

An Illustrated History of the King Edward Hotel  
prepared for  
Dundee Realty Corporation



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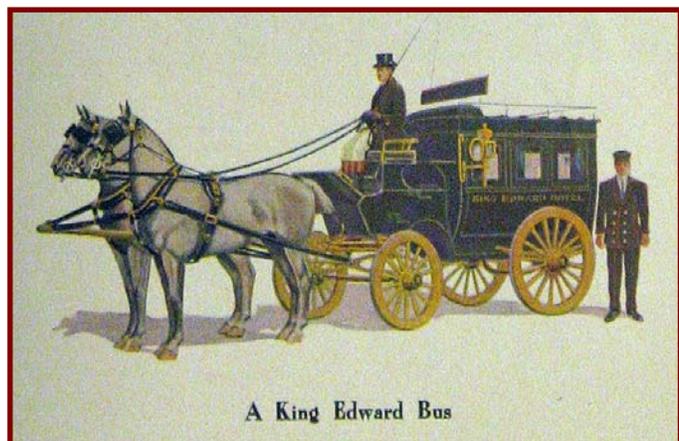
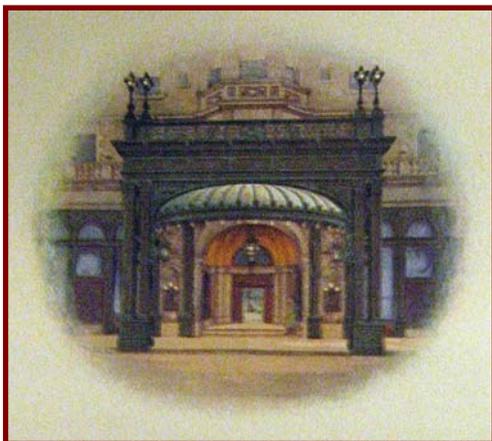
## 1. A Palace Hotel on King Street, 1903

In 1903, Toronto joined the ranks of cities boasting “palace hotels.” New York had its (first) Waldorf-Astoria, but not yet its Plaza or St. Regis. London had the Savoy... Paris the Ritz ... Quebec the Chateau Frontenac ... and Montreal the Windsor. Now Toronto had the King Edward Hotel, conceived before Queen Victoria died in 1901 and brought to marble and steel fruition after Edward VII ascended the throne. The Edwardian age dawned, bringing opulence and exuberance to the new century and Canada’s Queen City, as Toronto had long been known.

While Toronto might not have the “air and dash of London or New York,” the first illustrated guest book averred with classic Canadian modesty, “the Toronto of to-day will surprise some people [with] how very metropolitan it is.” And the hotel, oh the hotel. “Representing an investment of over three million dollars, it shows at a glance its superior construction and equipment, equalling in elegance and excellence the most palatial hostelries of much more pretentious cities,” proclaimed the 1903 brochure, pumping up the rhetoric just a tad. Safety and convenience. Good taste and luxury at every turn.

It was “absolutely fire-proof,” with concrete beneath those mosaic-tile floors and terra cotta behind that decorative plastering. It was centrally located, convenient to theatres, shops and transportation. Its public rooms were grand and its guest rooms offered every modern convenience. All rooms had telephones. Three of four hundred had private baths. And the top-two-floors had views of the nearby great lake.

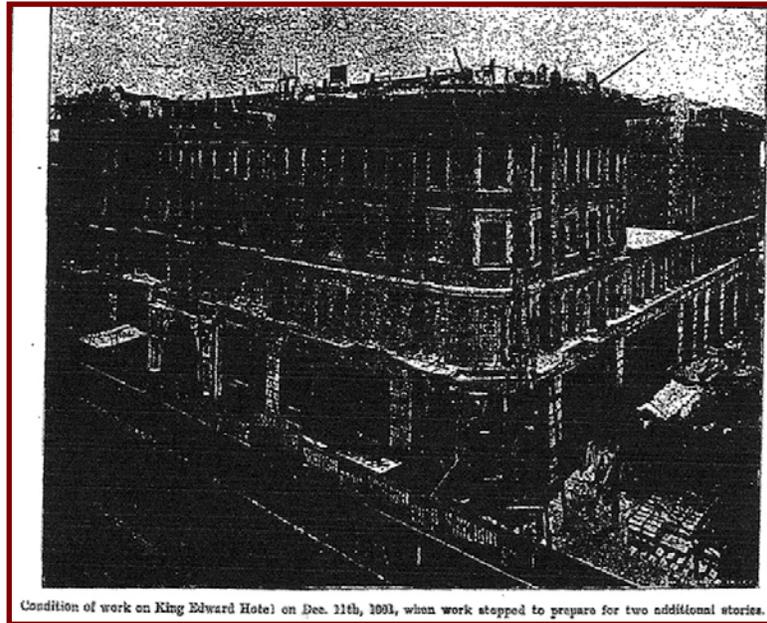
Torontonians of all classes watched in awe as the building took shape on fashionable King Street East. “What the Canadian Pacific Railway is to the country at large,” a *Globe* reporter hyperbolized in December 1902, “the King Edward Hotel is to the city.” Well, perhaps. The King Eddy, at the very least, became an instant landmark and long-term lure. Photographs appeared in view books for tourists. The hotel popped up on tally-ho tours of the town. A veritable parade of horse-drawn King Edward Buses (modeled on Paris Opera buses) met steamships and railway trains. Meanwhile, the local elite entertained and dined out as never before in a city almost bereft of fine restaurants. The King Edward had arrived ... and so had Toronto.



Welcome to the King Edward Hotel, 1903  
*Source: Toronto Public Library*



First guests' book issued by the King Edward Hotel, 1903  
*Source: Toronto Public Library*



Condition of work on King Edward Hotel on Dec. 11th, 1901, when work stopped to prepare for two additional stories.

Rare progress photo of the hotel under construction  
*Globe*, Saturday, December 13, 1902  
Source: Toronto Public Library



Hotel envelope for writing home with news from Toronto, 1903  
Source: Sally Gibson

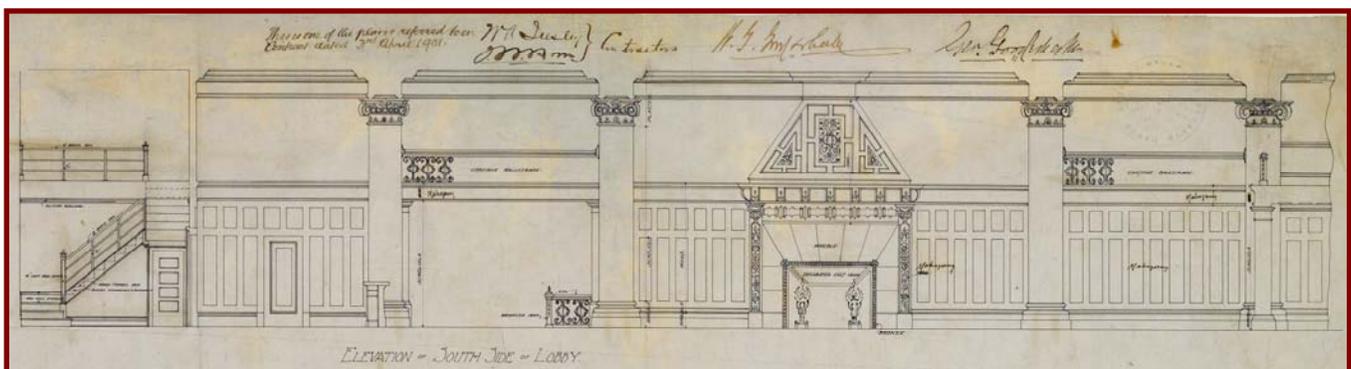
## 2. George Gooderham, financier

As the Victorian age waned, Toronto's elite - both financial and social - travelled and experienced Grand Hotels elsewhere. Their own Queen's Hotel on Front Street (where the Royal York now stands) was, frankly, shabby. There was simply nowhere to recommend to visitors - royal or otherwise - without apology. In 1899, a group of wealthy and well-connected men, led by financier Aemilius Jarvis, incorporated the Toronto Hotel Company with the intention of building a "palace hotel" in Toronto. Jarvis set the wheels in motion ... but George Gooderham made it all happen.

Gooderham had risen to the top of the financial world in Canada, first through expanding the family's internationally renowned Gooderham & Worts Distillery, then by diversifying into banking, railways, mining, real estate, insurance and other interests. When fellow capitalist and RCYC commodore Aemilius Jarvis's Toronto Hotel enterprise ran into rough financial waters, Gooderham bailed it out ... more than once. He became President of the Toronto Hotel Company. And he undoubtedly kept close track of the hotel's financial and physical progress from his own office in the nearby Gooderham (or Flat Iron) Building on Front Street.

Gooderham was immensely successful, travelled in the best social circles, but was an essentially private person. It's rare to see his photograph in the newspaper. But when the King Edward Hotel was nearing completion, the newspapers and city boosters showered him with praise. "Too much cannot be said of Mr. Gooderham, for he came forward at a time when his cooperation was most needed," lauded the *Saturday Star* of March 14, 1903, "and later, when his liberal hand was again essential to the success of the venture, he stood behind it with the present gratifying result."

Only the tiniest of quibbles emerged, not directly against Mr. Gooderham, but against the \$30,000 bid made by an unnamed company to provide the hotel with booze. Toronto's temperance forces didn't have much of an impact on the hotel in 1903 ... but their day would come.



Gooderham's signature on a 1901 "contract" drawing for the rotunda confirms his involvement in the project

Source: Archives of Ontario, F43-31

# THE PALATIAL NEW HOTEL

### A Monument to the Enterprise of Torontonians—Splendid Structure With Modern Ediuqment,

Toronto's new hotel, the mammoth two-million dollar King Edward, on King street east, is nearing completion, and every succeeding day opens wide further the vista of beauty which the splendid structure will shortly present in all its fulness and perfection. Comment may not be unnecessary, in view of the magnitude of the enterprise, the financial interests at stake, and the architectural and commercial importance of the project.

The evidence of the colossal and palatial King Edward is due to the need of just such a hostelry, and, in brief, may

be said that Toronto could supply the best possible site, indeed Mr. George Gooderham to provide the capital. When every detail is finished, fully \$1,000,000 will have been spent. The large salary, however, has not deterred Mr. Gooderham, and as a result the King Edward, to all intents and purposes, is an accomplished reality. Ten much cannot be said of Mr. Gooderham, for he came forward at a time when his co-operation was most needed, and later, when his liberal hand was again essential to the success of the venture, he stood behind it with the present gratifying result.

The King Edward, begun in Sept., 1901, will be opened in the course of a few weeks. Its inaugural will be an epoch for the King Edward will then take its place among the famous hotels of the world. Eight stories in height, containing four hundred bedrooms, each equipped with bath and telephone, its complete gorgeous suite, a vast restaurant, massive pillars, and corridors of great extent and elegance. In design the King Edward achieves an almost unprecedented triumph. The designers travelled not only all over America, but across to Europe, and in the Toronto you have considered the circumstances and charms of the pretentious plans of New York, London, Paris, and Cairo. In fact it is superb. In effect it depicts applying invention won in the country. The cost has been enormous, but those interested in it are entirely satisfied.



PRESIDENT GEORGE GOODERHAM

be attributed to the law of momentum. That the conditions warranted the erection of the King Edward the promoters had little doubt at the time, and they have even less now. The conviction that Canada afforded a field for an institution and investment of the



## THE NEW KING EDWARD HOTEL.

The King Edward is leaving the city with a reputation that will open its hospitable doors to a proud and patriotic public.

The King Edward Hotel Company, in appointing Mr. Robert G. Clark to the management, has shown the sound judgment which has characterized its efforts

from the first. Mr. Clark has had wide experience, and possesses the qualifications necessary to the successful conduct of such an important institution as the King Edward. That he will fill the position, no one qualified to know has the slightest doubt.

The King Edward, for the sake of an

intelligible understanding of its standards, may be likened to the Waldorf Astoria of New York city, which has long been the epitome of all open. The comparison is in keeping with conditions for the King Edward and the Waldorf very quite properly be classed together. The latter is regarded as a model, and the King Edward in its every way qualified to rank with the metropolitan favorite, magnificence on a large scale distinguished both.

something to do with it. The presence of an Upper Chamber gives tone to the

which lend strength to the rich color, the beautiful oil paintings scattered

conclusion, who get \$1,000 each for three months' work. In the Legislature and

though it was delivered years ago. The Cabinet does not suffer for want of

and the work in its entirety is done. That day is near at hand. When it arrives the King Edward will become known to all the continent, and Canadian in general and Torontonians in particular will view with pleasure the finest hotel in this half of the North American Continent.

## DIVERSE SPIRITS

George Gooderham & the new King Edward Hotel  
Saturday Star, March 14, 1903  
Source: Toronto Public Library

### 3. E. J. Lennox, architect

Two architects share responsibility for designing the King Edward Hotel: prominent American architect, Henry Ives Cobb, and celebrated Toronto architect, E. J. Lennox. Since Lennox became the architect of record, responsible for amending earlier plans, creating new plans, and overseeing construction, he is generally given pride of place.

