

The Lord Elgin Hotel

Mackenzie King's capital vision and the birth of a landmark



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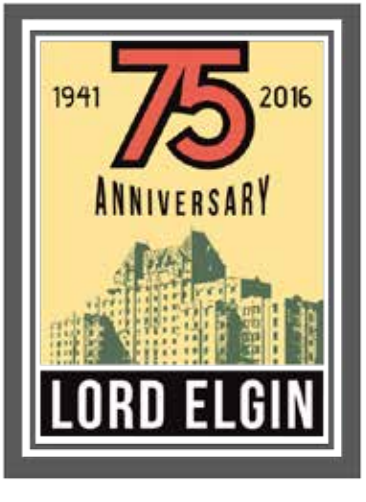


Table of Contents

Offspring of war, symbol of faith 1

'A first class hotel in that locality' 3

'Dignified, attractive' — yet nameless 7

Lord Elgin shapes Ottawa's destiny 9

'The Hand of God in the affairs of men' 14

'A real addition to the capital' 24

'I thought of dear little Pat at this point' 28

A landmark with a 'vital' purpose 34

Key war issue 'practically settled' there 39

'That's how I bought the Lord Elgin' 42

A noble link: the 11th Earl of Elgin 46

The Gillin era: renewal and growth 48

Acknowledgements / Photo Information 59









The expanded hotel, circa 2009 (top); an original room key (l); an artfully shot wedding picture in front of the hotel entrance (centre); a portrait of Scottish nobleman James Bruce, the 8th Earl of Elgin, from the hotel lobby.

Offspring of war, symbol of faith

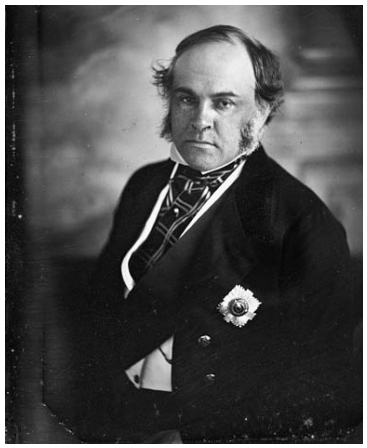
For 75 years it's been a monumental presence in the heart of Canada's capital — an elegant limestone landmark adorning the Ottawa streetscape, etched with history, welcoming the world. The Lord Elgin Hotel was an offspring of war and an early expression of the modern vision that would eventually transform a dusty, rough-hewn lumber town into a cosmopolitan city and epicentre of national pride. An architectural triumph designed to complement the stone-walled, copper-clad houses of Parliament nearby, The Lord Elgin has remarkable links to Canada's longest-serving prime minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King, and to the hotel's aristocratic namesake, the 8th Earl of Elgin, Queen Victoria's top representative in Canada from 1847 to 1854.

This 19th-century governor general, whose 1853 visit to the city helped propel Ottawa's quest to become Canada's capital, is best known for ensuring that Responsible Government — in a word, democracy — would reign supreme in this wintry corner of Victoria's vast empire. A warm relationship between the hotel and Lord Elgin's descendants in Scotland, including the present 11th Earl, continues to this day.

At the cornerstone ceremony marking The Lord Elgin's construction in February 1941, a time when Britain was reeling from the enemy's nighttime bombing Blitz and the future of all democratic nations was in doubt, the fast-rising hotel was hailed as a symbol of the faith that freedom would ultimately prevail over tyranny in the war then raging.

The building and the business it embodied would come to represent other values, too: a belief that public and private interests could ally to create a world-class capital for Canada; and that tourists, business travellers and other visitors to downtown Ottawa — some 10 million of them to date — would be drawn to a place where history and hospitality share a stylish, storied home.





Mackenzie King (left), Canada's prime minister for over 21 years between 1921 and 1948, including the Second World War; the 8th Earl of Elgin, Canada's governor general from 1847 to 1854.

Even before the Second World War broke out in September 1939, it was clear that Ottawa needed many more hotel rooms to match its expanding importance as a government nerve centre, commercial hub and tourist destination. When King George VI and Queen Elizabeth made their historic visit to Ottawa in May 1939 — the key stop on the first ever tour of Canada by a reigning monarch — city officials were forced to enlist hundreds of homeowners with spare rooms to help accommodate the influx of royal watchers from out of town.

With the onset of war just a few months later, the scarcity of quality, affordable hotel rooms in Ottawa became an urgent problem. Steady streams of military personnel, public servants and equipment suppliers from coast to coast were pouring into the capital every day to plan and carry out Canada's war effort.

Soon, several members of the city's Civic Industrial and Publicity Committee, a body formed to promote tourism and economic development in Ottawa, began a North





Ottawa businessman, alderman and later Board of Control member Chester Pickering (left), spearhead of the city's hotel project in 1940-41; French architect and urban planner Jacques Gréber, whose 'City Beautiful' movement inspired Mackenzie King to transform Ottawa into a modern, cosmopolitan city.

America-wide search for a company willing to build a large new hotel in the capital's downtown core. Europe was in flames and German U-boats would soon be menacing Canada's shores; it was not an ideal time to attract investors or secure building material for a major hospitality project. But led by local businessman and city alderman Chester Pickering, by the spring of 1940 the special hotel sub-committee had lured John C. "Jack" Udd, young president of the U.S.-based Ford Hotels Company, to Ottawa. Ford had built a no-frills, 750-room hotel in Toronto in 1928 and ran similar operations in Montreal, Buffalo, Rochester, N.Y. and Erie, Pennsylvania.

After talks with Pickering and other top municipal and federal officials, Udd tentatively agreed to construct a hotel with at least 350 rooms in central Ottawa. But the exact site, design, financial terms and name of the proposed hotel still had to be worked out. Who ultimately made it all happen? Along with Pickering and Udd, the key player in the birth of The Lord Elgin Hotel was none other than Canada's wartime prime minister: William Lyon Mackenzie King.

Though the grandson of one of the country's most famous political outlaws — William Lyon Mackenzie, leader of the 1837 Upper Canada Rebellion — Mackenzie King was cautious, understated and eager to compromise. He is best remembered by Canadians for deftly dithering over the explosive question of conscription during the Second World War, for consulting mediums to communicate with his deceased mother and for showering affection on his pet Irish terrier, Pat, the country's best known dog.

But in pursuit of his goal to make Ottawa a classy, cosmopolitan capital — the place envisioned in 1893 by his mentor and predecessor Sir Wilfrid Laurier as a potential "Washington of the North" — the eccentric prime minister was highly knowledgeable and resolute. In 1936, King had enlisted (in his words) the "exceptionally brilliant" Jacques Gréber, a renowned urban planner from France and promoter of the "City Beautiful" movement, to help him create a Canadian capital encompassing both sides of the Ottawa River and worthy of international admiration — a showcase of grand public buildings and exalted monuments, stately boulevards and scenic parkways. Next, King convinced his cabinet colleagues to support the federal acquisition of various properties along a north stretch of Elgin Street.

Widened in 1938 and its north end punctuated by the soaring National War Memorial unveiled during the landmark 1939 royal visit, Elgin Street was central to King's vision of a pride-stirring, river-spanning ceremonial route approaching Parliament Hill and ringing the urban heart of Ottawa-Hull — today's Confederation Boulevard linking the renamed Ottawa-Gatineau.

It was to be a circuit of symbolism lined with magnificent architecture and dignified statuary — a place befitting a confident young nation striving for greatness on the world stage. In King's mind, Ottawa's immediate practical problem — the wartime hotel-room crunch — could be solved in a way that also made an enduring contribution to old Bytown's transformation into a world-class metropolis.

‘A first class hotel in that locality’



Postcard showing Toronto’s Ford Hotel, built in 1928.

On May 3, 1940, a meeting was held between King, Udd and Redverse Pratt, a key Pickering ally and city-employed manager of the sub-committee working to secure the new hotel. The lobbyists pitched King on the idea of building an Ottawa branch of the Ford Hotels Company on land along Elgin Street recently acquired by the federal government. The prime minister quickly nixed any plan to construct a standard, boxy, brick-faced Ford Hotel with its uninspired architecture and cheap construction materials.

“I gave them to understand that the government would probably consider favourably the erection of a first class hotel in that locality, providing it fitted into Gréber’s plan for development,” King recounted that evening in his diary. “Also that the building was faced with stone, either wholly or in part, and that the height was in accordance with what Gréber deemed essential for the preservation of a suitable sky-line. The company is now prepared to erect a hotel as fine in appearance as the Mount Royal in Montreal… This shows how wise we have been to secure this frontage when we did. That was my own thought, and I had more or less to use all the power I could command to secure the appropriation.”

The Mount Royal, an 1,100-room luxury hotel designed by the prestigious Montreal architectural firm Ross and Macdonald, was opened in 1922 and built to a scale well beyond Ford’s intentions in Ottawa. Even so, King had raised the stakes dramatically. And while there were many more steps to take before the city’s hotel dream could be realized, the stars were aligning. The tentative support of Canada’s prime minister — not to mention his direct involvement in the building’s proposed placement and design — had pushed the imagined hotel a good way towards reality.

Meanwhile, as the three men were meeting in Ottawa, Nazi Germany was continuing its aggressive advance across Europe. Norway was being overrun that very day by invading forces, portending a new northern base of operations from which Germany could escalate its attacks on Britain. In his diary, just before recording his happier thoughts about Ottawa’s potential new “first class hotel,” the prime minister had written: “It must be a dark and sombre night in the British Isles.”

The crucial moment, according to Pickering, in securing the final agreement to build The Lord Elgin came on July 24, 1940. On that day, below a banner headline about deadly firefights in the skies above England, The *Ottawa Evening Citizen* carried a front-page picture of an architectural drawing that showed the city's future hotel impressively positioned on the northwest corner of Laurier and Elgin streets. Envisioned at the site of what was then a lowly gas station, the building's great scale, handsome stone-covered walls and château-style roof not only conformed to King's expectations of grandeur, but also seemed to declare Ottawa's coming-of-age as a city of consequence and ambition. "The magnificent new hotel," the newspaper reported, "will be constructed of Canadian limestone and furnished in lavish manner." Now projected to cost $1.3 million (much more than the $900,000 Udd had originally intended) and to be ready for guests as early as April 1941, the still-unnamed hotel's front-page depiction and the *Citizen*'s accompanying story left readers with the impression that federal approval for the project was essentially a done deal. It was not, in fact, but the article had been planted to help persuade King to give his final stamp of approval.

"Admittedly I had to use some shenanigans," Pickering recalled in *Net Worth*, the 1973 memoir of his life in business and politics. "I knew, for example, that Mackenzie King longed to make Ottawa the most attractive capital in the world, so I was sure that the idea of cleaning up that dilapidated section (of the city) would appeal to him."

