

Visionaries and Risk-Takers: The First Hundred Years of the Fort Garry Hotel

by Giles Bugailiskis
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Monumental buildings have a history that goes beyond their individual style and design features. Oftentimes the story of the owner/entrepreneur, taking a business risk to provide a needed service to the local community, is never told. Nor is the story told about the individuals who provide a public face of the enterprise, the individuals that represent the investor's vision. My aim is to do just that, to recall the fortunes of the Fort Garry Hotel, a grand, luxurious Winnipeg landmark on Broadway.

The Grand Trunk Pacific Railway Era 1904–1919

At the end of the 19th century all the pieces of the puzzle were coming together in the development of Western Canada. British capital was once again flowing into the country, the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) was expanding in the West, eastern manufacturers were seeking new markets for their goods and the newly elected Liberal government of Sir Wilfred Laurier was pushing for increased immigration and, perhaps most importantly, courting railways to compete with the CPR.

Prime Minister Laurier held intensive secret negotiations with Charles Melville Hays, General Manager of the British-owned Grand Trunk Railway (GTR), incorporated in 1851 and operating lines in United States, Quebec and southern Ontario. The results of the negotiations, announced in Parliament in July 1903, underlined Hays' risk-taking nature and Laurier's desire for railway expansion into the West.

The Canadian Government would build a railway from Moncton to Winnipeg, namely the National Transcontinental Railway to be leased and operated by the GTR, who would then build the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway (GTPR) from Winnipeg to the Pacific coast. It was later argued that the rail scheme was approved more to carry votes for Laurier than to transport immigrants and freight. Nevertheless, people and grain were moved in great



Archives of Manitoba, Foote 1536, N2567.

Winnipeg photographer Lewis Foote took this view of the Fort Garry Hotel in August 1924.

quantities; 330 towns and villages were established along the 1,768-mile GTPR through Western Canada.

In 1904 Hays, now the president of the GTPR, envisioned a chain of elegant hotels built along their rail line with a signature corporate look that art historians have labelled the finest example of a Canadian national style, "the Chateau Style," or the "François I Style," based on medieval castles in France. Hays believed that his hotels must not only cater to the travelling public but, in order to be truly financially viable, they must also cater to a city's social life and its social elite.

The hotel chain started in Ottawa with the construction of the Chateau Laurier named after its political patron. The U. S. architectural firm of Bradford Lee Gilbert was hired in 1907 to draw up a set of plans, incorporating an exterior decoration based on Gothic detailing. Due to the projected high cost of the proposal, and Hays' enthusiasm for the



Giles Bugailiskis holds an MA in Canadian History from the University of Manitoba. Over a period of 28 years, he was the City of Winnipeg's Senior Planner for Heritage. He is currently a heritage conservation advisor. He has received a Special President's Award from Heritage Winnipeg and a Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal for heritage planning in Canada.

chateau-style decoration featured on the CPR's Empress Hotel in Victoria, British Columbia, Gilbert's contract was pulled.

In 1908, the Ottawa hotel project was then awarded to the newly established Montreal architectural firm of George A. Ross and David H. MacFarlane. Ross had previously worked for GTR as a draughtsman. Their proposal for the Chateau Laurier turned out to be very similar to the interior plans prepared by Gilbert, but it also featured a new medieval French castle exterior, and it saved \$1 million.

For the GTPR's passenger station in Winnipeg, the company partnered with the other transcontinental carrier, the Canadian Northern Railway, and prepared plans for the "most modern terminal in the world." The contract for the depot was awarded to the prestigious New York architectural firm of Warren & Wetmore, designers of New York City's Grand Central Station.