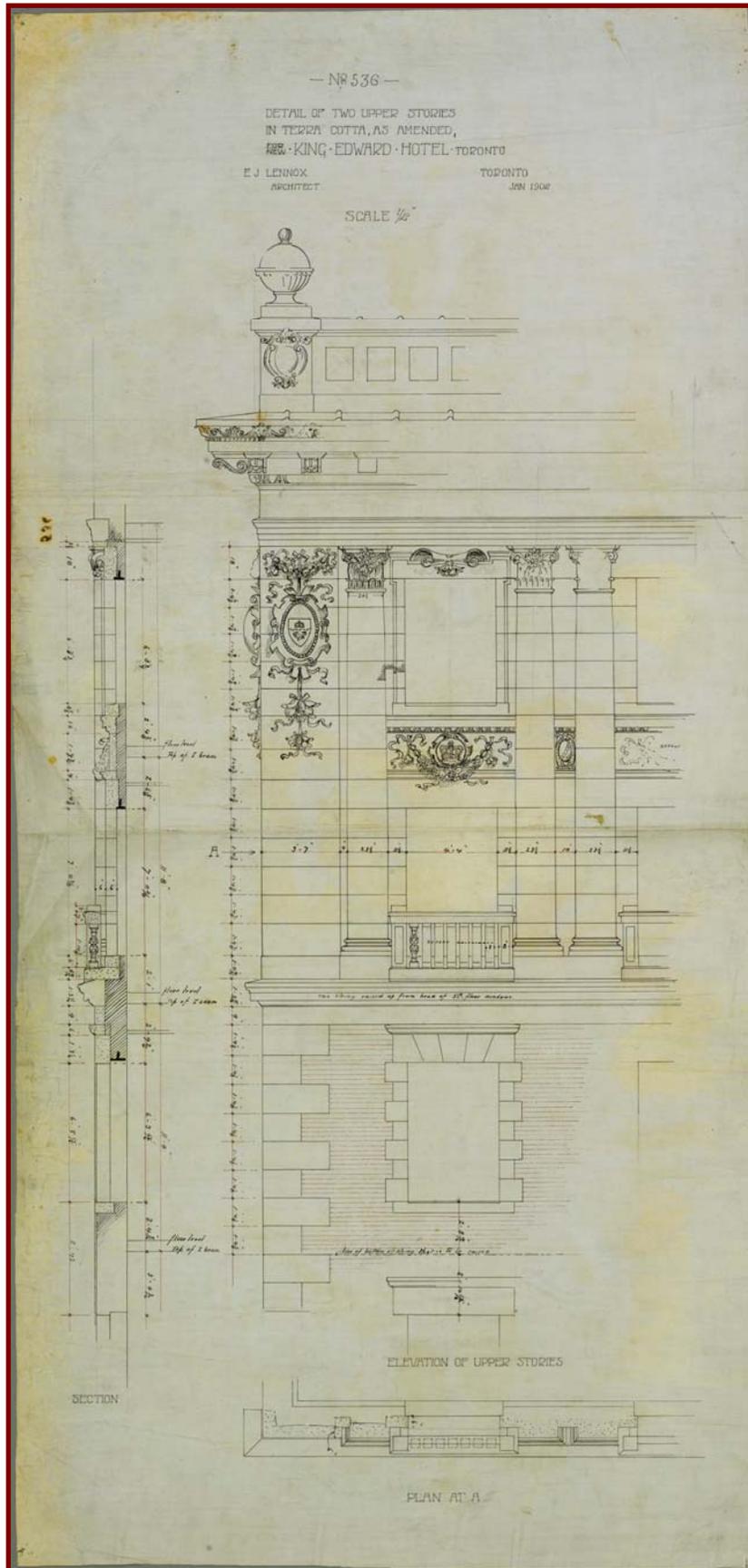
Both architects developed plans for the Toronto Hotel Company. Cobb's exterior elevation bears close resemblance to the final design, while Lennox's was an ornate, top-heavy structure with three cupolas. One feature of the early Lennox scheme that worked its way into, and improved, the early Cobb scheme, was its eight-, rather than six-storey height. Cobb and his supporters had been convinced that no guests would feel safe more than six-storeys above ground, no matter how "fire proof" the building was said to be. Obviously, Lennox and the Gooderham group begged to differ. And, of course, eight storeys would generate more revenue than six.

Just why Cobb was replaced remains something of a mystery. Based in New York City, the American had planned to establish a Toronto office. Perhaps a vociferous, anti-American debate within the Canadian architectural profession at the time resulted in the change. Perhaps Lennox's growing reputation - following the opening of his Richardsonian Romanesque Revival City Hall and his opulent, barrel-vaulted McConkey's restaurant in 1899 - tipped the balance in his favour. (Certainly, the McConkey's design looms large in his design for the King Eddy's second-floor restaurant.)

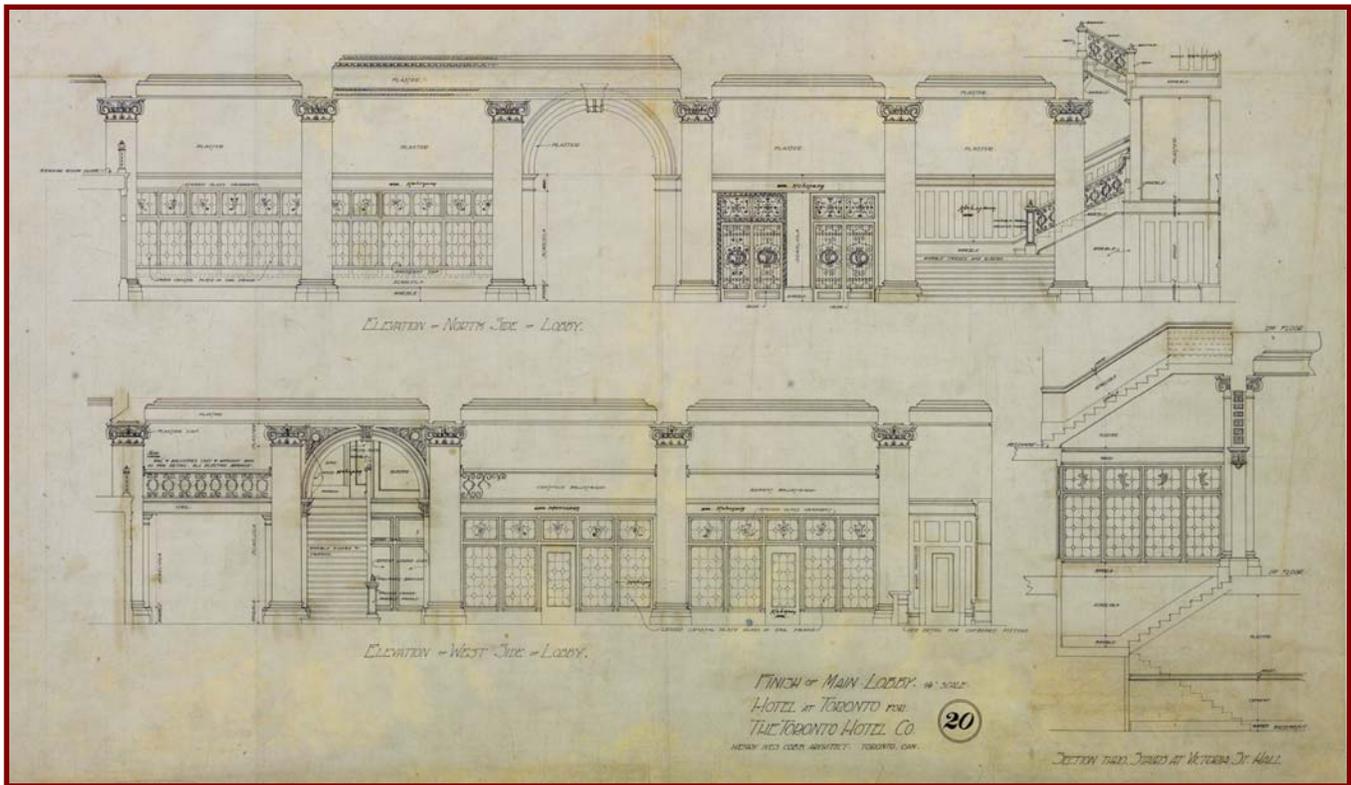
By December 1901, Lennox had taken over the project and would see it to completion a mere 18 months later, including a three-month halt while Lennox drew up plans for the two new top floors and additional steel was finally found and shipped from Antwerp. The upper-storey addition echoed the neoclassical stone base and provided a satisfying completion to the whole. "Where Cobb's design was polite, Lennox's was bold," wrote Lennox biographer Marilyn Litvak. Lennox also added the distinctive, green-painted, iron porte-cochère that once greeted patrons at the main entrance on King Street.

Lennox was well-known as being a very intense, hands-on architect. Someone who paid as close attention to the ventilation and heating systems, as the colonnades and detailing of the public spaces. Someone who demanded, and usually got, superb craftsmanship from his contractors. The importance of the project and the pride of the subcontractors is reflected in the many illustrated advertisements that appear in professional journals, as well as Lennox's own self-promoting book in 1905. Plaster by Hoidge & Sons, as well as Bailey & Oben. Architectural Iron Work by H. R. Ives & Co. Even refrigerating and ice-making machinery by Linde British Refrigeration Co.

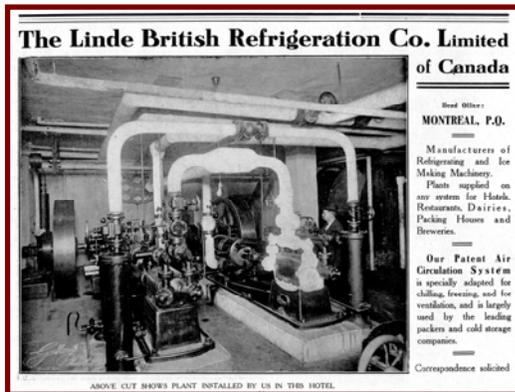
Great architecture lies in the grand schemes ... and the tiny details.



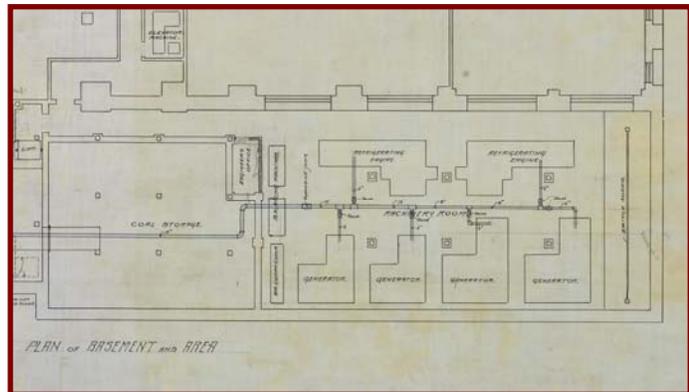
E. J. Lennox's January 1902 Detail of Two Upper Stories  
Source: Archives of Ontario, C43-31



Henry Ives Cobb, North and West Sides of Lobby, ca. 1900  
 Source: Archives of Ontario, C43-31



1907 Guests' Book Refrigeration ad  
 Source: Sally Gibson



E. J. Lennox, Detail for Basement Refrigerating Machinery, 1903  
 Source: Archives of Ontario, C43-31

**Hoidge & Sons**

Phones ( Main 5686  
Park 1213 ) 100 King St. W.  
Toronto, Ont.



AMONG THE CONTRACTS EXECUTED AND ON HAND FOR MR. E. J. LENNOX,  
WE MENTION THE FOLLOWING:—

KING EDWARD HOTEL	ST. PAUL'S CHURCH ADDITION, BLOOR ST.
MCCORMACK'S RESTAURANT	BAPTIST CHURCH ADDITION, BLOOR ST.
E. J. LENNOX OFFICE BUILDING	TRANSFORMED HOUSE, TORONTO
DAVE BUILDING, KING AND JARVIS STS.	TRANSFORMED HOUSE, NAGLERIA
MANNING CHANDLER	POWER HOUSE, NIAGARA

AS WELL AS A NUMBER OF RESIDENCES



Ad from *E.J. Lennox, Architect*, 1905  
Source: *City of Toronto Archives*

European or Main Dining Room, 1903  
Source: *Toronto Public Library*

#### 4. Grand Openings, May 1903

The King Edward Hotel opened without ceremony on May 11, 1903. At six a.m., management swung open the front doors to welcome the first paying guests. Before long, word got out that Toronto's new palace hotel was open for inspection, so ordinary Torontonians made their way to King Street East. "From the early forenoon until nearly midnight," the *Globe* reported, "the rotunda and corridors were thronged with the curious and the admiring." All public rooms were on view, except the second floor ball room being prepared for the formal opening in ten days time.

Fittingly, the first name on the hotel register was George Gooderham, followed by his son-in-law T.G. Blackstock, George H. Gooderham, W. S. Gooderham, then other directors and principals, such as E.J. Lennox. They, of course, had not lined up at the hotel, but had signed before the book was opened to the public.

The first real guest turned out to be John A. Davidson of Chicago, who had supplied the marble for the hotel and was shown to Room 459. He was soon followed by others from Canada, the U.S., and as far away as Liverpool. Before long Davidson and another Chicagoan, J. E. Graham who had superintended construction, passed the first money over the bar. Their American bill was duly framed and presented to George Gooderham. A tiny return on his extraordinary investment.