A plan had been hatched, Pickering claimed, to use the news coverage to project the notion that the new hotel was so perfect an addition to Ottawa's skyline that "getting permission to build there was almost a foregone conclusion." It was arranged through Pickering's friend Walter Turnbull, the prime minister's private secretary, that the day's newspaper would be placed promptly in King's hands. "We heard later from Turnbull that, when the 'Old Man' came in, even though those were the busiest hours of the war, he spent a full half-hour looking at that picture and daydreaming. The stage was set." King's diary


THE OTTAWA EVENING CITIZEN

NINE NAZIS SHOT DOWN IN AIR FIGHTING;
PRICES BOARD PROBES HIGHER MEAT COSTS

Six German Planes Shot Down in Fight Involving 60 Ships

War at Glance

Widespread Protests Reaching Ottawa Over Sudden Jump in Costs

Nazis Capture

Front page of the *Ottawa Evening Citizen*, July 24, 1940, showing artist's drawing of proposed "big hotel" at the corner of Elgin Street and Laurier Avenue.

from the same day does indeed suggest that the artist's rendering — along with a conversation he'd had about the proposed hotel with his Public Works Minister Arthur Cardin — fueled his enthusiasm and firmed up his support: "Discussed with Cardin the new hotel for Elgin Street. He has had the architects carry out my suggestion about change of the roof to … Chateau style. Also has secured building completely of stone and has new hotel planned to be located in the middle of the area between Laurier Avenue and Slater Street … It will be ornamental on that location — a real addition to Ottawa."

When the deal was, in fact, finalized a week later, King recorded the moment in his diary with satisfaction — and some justified self-congratulation: "The city can thank me for having this particular hotel as an addition to the fine buildings in the city. They would not have had either the site or the buildings except for steps taken to expropriate, to begin with, which I had to fight for pretty much alone, and the conditions I lay down in offering to let the company have the site if they would build accordingly."

Pickering, too, could take a bow. He had lured one of North America's top hotel builders to Ottawa in the dark-

est days of the Second World War. He'd then used all of his leverage at city hall to secure approval of a contentious tax deal that would allow the Ford company to pay just one-third of the standard municipal assessment for the hotel's first 15 years. Furthermore, Pickering had drummed up enough local investment dollars to satisfy another of Udd's preconditions for committing his own firm to a million-dollar stake in the hotel project. Finally, the alderman had helped finagle federal approval for the building site (under a 99-year lease arrangement) and facilitated design changes that met King's demands for capital-worthy elegance without sacrificing Udd's need for profitability.

In short, Pickering had achieved what most of his municipal confreres and other doubters had deemed an impossible task just a few months earlier. It's little wonder that, some years later, this determined and dynamic businessman-politician, who'd poured so much energy into securing a grand new hotel for Ottawa, would become the principal owner of The Lord Elgin.

With the deal in place, it was time to get building. On Sept. 11, 1940, Udd and Pickering were joined by Ottawa Mayor Stanley Lewis and a host of other dignitaries for a special sod-turning ceremony at the site of the future hotel.

"Lewis took off his coat and hat, and swung a pick-axe manfully into the hard-packed ground near Elgin and Laurier," the *Ottawa Journal* reported the next day. "Taking the shovel handed him, the Mayor ladled out a good shovelful of earth and threw it aside."

So began a construction blitz that, remarkably, would see completion of a 12-storey, 400-room hotel — at the height of the war and through the dead of winter — in just 10 months.

Ottawa and all of Canada needed just such an emotional lift; during the week Mayor Lewis broke ground for the hotel project, hundreds of Londoners were killed in German air attacks and Buckingham Palace itself was targeted by the Luftwaffe, destroying the palace chapel as the King and Queen took cover nearby. "No one should blind himself to the fact," British prime minister Winston Churchill stated in a famous speech broadcast worldwide on Sept. 11, the day of the hotel ground-breaking, "that a heavy, full-scale invasion of this island is being prepared."

As construction began on the Ottawa hotel, even in the



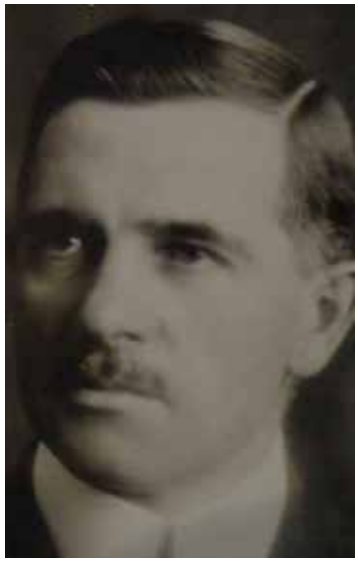


A preliminary design (left) believed to be Ford Hotels' original concept for The Lord Elgin; an early rendering of the final design, incorporating major changes required to please Prime Minister Mackenzie King, including steep-sloped copper roof and limestone walls.



Ottawa Mayor Stanley Lewis digs 'manfully' into the soil with a pick-axe at the construction site ground-breaking ceremony, Sept. 11, 1940. Ford president Jack Udd is shown holding shovel.





Montreal-based architects George Ross (left) and Robert Henry Macdonald were chosen to design The Lord Elgin Hotel after King praised their Mount Royal Hotel as an example to emulate.

face of such grim news from across the Atlantic, the city had found a way to be upbeat, hopeful, forward-looking. Udd relocated temporarily to Ottawa to personally oversee construction; city leaders and the local newspapers were impressed by the gesture.

The Ford president's strong attachments to Canada — evident not only from the hotel company's operations in Toronto and Montreal, but also in Udd's marriage to the former Grace Eaman, a nurse from the Cornwall area who knew Ottawa well — reassured all concerned that Udd's commitment to the city was genuine and deep.

General contractor John Wilson said expert stonemasons from Scotland would be needed to complete the project, but that as far as possible, all sub-contractors, suppliers and skilled labourers for the massive undertaking would come from the local area — a huge boost to the city's economy.

"There were smiles on the faces of all interested parties at the realization that work on the big hotel was at last under way," the *Citizen* noted. "As the new hotel will occupy a most important site in the centre of the Capital, it was essential that it be a building of dignified and attractive appearance."

"Dignified and attractive" it would be, thanks to King's interventions. Apparently in response to the prime minister's mention of Montreal's Mount Royal as an example to emulate, Udd secured Ross and Macdonald to design the Ottawa addition to Ford's existing five-city chain.

The Montreal-based architects had already designed many other prestigious hotels across Canada. The firm had also helped to define what's been described by Harold Kalman, author of *A History of Canadian Architecture*, as a "uniquely Canadian architectural style" — a look typified by monumental, "châteauesque" public structures and grand railway hotels with stone-faced walls and steep-sloped, dormered copper roofs.

The company's previous hotel projects in this "national style" included the majestic Royal York in Toronto (1929), the Fort Garry in Winnipeg (1914), the Hotel Macdonald in Edmonton (1914) and (under the predecessor partnership Ross and MacFarlane) Ottawa's own Château Laurier (1912), the historic, castle-like hotel beyond the north

‘Dignified, attractive’ — yet nameless

terminus of Elgin Street.

By the time it was hired in 1940 to design Ottawa’s newest hotel, the company run by George Allen Ross (1879-1946) and Robert Henry Macdonald (1875-1942) had earned a sterling reputation for creating ambitious, classically inspired, functionally modern landmarks. Notably, the Château Laurier and Lord Elgin — situated just 400 metres from each other, but built three decades apart — represent bookends in the architectural oeuvre of Ross, MacFarlane and Macdonald, being the firm’s first and last hotels respectively. The two structures also signal the evolution that occurred within North America’s “grand hotel” tradition from old-world opulence to the more economical, restrained elegance of the post-Depression years. Ottawa’s new hotel would be an aesthetic success, but not a symbol of sumptuous wealth.

Assisting Ross and Macdonald in realizing their vision was W.C. Beattie (1886-1945), the project’s Ottawa-based associate architect. His surviving designs from the 1920s and ’30s include the York Street Public School in Lowertown, the former St. Patrick’s College in Ottawa East (now Immaculata High School) and the heritage-designated former Ottawa Hydro headquarters at the corner of Bank and Albert streets, an Art Deco classic that’s now a Bridgehead coffee shop a few blocks from The Lord Elgin.

While the finished hotel would be described as a “modernized” design in the “French château” or Normandy style, its symmetrical, rectilinear composition and certain exterior embellishments — including chevrons and other geometric patterns etched on the building’s façade — as well as many aspects of the original ground-floor interior, reflected the residual Art Deco impulses of the era.

By November 1940, the ground had been broken, the concrete foundation was being poured and hundreds of workers were swarming day and night over the Elgin Street construction site between Laurier and Slater. So intense was the interest in the project — among local residents, visitors to the city and even members of Parliament — that a special observation deck was constructed to allow spectators a good view of the excavation and other activity below. “On nice bright mornings, when the autumn air is not too chill, the folks gather elbow to elbow to watch the show on downtown Elgin Street,” the *Globe and Mail* reported. “They can watch a steam shovel, concrete mixers, and a fleet of trucks that travel the pit with the precision of ballet dancers.” Curious citizens, said construction boss Wilson, “are just naturally interested in that sort of thing. We decided they might just as well have a good vantage point where they won’t bother the workers... It seems to do everybody good. When the crowd gathers, the boys hop right to it and make things hum.”





W.C. Beattie, Ottawa-based associate architect on the Lord Elgin project, also designed the heritage-designated Art Deco building at Bank and Albert streets, now a Bridgehead coffee shop. Beattie’s other surviving designs include the present Immaculata High School and York Street Public School.

What the hotel still needed was a name — a seemingly simple step that, in fact, prompted 154 different proposals, months of debate and indecision and, at long last, a choice that was widely and warmly embraced: The Lord Elgin Hotel. But it might well have been called The Kingsford (to triply honour King George, Mackenzie King and the Ford Hotel Company), The Tweedsmuir (after the late governor general Lord Tweedsmuir, who had died suddenly in February 1940 after a stroke at Rideau Hall) or The Winston Churchill (in tribute to Britain's inspiring new wartime prime minister) — just a few of the contenders that earned serious consideration.

Also high on the list of possibilities: Empire, Confederation, Capital, Marlborough, The Lion and Dunkirk. "So long as they don't call that new hotel the Bluebird or the Pussywillow or anything quaint or kittenish, we shall be satisfied," the *Ottawa Journal* teased as the city, even in the throes of a world war, battled over a hotel's name.

King himself had spent time wondering what the place should be called. "I would like to give it a name," he wrote in his diary that July. "Cannot think of one unless it were 'Queen Elizabeth' " — an idea meant to honour the wife of George VI and mother of Princess Elizabeth, the future queen. But the wildly popular star of the 1939 Royal Visit to Canada — who invented the crowd-pleasing royal "walkabout" on Elgin Street during that trip, and was known from 1952 until her death in 2002 as the Queen Mother — was not, in the end, granted the honour. Nor were Canada's first prime minister, John A. Macdonald, or Ottawa Valley pioneer Philemon Wright, though each had their champions as the name game played out through the spring, summer and fall of 1940.

Despite (or perhaps because of) the intense public interest in what name should grace the new hotel, a solution proved elusive. Finally, at a city meeting on Nov. 12, 1940, Ald. Hamnett Pinhey Hill, Jr. submitted that "Lord Elgin" should be chosen, a name that had been previously suggested by a letter writer to the *Citizen*. Hill's proposal was embraced unanimously. Moments later, a phone call was made to the New York headquarters of Ford Hotels; Udd



Ottawa Ald. H.P. Hill, left, is credited with naming 'The Lord Elgin Hotel' in November 1940. Hotel builder Jack Udd promptly endorsed the City of Ottawa's choice. Remarkably, Hill's great-grandfather, the Bytown-era civic leader Dr. Hamnett Hill, had met Lord Elgin in July 1853, a key moment in Ottawa history.

and other Ford executives promptly endorsed the city's choice. According to some news reports from the time, the prime minister was also consulted and voiced his approval, though King's diary is silent on the matter.

