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Before Marriott: Hot Shoppes

Before the start of their hotel empire, J. Willard and Alice Sheets Marriott started out owning A&W Root Beer franchises in the Washington, D.C. area. The Marriotts opened their first stand on 14th Street in Washington in 1927. Soon, the family expanded their business, renaming their restaurants Hot Shoppes, as they sought to attract customers in non-summer months. After adding hot beverages and southwestern food to their offerings, the Marriotts soon experienced success, including here in Alexandria.

The Marriotts' local expansion utilized the slogan: "A square meal at a fair price." That expansion included a location at 905 N. Washington St. The restaurant's location highlighted the chain's focus on vehicular customers on their way in or out of Alexandria. This third Hot Shoppe location in the Washington D.C. region was the first drive-in restaurant on the East Coast.

By 1942, the date of this photograph, the convenience of



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Hot Shoppes at 905 N. Washington St. in 1942.

a restaurant for motorized customers was a key component of the Hot Shoppe chain's success. The restaurant brand's distinctive features included rooftop neon signs to attract motorists and signature menu items

such as the Orange Freeze, the Mighty Mo burger and chicken noodle soup. The polar bear seen in this photo was not a Hot Shoppe marketing tool. Instead, it belonged to the Beck's Frozen Custard stand located

at 901 N. Washington St. from 1939 to 1963.

The Marriotts expanded their business into airline catering and cafeteria management at U.S. government buildings during the late 1930s and throughout World War II. J. Willard didn't buy his first lodging business, the Twin Bridges Motor Hotel in Arlington, until 1957. Even with the success as a hotel chain, the Marriott family continued to run the Hot Shoppes, though they soon experienced strong competition from the rise of fast-food chain restaurants. The last Hot Shoppe did not close until 1999.

In 2014, the Marriott Marquis Hotel opened in Washington. Its restaurant's menu included the Mighty Mo burger, named after the USS Missouri after the conclusion of World War II, and as a homage to the Hot Shoppe restaurants, the start of the Marriott hospital-ity empire.

Out of the Attic is provided by The Office of Historic Alexandria.