The hotel was an instant success, helped in large measure by "race week," leading up to the running of the Queen's Plate on May 23<sup>rd</sup>. "Each train is now bringing its quota of guests to the King Edward Hotel," reported the *Star*, providing a long list of prominent arrivals. Perennial plate winner, Joseph E. Seagram, was in from New York. (1903 was not to be his year, however.) The distilling fraternity was well represented, not only by Seagrams and Gooderhams, but also Corbys, Wisers, and Walkers. "Society" more generally was packing the hotel and enjoying such splendid novelties as a "Palm Room," a feature that came to symbolize Edwardian hotel grandeur around the world.

The formal opening of the hotel came on Friday, May 22<sup>nd</sup> with the Royal Canadian Yacht Club Ball. Always one of the highlights of the social season, the RCYC ball was an especially glittering event in 1903. It was also an entirely appropriate way to mark the opening of the hotel. Many hotel directors were club members, including both George Gooderham and Aemilius Jarvis, who had been commodores and fierce yachting competitors.

Their Excellencies Lord and Lady Minto descended from their soft-green-velvet and flower-filled Vice-Regal Suite to preside over dancing in the great ball room. (There was some journalistic disagreement about whether the new oak floor was perfect ... or dashedly sticky.)

There was no dispute, however, about the overall brilliance of the affair attended by six hundred fashionably turned-out guests. Fragrant, deep-pink American Beauty roses and simple white daisies comprised the main decorative touches in a richly-appointed ball room that needed no extra decorating. RCYC banners and shields bearing the names of famous yachts paid homage to the naval theme of the evening.

Supper was served in the main dining room (later known as the Victorian Café). And D'Allesandro's 20-piece orchestra provided "absolutely faultless" music throughout the evening.

May celebrations were capped off by a "citizens banquet" for the Governor General and Countess Minto in the same room on May 28<sup>th</sup>. Some four hundred of the "most prominent ladies and gentlemen of the city" were invited. Lady Minto was resplendent in a "gown of cream lace trimmed with gold sequins over white satin, tiara and necklace of diamonds, and American Beauty roses." The Glionna-Marciacno orchestra serenaded guests while they worked their way through a lavish meal of caviar a la russe ... Little Neck clams ... consommé venetienne ... fillet of black bass... mignon of boeuf bordelaise ... spring chicken au crossonne en casserole ... asparagus salad ... all washed down with citizens' punch.

"Certainly, no previous banquet has had so splendid a setting," concluded the *Globe*. But many future ones would.

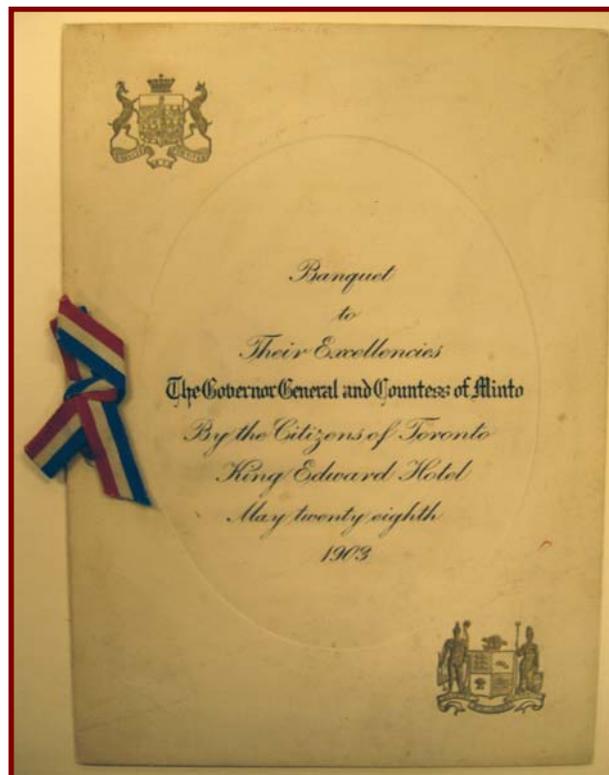


Grand Ball Room (aka American Dining Room) where Lord and Lady Minto presided over opening events at the King Edward Hotel in May 1903

*Source: Toronto Public Library*



Royal Suite, first occupied by Lord and Lady Minto in 1903  
Source: *Guests' Book 1906, Sally Gibson*



Program for Citizens' Banquet for Lord and Lady Minto, 1903  
Source: *Toronto Public Library*



Edwardian novelty: the Palm Room  
*Source: Guests' Book, 1907, Sally Gibson*

## 5. For the Ladies

Right from the beginning, the King Edward Hotel sought to attract unescorted female travelers. Given Victorian and Edwardian social expectations, let alone natural anxiety on the part of females unaccompanied by male companions, the hotel's special features were undoubtedly appreciated in their day, if somewhat surprising to the modern traveler.

More "feminine" furniture, like overstuffed sofas and rattan chairs. Abundant art work. Separate entrance, elevator, parlours and reception rooms. Maid service. Hairdressing. High-end shops. All were part of the campaign to attract and keep female custom. The 1903 illustrated brochure highlighted these services under the first, large colour illustration in the publication:

### Special to the Ladies

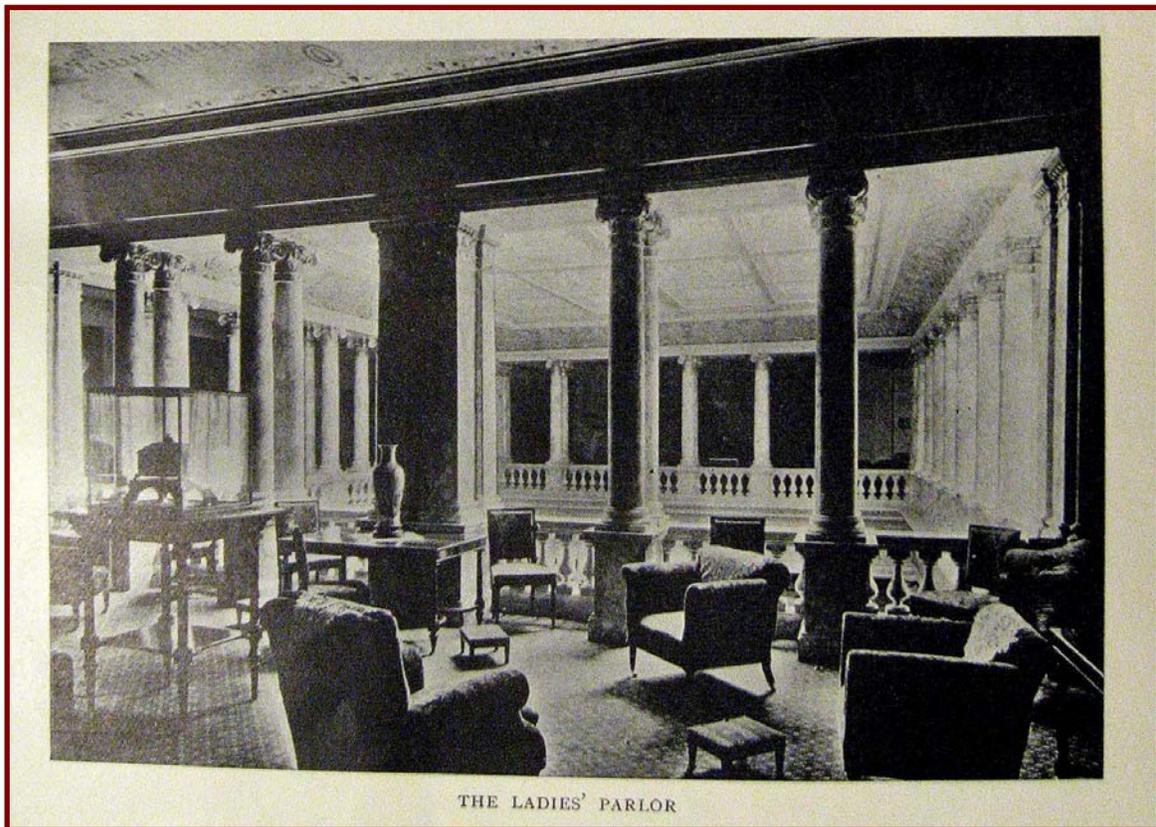
The Hotel maintains on the main office floor a Ladies' Department, where ladies travelling alone may register and have their rooms allotted, receive mail, telegrams, telephone calls and cards, and where they may receive callers. In connection with this department there is also an elevator connecting with all floors, parlors and dining rooms.

This department does away with the necessity of ladies having to cross the rotunda to the main office.

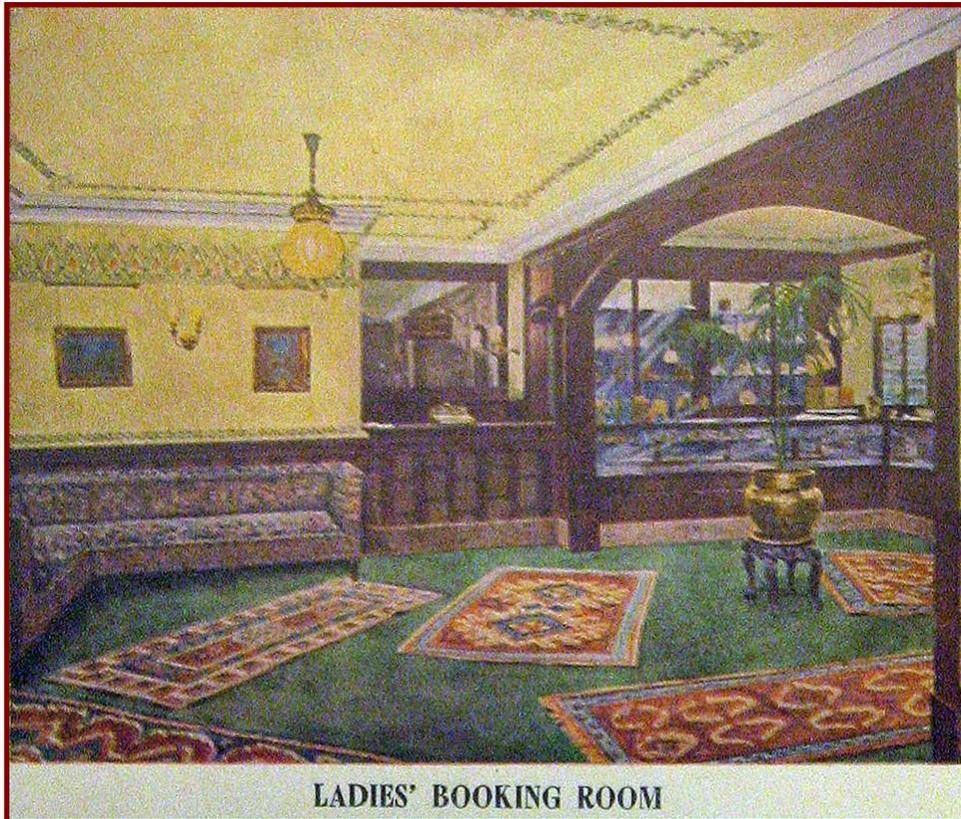
The female traveler could check-in, book theatre tickets, write letters, take tea with friends, move between hotel room and dining room, all without fear of being bothered or even observed by male guests. From the Ladies' Parlour on the colonnaded mezzanine, she could relax and admire *objets d'art* purchased for her viewing pleasure, such as an ivory jewel box said to have belonged to Diane de Poitiers, Henri II's "favourite" in sixteenth-century France. From her remote perch, she could casually observe the swirl of activity on the ground floor of the Rotunda below without attracting attention. She could meet gentlemen callers away from the prying eyes of anonymous crowds. And if she so desired, the active Edwardian lady could book a game of golf ... where she would, however, attract attention.



King Edward Hotel Ladies Department postcard, 1903-  
*Source: Sally Gibson*



Ladies' Parlour, 1903  
*Source: National Monthly, Sept. 1903 Toronto Public Library*



LADIES' BOOKING ROOM

Ladies' Booking Room, 1903 brochure  
 Source: Toronto Public Library

**Special  
to the Ladies**

This Hotel maintains on the main office floor a Ladies' Department, where ladies travelling alone may register and have their rooms allotted, receive mail, telegrams, telephone calls and cards, and where they may receive callers.

In connection with this department there is also fully equipped dressing-room with lavatories, etc., check-room for grips, suit cases, parcels, umbrellas, and ladies' wraps. Elevator connecting with all floors, parlors and dining rooms.

This department does away with the necessity of ladies having to cross the rotunda to the main office.

**Special Features**

Afternoon Tea served on the parlor floor every afternoon from 3.30 to 5.30.

Light Refreshments served in the Palm Room from 10 a.m. to 11 p.m.

Special for the Ladies, c. 1908

**Golfing**

Through the courtesy of the Directors of the Lambton Golf Club, guests at the "King Edward Hotel" can enjoy the privileges of these magnificent links by making application through the Manager. The Lambton Golf and Country Club Grounds are classed among the very finest in the world, and are easy of access by Street Railway at any time of the day or by regular C.P.R. trains.

For the active Edwardian lady, c 1908  
 Source: Brochure, Toronto Public Library

## 6. For the Gentlemen

The King Edward Hotel was built by men of business, primarily to attract, serve and pamper men of business. "In all things which tend to the comfort and indulgence of the male guest, the hotel is magnificently equipped," assured early *Guests' Books*. "The bar and buffet have the sumptuous dignity of an old baronial hall, while even in the barber shops the same note of luxury prevails." All true.

