



One of the most interesting buildings in all of San Diego sits at 2223 El Cajon Blvd., near the intersection with Park Blvd. In the early days, before the construction of Highway 80 in Mission Valley (now the I-8), El Cajon Boulevard was the main east-west artery through the city. Cars would travel from downtown San Diego, north past Balboa Park, and then turn eastward to continue their journeys.

It was there that car salesman/developer/entrepreneur Larry Imig located his ambitious hotel, naming it the Imig Manor. With its brickwork and tall white columns it was a startling departure from the usual neighborhood businesses, and it attracted a lot of attention.

The hotel opened on July 1, 1946, with the first registered guest being Bob Hope. In those days it was a long drive from Los Angeles to San Diego, and even further if the destination was the very popular race track in Tijuana, where many of Hollywood's finest went to play. Regular visitors to the hotel were Ava Gardner, Lana Turner, Betty Grable and her bandleader husband Harry James.

Hollywood's Tarzan of the day, 5-time Olympic gold medal winner Johnny Weissmuller, even designed the gigantic swimming pool, and San Diego's own Florence Chadwick of English Channel swimming fame went there to use the pool, even though she confided it was actually 2" too short.

The hotel was luxurious, popular, and busy. There were 24 shops, four restaurants, and many other special features and it prospered. For a while it was owned by hotelier Conrad Hilton in the days when he also owned the brand new San Diego Chargers football team, and team offices were in the hotel. Charter buses took sports fans to and from Balboa Stadium on game days.

There were changes, additions, and subtractions, and the hotel changed hands several times over the years, becoming known to the community as the Lafayette Hotel. On the western side was the 5200 square foot Mississippi Ballroom, with its stunning band shell and magnificent hardwood dance floor, which is now a wonderful venue for large wedding receptions or dances. On the east side is the famous Red Fox Room, a restaurant and bar with a long history as a steak house. The name comes from the original venue of its incredible hand-carved wooden bar, which dates to 1642. The Tudor paneling and fireplace were purchased from an old inn in Surry, England in 1926, dismantled, and shipped in pieces to the home of movie star Marian Davies in Santa Monica. Although the history is unclear, this beautiful woodwork eventually took up residence at the Lafayette, where visitors and guests have enjoyed it now for decades.

The addition of the L Bar & Grill which serves cocktails and food to the sun worshipping guests poolside, recalls memories of old Hollywood days but amenities are state-of-the art with free high-speed Internet access in every room as well as wireless access in the lobby, bar and common areas. The hotel has the happy advantage of being located centrally and with easy access to freeways in all directions. It also proudly lists on the San Diego Registry of Historic Landmarks, a perfect place for a grand hotel on our Historic Highway 80.