Charles M. Hays changed Winnipeg's skyline when he announced on 14 August 1910, as President of both the GTR and GTPR, that the "Fort Garry Hotel" was to be built based on a design by architects Ross and MacFarlane. The Fort Garry Hotel design was based on the plans of the Chateau Laurier but decorated similarly to the Plaza Hotel in New York and the Willard Hotel in Washington, D. C. Vacant lots on Broadway between Fort and Garry streets were to be acquired from the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) adjacent to the Manitoba Club and on a parcel of land that once housed Western Canada's most significant trading post and political centre, Upper Fort Garry. While the plans were being drawn up for the Fort Garry Hotel, the GTPR announced that their next hotel in the chain was to be built for \$1.5 million in Edmonton, Alberta and called the Macdonald Hotel.

In May 1911 test holes were being drilled on Broadway, but curiously the building was now referred to as the "Hotel Selkirk." At the end of August, the firm of George A. Fuller Co. Ltd., of New York and Montreal, builders of the Chateau Laurier in Ottawa, were awarded the contract to construct the Selkirk for \$1.5 million excluding heating and plumbing. The company brought with them a new feature to Winnipeg, the cost-plus contract, whereby the general contractor was paid a fee to hire local sub-contractors and manage the work while the owner paid for the labour and materials.

Charles M. Hays arrived in Winnipeg on 15 September to meet personally with HBC representatives to resolve issues on closing lanes on the lots that the railway had purchased. Naming the hotel "The Selkirk" rather than honouring the history of this hallowed site was just one means to pressure the HBC to allow the GTPR to have one large contiguous lot, going all the way back to Assiniboine Avenue, in case the hotel needed to be expanded. Winnipeg architect Herbert B. Rugh became the local manager for Ross and MacFarlane's design work in Winnipeg and announced on 19 September 1911 that all outstanding issues with the HBC and the City had been resolved. Two days

later a notice in the *Manitoba Free Press* confirmed that the new hotel was to be called "The Fort Garry," and not the "Lord Selkirk."

Excavation for the deep basement began within days and continued all winter, sometimes 24 hours a day. On 7 February 1912, the first of several construction accidents occurred when a worker was accidentally killed when heated excavation material buried him alive.

Tragedy struck again on 15 April 1912, when Hays, sailing across the Atlantic with his family, was drowned aboard the *Titanic*. Sir Wilfred Laurier called Hays "the greatest railroad genius in Canada." The opening of the Chateau Laurier was delayed for a month in respect for the company's late president and it is said that his ghost started to haunt the hotel.