A fabulous, glass-and-mahogany newsstand-cum-cigar store stretched along one side of the Rotunda, sending out the sweet smell of Havana cigars and stocking all the best newspapers. The well-appointed barber shop - with onyx counters, shiny brass electric lights, and soaring gilt-framed oil painting - looked after the grooming needs of the well-appointed gentlemen. And a men's Grill was tucked away in the basement, not far from a billiard room, according to Lennox's 1903 basement plan.

Most sumptuous of all the male preserves was the antique oak-paneled Bar and Gentleman's Café on the main floor (later known simply as the Oak Room). While (painted) hunters chased prey above the dark wainscotting, businessmen settled into tooled-leather tub chairs, ordered a beer or a whisky (make that a G&W Special), and got down to business.

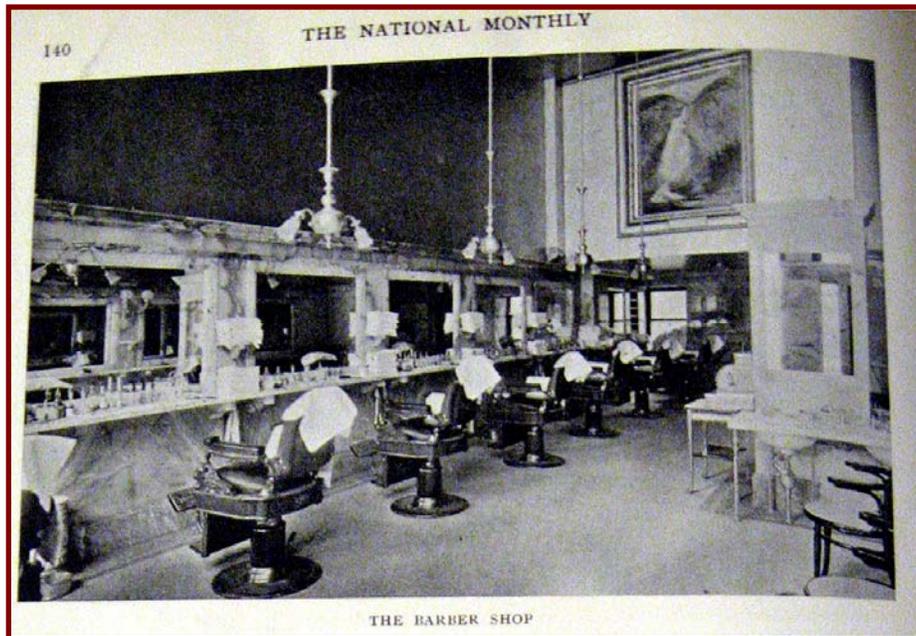
The Gentleman's Café became so celebrated that it sometimes attracted a distinctly different crowd ... like the (perhaps apocryphal) gold miners who came down to the big city in 1907, checked into the finest hotel, and brought their mules right up to the bar with them. No one knows what the mules ordered.



Cigars and newspapers, 1903  
*Source: Toronto Public Library*



Buffet or Gentlemen's Café and Bar, 1903  
*Source: Toronto Public Library*



Barber Shop: luxury at every level, 1903  
*Source: National Monthly, Sept. 1903, Toronto Public Library*



One of many all-male events: John's Manville Annual Banquet, 1911  
Source: *City of Toronto Archives, 387-181*

## 7. Edwardian Baroque

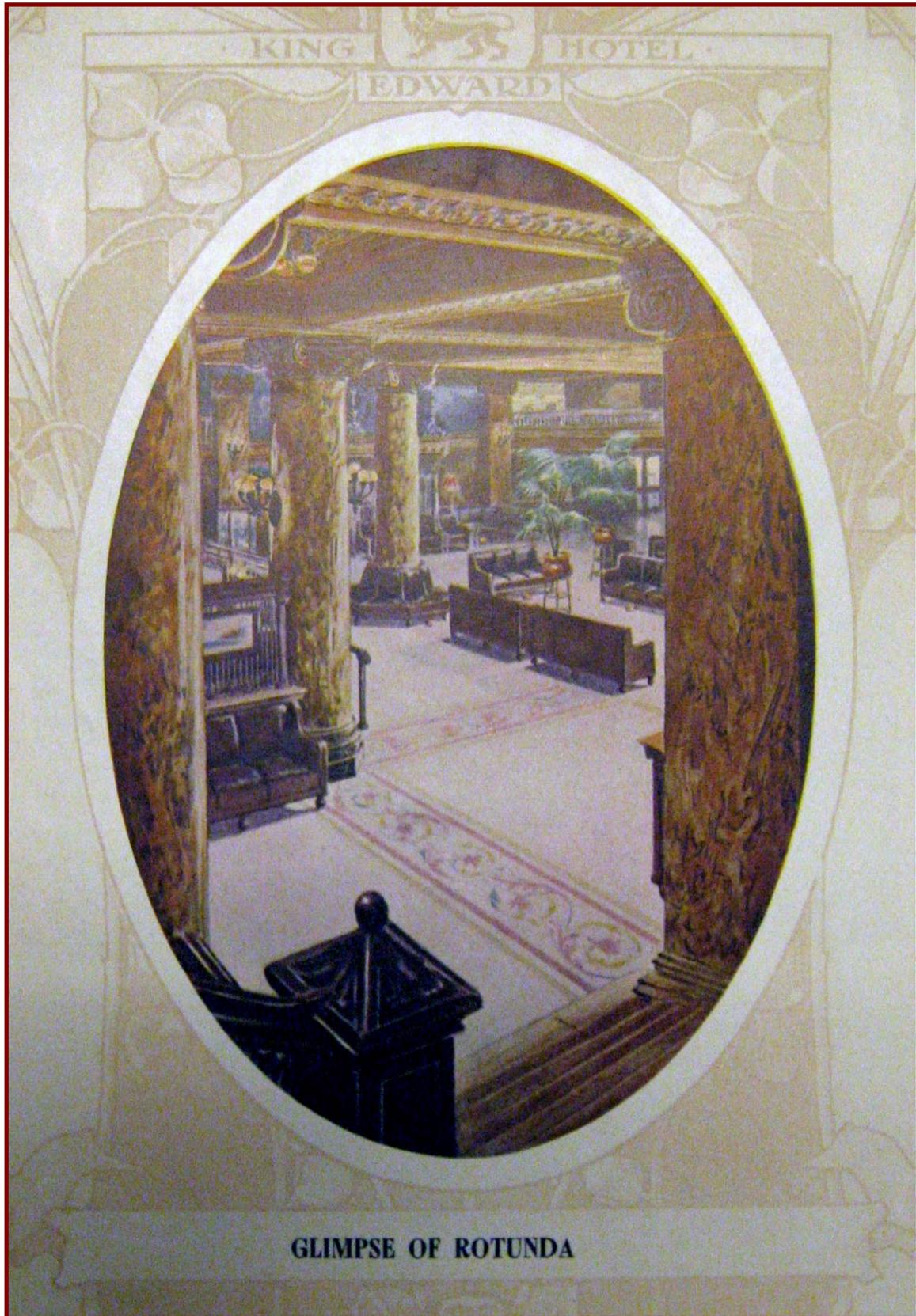
“Edwardian Baroque” best describes the extravagant, multi-hued, over-the-top decorating style embraced by the King Edward Hotel in 1903. In contrast to equally opulent but more subdued later decorating schemes, Victorian-born Lennox, with the blessing of hotel owners, piled pattern-upon-pattern, rich material-upon-rich material to almost alarming effect ... at least to the modern eye. Beaux-arts neoclassicism, great scale, and the grand gesture were other Edwardian baroque features notable in the hotel and generally filtering into Toronto’s turn-of-the-century architecture.

While evident throughout the hotel, for example in the second-floor American Dining Room where the opening RCYC ball took place, the extravagant style was most readily detected in the hotel’s signature public space: the two-storey Rotunda. The King Eddy’s lobby was actually not a rotunda. It was neither round nor domed. No matter. It was grand, classical in style, and at the symbolic heart of the hotel.

Colour - rich, varied, and everywhere - is perhaps the most striking feature. Massive ionic columns supporting a colonnaded mezzanine, walls, pilasters, reception desk - even news stand - were all made of amber, red-and-green-veined “scagliola” - a material made from coloured plasters and polished to look like marble. Popular during the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Baroque, the technique was regaining popularity in the late Victorian and Edwardian period. It must have cast the new hotel lobby into a rich, golden glow.

The Rotunda did feature some marble, on walls, stairs, and massive Renaissance fire place, as well as other rich materials. Dark mahogany wainscotting. Decorative iron balusters and elevator gates. Stained-glass windows. Sumptuous plastering. And mosaic-tile floor. The lovely mosaic floor also had the virtue of fire-proofing the building ... and providing a surface for intricately patterned and expensive Turkish and Persian rugs.

Contemporary observers commented on the “airiness” experienced in the Rotunda. This could only have come from the great volume and the bountiful light pouring in through the glass skylight onto patrons and potted palms below.



View from the Grand Staircase across the Rotunda with scagliola columns, mosaic floor, potted palms and coffered ceiling, 1903  
*Source: Toronto Public Library*



A view of the central Rotunda: light, airiness, chandelier, and mezzanine colonnade, 1907  
*Source: Sally Gibson*

## 8. Murals: Canadian History Writ Large, 1903

Once upon a time, French fur traders, explorer John Cabot, First Nations Peoples and other characters from Canadian history looked down upon the central Rotunda. The subject choices were Edwardian. The figures were life-size. The painting was turn-of-the-century romantic realism. And all have disappeared, either completely or perhaps behind other wall treatments.

Lennox et al hired Tiffany Co. of New York to take care of such interior decoration matters as murals for their new palace hotel. Tiffany hired well-respected American Impressionist and celebrated mural painter, William de Leftwich Dodge, who had studied in Paris and whose work already soared over the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C.

Dodge developed a program for four major murals, one of which caused intense disagreement, not for its subject matter (General Wolfe on the night before his victory over the French on the Plains of Abraham), but for its treatment (too dark and too big). Sixty years later, the subject would also have caused significant political disagreement, but that's another story.

When this mural arrived in Toronto, Lennox rejected it. It was too gloomy. And it didn't fit in the allotted space over the elevators. Dodge resisted any attempts to alter his work: Lennox wanted him to change it from night to day. "But Wolfe did not advance on the citadel in the daylight," Dodge argued. "This Wolfe will," replied Lennox.

Dodge added a moon, but beyond that he would not go. He took the matter to (American) court. Although he received an early victory for artists' retaining moral rights in their work that would prevent such change, his Canadian employers simply disregarded the judgment.

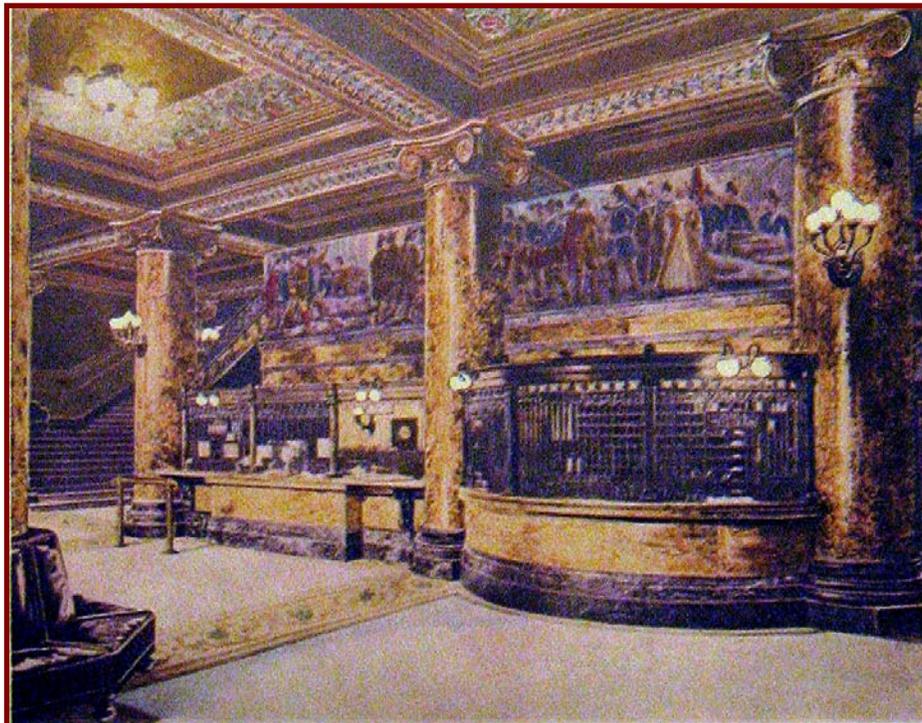
Ultimately, the dodgy Wolfe mural was replaced by an historical scene with local reference: "Trading at Fort Rouillé," by Frederick S. Challenger, who became an eminent Canadian muralist in his own right. Here, French traders negotiated with aboriginals at the old French fort that was destroyed after the British victory on the Plains of Abraham in 1759. (The ruins are still commemorated at Exhibition Place.) Challenger's mural celebrated Toronto's own history and pushed the boundaries of relevant local history back beyond the arrival of the British.

Dodge's other murals caused less controversy and inspired much admiration. Subject choices seem a bit bizarre, however. Particularly odd is the 20-foot long mural over the main desk depicting the arrival of "Les Filles du Roi" - about 800 young French women sent over to Quebec by Louis XIV as wives for the soldiers, traders, and other settlers who would populate this remote corner of the French empire. Another mural captures the 1497 landing of John Cabot (aka, Giovanni Caboto), not in Ontario, but in Newfoundland. A fourth, allegorical mural depicted a group of native people with arms outstretched, protesting the invasion of both the French and the English into

their territory. Whatever their particular subject matters, however, the mural added colour and drama to the already colourful and dramatic Rotunda space.



