

From The PLAZA  
Produced by Ted Smart  
& David Gibbon

How The PLAZA Hotel in NYC was built  
as a result of  
OF COBURG BORN  
HARRY BLACK.



bigger, grander and much more expensive.

One of them was Harry St. Francis Black, chairman of the United States Realty and Construction Company, Fuller's parent company. He had given up a promising career in the general store in his native Coburg, Ontario, to join a surveying party in the Canadian Northwest in the 1870's. He never went back to Coburg. When the surveying was done, he took a job as a "commercial traveler" for a Chicago woolen house with the Pacific Northwest as his territory. It was a virgin territory in those days and Harry was a welcome sight in stores in every part of Washington and Oregon. There was no doubt they needed his wool, but in his travels, Harry noticed another need. There was a lot of expansion going on but not many banks to finance it, so Harry started a couple. It wasn't long before he was traveling for himself.



A-Black, Harry St. Francis  
(03-02)  
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But his life wasn't all work and no play. He took a vacation in 1895 and, fortunately for Harry, so did George A. Fuller, a very successful contractor. Fuller and others were beginning to experiment with steel frame buildings and the idea interested Harry Black. Before the vacation was over, Harry had a new job and a new interest, George Fuller's daughter, Allon Mae.

When he married the girl, he also became vice-president of his new father-in-law's company, a job he probably would have gotten anyway. The marriage lasted less than 10 years, but his association with the company lasted the rest of his life. And through a series of mergers engineered by Black, it became the first construction company that was also an investment company with the ability to finance its own projects.

It was a brand-new company when it bought the old Plaza, and though it had assets of \$66 million, Black had chosen to join forces with an outsider to put the deal together.

He was another self-made man named Bernhard Beinecke, who had come from Germany some 40 years earlier without a pfennig in his pocket.

Ben Beinecke's first job in America was as a delivery man for a New York butcher. In an almost classical example of the rags-to-riches story, he saved his money, learned the business and then bought it.

Realizing that the real money in the meat business went to people who sold it to people like him, he soon sold the butcher shop and became a wholesaler. He cultivated hotels and restaurants as customers and in 1876





*The skyline has changed  
over the years. The Savoy  
Plaza has gone; 9 W. 57th  
St. has arrived and with  
it the Park Lane tower.  
But The Plaza stays  
serenely unchanged.*



managed to get the contract to supply all the meat for the great American Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia.

The Fair was good business for a lot of American businessmen because of the attention it attracted in Europe. It was terrific for Ben Beinecke because meat was one of America's biggest export products in the late 19th century. In a very short time he had sold his company to a group of British financiers and become a financier himself.

Most of his friends and former customers were hotel men, and it seemed only natural for him to invest his money with them. But their ideas usually involved big commercial properties that were clean, comfortable and profitable but not too memorable. Together they built a few, but Ben Beinecke had a different vision. He wanted to build a hotel that would be like a private club. He wanted to build a hotel like The Plaza.

He found the support he needed in the person of Harry Black. But the more they discussed the project, the more they realized such elegance called for big money, more than either of them had. They found their big