

WI-270
Wicomico Hotel
Salisbury
Private

1923

The old Wicomico Hotel, erected in 1923, is the largest structure defining the center business district of Salisbury. Rising seven stories on an excavated basement, the stretcher and common bond brick commercial block stands out on Salisbury's skyline as the tallest building and one of the city's most distinctive structures. Following in a repeated architectural format for early twentieth century high rise hotels, the red brick walls are accented with stone trimmings that divide the building in three parts, which correspond to the three main components of the classical column. The first floor, although altered, retains a heavy stone entablature that serves to highlight the base of the building and at the same time it symbolizes the column's plinth. The five stories above the first floor are the plainest, and they correspond to the column's shaft. The top floor, the most elaborately finished portion, represents the column capital with its heavy console block cornice. This architectural formula was repeated countless times in the design and construction of early high rises in small and large cities across the United States during the early twentieth century. Centrally located on the southwest corner of the main intersection in the city, the Wicomico Hotel was thought of as a progressive addition for city residents that signaled to the outside world that its move to an urban commercial center was secure and ever-improving.

The construction of a modern hotel in the center of Salisbury was discussed

periodically during the early years of the twentieth century. It was felt by many city leaders that the future economic prosperity of Salisbury was dependent on the building of a modern hotel facility. The idea gained momentum during the early 1920s with the formation of the Wicomico Hotel Company. The executive and building committee included E. D. Mitchell, C. R. Disharoon, M. C. Evans, Ralph H. Grier, Henry H. Hanna, T. L. Ruark, and F. L. Wailes.

The executive and building committee reported to the public through an article in the Wicomico News that a study had been made to determine the acceptance of such an undertaking:

.....the time has arrived when Salisbury can not hold her town against the prosperity of other cities without this new modern hotel. As a result of this report thirty leading citizens of Salisbury have formed a corporation, with the kind of hotel best adapted to meet the growing needs of this favored community.

A proposed plan of the hotel was published in the paper as well, and the initial design, executed by architect B. K. Gibson of Chicago, called for a four-story, eight-bay by ten-bay structure of neoclassical style. Presumably the building committee decided that a big city architect from Chicago could supply Salisbury with a design better than any local talent. Public concerns soon surfaced in the paper that the building was not large enough to suit the needs of city. The land for the hotel had not been acquired so that a specific lot size had not been exactly determined. The land for the hotel was partitioned from the old Wailes homestead known as "Lakeside," which remained

standing in the center of Salisbury until the mid 1950s. The Wailes sisters, Laura L. and Victoria, resided in the house at the time when they sold their front yard acreage to the hotel company. The construction plans for the hotel were ultimately changed to erect a seven-story structure, which allowed for parking on the east side of the building.