Frederick Challener's Fort Rouillé mural over the elevators, 1903  
*Source: Toronto Public Library*



William Dodge's Filles du Roi mural over the registration desk, 1903  
*Source: Toronto Public Library*

## 9. A Working Hotel

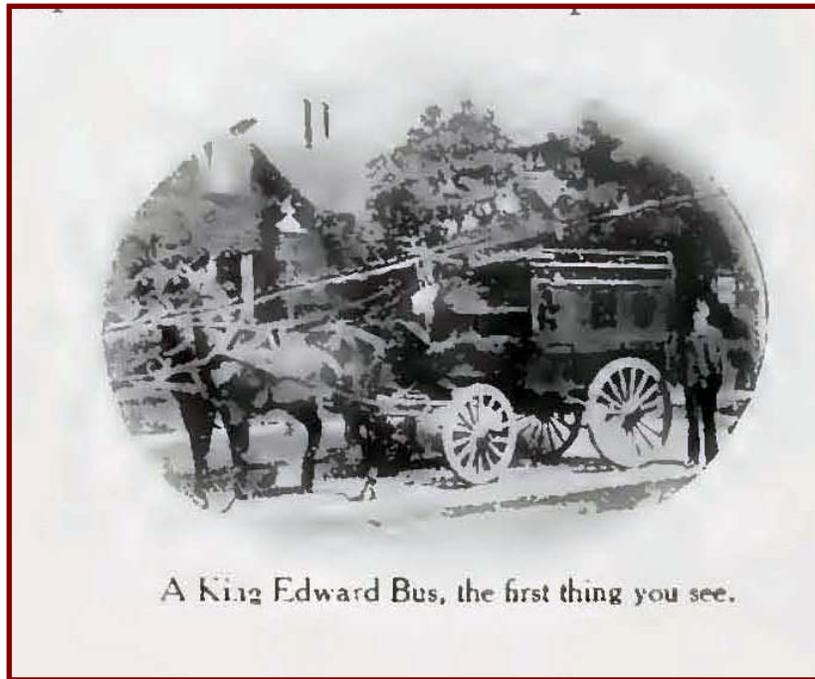
When the King Edward Hotel opened in May 1903, some 325 chambermaids, waiters, bellboys, and others had been hired to provide the “perfect service” desired by owners and senior management. Some worked behind the scenes, in the kitchens and basement machinery rooms. Others worked unobtrusively in the grand public spaces and private guest rooms.

As General Manager, American hotelier William C. Bailey had been lured away from Chicago’s Metropole, after having served in various other establishments, including Sherry’s of New York. Shortly after arriving in Toronto he was introduced to Members of the Toronto Stock Exchange, who were given a special, pre-opening tour of the hotel. Always a good idea to pay special attention to potential customers, especially when, like Bailey, you have a financial stake in the business.

Before Bailey took the helm on May 1, 1903, hotel consultant Robert C. Clarke had spent 14 months advising the owners - especially George Gooderham’s energetic son-in-law, T.G. Blackstock - about staffing and equipping the hotel. Clarke probably expected to become General Manager, but appeared content to take over Bailey’s old spot at the Metropole and to be fêted at the first social event held at the King Edward Hotel. Over a lavish dinner in the handsome Grill Room on April 24<sup>th</sup>, Blackstock commended Bailey as “an invaluable counselor and all-round fine fellow,” and presented him with a silver replica of the \$2000 gold King Edward Hotel Cup that George Gooderham had donated to the Ontario Jockey Club. (It couldn’t hurt to keep the hotel’s name before the horse set.)

The other key personnel decision was chef, Signor Gaetano Rascio, who worked behind the scenes, but not anonymously. His name and reputation would attract hungry, sometimes gourmet, patrons. Rascio was reputed to be an “undoubted *cordons bleu*,” who had served under Delmonico in New York, on the British flag-ship *Agamemnon* and the United States man-of-war *Omaha* (not necessarily high culinary recommendations). At the King Eddy, he took charge of 75 white-coated kitchen staff and produced French-style menus designed to tickle the palettes of Their Excellencies Lord and Lady Minto and ordinary hotel guests alike.

Most hotel employees, of course, cleaned, cooked, polished, served and otherwise worked in obscurity. Very occasionally, however, images do surface and enter public awareness. The liveried driver of a King Edward Hotel coach delivering guests to the hotel doorman in a 1906 brochure. The bell “boy” (no matter what his age), at your service on the Welcome page of a 1907 Guests’ Book. The (uncharacteristically) slouching elevator operator in the lower part of a photograph focusing on the overhead murals. Kitchen staff posing among the copper pots, massive stoves and white encaustic tiles for a portrait of the celebrated hotel kitchen in 1907. A drawing of the European Dining Room, annotated by one of the formally dressed waiters, “Here I am working,” perhaps as a souvenir for family or girl friend. All are tokens of the real people who made the hotel work.

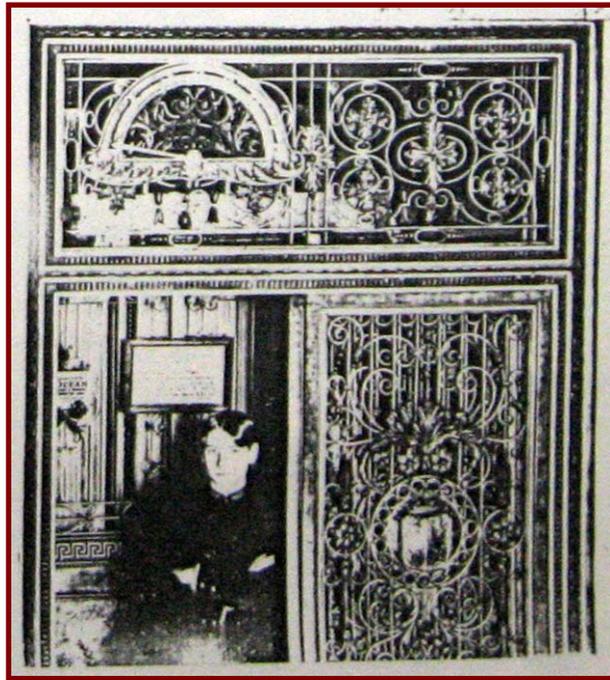


A King Edward Bus, the first thing you see.

King Edward Bus with Liveried Driver & Doorman, 1903 (left) or 1906 (right)  
*Source: Toronto Public Library*

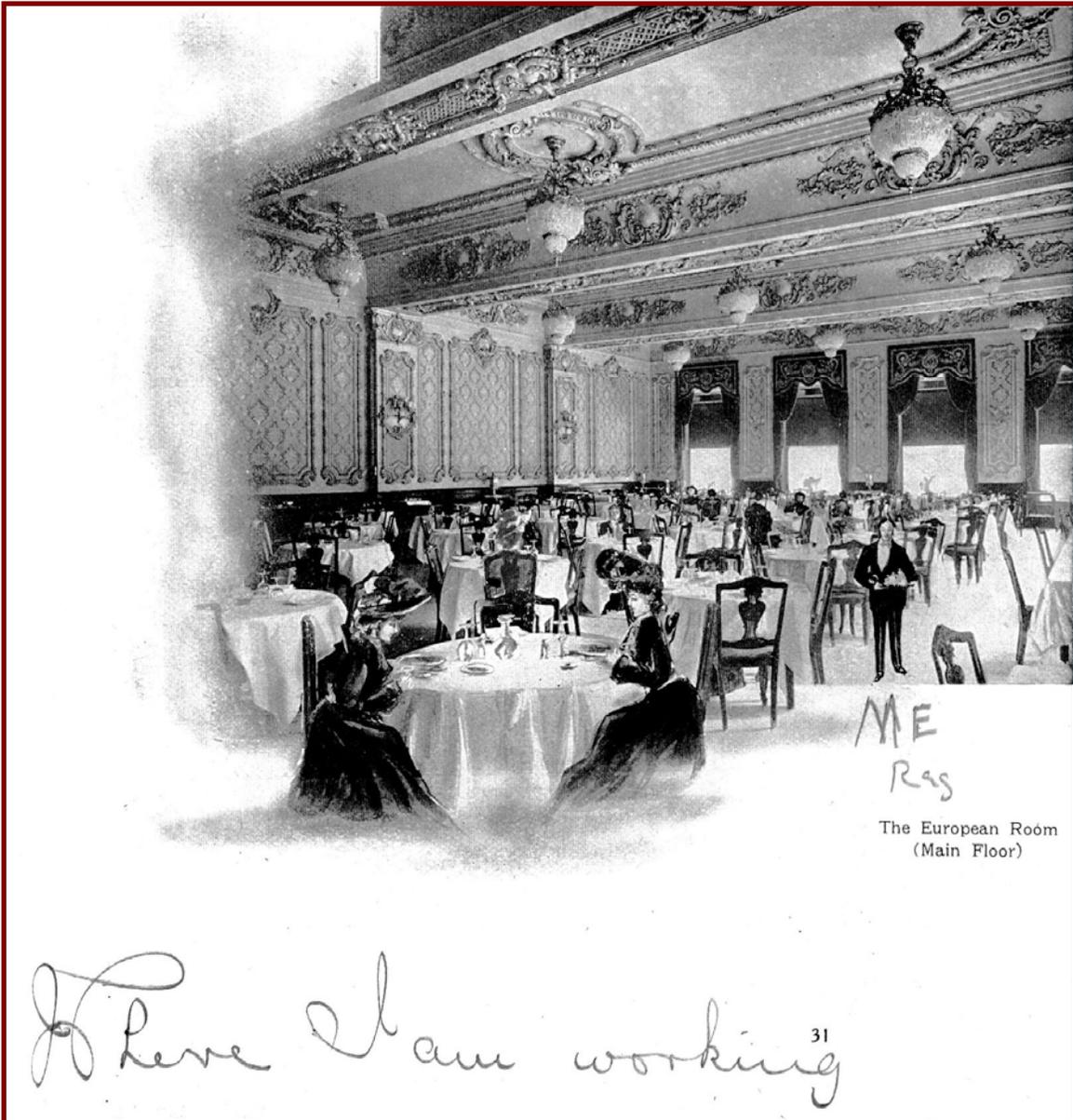


Bellboy, 1907  
*Source: Sally Gibson*



Casual elevator operator, ca. 1905  
*Source: City of Toronto Archives, 387-176*





Annotated page from 1907 Guests' Book  
Source: King Edward Hotel Archives



Grill where Robert C. Clarke was fêted on April 24, 1903  
*Source: Toronto Public Library*

## 10. Edwardian Banquet, 1910

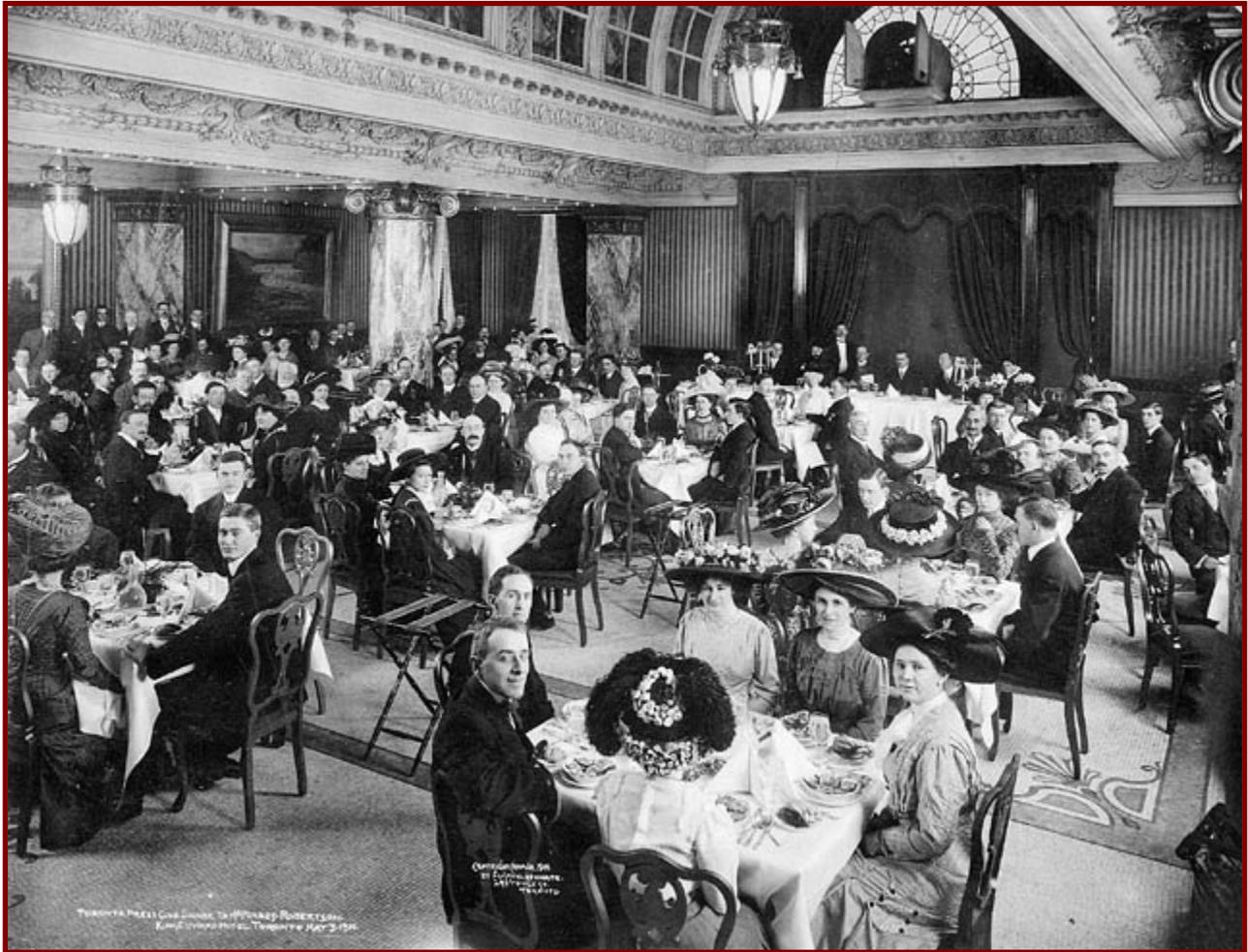
Lauded by the Toronto press as “the finest actor on the English-speaking stage,” Johnston Forbes-Robertson paid a much anticipated visit to Toronto in May 1910. Ticket sales at the fabulously plush Royal Alexandra Theatre, named for the good King’s consort, were way beyond expectations. Illustrated feature articles appeared in local papers. Ads promoted his week at “Canada’s Handsomest Theatre.”