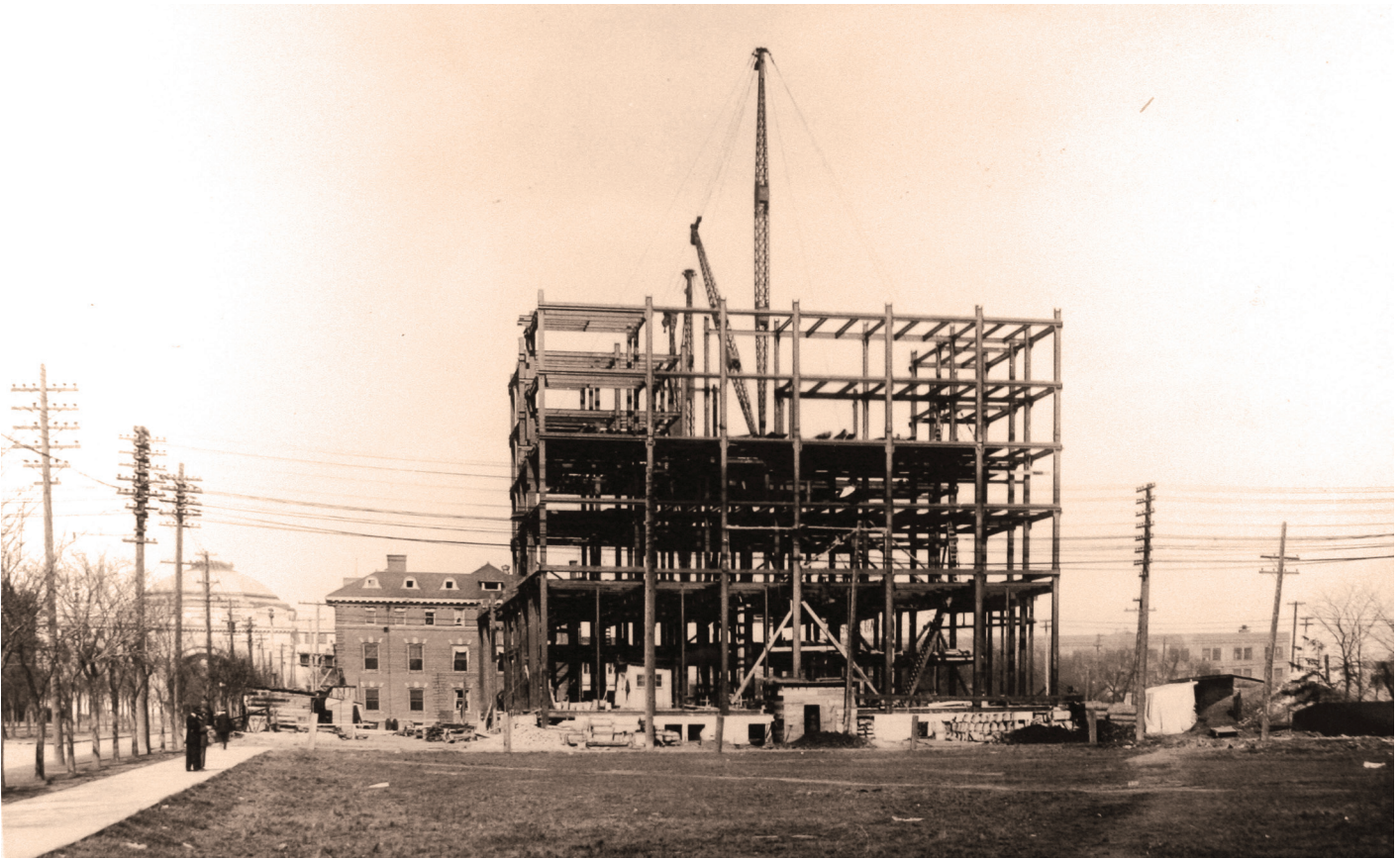
Construction of the Fort Garry continued without incident until July 1912 when 60 labourers went on a brief strike, upset that their work day was reduced from 10 hours a day to 9 hours at a rate of 27½ cents an hour.

In October 1912 Frederick W. Bergman was appointed the company's manager of hotels. Born in Germany, the elegant and dapper Bergman had been hired to be the Chateau Laurier's general manager. He had a strong background in the hospitality industry having worked in hotels in London, China, New York City and finally at the Banff Springs Hotel. Upon his new appointment, he and his family moved to Winnipeg to stay at the Royal Alexandra Hotel to manage the finishing of the Fort Garry Hotel and the construction of the Macdonald Hotel in Edmonton. In addition, he was to oversee the construction of proposed hotels in Regina, Mount Robson, Prince Rupert and Prince George.

In April 1913, it was announced that plans were being prepared for a 200-room addition to the Winnipeg hotel, almost doubling its capacity. Bergman now played a key role in letting the public know about the opening of the Fort Garry Hotel. Plastering was underway with extra crews brought in to hasten completion of the work. Public rooms were detailed in a Louis XIV style, the Palm Room was Adamesque, and the private dining rooms were Jacobean.

In August, he announced that the hotel manager, chef and other head officials had been hired and were to be arriving shortly. He also let Winnipeggers know that his wife Laura had designed special carpets, furniture coverings, and the hotel's colour schemes all of which had copyrights. The Tiffany Studios from New York had manufactured and were installing all the hotel's lighting fixtures. Much of the bedroom and public room furniture, bedding, paintings and room accessories were to come from the T. Eaton Co.

By October 1913, Bergman and his family were living on the fourth floor of the hotel with 70 employees already working in the building. The conservatory on the roof was complete and was used to keep the plants for the grand opening. A mushroom cave was also built on the roof to supply the hotel.



Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg - Hotels - Fort Garry #8, N1463.

In this 1912 view of the steel skeleton for the Fort Garry Hotel taking shape, we see the Manitoba Club building immediately behind it and the Union Station, at the intersection of Broadway and Main Street, in the background.

In the spring of 1914, construction of the Macdonald Hotel in Edmonton was also nearing completion; work had also started on the Chateau Qu'Appelle in Regina.

On 9 December, a GTPR Express train with two special cars arrived at Union Station from Regina carrying dignitaries to attend the opening festivities. Arriving passengers included Franklin J. Robinson, Chairman of the Board of Highway Commissioners for the Province of Saskatchewan, William F. Kerr, owner of the *Regina Leader*, William M. Martin, Member of Parliament for the Regina constituency, Regina real estate developers Walter H. A. Hill and E. A. McCallum, and Thomas B. Patton, a Regina alderman. The pre-opening celebrations on 10 December 1913 included an early dinner for dignitaries followed by a gala evening dance hosted by the Victorian Order of Nurses. In attendance that evening were many of Winnipeg's most influential men dressed in their tails, while the women wore gowns dutifully described in the following day's newspapers.

Most public spaces in the hotel were completed, although only a small number of guest rooms were done and finishing work was still continuing. The official opening of the hotel occurred the following day, 11 December 1913, with a tour of the building by numerous GTPR managers and special guests. Morley Donaldson, the railroad's vice-president and general manager, hosted a luncheon for 200

invitees. At 6:00 pm the doors were open for Winnipeggers to inspect their new castle of opulence.

The New Year saw Winnipeggers attending numerous social functions in the ballrooms, with luncheons held by various business organizations along with frequent meetings of the Rotary Club. Train travellers felt welcome in the sumptuous surroundings. But, dark times lay ahead: the GTR was showing signs of financial trouble; fear of a war in Europe and the high cost of borrowing hampered the company's ability to meet its commitments; and by the summer of 1914 the Panama Canal was open and Winnipeg's dreams of being a major rail transportation hub were over. Canada entered into the First World War in August. The country's German population became a reviled immigrant group and in April of that year Frederick Bergman resigned from the company. With his family Bergman quickly left Winnipeg for the eastern United States, ending up working for the Statler hotel chain.

The Fort Garry reduced its staff levels due to the decrease in business. Some staff formed the Grand Trunk Pacific Home Guard to contribute to the war effort. Construction of Edmonton's Macdonald Hotel continued but work on Regina's Chateau Qu'Appelle ceased with only seven floors of steel framing complete. In the 1920s, the foundation was covered over and the steel framing was re-used for a different hotel.

The Fort Garry Hotel

After the war the GTR's financial problems were so severe that they defaulted on loan payments to the federal government. On 7 March, 1919, the GTPR was nationalized to be operated by a federal Board of Management. By July 1920, the GTPR and all of its assets were turned over to a crown corporation, the Canadian National Railway (CNR), which eventually included the Canadian Northern Railway and the GTR.

The Canadian National Railway Years 1919–1979

After the War, and in spite of the problems in the railway industry, the Fort Garry Hotel continued to be successful as a social centre for Winnipeggers. During the 1920s, one of its most notable guests was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, author of the Sherlock Holmes books. His earliest visit may have been in 1914 because he had written about how modern and luxurious the building was, rivalling anything in London. In 1924 he stayed at the hotel again, promoting the cause of Spiritualism, and visited Dr. Thomas G. Hamilton, a noted spiritualist living on Henderson Highway.

The CNR amused its rail passengers by providing radio transmissions on its trains. Radio station CNRW began broadcasting from the Fort Garry Hotel in September 1924. In fact, CNR had one of the earliest—possibly the first—regularly scheduled broadcast networks in North America.