The precise reasons given by Ald. Hill for his sponsorship of the name were not recorded in the day's press coverage nor in the archived minutes of the city meeting, though Lord Elgin's service as a pre-Confederation governor general would certainly have been known to Hill and his council colleagues. The name, after all, was already attached to the downtown street where the hotel was being built, and which city planners — at the prime minister's urging — had just broadened into a showy boulevard as part of the Greber-King plan to beautify Canada's capital. But Hill, the son of Ottawa's leading local historian (H.P. "Hammy" Hill, a lifelong friend of King's) and a descendant of one of 19th-century Ottawa's most prominent families, might also have been aware of something else: a historic encounter between Lord Elgin and his own great-grandfather — the pioneer physician and civic leader Dr. Hamnett Hill — on a banner day in Bytown nearly 100 years earlier.

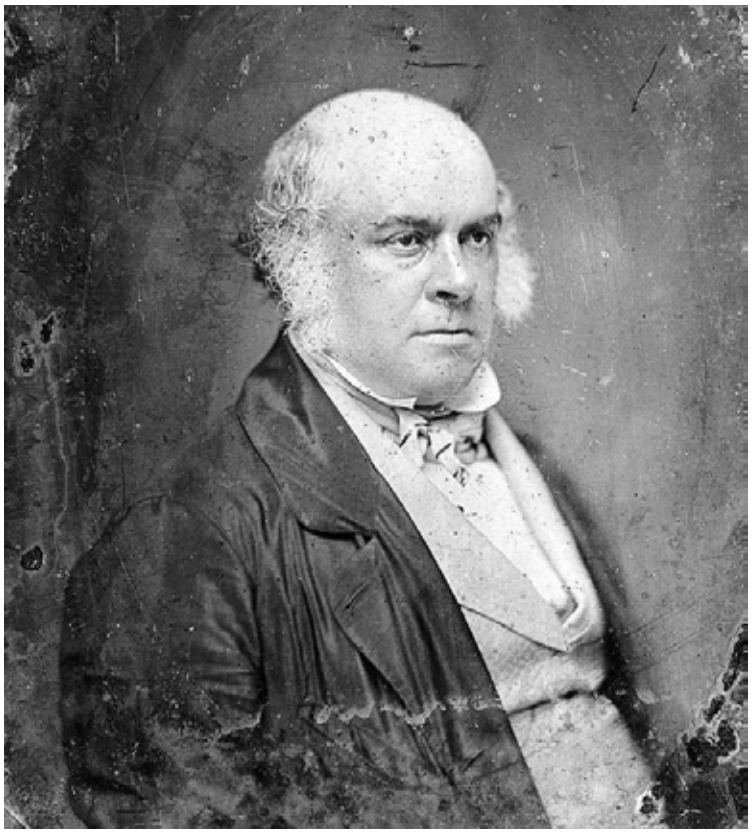
Lord Elgin shapes Ottawa's destiny



The 1849 burning of Parliament at Montreal during riots over the passage of the Rebellion Losses Bill prompted Lord Elgin's decision to remove the capital of the Province of Canada to another city. A planned trip to Bytown was scuttled when similar violence broke out there.

Scottish nobleman James Bruce, the 8th Earl of Elgin and heir to the clan of Robert the Bruce, medieval King of Scots, was governor general of the Province of Canada from 1847 to 1854. Lord Elgin first figured prominently in Ottawa's history in 1849, when the British colony (today's Ontario and Quebec, or the united Upper and Lower Canada) was convulsed by conflict over the Rebellion Losses Bill, dividing Tories and Reformers, English and French, and Protestants and Catholics in riotous hostility.

The Reform government's bill, modeled on a similar measure passed earlier in Upper Canada, compensated Lower Canada residents who'd suffered lost or damaged property during the suppression of the 1837 rebellions — which, though quickly crushed, led to important democratic reforms and kind treatment of rebel leaders





Lord Elgin's 1853 visit to Bytown — soon to be renamed Ottawa — was highlighted by a meeting with Dr. Hamnett Hill (right) great-grandfather of H.P. Hill, the city alderman credited with naming The Lord Elgin Hotel. Dr. Hill was president of the Bytown Mechanics Institute and Athenaeum, which was dedicated to making Ottawa 'the Capitol' of Canada.

(including King's grandfather, W.L. Mackenzie) by later historians.

Yet Tory opponents slammed the restitution bill as a financial reward to rebels, even though anyone directly implicated in treasonous activity was excluded from compensation. Passage of the bill in April 1849 by the majority Reform government, followed by Lord Elgin's formal consent, sparked mayhem in the colonial capital of Montreal, where Parliament was burned and Elgin's carriage was pelted by stones and eggs.

The governor general's determination to support the duly-elected government — despite his own misgivings about the bill, and even in the face of violent protests — has been hailed as a landmark moment in Canadian political history, confirmation of the principle that democratic, autonomous rule or "Responsible Government," a central aim of the 1837 rebellions, shouldn't be thwarted by unelected administrators, including the Queen's own representative in Canada.

Yet continued agitation by Montreal mobs forced Lord Elgin to make a fateful decision: he would relocate Canada's capital to a more peaceable city.

Montreal's misfortune was Bytown's golden opportunity. The city that would be renamed Ottawa in 1855 was located a safe distance from the border of a potentially hostile U.S., and on the very shore of the Ottawa River — the boundary between French and English Canada — making it the perfect seat-of-government compromise between the country's two main linguistic groups, as well as old Upper and Lower Canada.

But Lord Elgin's proposed visit to Bytown in September 1849 — widely viewed as a scouting trip for a new colonial capital — ignited a Montreal-style uproar known as the Stony Monday Riot. Tories and Reformers in the future Ottawa, just like their fellow partisans in Montreal a few months earlier, clashed violently over whether Lord Elgin, vice-regal backer of the contentious Rebellion Losses Bill, should be warmly embraced or vehemently protested when he arrived in Bytown.

Instead, the governor general steered well clear of the rowdy place and announced that Canada's capital would — at least for the time being — alternate every four years between Toronto and Quebec City. Bytown, Kingston, Hamilton and other hopefuls were out of luck for the moment, but Lord Elgin had clearly set the stage for soon choosing a new, permanent capital of Canada.

Nearly four years passed before Lord Elgin's next major impact on the future of Bytown/Ottawa — and



Ottawa, as it appeared in 1855, looking west toward the future Parliament Hill (centre) and beyond to the Chaudière Falls (upper right).

this time he actually came to town. The tensions of 1849 had died down by the summer of 1853, and the governor general was finally scheduled to visit the rapidly growing lumber hub at the industrial and intellectual heart of the Ottawa Valley.

When he arrived by steamship on July 28, 1853, Lord Elgin was met by throngs of well-behaved well-wishers, all of them eager to impress upon Victoria's top Canadian designate that once the expensive, inconvenient system of alternating Canada's capital between Toronto and Quebec had run its course, the Queen should make Ottawa her permanent, picturesque "metropolis" of British North America. At the front of the crowd was Dr. Hamnett Hill, president of the newly formed Bytown Mechanics' Institute and Athenaeum, a society dedicated to developing the Ottawa Valley's natural resources and spreading knowledge about science, nature, industry and the arts among all classes of citizens.

"We, the trustees and officials of this Institute," Dr. Hill had declared in his inaugural address earlier in 1853, "hereby give notice that we intend to make this place, now called 'Bytown,' the Capitol, to be henceforth called the 'City of Ottawa'.… Here alone do we find the two provinces really and geographically united."

Now, just a few months later, Dr. Hill got his chance to press the governor general directly on the seat-of-government question as he delivered a glowing welcome to Lord Elgin — "with the liveliest feelings of pleasure and satisfaction" — and accompanied him to the grand opening of the institute's special exhibition showcasing the Ottawa region's resource wealth and cultural sophistication.

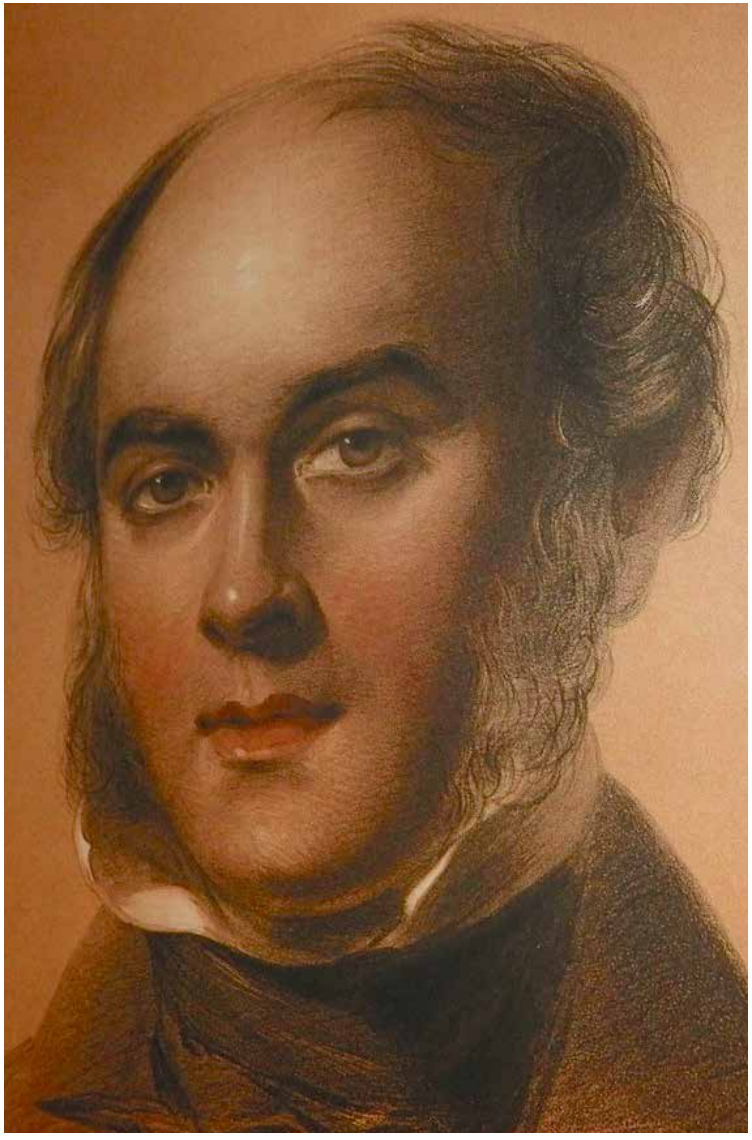
"I am grateful to you," the distinguished visitor replied, "for giving me so admirable an opportunity of seeing how rapidly the Arts which accompany and adorn civilized life advance along the banks of the Ottawa." Dr. Hill and other civic leaders were infused with newfound confidence as they carried their "Capitol" campaign forward through the mid-1850s. On Dec. 31, 1857, Queen Victoria an-



A metal plaque created for the the cultural and scientific exhibition officially opened by Lord Elgin during his landmark visit to Ottawa in 1853.

nounced her choice for Canada's permanent seat of government: Ottawa. By the time the Parliament Buildings were erected and the legislature officially opened in June 1866, the Province of Canada was already committed to a Confederation pact that would, on July 1, 1867, see Ontario and Quebec join with New Brunswick and Nova Scotia to form the Dominion of Canada — the sprawling nation destined to stretch from Atlantic to Pacific to Arctic. Its capital, too, would be Ottawa. Lord Elgin's legacy as a true friend of the city, bound up in the struggle for democracy and the seat-of-government saga, was cemented in 1940 when, at the urging of Dr. Hill's own great-grandson, a splendid new hotel being built a short distance from Parliament Hill was christened "The Lord Elgin."