Theatre-goers were not disappointed. Playing “A Passer-by” in Jerome K. Jerome’s new play, *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*, Forbes-Robertson received standing ovations and rave reviews. “Forbes Robertson is so sincere and so finished an actor that his portrayal of the Passerby is a veritable delight,” the *Star* critic enthused. “His rich, clear voice, his restraint of gesture, his impressive stage presence, and his eloquent eyes combine to make this stage portrait an unforgettable one.” All this for a player who was even more celebrated as a Shakespearean actor. George Bernard Shaw counted Forbes-Robertson’s Hamlet as the finest he had ever seen and wrote the part of Caesar in *Caesar and Cleopatra* for him.

Forbes-Robertson was not new to Toronto. He had played here several times before. But he was perhaps new to the King Edward Hotel where he stayed and was celebrated at a Toronto Press Club banquet held in the vast second-floor Ball Room. During the evening, local photographer, F. W. Micklethwaite, captured the moment and the setting with superb detail. His camera recorded not only the ladies in big hats and the normally ink-stained wretches in formal attire, but also the oysters on their plates, the mosaic tiles on the floor, the multi-hued scagliola on the columns and the glass barrel vault ceiling springing from gorgeous ornamental plaster mouldings.

Before leaving for his nightly performance at the Royal Alexandra Theatre, the guest of honour rose to thank his hosts and make a plea for the creation of a National Theatre in London to celebrate Shakespeare. The tall, gaunt-but-graceful actor with the splendid voice could project to the outer reaches of the hall. He also displayed a nice sense of humour, or perhaps it was a challenge. Staff Inspector Kennedy had apparently warned him that Toronto’s censor would be compelled to cut scenes of violence from *Hamlet*, should he attempt to present it here. Forbes-Robertson thought it might be nice to play Hamlet again some time in Toronto. But he probably never did, since he retired from the stage in 1913.

The Press Club dinner for Mr. (soon to be Sir) Johnston Forbes-Robertson was one of the final, perhaps *the* final truly “Edwardian” banquet at the King Eddy. Just three days later, Edward VII died. The “Edwardian Age,” however, lingered on until the outbreak of the Great War in August 1914 when the whole world changed.



Press Club Dinner for Johnston Forbes-Robertson, May 3, 1910  
*Source: Toronto Public Library, T-13208*

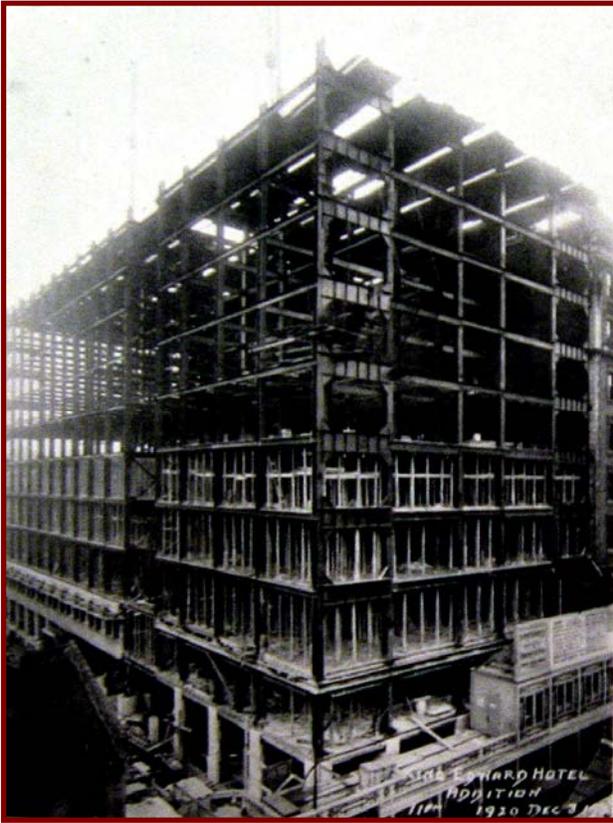
## 11. Skyscraper Expansion 1921

The King Eddy burst into the roaring twenties with a skyscraper addition to the hotel. Now easily outpaced by towers of 50, 60, and more storeys, the 18-storey structure that rose at King and Leader Lane can easily be overlooked. But in the early 1920s, it was one of Toronto's tallest buildings, exerting a distinct impact on King Street East and the skyline of the city. The addition of 530 guest rooms also made the King Eddy, for a time, the largest hotel in Canada. (The Royal York Hotel claimed that title in 1929.)

As early as 1912, hotel owners had started planning an annex. The hotel's original architect, E. J. Lennox, even prepared plans for a 600-room, 14-storey building. But Lennox's scheme was never constructed, likely because of the Great War from 1914 to 1918. After the war, new architects were hired by the new owners, United Hotels Co. of America, and their steel-frame, buff-brick structure rose in record time. The first piece of steel was placed on September 23, 1920 and the frame was finished on January 21, 1921.

The design by Esenwein and Johnson of Buffalo with Watt and Blackwell of London, Ontario was frankly utilitarian. "The exterior symbolizes in its severe simplicity silent protest against misguided striving for exterior picturesqueness at sacrifice of comfort and convenience to the patrons," an anonymous writer for *Construction* magazine commented in February 1922, "the whole unit being a compact 18-storey structure erected primarily to produce revenue for the owners." Some would argue that Lennox's exterior and interior extravagances comprised much of the charm and glamour of the old hotel. Still, progress brought modern conveniences like private bathrooms or showers to every guest room.

Fortunately for hotel visitors and Toronto residents alike, the new King Eddy did include some extravagances - above all (literally and figuratively) the Crystal Ball Room on the 18<sup>th</sup> floor. Here banquets for 1000 and balls for 2000 could be accommodated with grace and (relative) ease ... with a brand new kitchen being located nearby. State dinners. Debutante balls. Civic receptions for Jean Harlow (1932) and Toronto's 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday (1934). Almost-nightly dancing to the music of Luigi Romanelli's orchestra (Sundays excepted). New Year's Eve parties throughout the thirties and on into the forties. The King Eddy's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 1953. All took place in the King Eddy's new crown jewel.



Steel-frame hotel annex rose in record time  
source: *Construction*, 1922, Toronto Public Library



Dramatic foreshortening of this 1930s postcard emphasizes skyscraper quality of the annex  
source: *Sally Gibson*



Crystal Ball Room, 1922: crystal chandeliers, orchestra balcony, and views of the stars  
*source: Construction, 1922, Toronto Public Library*



"Typical Bed Room," 1922 ... every one with private bath or shower  
*source: Construction, 1922, Toronto Public Library*

## 12. Movie Royalty 1924 Mary Pickford & Douglas Fairbanks

Early on Sunday morning, March 23, 1924, Mary Pickford and husband Douglas Fairbanks tried to slip quietly into Toronto. They hailed a cab at Union Station and walked unnoticed through the Rotunda of the King Edward Hotel - just another weary, albeit well-dressed, couple. Their cover was blown when the hotel manager glanced down at the register and noticed - with a pop of recognition - that "Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Fairbanks of Beverley Hills, Cal." had signed in, along with "mother, maid and valet."

The rest of the day consisted of family visits and quasi-public events. The group dropped in on Mrs. Pickford's sisters, posed outside Mary's birthplace in a tiny house on University Avenue, and visited the graves of Mary's father (at Mount Pleasant) and grandmother (at St. Michael's). Particularly popular, was the couple's pilgrimage to the Christie Street Hospital where Mary chatted to wounded veterans of the First World War, while Douglas displayed his fitness by doing chin-ups on an iron bar.

As always, America's Sweetheart, and Toronto's native daughter, melted hearts and sold papers. "If it had been any other place than Toronto and any other time than early Sunday morning," the *Globe* reporter enthused, "they would have been mobbed and cheered and maltreated with every kind of enthusiasm" known to movie fans and royalty watchers on other occasions at the hotel. As it was, they did hold court long enough in the hotel for photographs, like this one, to be snapped.



Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks smile for photographers at the King Edward Hotel, 1924  
Source: City of Toronto Archives, 1266-2234

### 13. Dancing Princes, 1927

Edward, Prince of Wales, future Edward VIII and then (disgraced) Duke of Windsor, did not stay at the King Edward Hotel when he and his young brother, Prince George, visited Toronto in August 1927. The two princes, who were in town to open the new Union Station and dedicate the Princes Gates at the Exhibition Grounds stayed at Government House, a French chateau of a building in remote Rosedale. But they did attend a State Dinner at the downtown hotel on Saturday, August 6<sup>th</sup>.

The two princes travelled by train from Ottawa to Toronto, disembarked at North Toronto Station (later converted into the Summerhill Liquor Store), and set off on a whirlwind of official duties. First, cutting the ribbon at Union Station ... although there were still no tracks tying the new station into the old railway network. Then, a civic reception outside City Hall. Followed by a repeat visit to Great War veterans still at the Red Cross hospital visited by the Prince of Wales during his triumphant tour of 1919. Then a Garden Party ... for four thousand people ... at Government House. And finally off to a State Dinner given by the Province of Ontario at the hotel. King Street East was so clogged by cheering crowds that the princes were secretly deposited on Leader Lane and entered via the side entrance.

The 18th-floor Crystal Ball Room had been "transformed into a veritable fairyland," according to a *Star* reporter. Vine-covered, flower-bedecked trellises flowed over the walls. Views of the growing city were, of course, spectacular. The princes and dignitaries, such as British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin and Ontario Premier Howard Ferguson, occupied the head table. Despite Premier Ferguson's assurances to a formality-weary Prince of Wales that there would be *no* long speeches, Prime Minister Baldwin couldn't resist the opportunity to go on and on, as politicians are apt to do. The Prince and the Premier were admirably brief.

After dinner came dancing. Luigi Romanelli and his orchestra set the tone from their balcony above the dance floor. Prince Edward and brother George had an opportunity to kick up their heels, discreetly. Their dance partners tended to be older, married ladies with connections. Still, HRH requested the peppy new hit, *At Sundown*, which he danced with Mrs. Fraser Grant, and performed a modest, British version of the Charleston with his final partner, Mrs. McLeod. This "flat Charleston" consisted of "a few smarts side steps and hops..." perhaps appropriate to the smart side steps required to sneak the Prince and his party from the formal King Edward Hotel dance (exiting through the Leader Lane door) to an informal after-party in Rosedale.

Playing hide and seek with photographers and news reporters - a decoy car was even sent out the north side of Government House - the two princes were stealthily transported from the south side of Chorley Park to a nearby Rosedale mansion. While in Ottawa, the Prince had danced with and asked Miss Elena Murdoch to organize a private party where he could dance away from the eyes of the multitudes. How could she refuse? A dozen of Toronto's loveliest debs quickly planned the event, hired a small orchestra, and invited a select crowd of about 30.

HRH and Prince George danced into the small hours. Prince Edward again requested *At Sundown* and danced the Charleston, while Prince George was heard singing

another of 1927's hit songs, "Ain't She Sweet," to one of his partners. As he left, the Prince thanked his hostess, "It was one of the nicest parties I have ever had."

For generations, social Toronto had special reason to croon yet another of 1927's pop tunes, "I've Danced with a man, who's danced with a girl, who danced with the Prince of Wales" ... right here in Toronto.



Head Table & Dancing in the Crystal Ball Room, August 6, 1927

TPL



August 15, 1927: a quiet day outside the hotel while the princes were vacationing in Alberta  
*Source: City of Toronto Archives, 71-5187A*

## 14. Luigi Romanelli and Orchestra

For over twenty years, from 1918 until 1942, Luigi Romanelli made beautiful music at the King Edward Hotel. Trained as a classical violinist, Romanelli brought deep knowledge and flexibility to his work. Classical concerts. Big band music. Even semi-hot jazz.

