



## University Heights Historical Society

### **LAFAYETTE HOTEL**

When it opened on July 1, 1946, with entertainer Bob Hope as its first guest, the Imig Manor hotel soon established its reputation as a grand Hollywood hideaway. The hotel was named after its builder/developer Larry Imig, and it was the only hostelry project to be constructed in the country during WWII. Located at 2223 El Cajon Boulevard, the neo-classical 243 room resort was both a hotel and apartment complex, which a brochure described as a “city within a city.”

The main building contained hotel rooms, twenty shops, four restaurants, and the Mississippi Room, which featured the big bands of Harry James, Charlie Barnett and others. It even offered the services of a dentist who showed movies on the wall to relax his patients. Swimming lessons were given in the Olympic-size pool, designed by Johnny Weissmuller, the Olympic swimmer and movie Tarzan. Before Florence Chadwick swam the English Channel in the then-record time of 13 hours and 20 minutes in 1950, the San Diego athlete trained in that pool.

Its name was changed in October 1955 to the Lafayette Hotel and Club. Hotel operations ceased altogether in 1960, and the Lafayette became an office building. Radio stations XEMO and KCBQ had offices and studios there. The San Diego Chargers maintained their headquarters there when they first came to town. In 1959, the Red Fox Steak House, decorated with 18<sup>th</sup> century artifacts from England, was added on the northeastern corner of the building. Sometime in the 70’s or 80’s there was a scandal concerning a call girl operation being run from the hotel, which involved officials who were clients.

A group headed by developer Bud Fischer bought the property for \$2.125 million in 1995 and spent \$2.5 million to restore it to its former glory, uncovering the original exterior brickwork. A few years later InnSuites bought the property from Fischer’s group.

A short time ago the property again changed hands, and its former name, the Lafayette, was restored. The new owners were proposing a 17-story tower with over 200 luxury condo units at the southeastern corner at Howard and Louisiana Streets. This project did not materialize and the developer’s current plans call for a refurbished boutique hotel with 8 additional rooms, and 110 units of which 28 are residential condominiums only and the remaining 82 are condominium-hotel units. This project has not yet gone into construction.

The hotel is a City historical landmark having been designated on September 22, 1993.