

In 1938, Col. Donahue died and in 1939 the oldest wing was removed because it was a fire hazard. In 1945, John Hahn, a Colfax insurance agent, purchased the property for taxes, said to be around \$6,000.

In 1946, the Fox Chemical Co. purchased the hotel, and began a new era. Hotel Colfax became known as the “Swine Palace.” Hogs lived in the basement and were taken up the marble stairs to be auctioned and sold in a theater type setting in the dining/ball room, which is now the chapel. In 1948, a group of businessmen issued stock in the amount of \$200,000 for the purchase and administration of the hotel to be used as a



River Oaks Manor

hospital for the rehabilitation of alcoholics. This was known as “River Oaks Manor.” Operating expenses caused them to forfeit the property back to Fox Chemicals in 1951. Fox then used the building to train their salesmen and also conducted a school for auctioneers.

In 1955, the property came into the possession of “The Catholic Society of The Divine Savior,” and was called the “Salvatorian Novitiate.” Young men came to spend a year in training to determine if they wanted to become either a Father or a Brother. During this time a few changes were made to the building, including moving the kitchen and dining area to the basement. The Priest in residence proposed the mural that is now in the dining room. The artist, Michael Angelo Tortroete, was studying at the Novitiate in preparation for life as a Brother. It took him from January to September of 1963 to paint the mural. The painting is

about 53 feet long and 10 feet high. The mural portrays Christ restoring Peter from John 21.

According to Michael, the scripture reference is written in the ropes of the net. The different types of fish in the net represent brotherhood, and the three fish on the fire represent the Trinity. The sail on the mast is rolled to look like a cross, and a rising sun reminds us that Christ is our risen Savior. As you walk from one end of the dining room to the other, all of Christ turns and follows you, symbolizing that Christ cares and watches over all.



The historic mural, “Christ Restores Peter.”

In 1968 it was announced that the Novitiate was to be closed and sold since there was a decline in young men entering the religious life. As a result, many interested persons started working together to retain the wonderful facility. The purchase price was \$150,000 and approximately \$70,000 was raised through donations. A board of directors, consisting of persons from various religious backgrounds, was appointed and the building was given the name “Colfax Interfaith Spiritual Center.” During this reign many repairs were made: some new wiring, added paneling, new front entrance, game room, some rooms carpeted, water and restroom on first floor, several new ceilings installed, dishwasher, extensive roof repairs, small dining room, fire alarm system, new ceiling in the lobby, new main office built, etc. At this time, most of the furnishings throughout the building were donated.



Teen Challenge of the Midlands—1986-Present

Early in 1986, Teen Challenge of the Midlands’ Executive Director, Roger Helle, offered to purchase the facility. In the spring of 1986, the City of Colfax held a town meeting to determine if the local population would permit an institution such as Teen Challenge to come into the community. In the summer Teen Challenge received word that it had been approved. The move was made on December 1, and Hotel Colfax became Teen Challenge of the Midlands.

Since then numerous building improvements have been made:

- 1990 - new fire escape tower, emergency exits, fire doors, firewall, and fire detection system installed to meet current fire codes
- 1993 - new sewage treatment system is installed
- 1995 - new boiler plant and natural gas service to replace old fuel oil/propane system
- 1995 - new air-conditioning installed in chapel and classrooms
- 1996 - director’s residence is built on campus
- 1996 and 2003 - all roofs are replaced on main building
- 1998 thru 2003 - staff apartments are remodeled in the main building
- 1998 - new asphalt pavement laid on old gravel lane
- 1999 thru 2000 - two metal pole barns are built on grounds
- 1999 thru present (and ongoing) - window replacements
- 2001 thru present - guest rooms, shower rooms and snack room renovations
- 2001 - new pond is completed
- 2001 - fourth floor dormitory, restrooms/showers, and staff apartments are renovated
- 2001 - laundry facility completely updated and selected as Maytag test site
- 2001 - classrooms are remodeled
- 2002 - chapel is remodeled
- 2002 - kitchen is remodeled including all new appliances, air conditioning, walk-in cooler/freezer and new food storage area
- 2003 - public restrooms on lower level are remodeled
- 2004 - new staff housing replaces old mobile homes



Teen Challenge of the Midlands

Teen Challenge was founded in 1961 by Dave Wilkerson, author of “The Cross and the Switchblade”, and today there are over 120 Teen Challenge centers in the U.S. Teen Challenge is a discipleship ministry designed to help those struggling with life-controlling problems such as drug and alcohol abuse. To learn more about Teen Challenge of the Midlands, please visit our website at www.tcmid.org or call us at 515-674-3713.

Hotel Colfax



Past



Present

*A brief visit into the history
of the building formerly
known as, "Hotel Colfax."*

In 1875 mineral water was discovered in Colfax, Iowa, while a group of miners were digging for coal. The artesian water immediately attracted persons with a variety of illnesses, and so the first modest hotel was built. The mineral spring was called Magnesian Chalybeate Spring (MCS) and the hotel called Mineral Springs House. This led to the construction of the first bottling works making the water available in bottles, cans, kegs, one, three and five gallon crockery jugs and fifty-five gallon steel barrels. After coming to Colfax to drink the water and take the baths, the people would have water shipped to them upon returning home.



Construction of the "Hotel Colfax."

The first hotel, which was a wood framed structure, burned on Thanksgiving Day in 1881. In the spring of 1884, the "Saratoga of the West" was opened (now referred to as the Hotel Colfax), and taking part in the dedication was former vice-president to Ulysses S. Grant, Mr. Schuyler Colfax. The magnificent frame building contained over 100 rooms and was the best hotel between the Mississippi and the Rocky Mountains! A side railroad track and depot were constructed at the base of the bluff and an incline railway lifted the passengers and baggage to the hotel entrance on the North side.

In 1892 Wesley Jordan purchased the property for \$10,000. The hotel's peak year was 1900 when a record 13,000 guests came to stay. A few years later this boom turned to a crash. The property was sold at a sheriff's sale in 1904 to Col. James P. Donahue

from Davenport, Iowa. He had the incline railway, depot, etc. removed, and had tracks installed from Walnut and Front Streets in downtown Colfax out to the hotel running East two blocks up Front Street, then alongside the railroad tracks, cutting through the hills just West of the hotel where a trestle was built to come



**The beautifully landscaped grounds
of the "Hotel Colfax"**

out on the level just South of the hotel. The trolley that ran on these tracks was powered by generators in the hotel basement. The fabulous hotel was Spanish Mission style and filled with the latest equipment. At that time the grounds totaled 160 acres. Much of the food was raised on site, and the hotel had its own garage, six-hole golf course, beautifully landscaped grounds, ice and cold storage plants, electric powerhouse, pumping system, laundry, and water tank. Dances were held in the dining room and famous entertainers frequently appeared. Success, however, didn't last long and the hotel closed during WWI.

After the war, Col. Donahue leased the hotel to the government to be used as a hospital for veterans. Once again there was extensive remodeling done, with the large rooms divided to accommodate twice as many patients. At the same time, elaborate apartments were made for the officers. Only once did the hospital have more than 100 patients, and the officers' parties caused a great deal of comment in Colfax. The rent was very high and after a Congressional investigation, all the patients were moved to Knoxville, Iowa. The hotel/hospital closed in 1923. It remained empty for 22 years with only a caretaker living on site.



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