Romanelli never became as famous as his contemporary, Guy Lombardo, who played his own final series at the King Edward Hotel before emigrating to New York City in 1929. But he did develop an international reputation, fed by touring and radio work; was a power in Toronto musical circles; and gained considerable wealth. He once owned a string of thoroughbreds, compiled a music library valued at \$50,000 in 1942, and was the proud owner of a colossus model Stradivarius violin. Not bad for a hometown boy.

Romanelli started early, making music on the streets of Toronto as a youngster and his theatrical debut in a show featuring little Gladys Smith ... later known as Mary Pickford. He went on to play in vaudeville, toured as a concert violinist, and pioneered musical accompaniment for silent films.

In 1923, he was appointed general musical director for the United Hotels in Canada. The recently expanded King Edward Hotel became home base where he and his orchestra provided music for every occasion - luncheons in the Oak Room; supper dances in the Victoria Room; tea dances, banquets and balls in the spectacular new Crystal Ball Room.

Advertising was a key to success, then as now. Romanelli's name was kept before the public in theatre programs, newspaper ads (some quite odd), and on sheet music for popular songs of the day. Music for 1924's *I'll See You In My Dreams* featured a photograph of Romanelli striking a thoughtful pose. A 1927 advertisement in both the *Star* and the *Globe* featured an altogether different mood, with a glum-looking Romanelli crowned as Toronto's "King of Jazz."

Romanelli died in July 1942 during the summer season at tony Murray Bay, Quebec. Obituaries noted that the "famed orchestra leader" had played before princes and prime ministers. True. But he had also entertained thousands of more ordinary folks, silent-movie goers, radio listeners, middle and upper-class hotel visitors. His funeral was attended not only by politicians, but also by colleagues and admirers in the world of music. The staff of the King Edward hotel turned out in force ... including bus boys and shoe shiners.

# I'll See You In My Dreams

A typical Isham Jones melody  
**FOX TROT SONG**  
With Ukulele Accompaniment

Lyric by  
**GUS KAHN**  
Writer of "ELIZA" and  
"How I Love That Girl"

Music by  
**ISHAM JONES**  
Writer of "Swingin' Down the Lane"

You can't go wrong  
with any FEIST song!

KENNEY MUSIC STORE  
VICTROLAS,  
VICTOR RECORDS  
832 Bloor St. W., KEN. 0928

Featured by  
**LUIGI ROMANELLI**  
and his  
KING EDWARD HOTEL ORCHESTRA

CANADIAN EDITION  
**LEO FEIST LIMITED TORONTO CAN.**  
UNITED STATES, LEO FEIST INC., 251-255 WEST 40TH ST., NEW YORK,  
FRANCIS DAY AND HUNTER, LONDON, ENGLAND.

Before the era of LPs and CDs, sheet music promoted bands  
source: Bill and Betty Pratt

1,000 Rooms      1,000 Baths



**“King Edward Hotel”**

“Close to the Interesting.”

**The Dansant**  
Roof Ball Room  
Wednesday and Saturday Afternoons, from 4 p.m. to 6.30 p.m.

**SUPPER DANCE**  
Evenings Victoria Room, from 10.30 p.m. to 1 a.m.  
Tea served on Mezzanine Floor  
Each Afternoon other than Wednesday and Saturday  
Romanelli's Orchestra.

GEO. H. O'NEIL      L. S. MULDOON,      E. R. PITCHER,  
General Manager.      Manager.      Asst. Manager.

Princess Theatre Program ad, December 1921  
source: *Bill and Betty Pratt*

**ROMANELLI is back**  
**from Europe**



**with his great new orchestra**  
**for the KING EDWARD HOTEL**

To-night—leave dull care behind and come and dine and dance and be merry—at the smartest place in town.

Riotous, rollicking, foot-fingling jazz is enthroned once again at the King Edward! Old King Jazz himself has returned, and with him the finest, most versatile dance orchestra ever offered to Toronto. Twelve master musicians, every one a soloist—36 instruments.

Back from the music centres of Europe with entrancing new orchestrations, gloriously lovely tonal effects, striking novelties, new instruments—Luigi Romanelli's nightly programs at the Supper Dances in the Oak Room are a perfect blending of the gay, the new, the colorful and the beautiful.

**Supper Dance every night except Sunday**  
**in the Oak Room, starting 10.30 p.m.;**  
**Saturday, 9.30 p.m. For reservations call**  
**Main 4600, KING EDWARD HOTEL**

Jazz Age ad, *Globe*, Oct. 10, 1927  
source: *Toronto Public Library*



**ROMANELLI**  
and his internationally famous 15-piece orchestra play every night (except Sunday) for the Supper Dance held in the Oak Room with its gracious Old World Atmosphere.

Art Deco ad 1934  
source: *Sally Gibson*

## 15. CKGW Radio Broadcasting from the King Edward Hotel 1928-1933

On March 5, 1928, radio station CKGW beamed out its first broadcast from an ultra-modern studio in the King Edward Hotel. "Tonight marks one great step forward in the history of radio broadcasting in the Dominion of Canada," broadcast manager N. E. Maysmith announced with pardonable pride.

According to news reports, CKGW instantly became the most powerful radio station in Canada and the third largest in the British Empire. Radio signals were hurled through the ether by CKGW's 5000-watt transmitter in Bowmanville. Telegrams and long-distance phone calls flooded in from listeners in New Jersey ... North Bay ... Winnipeg ... Miami ... Vancouver ... Los Angeles ... even Hawaii.

CKGW was the brainchild of Harry C. Hatch, owner and president of the Gooderham & Worts distillery in Toronto, as well as Hiram Walker in Windsor. Prohibition had just ended in Ontario, but was still in force south of the border. Hatch was exquisitely well positioned to take advantage of the situation.

Radio was becoming hugely popular and offered a new way of reaching potential customers from near and far. Although CKGW was apparently not allowed to advertise G&W products directly, its call letters did the trick. Given the strong links between Gooderham & Worts and the King Edward Hotel (remember, George Gooderham was the hotel's key backer in the early 1900s), locating the studio in the hotel just made sense.

It also made sense, because it promoted the hotel itself. Broadcasting from six to midnight, CKGW offered mining news, weather, but mostly music. Romanelli and the hotel were front and centre on the schedule. Dinner music from the King Edward Hotel ... Luigi Romanelli and his Radio Syncopaters ... Supper Music by Luigi Romanelli and his King Edward Hotel Orchestra from the Oak Room of the hotel .... And so it went for about five to six years, before the station moved out of the hotel and was ultimately rolled into something called the CBC. The once-popular "Cheerio Station" faded into history.



Rare peak inside the CKGW studio at the King Edward Hotel *Globe*, May 23, 1928 (Toronto Public Library)



Reception verification stamp (Distillery Historic District)

## 16. Depression, 1934

The hotel fell on hard times during the Great Depression. Some say that many of the famous and valuable *objets d'arts* disappeared, whether stolen or sold, no one now knows. The hotel went into receivership for a bit. Rates were revised "in keeping with the times." Rooms with bath cost from \$3.00 up; double rooms with bathroom, from \$4.50; and suites from \$8.00.

But all was not lost and some good times did continue to roll. Romanelli continued to draw dancers to the Crystal Ballroom and Oak Room. Special celebrations continued to occur, like the City of Toronto's official Centennial Luncheon that took over the Crystal Ballroom on March 6, 1934. And then, on July 24<sup>th</sup>, hotels could once again sell beer and wine ... only seven years after most prohibition regulations had already been lifted. Hallelujah ... or perhaps ... Cheers!

On the night that wine and beer flowed once again in Ontario's hotels, reporters and photographers fanned out across the city, pursuing one of the pleasantest assignments possible. Contrary to the fears of some, these hard-working journalists reported that Toronto and cities across the province had remained trouble-free. Hotel dining rooms and bars (or "beverage rooms" as the legislation called them) were busy, but drinkers well-behaved. At the King Eddy, guests quietly sipped wine with their dinner and ordered beer by the bottle at the Grill. Not surprisingly, the photograph taken at the hotel was not published the following day. Peace prevailed and privacy was preserved.



**COMFORTS AND CONVENIENCES  
BORN OF 30 YEARS' TRADITION**

● Central, fashionable and charming, the King Edward offers comforts and conveniences found under no other hotel roof in Canada. Here you will find that spirit of friendliness and hospitality and the worth-while, delightful hotel service that has made this hostelry famous from one end of the continent to the other. Whether you stop for business or pleasure in the Centennial City, your stay at the King Edward will be an unforgettable experience.

**RATES REVISED**

Rooms at the King Edward are in keeping with the times. Rooms with bath from \$3.00, double room and bathroom, from \$4.50; suites from \$8.

Meals—In the restaurant—Breakfast, 50c.; 60c., 75c., Luncheon, \$1.25; table d'hôte, \$1.50, or in the cafeteria at correspondingly reduced price.

Here Smart Toronto congregates to find the center of the social whirl... to dance to one of America's finest orchestras... to enjoy the delightful cuisine of the inimitable Claude Baujard, noted chef, who has been decorated by the French Government. Feminine guests will find added conveniences, with the tenth floor all to themselves, furnished in the most attractive style and with a private parlour for entertaining.

**ROMANELLI** and his internationally famous 15-piece orchestra play every night (except Sunday) for the Supper Dance held in the Oak Room with its gracious Old World Atmosphere.

**King Edward**

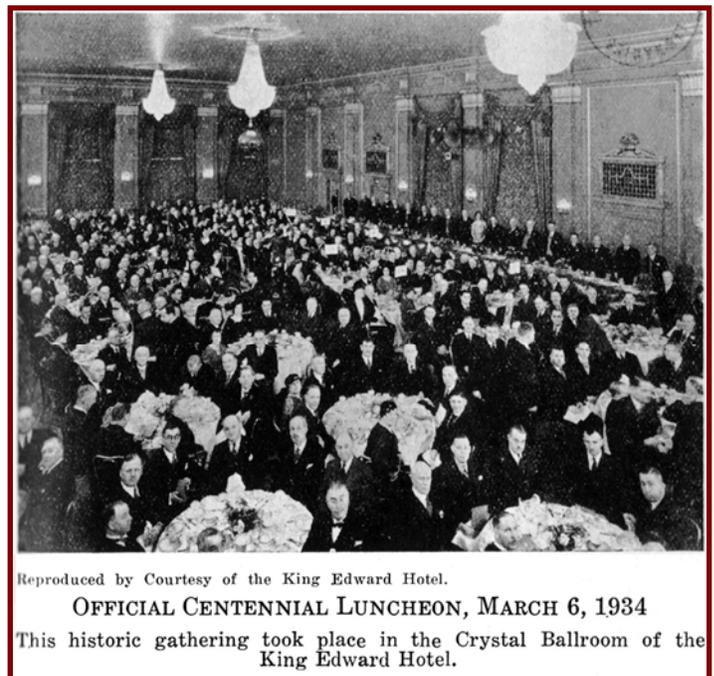
P. KIRBY HUNT  
MANAGER



**Hotel, Toronto**

FOR RESERVATIONS  
PHONE: WA. 7474





The King Eddy shares in Toronto's 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday celebrations, with an ad from the centennial book and a luncheon in the Crystal ballroom on March 6, 1934

Source: Sally Gibson



*Globe* photographer captures low-key drinkers at the King Eddy  
Source: City of Toronto Archives, 1266-34166

## 17. New Year's Eve, 1939

A world at war ... with a depression just behind. Such was the parlous state of affairs when December 31, 1939 rolled around. No matter. New Year's Eve is for celebration. "Perpetuating the happy optimism that seizes people the world over on every New Year's Eve," the *Globe and Mail* commented amid photographs of celebrants at the Royal York and King Edward hotels, "the city drummed out the psychopathic thirties and welcomed the forties with an open mind last night."

Perhaps fueled by an "eat, drink and be merry" philosophy common in times of trouble, Toronto revelers almost matched pre-depression levels, laughing, tooting, drinking, and dancing their way toward the new decade. The Crystal Ballroom was jammed. Luigi Romanelli and his orchestra serenaded and syncopated from the balcony. Waiters served booze and (pre-rationing) snacks. Future soldiers, nurses and munitions workers dressed in their finest, donned silly hats, and lived for the moment.



King Edward Hotel, December 31, 1939

Source: *City of Toronto Archives*, 1266-63902 (left) and 63087 (right)

## 18. Nostalgia at 50, May 1953

On May 11, 1953 the King Edward Hotel celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a nostalgic reception in the Crystal Ballroom. Under the still bright crystal chandeliers - that would only shine a few more years - current owners and staff were joined by legions of former employees and guests. A chef posed proudly beside a model of the hotel and a multi-tiered birthday cake. Then for one more afternoon, lovers of the hotel traded stories. Some remembered famous guests like movie-star Rudolph Valentino, dancer Pavlova, the Prince of Wales, prize-fighter Jack Dempsey, and (perennial) Prime Minister Mackenzie King. Others recalled moments of temporary scandal, like the time a *woman* first lit up a cigarette right there in the main dining room. Others were horrified by recent changes.

Times *had* changed. New hotels with swimming pools and convention facilities presented challenges. Something called "motels" were being built to cater to drivers of big American cars. Interior decorating trends had obliterated some of the colourful Edwardian splendour. An anonymous-but-peeved old waiter complained that one proprietor had "slopped white paint" over all the famous gilt mouldings in the main dining room (later Victoria Room) and another had painted the beautiful oak in the Oak Room. Shame ... at least according to nostalgic old-timers.

