

THE LADIES WHO LOBBY

A vanishing species, these hotel guests still have plenty of staying power.

By TOM O'NEILL

Fifty years have passed since Sue Read checked into the Wellington Hotel. About the same time, Bea Henle arrived at the front desk of the Gramercy Park Hotel. They never got around to checking out.

Read and Henle belong to an endangered species — the long-term hotel guest.

Manhattan hotels, once considered havens, especially for single women, are less and less the protectors of the young and aspiring or the elderly. Their center of interest, not surprisingly, has become the superwealthy.

Sue Read and Bea Henle live in apartment suites protected by rent control. (They conceal their rents like state secrets.) The Wellington and the Gramercy Park are among the very few hotels that treat their "long-termers" with the respect and kindness befitting their historic status in the hotel.

Over at the Plaza, the Daily News was denied access to the hotel's long-term guests. According to a cordial spokeswoman, "Mrs. Trump doesn't want to promote that image of the Plaza," adding: "People living in the aren't cost-effective, and we'd rather not publicize them."

This was not an uncommon response. The Ritz Carlton, Mayflower, St. Moritz, Algonquin and Roosevelt hotels, unable to force long-term residents out, are "just waiting



SUE OF THE WELLINGTON: She never got around to checking out.

for them to die," as more than one general manager admitted.

Read and Henle, meanwhile, enjoy luxurious living on a shoestring. With no plans to move out, they occupy a permanent niche in a transient world; whether

holding court in the lobby or sharing an elevator with Japanese tourists, they are romantic relics of a bygone era.

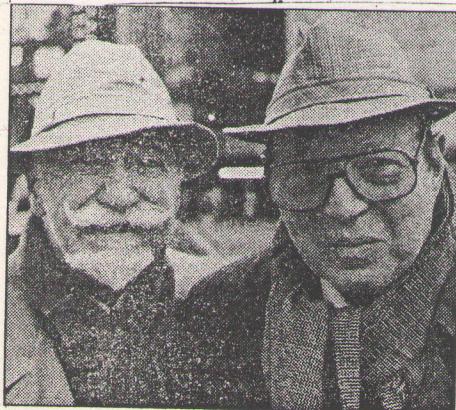
"I came to New York to study acting," explains Read, a native Philadelphian who was the Lucky Strike Girl on early television and now tours in her own one-woman variety show. "My parents wanted me near my teacher, who lived across the street, so they put me in the Wellington. I was 16."

to us. "We had to buy furniture," she laughs. "We had to replace two worn chairs." The furniture in their suite (now considered antiques) belongs to the hotel.

Any talk of leaving the Wellington sends Read into a tizzy. "No, please! Don't even mention it! I'm spoiled rotten, and it's too late to change."

At the Gramercy Park, where retired businesswoman

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The winner is . . .

RICHARD ROFFMAN (r.) squeaked by Richard Falk in a special election to name the "mayor of Times Square" (Sunday City, Feb. 18). Roffman, a proponent of redevelopment, "was delighted." A bitter Falk vowed, "I'll come back next year."

Her first room, "the cheapest in the place," cost \$40 a month. "The hotel was filled with show people then," she says, recalling a time when Ziegfeld girls shared rooms, and guests would gather in the lobby to listen to Benny Goodman rehearse in an adjacent studio.

"Everybody looked out for me," Read recalls. An elevator operator wouldn't allow her dates upstairs. Once, when her parents visited, a resident "took Mother aside and gave her such a lecture for letting her little daughter live alone in a New York hotel!"

In 50 years at the Wellington, Read moved through four rooms winding up in her present suite ("the nicest in the hotel") when she married Monroe Forma in 1946.

Forma, a retired safe salesman, calls life in the hotel "very lovely, like an extended honeymoon," and adds that his wife gives their place a "real homemaker's touch." Indeed, it's beautifully decorated and, once the door closes, feels nothing like a hotel room.

The Formas recently enjoyed a new experience as foreign to them as ordering room service may be

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an Bea Henle has lived in the same one-bedroom for 50 years, sharing it with her police officer husband until his death in 1967, manager Tom O'Brien calculates that about 25% of the guests are permanent. O'Brien, who calls Henle "absolutely out of this world," says the Gramercy Park still accepts long-term guests, but only during the slow winter months.

The Wellington, according to manager Bob Coddillo, has abolished its long-term rates. "Hotel living is a lost thing that I don't think is going to happen again," he says wistfully. Of the 25 remaining long-termers, he muses, "You become accustomed to them. It's a nice feeling to know who you're dealing with and have a face rather than just a room number."

(Tom O'Neill is a freelance writer.)

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March 4, 1990

TODAY



Israeli thriller

'S' treets of Yesterday," set amid the intifadeh and the underground

SKIN

DISEASES
SKIN CANCER

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DISEASES

HAIR
LOSS

COLLAGEN INJECTION
WRINKLE TREATMENT

Dir. by
Board Certified Dermatologist
American Dermatology Center

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