During its early years, the Fort Garry had many notable maître d's, bellmen and managers. A true Winnipeg character was Alfred Banyon, also known as The Great Zanzig, a magician in the circus world. He started working

at the Fort Garry in 1924 and remained the maître d' until 1946. A Latvian by birth, he performed throughout Europe and North America before joining the CNR. At the hotel he was distinguished for promoting Winnipeg goldeye, a local delicacy that became popular around 1911.

During the depression in the late 1920s and 1930s, rail travel was down but the hotel continued to survive by serving the local population. Travelling Manitobans also favoured the luxurious setting. In 1932, the CNR began its annual excursions to Churchill to see the polar bears, with most guests staying at the hotel, an activity that continues today.

During the war years a number of entertainers stayed at the hotel as part of their tours to entertain the armed forces. One guest in July 1943 was 21-year-old Hollywood actress Jane Russell who stayed for only one night. It remains a mystery why she was here. Her scandalous film "The Outlaw" had not yet been released due to censorship. Meanwhile, Claude Turner and his Orchestra initiated the fall supper and dance season.

Another notable employee who started in 1948 was Andy Kuhn, a bellman who collected autographs of celebrities staying at the hotel for the next 32 years. His collection included Nelson Eddie, Nat King Cole, Brenda Lee, Harry Belafonte, Basil Rathbone, Charles Laughton, Laurence Olivier, Joan Crawford, Liberace, Louis Armstrong, Mitch Miller, Art Linkletter and Mary Costa, the voice of Snow White.



Archives of Manitoba.

A group of steel workers poses during construction of the Fort Garry Hotel, 1912.



Archives of Manitoba, Foote 1537, N2568.

A group of waiters at the Fort Garry Hotel posed for photographer Lewis Foote in January 1921.

By the 1960s it became common knowledge that the CNR hotel chain was losing money due to low occupancy, the poorly maintained physical condition of their properties, and the lack of a strong business plan. The Fort Garry continued to be a popular social location including being the venue for a live CBC television broadcast from the lobby, “Around Town”.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s the hotel struggled. An editorial in the *Winnipeg Free Press* on 26 December 1963 suggested that a proper hotel management firm should be hired to manage CNR’s hotels.

A fire in November 1971 on the 7th floor required around 50 firefighters to extinguish the blaze. The fireproof construction of the building resulted in only one person being hospitalized due to smoke inhalation. Water damage was extensive with many guests fleeing in their night clothes.

Shortly after, cosmetic changes occurred in the building. CNR converted the Palm Room on the main floor into the Drummer Boy Lounge, a cocktail lounge to reflect the area’s military past. The former Jade Room became The Factor’s Table, a fine dining room, and the lower level was transformed into the Left Bank, a “Bohemian-style” café and nightclub.

At the end of the 1970s the CNR, now called CN, began to operate much more efficiently by assuming its own debt rather than having its debt subsidized by the federal government. The company started to remove itself from any activity that was not related to freight rail transportation, which included selling off its hotels. The majority went to the CPR, although the Fort Garry was not part of that package.

In February 1979, CN announced that it was planning to close the hotel once it built a new one closer to the city’s downtown business district. The heritage community became alarmed and tried to pressure the City

administration to do something, as municipal heritage legislation was being discussed at City Council.

On 12 April 1979, Winnipeggers had an opportunity to see Prince Charles who was on a cross-Canada tour. His stay in the city was very brief, a dinner and reception at 6:30 p.m. at the hotel, a military parade, a one-night stay, and off again at 9:25 a.m. Marion Warhaft, still a food writer today, described the truly made-in-Manitoba dinner: Winnipeg goldeye, watercress salad, braised wild prairie duckling, wild rice, fiddleheads and strawberries Romanoff. For breakfast he had orange juice, corn flakes and milk.

Two weeks later the Hotel manager told the media that CN was not looking for a buyer, saying “There is no way Winnipeg would let it go down, this is a piece of history.” Harvard Investments’ offer of \$2.4 million for the hotel was accepted by CN in June 1979. The sale included the land that the Hotel sits on and a garage building extending to Assiniboine Avenue. In November, CN accepted the offer, agreeing to sell the property and all stock and liquor for \$2.75 million.