Change, of course, was inevitable. Rooms now came equipped with free TV, radio, and air-conditioning. A smart cocktail lounge had been opened where the rotunda elevator used to be. The name, *Times Square*, puzzled some. But it turned out to be the name of a show horse owned by a general-manager-turned-owner, not a reference to New York's tawdry entertainment district.

Sheraton Hotels added the King Eddy to its roster in 1950. Postcards and advertisements presented a "contemporary" image. Lennox's elaborate exterior was stripped down and the hotel set against a backdrop of mountains, river, and evergreens, presumably to suggest the hotel as a logical launching pad for exploring Canada's natural wonders. Anniversary ads urged suited businessmen and romantic couples to "dine royally," served by attentive waiters, under an equestrian portrait, perhaps of a (slimmed down) Edward VII.



Repainting the Crystal Ballroom, August 22, 1952  
*Source: City of Toronto Archives, 975-1073-xx*



Model Chef, May 11, 1953  
*Source: City of Toronto Archives, 975-1928-xx*



50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary reception, Crystal Ballroom, May 11, 1953  
*Source: City of Toronto Archives, 975-1928-xx*

AT THE KING EDWARD—TORONTO  
A SHERATON HOTEL  
GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY YEAR

**Dine Royally!**

You'll fare like a king when you choose from the menu—at any of the Sheraton Hotels—famed roast beef at Toronto's proud King Edward, or Chicken Maryland at Baltimore's Sheraton-Belvedere. And fine food is just the start. Courteous service, new and imaginative room decorations, convenient mid-town locations, and easy parking are other reasons regular travelers choose Sheraton. For free Teletype reservations, just call your nearest Sheraton.

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TORONTO—King Edward	NIAGARA FALLS—General Brock

King Edward Hotel Advertisement, 1953  
Source: Sally Gibson

**TORONTO: The KING EDWARD SHERATON**

King Edward Hotel postcard, 1950s  
Source: Sally Gibson

## 19. Movie Royalty 1964 Elizabeth Taylor & Richard Burton

Richard Burton was a celebrated classical actor who rocketed to international fame not because of Shakespeare, but because of his affair with Elizabeth Taylor. The two had met on the set of the fabulously expensive *Cleopatra*, where Taylor received the unprecedented sum of \$1 million. The beautiful amethyst-eyed Taylor had been a movie star since childhood. Film fans couldn't get enough of her. And her multiple marriages were the stuff of gossip-column legend. The fact that she was then married to crooner Eddie Fisher (who had previously dumped all-American musical actress Debby Reynolds for the sultry Taylor) only added to the excitement.

When the infamous couple arrived at the King Edward Hotel in January 1964 they were besieged. Preachers in "Toronto the Good" fulminated from the pulpit against the adulterous Taylor (who was still married to Fisher) and the unmarried couple's publicly living-in-sin. Just about everyone else in town was breathlessly obsessed by Liz 'n Dick's every move. They received saturation press coverage throughout the time Burton was rehearsing and then performing in *Hamlet* at the O'Keefe Centre.

"In the glittering, green-and-gold, chandelier-hung Victoria Room of the King Edward Hotel, you can even take off your jacket without being bounced," Ron Loman of the *Star* reported, "if you've played King Arthur in Camelot, Mark Antony to Liz' Cleopatra and are about to embark on Hamlet." After lunching on lamb stew (Liz) and mushroom omelet (Dick), the couple retreated to the Vice-Regal Suite through a "seething throng of 300" filling the hotel lobby. No wonder they seldom emerged from their seven-room, \$65 per day suite.

Following "one of the greatest publicity build-ups this town has ever seen Opening Night was a bit of a let down. Crusty drama critic, Nathan Cohen, slammed the pre-Broadway opening as "an unmitigated disaster." Man-about-town, Gerry Barker, complained about the "contrived and dull" after party. And the woman's editor castigated just about everybody for crowding Liz and Dick. "Don't ever pick on your teenagers for going gooney over the Beatles," Helen Palmer admonished. "... grown-ups behaved almost as badly as teenagers," as they gawked and pushed their way closer to the celebrated couple.



A haunted-looking Richard Burton escorts his *paramour*  
Liz Taylor to the King Edward Hotel  
*Toronto Public Library*

## 20. Beatlemania on King Street 1964

Six months after Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton vacated the Vice-Regal Suite, the Beatles bounced in, amid even more pandemonium and press coverage than their predecessors. "One of Beatles sleeps in Liz Taylor's bed," trumpeted the *Star*. (No one mentioned that one of them also slept in Richard Burton's bed.)

"I think it was lovely putting us in her suite. Thoughtful," John Lennon commented, perhaps sardonically. Or perhaps genuinely. After all, the four lads from Liverpool had risen from working-class poverty to the heights of success ... and access to the best that fame and money could buy. In Toronto, in September 1964 that was still the King Eddy.

"I've seen everything," said resident manager Joseph J. Downey the morning the band flew off to Montreal. "But the Beatles were incredible." For about 30 hours the normally sedate old hotel was at the centre of a publicity - and a teenage - maelstrom. Thousands of frenzied fans thronged King Street, periodically trying to break through police lines to enter the lobby. Other, well-heeled "beatlemaniacs" were registered hotel guests hoping to see or perhaps bump into the boys. A few actually succeeded.

Around 1:30 a.m., four Beatles erupted from their airport limousines and sprinted for the hotel door. One fan succeeded in ripping a button from Paul McCartney's shirt and another screamed, "I've got Ringo's tie pin ..." except Ringo wasn't wearing a tie. Surrounded by uniformed police, house detectives, and sundry hotel personnel, the Beatles were whisked up to the eighth floor ... only to discover a couple of teenagers had managed to sneak past security. The girls were hustled away and the lads were left to relax. John Lennon modeled a striped nightshirt sent by a fan. The foursome traded quips, tucked into breakfast, read the English papers, and took a snooze.

Around 4 p.m., it started all over again. By then some 3,500 fans were churning outside the King Street entrance, expecting their idols to emerge en route to Maple Leaf Gardens. The group was prepared to go out the front door so their fans could see them. But Toronto's police chief put his foot down, insisting that they leave by a back door and hop into a waiting paddy wagon for the ten-block journey.

At Maple Leaf Gardens, the Beatles gave two, nearly inaudible but wildly successful 30-minute concerts before record-breaking crowds. "34,000 Beatle fans pay \$100,000 to hear themselves," a *Star* headline joked. Even drama critic Nathan Cohen, who had improbably been sent to cover the event, was more enthusiastic about the Beatles than he had been about Richard Burton's *Hamlet*. "They are energetic, good-natured, and robustly masculine. They have a sense of independence about them, of enjoying life to the full," Cohen wrote. "... and chances are they are going to remain popular for quite a while." Indeed they were. Before long, the band broke up ... but the music lived on.



John Lennon, relaxing in the Vice-Regal Suite, September 7, 1964  
Both images: *Toronto Star*, Toronto Public Library



Pandemonium outside the King Edward Hotel, Labour Day weekend 1964

## 21. Bed-in, 1969

Bearded John Lennon returned briefly to Toronto with his wife and bedmate, Yoko Ono. Since being married, they had been conducting their tongue-in-cheek, but deadly serious, "bed-in for peace" campaign around the world. Late on May 25, 1969, the couple flew in, unannounced, from the Bahamas. Within minutes of their landing, Toronto radio stations learned of the surprise visit and broadcast it across the city.

By the time John and Yoko reached the King Edward Hotel, they were met by a gaggle of teenagers and members of the press. "It was too hot in the Bahamas," John told reporters. "We're here because the weather is cooler and I'll be nearer the United States," the obvious target of their anti-Vietnam-war efforts. At that moment, however, Lennon was barred from entering the US because of a marijuana conviction back home in London. Canada was the next best option.

Once again, Lennon spent only one night at the King Eddy. While increasing numbers of fans found their way into the lobby and up to the fifth floor, John and Yoko spoke with reporters in their \$50 suite. Lennon sent a message to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, "I want to invite him to join us in bed - or at least meet him and give him a peace flower." (Trudeau didn't join the bed-in, but they did meet in Ottawa in December of '69.)

Before being allowed to stay in Canada, Lennon had a preliminary immigration hearing back at the airport, where he was granted temporary permission to remain in the country. That evening, John and Yoko jetted off to Montreal for the real, week-long bed-in. When they returned to Toronto in early June, they stayed at the Windsor Arms rather than the King Edward Hotel. Perhaps the pushy teenage fans at the respectable old King Eddy had finally been too much for Lennon.

Shortly after John Lennon was murdered outside his New York apartment building on December 8, 1980, the *Star* published a memorial section that contained a photograph of the brief, but locally famous, bed-in at the King Edward Hotel.



John & Yoko at the King Eddy and John flashing a peace sign, May 1969  
*Source: Toronto Public Library*

## 22. Constitution Day, 1982

The newly refurbished King Edward Hotel threw a right royal bash to celebrate the repatriation of Canada's constitution on April 17, 1982. Ads invited Torontonians to spend Constitution Day at a champagne brunch served by the hotel. Come they did. To sip bubbly. To watch a big-screen TV broadcast of Queen Elizabeth - shielded by umbrellas - sign the parchment proclamation confirming Canada as a truly independent nation. And to reminisce among the Union Jacks and (more plentiful) Canadian Maple Leaf flags encircling the Rotunda.

The glitzy new Toronto Sheraton Hotel might have had the largest cake (an 8 by 12 foot map of Canada), but the King Edward had memories. Betty Hogg chose to celebrate Constitution Day at the King Eddy for sentimental reasons. "It was where I honeymooned in 1928," she told a reporter, "and I wanted to be with other Canadians on this momentous occasion." Also at the King Eddy that day were an immigrant from Kenya and a transplanted Montrealer ... even one or two disgruntled monarchists, but no Québec indépendistes.

The King Edward was born in Empire. By 1982, however, the world had changed and so would the hotel.

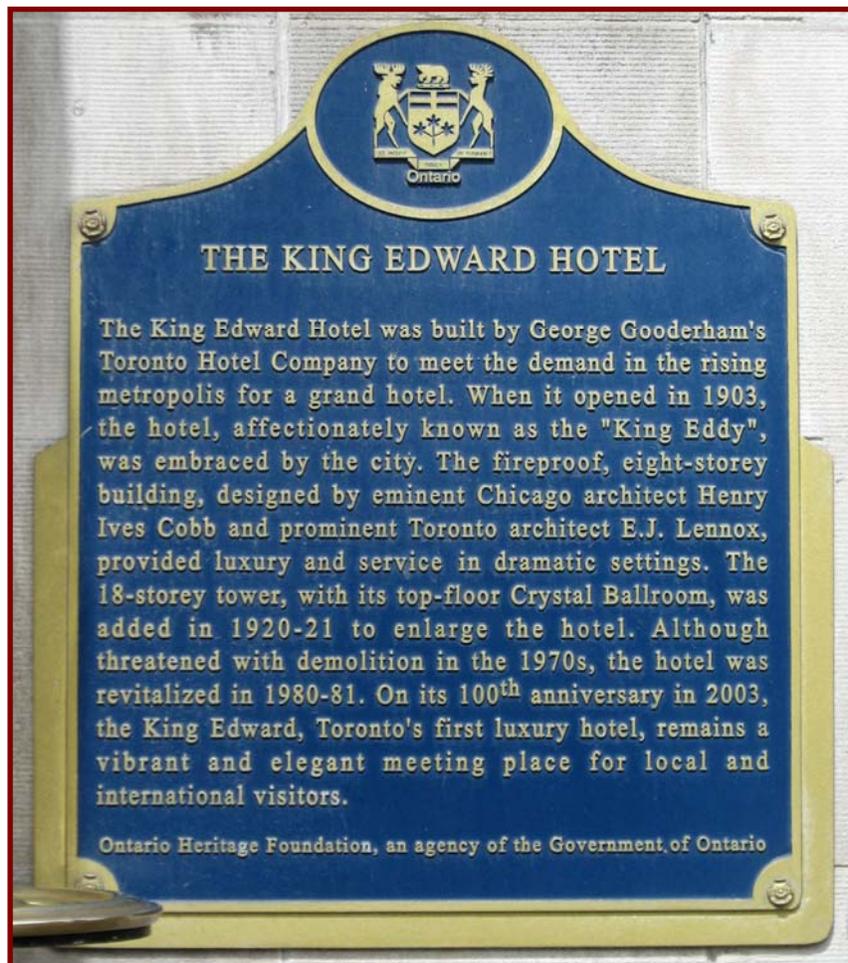


Colourful Constitution Day celebration at the King Edward Hotel, April 17, 1982  
*Source: Toronto Star, Toronto Public Library*

## 23. Heritage for Tomorrow

Heritage advocates marked the King Edward Hotel's Centenary on May 11, 2003 by unveiling an Ontario historical plaque next to the main entrance off King Street. The hotel had experienced many ups and downs during those 100 years. Going into receivership more than once. Undergoing numerous renovations, some more sympathetic than others. Losing absolute primacy among Toronto's first-class hotels. Even facing outright demolition in the 1970s.

But the grand old hotel has history on its side. "On its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2003," the plaque proclaims, "the King Edward, Toronto's first luxury hotel, remains a vibrant and elegant meeting place for local and international visitors." Luxury combined with a strong sense of history helped keep the King Edward Hotel at the top of its game.



Ontario Heritage plaque  
*Source: Sally Gibson*