James Bruce returned to Britain in 1854, later serving as viceroy of India, where he died of a heart attack in 1863. His widow — Mary Louisa, the Lady Elgin — arranged for an elaborate tombstone in the forested hills of northern India, a loving tribute to her departed spouse. The esteemed Canadian historian, W.L. Morton, hailed Lord Elgin in a 1976 essay for his pivotal role in helping Canada evolve a "government of moderates between the extremes of race, partisanship and tradition. What was extraordinary in Elgin's career in Canada was his immediate and imaginative mastery of his role, and the creative spirit in which he developed it." More recently, in his 1997 *Reflections of a Siamese Twin*, philosopher John Ralston Saul called Lord Elgin "our one truly great colonial governor," the British aristocrat who exercised such remarkable forbearance in the face of ugly mob violence that it helped define Canada as country of "great courage and restraint."



"What was extraordinary in Elgin's career in Canada was his immediate and imaginative mastery of his role, and the creative spirit in which he developed it."

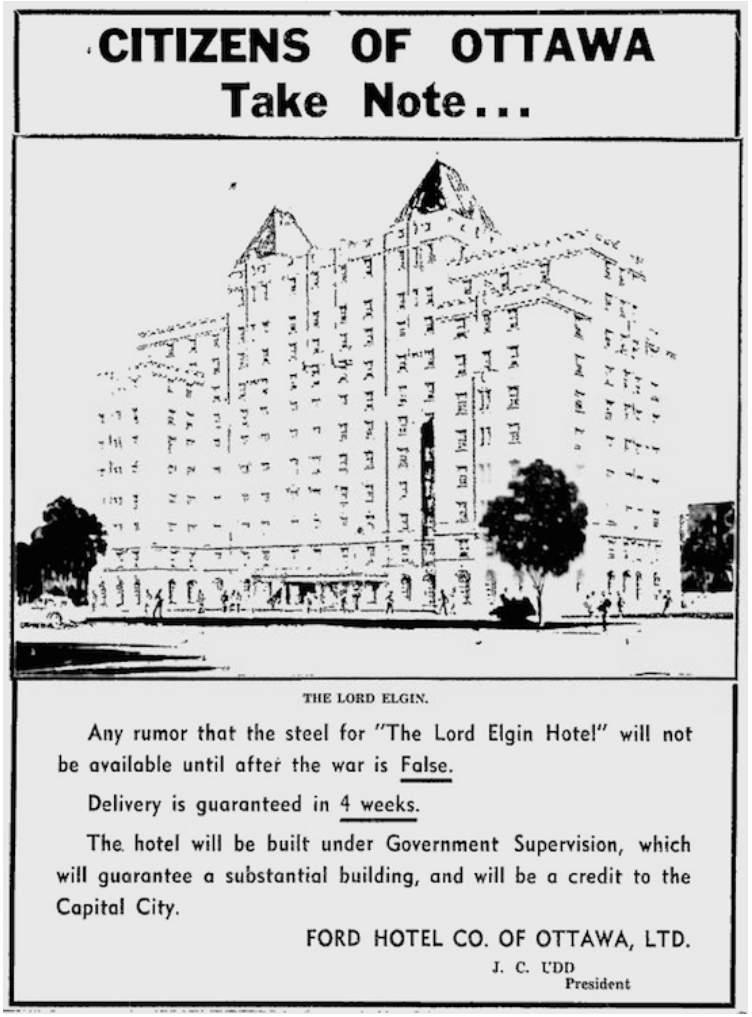
— Canadian historian W.L. Morton

Even as construction of The Lord Elgin Hotel ramped up rapidly in late 1940, there was a niggling concern about its name that generated further public discussion in Ottawa and beyond. A popular watch-maker in the U.S. — the Elgin National Watch Company — pronounced its name (like the Illinois city where it was based) with a soft 'g' sound: as in "gin and tonic" or "Eljin". Were Canadians mispronouncing the name of Ottawa's proposed new hotel? As the issue "had become one of considerable controversy," an enterprising journalist at the *Toronto Star* — convinced the soft 'g' was "an Americanism" — sought a clear answer by writing to Lord Elgin's grandson, the 10th Earl of Elgin, at the Bruce family estate in Dumfermline, Scotland.

"I am very much interested in what you tell me of the new hotel in Ottawa," replied the Earl, adding that the suggestion "the Bruce family pronounce the name of Elgin with a soft 'g' is not correct. So far as I am aware, the 'g' is always pronounced hard in Scotland. I have heard it pronounced soft in London, but whenever I have had the opportunity, I have corrected this." The *Ottawa Journal* reported Lord Elgin's definitive intervention under the bold headline: "This Should Settle It".

There was another alleged wrinkle with the Ottawa hotel project, and this one took high-profile ads in Ottawa newspapers to iron out.

During local elections scheduled for Dec. 2, 1940, some candidates sought to undermine Pickering's bid for a seat on the city's powerful Board of Control by asserting that, due to military needs, steel would not be available for the construction of The Lord Elgin, and that the hotel could not possibly be completed until after the war. An incensed Pickering denied the suggestion and Ford Hotels quickly placed prominent ads in the *Citizen* and *Journal* in a bid to throttle the damaging gossip. "CITIZENS OF OTTAWA — TAKE NOTE," the advertisements trumpeted above a large image of the planned hotel. "Any rumor that the steel for 'The Lord Elgin Hotel' will not be available until after the war is False. Delivery is guaranteed in 4 weeks. The hotel will be built under Government Supervision, which will guarantee a substantial building, and will be a credit to the Capital City." Signed personally by Udd, the emphatic newspaper notice had its desired effect. Ald. Pickering was the leading vote-getter in the election, securing his position as a city controller with increased influence in municipal affairs. "Mr. Pickering," the *Journal* reported, "said the vote given him showed clearly that the people of Ottawa were in favour of the Lord Elgin hotel project, which he sponsored in and out of the council." The shipment of steel girders arrived in Ottawa before Christmas, and work on the skeleton of the Lord Elgin was under way just after New Year's Day 1941.



CITIZENS OF OTTAWA
Take Note...

THE LORD ELGIN.

Any rumor that the steel for "The Lord Elgin Hotel" will not be available until after the war is False.

Delivery is guaranteed in 4 weeks.

The hotel will be built under Government Supervision, which will guarantee a substantial building, and will be a credit to the Capital City.

FORD HOTEL CO. OF OTTAWA, LTD.
J. C. UDD
President

This ad in local papers helped quell rumours that demand for steel for the war might delay the hotel's construction for years.

‘The Hand of God in the affairs of men’



Prime Minister Mackenzie King secures the ceremonial cornerstone of The Lord Elgin Hotel, Feb. 27, 1941. Ottawa Mayor Stanley Lewis, holding hat on right, assists the prime minister. Note the portal to a time capsule on the left side of the stone.

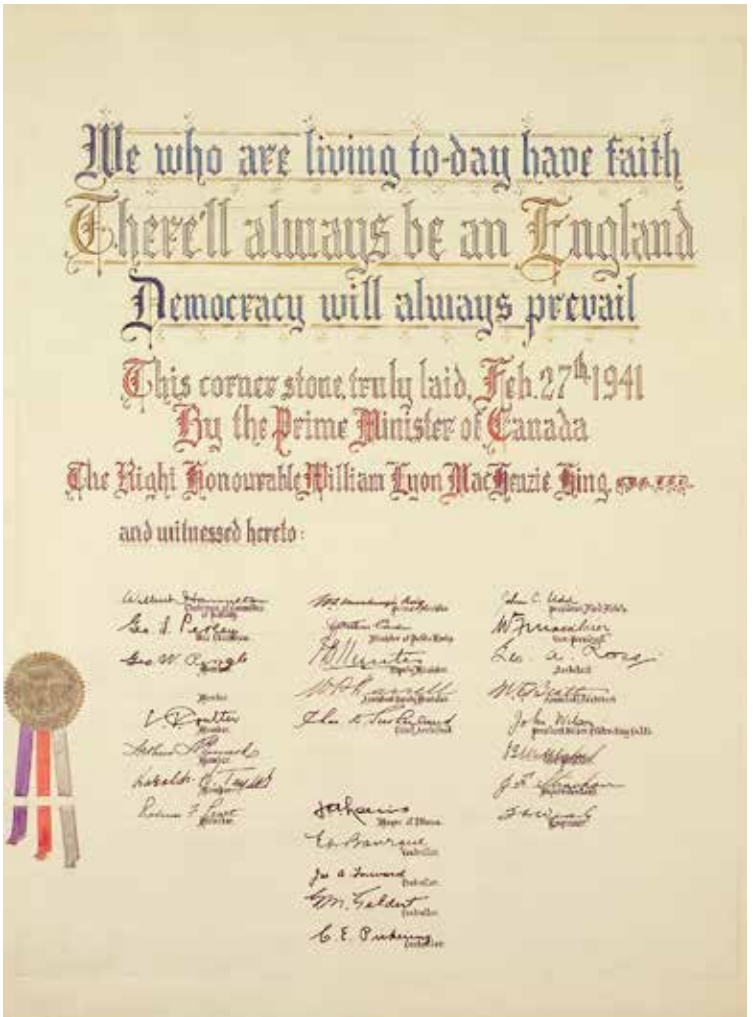
It’s a rare private enterprise in Canada that can claim to have had a sitting prime minister lay the cornerstone of its place of business. But in the case of The Lord Elgin, so much a product of Mackenzie King’s broad vision for the national capital as well as his direct influence on the project’s planning and architecture, the PM’s presence at the historic occasion might have been expected. And on the bitterly cold afternoon of Feb. 27, 1941, the prime minister was chauffeured to the Elgin Street construction site and, on a raised platform in front

of a sizable crowd of onlookers, accepted an ornate silver trowel from Udd. A specially prepared block of limestone was then lowered into place at the northeast edge of the building's footprint. The cornerstone, set about hip-height atop a few previously laid rows of the hotel's outer wall, was engraved simply: "THE LORD ELGIN A.D. 1941."

Inside the stone was a hollowed-out space where an assortment of "coins of the realm," copies of the day's newspapers and one other document — an elaborately lettered scroll prepared at Pickering's request — were placed as a time capsule for some future generation to discover. Inscribed on the scroll was a message that captured the awful dread of that moment in history, when the threat of a German invasion of the British Isles still loomed, but even moreso the Allied spirit of resilience, courage and confidence: "We who are living to-day have faith there'll always be an England — Democracy will always prevail." A further line declared the cornerstone "truly laid" by the prime minister, below which were the signatures of 25 witnesses, among them King, Pickering and Udd, public works minister Cardin and Mayor Lewis, architects Ross and Beattie, and construction chief Wilson.

Pickering described in his memoir how there was a genuine fear at the time that "Britain might not survive," so "on the spur of the moment" he'd had the scroll created to make the ceremony a more uplifting event, countering the time-capsule newspapers "with their sad headlines." Remarkably, in an account of Pickering's scroll gesture published a few days before the cornerstone was laid, the alderman was quoted saying that, "it would be nice when the hotel had outlived its usefulness in 75 years or so, and was being torn down, that the people living then would know the thoughts of the people who took part in the ceremony." While the scroll's message of faith in democracy has reached the people of Canada, circa 2016, the hotel can look forward to many more decades of "usefulness" than Pickering predicted in 1941.

