

A Sign Against the Times

By Joanne Chapman

Over the past decade, with the rise of City Creek and the progression of Downtown Rising, Salt Lake City has seen a transformation in the heart of its city byways. Most would argue the transformation was for the good: modernization at its finest. There was, however, a price to pay. Landmarks, such as the Scenic Motel of 1345 E. Foothill and the City Creek Inn once located at 230 W. North Temple are now gone. In their stead rise a modern Hampton Inn and City Creek Apartment complex. The vibrant neon signs of these historic motels, which once lit the path of passersby, have vanished. Their absence closes a chapter in Salt Lake history, one stretching back as far as World War II.

One such historic motel remains. Built in the 1930s to 1940s, the Temple City Motel stood among the hundreds of family-owned businesses emerging out of the Great Depression. Temple City Motel, at 3080 S. State, holds today as a testament to Salt Lake's distinct appearance and character. On April 18th, 2016, contrary to the demolition of its counterparts, the motel completed a restoration of its landmark neon sign.

Believed to have been added in the late 1940s or early 1950s, the neon sign depicts the word "Motel" with an inviting arrow. Above that, panels representing the Salt Lake Mormon Temple tip its appearance toward nostalgic. The Brimley Bros. Neon Company of Salt Lake; a family owned business founded in 1930, fittingly completed the restoration. David Brimley replaced neon tubing and internal wiring. The patina, the film on the surface of the original metals, remains as a testament to all the stubborn businesspeople that made a name for Salt Lake.

Perhaps as we applaud the rise of a modern Salt Lake, we should not forget its roots. Let us not allow the flashy light of big business to overshadow the neon of these historic motels. The sign outside the Temple City Motel, in the words of restoration artist David Brimley, is now "Glowing again after many dark years."