The Harvard Investment Years, 1979–1987

John Draper “Jack” Perrin was an athlete, naval officer and a highly successful Manitoba entrepreneur pursuing a variety of business interests as Harvard Investments and promoting professional hockey in the city. The Perrins were highly pleased with the purchase of the hotel since they saw it as another opportunity to establish the family in a new and challenging enterprise. Unfortunately things did not work out well.

Perrin’s purchase of the hotel included the lands adjacent to the building to the south but did not include a small portion of land that the City owned at Assiniboine Avenue and Garry Street. The City vacated their building and Perrin proposed to build an apartment building complex with tennis courts and pool as an amenity to his hotel business. His biggest challenge was people’s perception that the area and hotel had become run down. The restaurants were doing poorly. Talks about commercial developments at the CN East Yards gave him hope that the hotel’s future was bright. Unfortunately, the three levels of government put their efforts and money into the restoration of the north side of Portage Avenue; south Main Street had to wait.

On 20 February 1980, the City placed the hotel on the Buildings Conservation List as a heritage structure identifying the lobby area, Palm Room, Provencher Room and the seventh-floor Loggia and Ball Rooms as areas with significant, character-defining elements. This was to ensure that the building could not be demolished without City Council’s approval. Subsequently in 1982, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada placed a plaque at the hotel identifying it as a National Historic Site. In 1989, the Province of Manitoba recognized the property as a Provincial Historic Site.

A general clean-up of the hotel was started on 28 June 1981, with a major auction sale of furniture, carpeting,

table lamps including Tiffany lamps, and antique brass stained-glass hanging lamps. To attract a younger clientele, Winnipeg's first stand-up bar, called Broadway's, opened in the basement. Prominent guests included Pierre Elliot Trudeau, Sir William Stephenson, Sting (lead singer with The Police), and Rodney Dangerfield. Weddings, luncheons, musical concerts such as the CBC-Winnipeg Orchestra's Candlelight Series and fundraisers provided much of the business. The hotel's occupancy rate stayed around a low of 40% to 55%.

Although the *Globe and Mail* called the hotel a "fortress with class," controversy over the civic assessment of the property was to change the fortunes of the owners. In 1983, Jack Perrin announced that he was behind on his municipal taxes for the last three years, totalling more than \$1.3 million. In 1979, the province had frozen tax assessments for two years to allow a review of their system. Subsequently the legislation was extended indefinitely with no provision for appeal. Perrin argued that he was not making a profit with the enterprise, the building was not up to date, and the only value lay in the potential of the land. In June, the City placed the property on its tax sale list, an automatic procedure when taxes are unpaid. Perrin felt that if he paid his taxes, he would be accepting the unfair assessment, being unsure if an appeal would reimburse him.

In August 1983, with an estimate of \$385,000, Perrin made an application for a demolition permit stating he would withdraw the application if his taxes were forgiven or if he were provided with a substantial financial incentive to continue his major redevelopment proposal for the entire site. The City would not allow the building to be demolished as it was a municipal heritage site, and decided not to take title to the property in order to allow Perrin to continue operating the hotel.

In April 1984, the Great West Life Insurance Co., who had provided a mortgage loan to Harvard Investments, obtained title to the land south of the building where Perrin had envisioned building a new complex. Perrin was now left with just the hotel.

Positive news came in September when Pierre Berton launched his 30th book, "The Promised Land," at a breakfast attended by Premier Howard Pauley, Mayor Bill Norrie and other dignitaries. Later, the Heritage Canada Foundation and Pierre Berton were to lobby CN to return the GTPR signboard and grandfather clock taken from the hotel by CN (they were eventually lent to the Transcona Museum and were recently returned to the Hotel). Perrin continued to promote the hotel; in December, a landau carriage, drawn by a team of chestnut horses, left the Fort Garry to travel down Broadway for a traditional Christmas carriage ride.