King, writing in his diary, commented on the scroll's promise to future Canadians: "It is, I believe, a true bit of prophecy." He recounted the day's events in detail, noting



This ornate scroll, hastily commissioned by Chester Pickering and meant to symbolize its signatories' confidence in an Allied victory in the war, was sealed in the hotel's cornerstone.

how he "went through the motions of laying the cement and striking the stone with a mallet" before declaring the building's architecture "an inspiration to all" — and an excellent example of the Gréber plan in action. Udd also showed the prime minister a model room for the finished hotel that had been made up for demonstration purposes in a Slater Street building adjacent to the construction site.

In his public remarks, King had spoken eloquently about the life of Lord Elgin and his links to "the struggle for freedom a century ago" and "the achievement of responsible government." He had also congratulated "the



The cornerstone ceremony, held at the height of a late-February deep freeze in the capital, drew a large crowd to the Elgin Street side of the hotel. King (seen addressing onlookers, above) chatted casually with Stanley and Udd (right) between the official parts of the program. Workers, meanwhile, soon resumed their labours in the rush to complete the much-needed Lord Elgin (far right) ahead of what was, by then, a July deadline to finish the project. The hotel, King said, was a great symbol of co-operation between the city and federal governments, the U.S. and Canada, as well as labour and management.









Friday: Cold

THE OTTAWA EVENING JOURNAL

HOME EDITION

VOL. LIV.—No. 67. OTTAWA, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 1941—TWENTY-SIX PAGES. PRICE THREE CENTS.

EDEN AND TURKS REACH FULL AGREEMENT
BRITISH DRIVE BACK HUN TANKS IN AFRICA

Mediterranean And Balkans Affected by Pact

British Officer's Disappearance May Break Relations With Bulgaria

ANKARA, Feb. 27.—(AP)—British and Turkish leaders were authoritatively reported today to have reached full agreement on problems affecting the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean.

It was indicated that conferences would turn on the subject of Russia. Sir Stafford Cripps, British Ambassador to Russia, arrived at Istanbul by 'plane from Moscow today and was to join the conference at Ankara.

Officer Disappears.

SOFIA, Bulgaria, Feb. 27.—(AP)—British quarters here said

Italy Bills Spain For War Aid

ROME, Feb. 27. — (AP) — Stefani, Italian News Agency, disclosed today that Italy, claiming she had spent 7,500,000,000 lire (about $375,000,000) aiding the insurgents in the Spanish civil war, had presented a bill to Spain for 3,500,000,000 lire (about $175,000,000) to be paid in 24 annual payments.

Dig 12 Hours To Reach Trapped Men

12 Air Raid Wardens

$1,300,000 Tax on O'Brien Estate

R.A.F. Rains Bombs On Cologne

Heavy Attacks on the German Industrial Rhineland

By NED RUSSELL,
British United Press Correspondent.

LONDON, Feb. 27.—British 'planes of the bomber, coastal and fighter commands rained bombs on the Cologne area of the German industrial Rhineland, the submarine base of Flushing, the invasion port of Boulogne and German airdromes in occupied France in a series of raids during the night, the Air Ministry said today.

It was admitted that four bombing 'planes failed to return.

Liner Reaches New York After Two Months at Sea



—Wide World Photo.

The 8,599-ton Egyptian liner Zamzam as she arrived at Quarantine after her long passage from Alexandria by way of the Cape of Good Hope. While berthed in Alexandria last October, the ship was hit by splinters from an Italian aerial bomb intended for a British warship moored nearby.

Death Duties Boost Ontario Revenues

M. J. O'Brien Leaves Total Of $5,229,023

TORONTO, Feb. 27.—(CP)—It was estimated in government circles today the province will receive some $2,000,000 in succession duties from three large estates left recently.

The estate of M. J. O'Brien, Renfrew industrialist; valued at $5,229,023, will yield approximately $1,300,000. The $2,000,000 estate of John Hagan, Port Colborne, is expected to net about $300,000 and the estate of T. A. Russell, of some $900,000, will pay about $135,000. Mr. Russell was president of the Massey Harris Company.

The taxes vary according to the nature of the bequests and the beneficiary's relationship to the

Free 200 Seamen Held By Italians

Hun Units Chased In Libya—Enemy Elsewhere Demoralized

CAIRO, Feb. 27. — (B.U.P.) —General Headquarters of the Middle East Command reported today that advance British forces have driven back armoured fighting units believed to be German in a Libyan clash west of Agheila.

The enemy units were driven back by British mechanized forces.

(The location of the battle as given by the Cairo statement is more than 85 miles west of the location specified in Rome and Berlin communiques yesterday which said the encounter occurred near Agedabia, 100 miles south of Benghazi. The Axis reports claimed the German units defeated the British and captured some











Opposite: Mackenzie King (with trowel), Mayor Stanley Lewis and Lord Elgin owner Jack Udd (rear) at the cornerstone ceremony; the front page of the *Ottawa Evening Journal* from Feb. 27, 1941 (top), an early edition of which was placed inside the cornerstone time capsule. As the building neared completion, Ford Hotels assembled its key personnel (above, left to right): general manager Redverse Pratt; assistant manager William Jamieson; head of housekeeping Mae Stover; night manager Gerald Cherry; desk clerk J.A. Poirier.

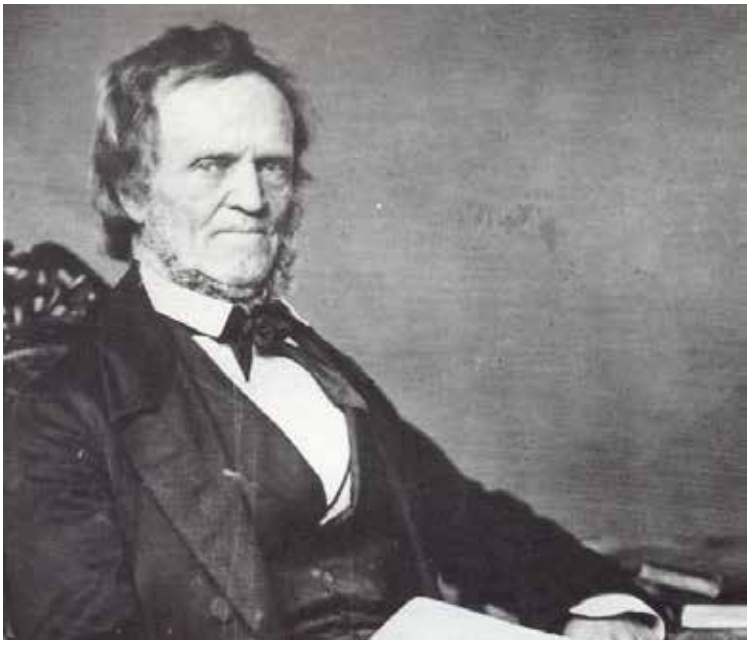
working man" toiling to erect the great hotel and expressed his delight that construction was "going so rapidly." King then paid special tribute to a 49-year-old Ottawa labourer, Charles Corbett, who had died that month from a tragic fall at the building site.

In the diary, the prime minister reflected further on the day's rich symbolism, from the new hotel's intriguing connections to his rebel grandfather — granted amnesty by Lord Elgin in 1849 after spending 10 years in exile in the U.S. — to King's own early career as an industrial relations expert, Canada's first deputy minister of labour and, finally, the federal labour minister under Sir Wilfrid Laurier.

King, his mind seized by the multi-layered meaning of the moment, also observed that the cornerstone and



The Lord Elgin Hotel under construction in early 1941.



Mackenzie King's grandfather, the crusading journalist and rebel fighter for Responsible Government, William Lyon Mackenzie.

much of the rest of the hotel's limestone façade had been shipped from the famous quarries at Queenston, Ont., the Niagara-area town where his grandfather had established a radical newspaper in 1824 to begin his battle against Upper Canada's old oligarchs.

"There have been numerous things today to confirm my belief that there is no such thing as co-incidence in some of the happenings but rather that they are part of a real plan. They centered around the laying of the corner-stone," King wrote just hours after he'd spread the mortar with his ceremonial trowel. "There comes to my thought the significance of a corner stone of the British Commonwealth of Nations being that of Responsible Government… There also comes to mind the (commemorative) stone at Niagara near my grand-father's residence as marking the birthplace of Responsible Government. I am as certain as I can be that my being asked to lay the corner stone of the Lord Elgin Hotel and taking into account all that the ceremony signifies of the relations between Elgin and my grand-father, Elgin having been the one who gave the official recognition to Mackenzie's work

for Responsible Government … is all part of the working out in the course of a century of the evidence of Divine Justice illustrated by the events of history — the Hand of God in the affairs of men."

King added: "It was significant how the ceremony had to do with municipal authorities as well as the Federal Government; Sir Wilfrid as well as Lord Elgin; U.S. representatives as well as Canada in erecting this structure in architectural beauty; (the) part of labour as well as of capital, government and management. In fact, all of the things with which my life and that of the family connection has been most closely associated."

It's little wonder that Udd, possibly overwhelmed by the torrent of historical and metaphorical associations racing through King's mind, turned at one point to the prime minister and (as King recalled in his diary) "told me what I had said caused them to be drawn into something much more than they had ever dreamed of, and were pleased beyond words."

Laying down the hotel's cornerstone was far from King's last involvement in the birth of The Lord Elgin. In May 1941, the prime minister again welcomed Udd and Pratt to a private meeting, this time to receive the silver trowel from the cornerstone ceremony — now suitably engraved — as a personal keepsake. (The object is a treasured artifact at Laurier House, the former home of both King and Laurier that is now a National Historic Site located about 1.5 km east of the hotel on Laurier Avenue in Ottawa's Sandy Hill neighbourhood.)

By now, Pratt had been lured from his position with the city to become Udd's choice as general manager of the hotel; a news story from about this time reported that Pratt "has a total of 1,004 applications on his desk for positions with the hotel." During the visit with King, the prime minister mentioned a letter he'd just received from the 10th Earl of Elgin about the proposed placing of white marble busts of his grandparents, the 19th-century Lord and Lady Elgin, in the lobby of the completed building.

King and the Scottish earl had apparently been corresponding on the matter and now, just weeks before the expected grand opening of The Lord Elgin, an extraordinary gesture was in the works.

