

April 2012

# The Nittany Lion Inn

by  
Mike Prero

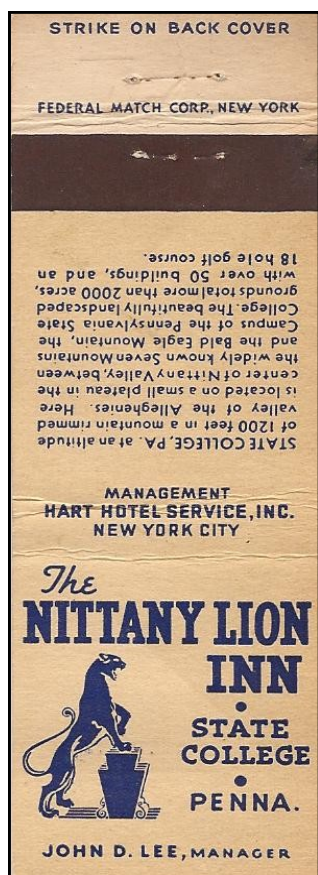
I first encountered covers from the Nittany Lion Inn when searching for College/University covers. I had to look twice; it's an inn, after all. But, as luck would have it, it's not only located *on* the grounds of a university, but it's also run *by* that university. And, as my College/University collection grew, so did my amazement at the array of covers from said inn! So, take a look.

“When it opened in 1931 in the midst of the Great Depression, The Nittany Lion Inn’s rooms rented for \$3.50 per night and included, among other things, a “completely equipped pin cushion.” During the past 79 years the Inn’s offerings—and size—have grown considerably, and the hotel has played host to some famous guests.

It’s hard to imagine a time when State College was short of hotel rooms. But in 1928, the area had only two hotels with about 90 rooms total and struggled to accommodate the increasing numbers of people drawn to the area by Penn State. To help meet the growing need, Penn State decided to build what would be called the College Inn on prime real estate bordered by the new Rec Hall to the south, Beaver Field to the east, and the two-lane, concrete Lakes-to-Sea Highway (U.S. Route 322) to the west. During construction, the University’s trustees decided on a different name: The Nittany Lion Inn.

The Nittany Lion Inn that opened for business on May 5, 1931, offered basic lodging

*Construction on the Inn*



and hearty fare in its dining room. Though the rates seem low by today's standards, some early patrons found the Inn a bit pricey. A University dean's assistant wrote complaining of being charged a dollar per head for a breakfast meeting that included grapefruit, Kellogg's Corn Flakes with cream, fried ham, eggs and bran muffins. The father of the bride at the first known wedding at the Inn, in 1933, balked at the \$100 bill for the reception. Just a year after opening, the Inn lowered many of its prices, by as much as half.

The 75 rooms of the original Inn nearly doubled the number of hotel rooms in the community. Waiters, maids and cooks lived on site—as was the custom at many hotels of that era—and earned modest wages of \$25 to \$50 per month. Managers and their families also lived at the hotel through the 1970s. Long before "The Suite Life of Zack and Cody" premiered on The Disney Channel, Bob Lee spent his early years living at the Inn, where his father served as general manager for 26 years, until 1958. Lee says his mother liked telling the story of the time, as a toddler, he escaped just before a bath and ran down the hall in his "birthday suit." Fortunately, a guest intercepted him and returned him to his mother. The guest? Former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who was staying at the Inn during her 1953 visit to campus. Other famous guests include Jack Nicholson, Billy Joel, Britney Spears, Danny DeVito, Louis Armstrong, Robert Frost and President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

After two additions and several remodeling efforts, The Nittany Lion Inn today offers nearly three times the number of rooms—223. Many traditions remain while others have evolved to meet changing tastes and times. A big basket of apples for guests and visitors still sits near the entrance and the Inn remains a hub for the Penn State Alumni Association's Traditional Class Reunions held each June. Blue-and-white-clad fans pack the place on football weekends, even though the stadium hasn't been next door since 1960. Wait staff, housekeepers and managers no longer "live in" but remain dedicated to providing top-notch service and accommodations, said Jim Purdum '77, who started at the Inn in 1989 and now serves as general manager of Penn State's hospitality services." [[http://www.imakenews.com/psaanews/e\\_article001656542.cfm?x=b11,0,w](http://www.imakenews.com/psaanews/e_article001656542.cfm?x=b11,0,w)]