A major blow to the Hotel occurred in January 1986 when Winnipeg City Council approved a \$65-million complex to be built on the adjacent lands by Marlborough Development's owner Martin Bergen. Perrin, along with the Manitoba Historical Society, was furious, being aware that the 20-storey building would ruin the view of the south side of his hotel and diminish his plans for expansion.

Nonetheless, the controversial proposal met all City zoning by-laws.

By the end of the year the City started legal proceedings to take title to the property. As well, on 22 January 1987, bailiffs acting on the City's behalf served a distress warrant on the hotel's management seizing \$30,000–\$40,000 worth of contents to cover business taxes owed to the City. By this time, 60% of the hotel's staff had been laid off. Bookings were being cancelled; the restaurants were seeing very few customers. A few days later the Fort Garry Hotel's doors were locked and Harvard Investments announced that they intended to sue the City for damages and compensation based on their belief that the property was over-assessed and for declaring the building a Grade II heritage structure. The closing resulted in commercial and residential tenants leaving the building including the Rainbow Society and Arnold's Investigators of Canada Ltd.

The City received the Certificate of Title in February 1987 and City councillors were quite concerned about owning such a large vacant building that may not be financially viable. They immediately put out a request for proposals and received four to five proposals; among them was an offer from Raymond Malenfant, a Quebec hotelier who was known for buying hotels at bargain prices and bringing them back to life.

The Malenfant Years, 1987–1993

Raymond Malenfant and son Alain were able to buy the Hotel for close to \$1 million late in the fall of 1987. They agreed to invest up to \$12 million to make the building viable. They planned to replace all 300 windows to reduce heating costs. They also had to install new boilers because CN would no longer provide heat from their steam plant in the East Yards (at the Forks).

Malenfant invested in new plumbing, electric heating and carpeting, and the seventh floor was repainted based on colour schemes in Malenfant's hotels in Quebec. The hotel's food and beverage operations were to be leased out to a local catering firm with more French flavour.

The grand opening of the hotel took place on 20 May 1988 at a black-tie affair for 750 dignitaries accompanied by a string quartet. The Factor's Table was renamed The Lautrec; the coffee shop was now Piaf.

Hoping to attract more people to stay and visit the Hotel the "Crystal Casino", run by the Province of Manitoba, opened on 28 December 1989 in the seventh-floor ballrooms. This was Canada's first year-round commercial casino and was envisioned to make Winnipeg the Las Vegas of the North. Critics said that the facility had limited potential since it could not draw a large number of tourists without serving alcohol and grand entertainment. The Winnipeg Convention Centre was to take over providing food services to the hotel. Concern was expressed by the local food industry who believed that a government-subsidized agency should not be involved in a private-sector venture. With no food services special event bookings dropped.

Two years later Malenfant owed the City \$536,000 in taxes and was asking for bankruptcy protection. At the same time he was asking the Province of Quebec for \$45 million in loans to keep his hotel empire alive. In September 1991, the Laurentian Bank of Canada filed a notice with Manitoba Land Titles advising that the Bank was holding a \$6.7-million mortgage on the building. By the new year, Malenfant had lost the hotel with the operating casino to the Laurentian Bank. The hotel was then acquired by Benoit Paradis, a Quebec City lawyer and Raymond Malenfant's son-in-law, through a \$7.3-million loan from Quincailleries Laberge Inc., a privately owned Quebec hardware and real estate firm run by Gilles and Jean Laberge. Within a year that ambitious deal went sour and in April 1993 Quincailleries Laberge Inc. took over possession with the intent of temporarily using the current hotel manager and a local entrepreneur couple who were providing limited food services in the hotel.

