

# The Sunset Tower Motor Court

By Patti Simpson (2009)



Dale, Evelyn, Robert and Mary Kay Luke

In 1935 the first paved road in the county was between Funk and Holdrege. By 1938 the old Detroit-Lincoln-Denver (DLD) Highway, now known as US 6, was hard surfaced across the entire state of Nebraska.

Dale, the son of Lee and Myrtle (Stephenson) Luke, was very familiar with the hotel business. His parents had built the Hotel Dale in Holdrege in 1931 and even named it after him. After attending two years at Kemper Military Institute in Kansas, Dale majored in Hotel Management at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. In 1936 he married Evelyn Miller.

Dale Luke capitalized on the newly paved and heavily traveled US 6 in 1940-41 by building The Sunset Tower Motor Court. The original 12 unit motel and office also had a family café that had a new idea for it's time – fast food. In the 1940s and 1950s, it was not unusual for 200 people to come to Holdrege on the weekends to eat at the Sunset Tower Café and then maybe go shopping or see a movie.

The tower with the winged tire on top, itself, has always been a curiosity. Several well known and respected tire and car manufacturers have used the logo of a winged wheel. Maybe Dale thought the winged wheel would be a symbol of a good place for travelers to stop. Whatever the reason, the Sunset Tower Motor Court with its tower and winged wheel were a local Holdrege



Photo of the building of the Sunset Tower Motor Court courtesy of Mary Kay Nelson

landmark for over 68 years. Dale's daughter, Mary Kay Nelson, remembers her dad seeing how far he could drive both east and west and still be able to see the tower in the distance.



Tower demolition photo courtesy of the Holdrege Daily Citizen.

According to the Phelps County History Book, the Lukes managed the Sunset Tower Motor Court until 1958. Many years have passed since then and current Holdrege residents may not remember the Tower as a family orientated business. It was purchased by the City of Holdrege in 2007 and all the buildings, including the tower itself, were tore down and the lot cleared in 2008. The 68+ year old weathered and well known winged wheel, however, was saved and given to the Nebraska Prairie Museum by the City of Holdrege.

So the next time you're driving through west Holdrege on US 6 and see the empty lot, I hope you think about the Sunset Tower Motor Court and remember it for all the good things it brought to Holdrege.



The Sunset Tower Motor Court's original winged wheel now located at the Nebraska Prairie Museum in Holdrege, Nebraska.