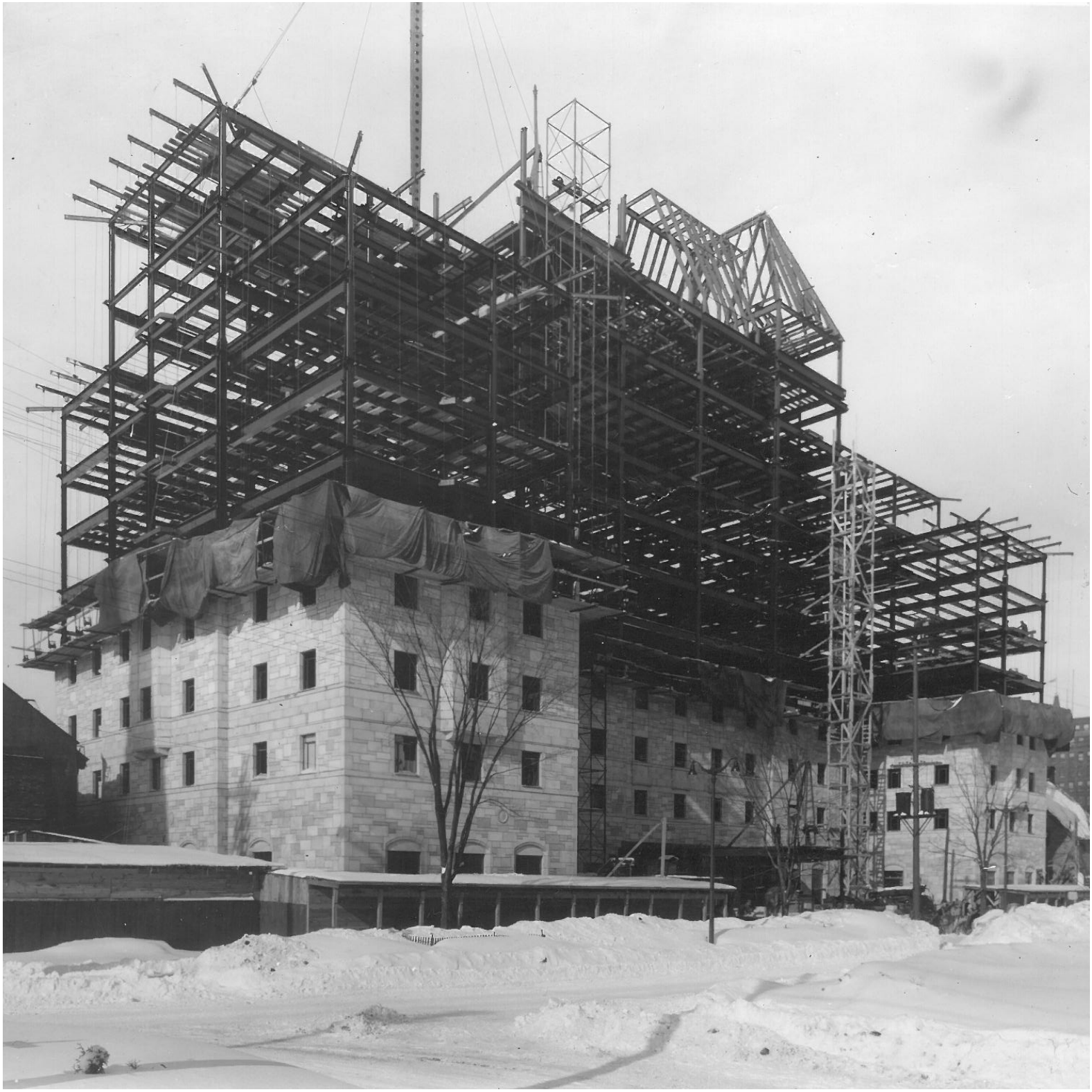


Prime Minister King, thrilled with the 'structure in architectural beauty' the hotel had become, speaks at the cornerstone event. To King, the moment symbolized key aspects of his own life.

"Also suggested the wisdom of having the interior of the rooms done in one colour, instead of a variety of colours — sort of a rainbow effect, as, in showing me the little sample room, (Udd) had told me was likely," King noted in his diary, further evidence of the prime minister's hands-on involvement in — bordering on micro-management of — the hotel project. "He agreed this was a very useful suggestion. I told him it was a sort of product of jazz to colour up rooms in that way. Men, having serious work to do, want to have quieter tones, and single tones."



The excavated footprint of the Lord Elgin Hotel site (above) looking north, late 1940; the fast-rising hotel (right) in the winter of 1941.



‘A real addition to the capital’

The official opening of The Lord Elgin Hotel on July 19, 1941, marked a milestone in the modern evolution of Canada’s capital — the successful collaboration of a private company, the local municipality and the national government in bringing both a vitally important public service and a stunningly attractive piece of architecture to Ottawa’s urban core. Another story unfolded that day, too, one that hasn’t been told before in connection with the hotel’s christening, but which encompasses not only the auspicious public occasion but also the deep personal anguish of Canada’s most successful — and most peculiar — prime minister.

In so many ways, The Lord Elgin was already Mackenzie King’s hotel. But his front-and-centre participation in the ceremony that formally launched The Lord Elgin on that mid-summer Saturday 75 years ago would create an enduring bond between the politician and the place. It’s a connection symbolized by the shape of the structure itself and the two gleaming works of art he arranged to unveil upon the hotel’s inauguration; but the link is evident, as well, in the preserved private thoughts of a man who was compelled by duty that day to perform on a public stage while gripped by grief over the loss of his closest companion: Pat the dog, the “great noble soul” so central to King’s life.

His pet since 1924, the dog was referenced in King’s diary almost every day for the next 17 years. Known for accompanying King to the voting booth on election days, the pooch and the PM had even been photographed by Yousuf Karsh, Canada’s most famous portraitist, and featured many times in newspaper stories.

But on July 15, 1941 — after many months of failing health, and just days before the planned opening of The Lord Elgin — the aged dog finally died. King, who had rushed home from a meeting of the war cabinet to be with Pat at the end, was deluged with telegrams, telephone calls and handwritten condolences from across the country. The passing of the prime minister’s dog even earned front-page news coverage in Ottawa, where King’s beloved “little man” was a familiar sight.



Mackenzie King and his beloved Irish terrier, Pat. The dog died just four days before the planned opening of The Lord Elgin.

•

But even amid his evident anguish over the dog’s death, King gamely prepared for The Lord Elgin’s grand opening. On July 17, two days before the scheduled celebration, the prime minister was given an advance tour of the completed hotel “to see the lay of the land before Saturday’s function,” as he noted in the diary. Udd showed several rooms to King, who was pleased that “they had kept 3 top floors as I had indicated, in one colour… (Udd) himself agreed that they were really the best of all.” King said he

wished more of the rooms were painted in a single colour and that they were larger, but Udd's explanation — that the hotel was aimed at travellers of modest means, did not offer grand ballrooms and was "not intended to compete with the Château" — struck King as a "wise" and laudably inclusive strategy in the Ottawa marketplace. There was a brief discussion of the thickness of the pillars at the hotel entrance; King (according to Pickering's memoir) had personally pressed for wide columns to support the porte-cochère, but said he now regretted exerting his influence in this instance and wished for narrower pillars. The ever-accommodating Udd promised to make the change, which was later carried out at the Ford Hotels Company's considerable expense. "The building itself is a real addition to the Capital," King concluded, "and has much to commend it inside as well as out."

On the morning of the ribbon-cutting ceremony, King visited Pat's burial place at Moorside, the prime minister's cottage property north of Ottawa that, after his own death in 1950, would be bequeathed to the people of Canada as the nucleus of Gatineau Park and to help fulfill King and Gréber's vision of a distinctively green National Capital Region. Touchingly, King plucked some pink flowers from the animal's gravesite to adorn his suit for the hotel's official launch party. "I had dressed in my grey flannel suit, put on (a) black tie — for my own feelings re Pat — When I saw the flowers I took the brightest … and put them in the button hole of my coat, to wear while I spoke in the city. To me they spoke of 'the life that shall ever be' — of resurrection, joy of eternal life — they expressed my real feelings re little Pat."

Sporting his dark tie and bright blossoms, the dual signs of King's conflicted emotions on that day, the prime minister was driven to Ottawa before noon. He took special notice, while crossing the bridge from Hull, of an optical illusion in which the old Château Laurier, the new Lord Elgin and the East Block of Parliament all appeared to be sitting side by side — "a true relationship," in the mind's eye of the prime minister, between the private and public architecture of the burgeoning capital.


FORMAL OPENING
THE
Lord Elgin Hotel

The *Ottawa Evening Citizen* and *Ottawa Journal* published special sections about the hotel on the day of its official opening.

The grand opening of The Lord Elgin Hotel was the subject of exhaustive advance coverage that morning by the *Citizen* and *Journal*, each of which published lavishly illustrated supplements devoted to the story of the hotel from conception to completion. Scores of congratulatory (and self-congratulatory) advertisements from local companies, almost all of which had supplied goods or services to The Lord Elgin for construction or interior elements, peppered the 30 pages of special coverage. It was almost as if the war had stopped for a day so that Ottawa could pay full attention to the unveiling of its new hotel. But the rest



On the day The Lord Elgin Hotel opened in Ottawa, British prime minister Winston Churchill first called upon the Allied nations to adopt the morale-boosting V-sign for victory.

of the news on July 19 made clear that the war had certainly not stopped, including reports of a furious German offensive on the recently opened Russian Front and dark foreshadows of the coming Pacific War with Japan. There were local stories, too, about the famed American actor James Cagney, who had arrived in Ottawa to shoot scenes for the propaganda film *Captains of the Clouds*. Cagney, best known for playing gangsters, was cast this time as a Canadian bush pilot drawn into the war against Germany.

Finally, there was an astonishing coincidence that linked another famous Churchill moment with The Lord Elgin's genesis. On the very day the hotel opened — July 19, 1941 — and at about the same hour when King and 150 invited guests were gathered at The Lord Elgin for its inaugural luncheon, the British prime minister was making history across the Atlantic by launching his famous "V for Victory" morale-boosting campaign during a BBC evening radio broadcast. Churchill's promotion of the stirring two-finger salute and the emblazoning of the letter V just about everywhere on Allied soil — and as a subversive sign of resistance across Nazi-occupied Europe — has been described as a highly potent mobilizer of civilian commitment to the war effort, "a gesture of defiance and solidarity" that would "unite and inspire millions." In the weeks after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, when Churchill visited Ottawa during a trip to North America that included crucial talks with King and U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt about America's entry into the war, the British prime minister repeatedly flashed the V sign to the delight of the throngs that surrounded Churchill at every public appearance in the city. The Lord Elgin, not yet six months old by that time, would erect a huge sign above its entrance, bathed in bright lights and festooned with a Union Jack: "WELCOME WINSTON CHURCHILL — MERRY X.MAS"

The July 19 hotel opening attracted a who's who of elite Ottawa — much of the federal cabinet, leading opposition members, U.S. and British diplomats, top federal public servants, municipal politicians, business leaders and journalists. Among the invited guests was Tommy Douglas, a young MP and party whip at the time, future premier of Saskatchewan and eventual father of the Canadian medicare system. But the stars of the day were King, Udd and Mayor Lewis, who singled out Pickering for his work as the force behind the municipal sub-committee that brokered the hotel deal with Ford Hotels and the federal government.





The 10th Earl of Elgin (above) sent greetings and two 19th-century marble busts from Scotland to mark the day The Lord Elgin Hotel, named for his grandfather, was officially opened. The inauguration ceremony (right) was led by Ottawa Mayor Stanley Lewis (left), Mackenzie King and Ford Hotels president John C. 'Jack' Udd (right). King wore a black tie and bright blossoms to signify his conflicted emotions over the loss of Pat.

Pickering's 10-year-old daughter, Marilyn, was chosen to hand "silver-plated shears" to Mayor Lewis for the requisite ribbon-snipping. Then the crowd gathered around King for his formal announcement that 19th-century marble busts of Lord and Lady Elgin had been given by the present Earl of Elgin to the government of Canada on the understanding that they would remain indefinitely on display in the lobby of the new hotel.

"At the suggestion of Lord Elgin," King told the assembled guests, "these historic works of art are today being given a place of honour in this hotel which bears the name of his illustrious ancestor."