Gilles and Jean Laberge, Rick Bel and Ida Albo: The New Caretakers, 1993–2013

Rick Bel and Ida Albo, who were running the banquet facilities at the hotel on a month-to-month basis, were there because they needed a larger kitchen to provide for their ever-expanding clientele at the Prairie Oyster Restaurant located at the Forks. The Laberges were considering selling the hotel and approached Bel and Albo to become part-owners and manage the hotel, which they agreed to do.

The two young entrepreneurs, with a background in Economics and a passion for the hospitality industry, believed that the secret to making the enterprise successful was running it as a smaller hotel, closer to the feeling of a big bed and breakfast with grander amenities and staff that cared about customer service—recalling the reputation of the hotel in its early years.

The occupancy rate had slipped to 25%, and an immediate upgrade was needed. They quickly undertook a \$1-million interior renovation and formed a partnership with the adjacent Fort Garry Place to build a walkway between the two buildings and share a pool and fitness centre and parking. On 22 December 1994, William Neville, a former City councillor, academic, and columnist wrote that finally “the Fort Garry may be on the way to becoming the jewel of Winnipeg Hotels that conservationists have long believed it could be.”

Work progressed furiously under the leadership of Bel and Albo who took up residence in the building to personally oversee all the upgrades. They managed to receive partial funding from the City to stabilize the exterior and foundations in their plan to physically upgrade their asset.

A two-storey parkade was built on the south portion of the building and over \$7 million was invested in the infrastructure of the property. The lease for the Casino was not renewed and \$2 million was spent to repair and upgrade the 7th floor ballrooms and loggia to a standard that

Frederick Bergman, the former GTPR Manager of Hotels, would certainly have approved.

Gala receptions and elegant weddings returned to the Hotel, including an evening in May 2000 when 500 couples who had previously celebrated their weddings in the building came back to reminisce. The 90th birthday of the Hotel was celebrated on 11 December 2003, with over 300 special guests and former staff invited to a black-tie dinner.

The dream of adding more amenities and improving the services available at the Hotel continued with the opening of the city's first luxury spa on the tenth floor. “Ten Spa”, located in the former chambermaids' quarters, became a sensational hit with visitors and locals alike. The weekly Sunday Brunch, described as Winnipeg's best, held in the Rotunda and all of the grand spaces on the Lobby floor, has attracted countless visitors and Winnipeggers alike.

In 2009, the hotel was rebranded as the Fort Garry Hotel, Spa and Conference Centre. The owners took over two floors of the adjacent Fort Garry Place to create a 35,000-square-foot facility for weddings, banquets, meetings and fundraising events. Three years later “Yoga Public” was opened a few blocks away on Fort Street. Thus a vacant and derelict building was transformed into Canada's largest yoga studio that complemented the activities available to guests staying at the hotel.

Outreach to the community has become an important element of the enterprise. In 2010 comedian Joan Rivers stayed at the hotel and was the keynote speaker at a gala to kick off a wellness and yoga-based lifestyle trade show. Net proceeds of the gala went to support Winnipeg's Canadian Museum for Human Rights at the Forks in Winnipeg.

So, as the Hotel comes to celebrate its 100th birthday, what lessons can one learn about running a heritage landmark and making it successful? Certainly location and the unique character of the building have been important, but more so are the passion, vision, extremely hard work, and available capital to maintain and upgrade the property for a contemporary clientele. A dedicated staff that provides a public face and character to the business is an important asset as well.

The Fort Garry Hotel has never been this robust and beloved by all Winnipeggers. We remain confident that the next hundred years will see the “Grande Dame” continue to evolve and yet remain the luxurious castle that Charles M. Hayes envisioned so long ago. Impressive as it must have been upon completion, the Fort Garry Hotel remains one of Winnipeg's most recognizable and striking landmarks. 🍷

Note

The author wishes to acknowledge that much of the information for this article was drawn from the files of the *Manitoba Free Press*, the *Winnipeg Free Press*, the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, the *Manitoba Historical Society's* website (www.mhs.mb.ca), *Manitobia* (www.manitobia.ca), and the files of the *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada*. Murray Peterson's support is greatly acknowledged.