (sometimes a widow and her children), who either lived in the office or in a small house nearby.

Establishments like this were patronized by single travelers more concerned with economy than creature comforts – traveling salesmen, railroad workers, down-and-out private detectives, and so on. By modern American standards it seems quite primitive, but many families of the past lived in similar circumstances until well into the century.

This floorplan is suitable for pulp adventures, *Call of Cthulhu* scenarios, and any other RPG or miniatures game set in the first four decades of the 20th Century.

Small Hotel, 1900-1925

The year 1900 is only a general guide; hotels of this type might be built as early as 1870 in some places. They were built just off the railroad right-of-way (the property owned by the railroad, usually extending several yards on either side of the tracks).

With a few exceptions, roads at this time were of dirt or gravel macadam, and few people traveled long distances on them. In 1900, most long distance travel was by train or by riverboat. Horses and horse-drawn vehicles were used mostly for short trips.

Amenities: This type of hotel provided little more than a place to sleep, reasonably protected from the elements. Rooms contained a simple bed, a chair, a washstand with a basin and a pitcher of water, a small stove, and sometimes a “closet” (in the corner, behind a curtain). In later years or in more urbanized areas, the hotel might boast

oil stoves and electric lights. Bath facilities were communal, and toilet facilities were an outhouse supplemented by a chamberpot under the bed in each room.

Registration: Until late in the period, the registration process was quite simple: pay for the room in advance, get a key (with a deposit), and let yourself in. If you were lucky, there would be (more or less) clean bedclothes. You were responsible for getting a pitcher of water, soap, and a hand towel from the bathroom (for washing in the privacy of your room). Usually, there were no guestbooks or formal paperwork to sign, and reservations were not available: rooms were rented on a first-come, first-served basis until the hotel was filled.

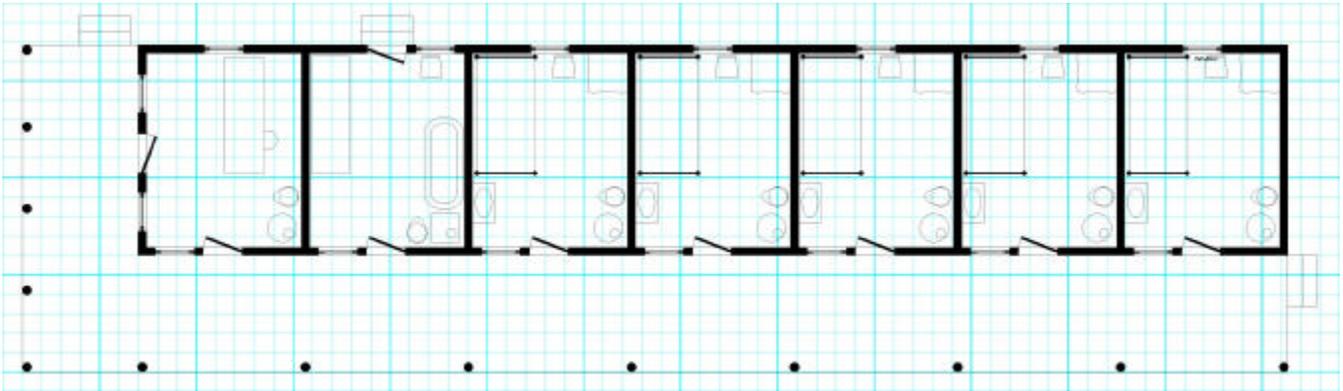
Checkout was equally simple: return the key, reclaim your deposit (if any), and leave. It was assumed that the guests were basically honest (and most were).

Prices: Prices varied depending on demand, location, and other factors. The following is a rough guide:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Price/Night</u>	<u>Price/Week</u>
1900-1910	\$0.50-\$1.00	\$3.50-\$5.00
1910-1915	\$1.00-\$2.00	\$4.00-\$8.00
1915-1920	\$1.25-\$2.50	\$4.50-\$10.00
1920-1925	\$1.50-\$2.75	\$4.75-\$12.00

1. Office: This room contains a registration desk, a stool, and a stove. It will have a cashbox (or a cash register if the place is “modern”) a kerosene lamp or candles for illumination, a coal bunker and coal scuttles, extra blankets, etc. Provision is not usually made for mail or messages, except when you tip the clerk, and it is unlikely that there is a telephone.

If the clerk sleeps in the office, there will



be a folding cot tucked behind the desk. Depending on the locale, the clerk may be armed with a pistol to protect the cashbox (caliber and manufacturer varies, but it will not be anything especially rare or valuable) – this is usually kept in the cashbox itself.

Most clerks will know the local railroad schedules, and if no passenger trains are expected for several hours, may take some time off. Guests arriving during this time may find a notice on the office door if the clerk is conscientious (“Gone Fishing”).

The clerk will usually be quite willing to steer patrons to local businesses such as cafes or taverns (often they pay him a kickback). Clerks range from extremely garrulous to quite taciturn, and may be willing to chat about various topics of local interest, recent guests, or the mysterious goings on out at the old Smith place – or not, as the case may be. In addition, useful intelligence may be gathered if the clerk happens to have a local newspaper or two.

There is no maid or housekeeping staff. What cleaning gets done is accomplished by the clerk, in his copious free time.

1a. Front Door: This provides access to the office, and will have any signs proclaiming “OPEN” or “GONE FISHING.”

1b. Side Door: This provides access to the side porch.

1c. Windows (4): These are provided for ventilation, not for viewing any local scenery.

1d. Desk and Stool: This will have several drawers, including a cashbox. If the hotel has a cash register, it will be here.

1e. Stove and Coal Scuttle: The clerk may keep a coffee pot going here, for his own use. A Coal scuttle is a special bucket incorporating a scoop in front for easy filling and a pair of handles to facilitate emptying.

Near the stove is a small scoop shovel and a poker for tending the fire.

2. Front Porch: Quite often, the hotel clerk can be found sitting here in a rocking chair, especially on hot afternoons or evenings. Depending on the locale and the time of day, there may be one or two locals (generally men in their 60s or 70s), whittling, playing checkers, and generally “passing the time.” Like the clerk, these may or may not be sources of local information.

3. Bath: If the hotel has running water, the lone faucet is located here. In places without a municipal water supply, there will be a pump (leading to a well or cistern) and a sink. Waste water is piped out of the building and down the hill a few yards.

For privacy, the doors hook from the inside and there are curtains on the windows if the glass is not frosted. Occupancy is first-come, first-served.

Also, there may be a hand-cranked washing machine used to clean the bed linen, if there is not one in the owner’s house.

3a. Door: This leads to the side porch.

3b. Back Door/Steps: This leads to the outhouse, located downhill a few yards along a short path.

3c. Windows (2): See 1c.

3d. Cabinet: This contains towels, soap, and other supplies.

3e. Water Heater: This is a small tank of water over a modified coal-fired stove. As a rule, hot water is available only as long as the clerk can be persuaded to keep the fire in the stove going, unless the guests are willing to stoke the fire themselves. Once the tank is emptied, it must be refilled by the pump and the heating process starts anew.

3f. Tub: The bathtub may be an old-style hip bath, or a “modern” claw-foot tub.