The "historic treasures," as King called them, had been sculpted shortly after Lord Elgin's death in 1863, the busts' creators at opposite ends of their respective artistic careers. The renowned English artist William Behnes produced the marble portrait of Lord Elgin, possibly his last completed commission before his death at age 70 in January 1864. The Scottish artist Amelia Robertson Hill (née Paton, a Dumfermline native) carved Lady Elgin's likeness in one of her first commissions, early proof of the tremendous skill possessed by the Victorian era's leading female sculptor. The busts had been displayed for decades at Broomhall House, the Bruce family estate in Scotland,

‘I thought of dear little Pat at this point’



The death of ‘Pat’ was given prominent news coverage, including a *Citizen* story that paid tribute to Mackenzie King’s ‘faithful companion’ alongside the above photo. King ‘almost broke down’ at The Lord Elgin’s grand opening after thinking of Pat’s passing.

when the 10th Earl wrote to King to offer the statues to Canada following the announcement that the new Ottawa hotel would bear the name of Lord Elgin.

“For sentimental reasons,” the Earl had stated, “I think that these two busts should not be separated and it would be a pleasure to me and to my family if they could find a home in Ottawa.” Following the unveiling of the artworks, King stepped to a nearby telegraph and wired a cablegram of thanks to the present Lord and Lady Elgin “for your thoughtful and most acceptable gift,” and to assure them that “the portrait busts have been placed in an honourable position in the main lobby of the hotel.” King added: “Not only will it serve as a reminder of the memorable part played in Canada by your grandparents, nearly a century ago, but it will be, as well, a visible evidence of your own and the Countess of Elgin’s constant interest and friendliness in all that relates to our country.” Udd wired his own message to Scotland, saying the hotel’s owners “are fully conscious of your generosity and will always endeavour to justify this token of your interest.”

In giving his blessing to the hotel named for his grandfather, the 10th Earl had urged the The Lord Elgin’s management to adhere to the sentiment that his vice-regal ancestor had voiced upon leaving Government House in Quebec at the end of his term in Canada in 1854: “I trust,” Lord Elgin had said, “that this house continues to be, what I have ever sought to render it, a neutral territory, on which persons of opposite opinions, political and religious, may meet together in harmony and forget their differences for a season.”

King, who repeated the words to the assembled crowd, was almost moved to tears by this expression of “the common good,” as he later recounted in his diary.

“As I concluded, I almost broke down in reference to Lord Elgin’s quotation,” wrote King, who appears to have endured the ceremony on the brink of an emotional



Jack Udd and Mackenzie King after the unveiling of the marble busts of Lord and Lady Elgin.

unraveling, ever-conscious of the reminders of the departed Pat that he'd worn to the hotel. "I thought of dear little Pat at this point — indeed, all the way thro' my voice might have betrayed my feelings, which it was difficult to control. But when I referred to the 'common good' my thoughts were of 'our mission' — he and I & our brotherhood — to be worked for together. I got over it all right, but it was like a last leap and I could not have uttered another word. It really was the covering of 100 years — looking down on it all from above as it were . . . the picture of a country that struggled for the fruits of self government in the lives of individuals, in the life of the Nations — Britain and Canada. It was all part of a plan."

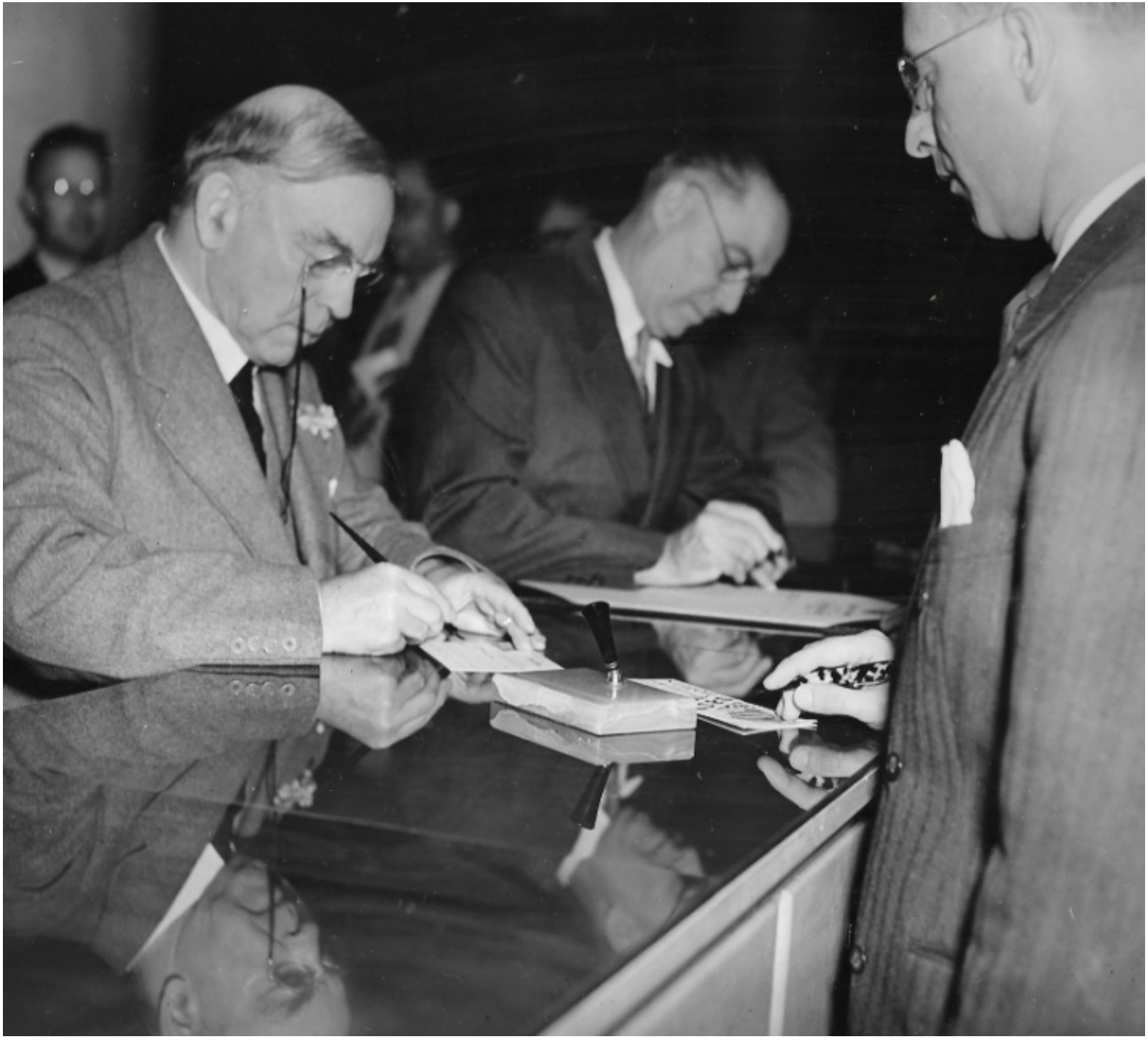
King, naturally, was granted the honour of registering as the first guest of The Lord Elgin. Photographs of the signing show the prime minister pen-in-hand and peering through his trademark pince-nez spectacles, black ribbon dangling and the wilting blooms still there in his buttonhole, the whole scene sharply reflected in the gleaming surface of the hotel's front desk.

Udd, in his turn at the podium, gave King much of the credit for the hotel's extraordinary appearance, revealing that "this entire undertaking was conceived and determined at Laurier House in the relatively short course of an informal interview which the Prime Minister graciously granted me on a certain day a year ago" — an apparent reference to the May 3, 1940 meeting at which King had insisted on the copper roof, limestone façade and all-round architectural ambition for the new hotel.

Pickering, no doubt, basked in the glow of it all — singled out for praise by the mayor, and then again by the *Citizen*, for having spearheaded the capital's urgent hotel mission. "Ottawa has been handsomely served by the public-spirited promoters, planners and builders of the new hotel," the *Citizen* editorialized after The Lord Elgin's inaugural. "They deserved to be honoured by the prime minister's presence at Saturday's opening ceremony."

The hotel christened at the July 19 ceremony was, by all accounts, a state-of-the-art contribution to Ottawa's commercial landscape. Along with the much-needed main business of providing overnight accommodation to those visiting the capital, The Lord Elgin housed a barber shop, newsstand, beauty salon, gift shop and full-service restaurant — Murray's — that belonged to a U.S.-based chain and would, in the years ahead, become one of Ottawa's most popular dining spots.

"The Lord Elgin, dream of many in Ottawa for years, now is a reality," the *Journal* reported on the day of the opening. "There it stands in all its glory to be admired by the residents of Ottawa who will pass it as they go about their daily chores and by residents of other cities..."



Prime Minister King, his image reflected in the gleaming surface of the new hotel's front desk, signs a room card to become The Lord Elgin's first registered guest. Mayor Lewis is next in line, symbolizing the close collaboration between federal and municipal governments and Udd's Ford Hotels Company in bringing The Lord Elgin Hotel into existence.



The newly opened Lord Elgin Hotel garnered attention across the country, and was featured in a 1941 issue of the *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada*. Soldiers from all over Canada en route to Halifax and ultimately the battlefields of Europe stayed frequently at The Lord Elgin, prompting the hotel to state that it was 'helping maintain a smoothly-working centre in Canada's war effort.'







Mayor Stanley Lewis (right) addresses the distinguished guests, including ambassadors, business leaders and much of the federal cabinet, at the hotel's inaugural luncheon on July 19, 1941. Prime Minister King and The Lord Elgin's owner, Jack Udd, shared head-table duties with the mayor. The hotel's lobby (above) was soon a popular spot for socializing, informal business meetings and reading the day's newspapers. The hotel (opposite, lower left) took a high-profile place in the ever-expanding, modernizing capital.

A landmark with a 'vital' purpose

And so began the rest of the story — the 75 years of workaday service, hospitality, maintenance, marketing and management that followed the 18-month effort to get The Lord Elgin approved, built and officially launched. Ownership changes, major expansions and momentous happenings would ensue as the years, then decades, unfolded. And through it all, hundreds and eventually thousands of hotel employees, plus hundreds of thousands and eventually millions of guests and visitors, would add layers of human experience to the grand architectural creation. A hotel, after all, is a stage where the drama of real life plays out daily.

The Lord Elgin immediately began serving the principal purpose for which it had been erected, that of alleviating the shortage of visitors' accommodations in the busy wartime capital.

But even before the hotel had been completed, local politicians expressed delight that the 1941 edition of Ford Hotels' promotional road map for northeastern North America — widely distributed to motorists on both sides of the Canada-U.S. border — featured the architect's drawing of The Lord Elgin on the front panel, with the proviso that the hotel would be "Open After July 1st". Ford's five other hotels in the Great Lakes area were also marked on the map and touted for their "convenience, comfort and economy," but Ottawa's unfinished landmark was already getting top billing within the chain.

Military personnel, tourists and other clientele had barely begun checking in to The Lord Elgin when the 225-member staff was put on high alert. On July 23, just four days after the hotel's official opening, Pratt — the former city official recruited by Udd to become The Lord Elgin's first general manager — rallied his employees for



The Lord Elgin outbilled Ford's other hotels on the 1941 cover of the company's popular road map

their first royal visitor: Princess Alice, granddaughter of Queen Victoria and wife of the Earl of Athlone, Canada's governor general since Lord Tweedsmuir's death.

Two days before, the vice-regal couple had been King's guests at Moorside, comforting the prime minister in his ongoing grief over Pat's death and even visiting the dog's burial place. "They, too, are great lovers of dogs," King had written in his diary. "It is interesting to note that the first persons from outside to visit little Pat's grave should have been a grand-daughter of Queen Victoria and a representative of the King in Canada. It was like royal honours to the little man, honours more than merited…"

King had evidently urged Princess Alice to visit the newly opened Lord Elgin. The princess, popular among Canadians for her energetic promotion of home-front activities in support of the war effort, arrived at the hotel on the morning of the 23rd in the company of Lady Byng of Vimy, a longtime friend of the Athlones and widow of an earlier Canadian governor general, Viscount Byng. The women and their attendants were greeted by Udd and Pratt, owner and manager together, who escorted the distinguished guests as they signed the official registry, toured the dining room, "were whisked on the high speed elevators to the 7th floor" to see the hotel's "cosy bedrooms," and otherwise "inspected the splendid new building from top to bottom," according to reporters who witnessed the event.

They also enjoyed the air-conditioned lobby, where the vice-regal consort "tried out a beige leather chair" before the entire party "paused for several moments before the white marble busts" of Lord and Lady Elgin. It was said that Princess Alice voiced her "enthusiastic approval" of all that she saw before being chauffeured back to Rideau Hall — amid happy sighs of relief, no doubt, from Udd, Pratt and the entire hotel staff, having passed Her Royal Highness's white-glove inspection.

Not everything went according to plan in those very early days, though. By Aug. 1 the *Journal* was reporting that some door locks with a fresh coat of protective lacquer were becoming so stuck that a number of guests couldn't back get into their rooms.



Princess Alice, Countess of Athlone, a granddaughter of Queen Victoria and the wife of Canada's governor general, toured The Lord Elgin just days after the hotel opened.

"On one occasion, a third-floor guest locked himself out and hotel employees were unable to open the door with emergency keys," a scribe noted, adding this scary nugget of news: "A man had to be lowered down the outside of the building from the fourth floor, and, after gaining entry through a window, was able to open the door from the inside." Pratt offered assurances that the locks, "after being used once or twice, functioned perfectly after the lacquer was worn off."



The Lord Elgin published advertisements in several major daily newspapers in July 1942 to mark the first anniversary of its official opening.

At the end of the hotel's first year in operation, a celebratory advertisement was placed in local newspapers and even *The Toronto Daily Star*, the *Globe and Mail* and *Montreal Gazette*. The *Citizen*'s full-page version of the ad trumpeted the hotel's role "in helping maintain a smoothly-working centre in Canada's war effort," and even revealed the total customer count for The Lord Elgin's opening 12 months: 128,329 guests, "the great majority of whom were in Ottawa on vital war work." The hotel boasted, as it had throughout its initial marketing blitz, that its accommodations were not only reasonably priced considering the prime location, but had "a radio in every room," as well as private bath. "Ice water fountains at both ends of every floor" was another highlighted pitch.

The hotel's early success earned news coverage, too, with the *Journal* reporting that "the list of guests registered at the Lord Elgin during its first year reads like a directory of the United Nations' war personnel. From all of these countries guests have come, their business being with some phase or other of Canada's part in the fight for freedom." A sense of intrigue accompanied the year-end report: "A great many world figures who have registered at the Lord Elgin have, of course, travelled incognito," the writer remarked suggestively.

Among those who stayed at the hotel in those maiden months of operation was American airman LeRoy Gover, a 27-year-old California crop duster who'd also flown sightseeing tours over San Francisco before deciding to go war against Germany as a Royal Air Force pilot. Thousands of such American volunteers enlisted with Canadian or British forces prior to the U.S. entry into the war, many passing through Ottawa on their way to Europe. Gover joined the RAF's famed Eagle Squadron and became one of its most decorated fighter pilots. The Californian transferred to the U.S. Air Force in September 1942, eventually earning both British and American versions of the Distinguished Flying Cross, a Silver Star and eight Air Medals during some 200 combat missions.

Gover, whose story has been recounted by U.S. military historian Philip Caine, kept a diary that detailed his November 1941 journey to Ottawa to sign up for overseas action. "Met by RAF representatives and checked in at Lord Elgin Hotel," noted the entry for Nov. 8 — less than one month before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor would draw his own country into the war.

Gover was joined at The Lord Elgin by three other American pilots heading to England via Canada's capital: Don Young, Jack Mause and Jay Reed. From their base at the "luxurious" hotel, the foursome made the most of their time in Ottawa: "This is a swell town — sure pretty



LeRoy Gover, an American airman who stayed at The Lord Elgin Hotel en route to Europe during the Second World War, became a decorated member of the Royal Air Force's famed Eagle Squadron, made up of U.S. pilots who enlisted with the Allied nations before the American entry into the war in December 1941. In his diary, Gover noted his stay at the 'luxurious' hotel, and Ottawa's 'cute French gals.'

— snowed this morning," Gover noted. "We get 10 percent more for our U.S. dollars. Had a fifty cent lunch, gave them a U.S. $5 and got a Canadian $5 bill back — not bad. It would sure do everyone down there a lot of good to see the people up here. Boy, they've really got a spirit. Really doing all they can to help win the war… Don Young and I went to the House of Parliament…. There are lots of cute French gals in town." After a four-day stay at The Lord Elgin, Gover and the others took a train to Halifax and shipped out to England on Nov. 21. The stop in Ottawa was perhaps typical of the time, when military personnel of all stripes were in continuous transit to and from distant theatres of war, the city's new hotel offering a few nights' respite on the voyage to glory, death or other fates.

The Lord Elgin quickly emerged as a centre of charitable spirit in the community, providing the 1941 headquarters for Ottawa's annual "Community Chests" fundraising drive to sustain a crucial network of social services for the city's poor, disabled and otherwise needier citizens. The hotel HQ of the program — a precursor to the United Way campaigns of today — was an early symbol of what would prove to be The Lord Elgin's enduring commitment to the social and cultural development of the city, as well as the wider country beyond the capital. Through its generous support for countless charitable causes, sponsorships of local festivals and in-kind contributions (including deeply discounted room rates) to various non-government organizations and academic bodies gathering in Ottawa for local, national or international conferences, The Lord Elgin made community engagement and philanthropy a central part of its identity.

Pickering, named to the Ford Hotels board of directors in late 1941 and soon afterwards appointed vice-president of The Lord Elgin, headed the Ottawa War Salvage Committee, which gathered paper, metal and other materials for recycling and reuse in the war effort.

"I want to pay a tribute to the thousands of Ottawa housewives who aided our activities by saving their salvage," Pickering said at a 1943 testimonial dinner honouring his leadership. He later led a postwar rehabilitation program for veterans and was president of the Ottawa Board of Trade.

The give-back ethic established by Udd and Pickering in the 1940s would be reinforced through the civic leader-



THE OTTAWA JOURNAL

Tribute Paid to C. E. Pickering By Ottawa Salvage Groups

The Lord Elgin became a hub of charitable activity during the war and Pickering (centre, holding hat), a hotel director by late 1941, established a give-back ethic as part of the business, which has endured to the present day. He is shown here with war salvage patron Princess Alice (on his left)and others involved in the vital wartime recycling program.

ship roles played in later years by many Lord Elgin employees, most notably 50-year man Don Blakslee — hired in 1954 and appointed the hotel's general manager in 1962, eventually serving in that position for a remarkable 42 years before his retirement in 2004. A distinguished Kiwanis Club figure who devoted his time and energy to innumerable causes over the years, Blakslee helped give local youth their best shot in life by serving as chair of the Ottawa Boys and Girls Club, then gave the capital its best chance for prosperity by chairing the city's Hotel and Convention Bureau and holding top positions with many other hospitality industry and regional economic development organizations.

Year One also saw the hotel featured prominently in the *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada*, including a photo spread offering views of the lobby, lounge and a "typical bedroom," as well as a full-page shot of the hotel from a northeast vantage point. This classic perspective, a favourite ever since the hotel's first public appearance on the *Citizen*'s front page in July 1940, shows the First Baptist Church across Laurier Avenue but not another building anywhere in sight to mar The Lord Elgin's stately presence against a clear summer sky. It would be years before the construction of taller office towers in that corner of downtown Ottawa began crowding the frame and casting their shadows over Ross and Macdonald's last hotel masterwork.

In an accompanying article titled "Hotel Planning," Macdonald listed the myriad challenges faced in designing any major urban hotel, from spatial organization to electrical systems, plumbing to guest security, ventilation and lighting to kitchen and convention services. "The main consideration, (with some assurance to the owner that he will enjoy financial benefit from his undertaking) is the comfort of the guest," Macdonald astutely observed. "It happens, unfortunately, that guests are not all cast from a perfect mould. There is the desirable and the undesirable, the man of affluence and the other of slender means, the tourists of all types, the travelling salesman with his samples, the guest who desires privacy and the other who craves publicity, and they arrive with their varied demands and expectations of hotel service."

Particularly welcome during the war years were some of Canada's top political powerbrokers, who used the hotel as a surrogate meeting space away from Parliament Hill to debate and decide key issues.

"The Lord Elgin has been headquarters for many official conferences of the highest importance," the *Journal* reported in 1942. "Due to its ideal location, the base in front of the hotel has been used as a reviewing stand by the Mayor and by officers of all branches of the Service. A large number of parliamentary members, of both Houses,

Key war issue ‘practically settled’ there

have been constant guests at the Lord Elgin.”

In fact, one room booked frequently by Liberal Senator W.A. “Bill” Fraser — a close friend of Pickering who’d helped him seal the hotel deal with Mackenzie King, and later joined The Lord Elgin’s board of directors — came to be known as the “Senator’s Suite” because of the high-powered gatherings routinely held there to hammer out war-related matters.

Among those was the conscription crisis that occupied the King administration throughout 1942. “The debate on conscription was practically settled in that room,” Pickering recalled in his memoir, adding that “a dozen top men from the Liberal Party” dropped in weekly for “food, drink, talk, gossip and laughs. At one time or another, all the key government people let their hair down at these dinners. They needed a chance to relax because government operations were very tense during the war.”

For a hotel that emerged in the midst of the great Allied struggle against the Axis powers, it was fitting that when Ottawa residents poured into the downtown core to finally celebrate victory in Europe in May 1945, the Lord Elgin distinguished itself by feeding (literally) the euphoria of the multitudes who filled Sparks Street between Elgin and Bank for the ticker-tape bedlam, then spilled into the surrounding area.

“Ottawa’s thousands who turned out yesterday to continue the celebration of V-E Day and to attend the ceremony on Parliament Hill found themselves without a place to eat when they finished their merry-making,” stated a May 9, 1945 news report. “All restaurants and other eating places in the city were closed tight all day and those looking for a snack went without, except those who discovered that Murray’s Lunch Ltd. in the Lord Elgin Hotel had remained open and the Château Laurier cafeteria…

“ ‘We had a tremendous day and I feel our staff who remained on the job deserve some thanks,’ ” Murray’s manager J.B. McDonald told the *Journal*. “We received congratulations from many persons.”



British prime minister Winston Churchill, anxious to shore up Allied support, visited Washington and Ottawa in the weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor and the U.S. entry into the war in late 1941. The Lord Elgin lit up a huge welcome sign for Churchill.

The promise of Pickering’s scroll had been kept: England had survived; freedom had prevailed.

The war that had given impetus to the construction of Ottawa’s new landmark hotel had ended in victory. And now the overjoyed locals were able to raise a sandwich and soda, thanks to The Lord Elgin, to toast democracy’s triumph.





The trappings of a hotel stay in post-war Ottawa: a classic Lord Elgin post-card (above), a matchbook (left); menu cover (right) and ruler with holes to size knitting needles.

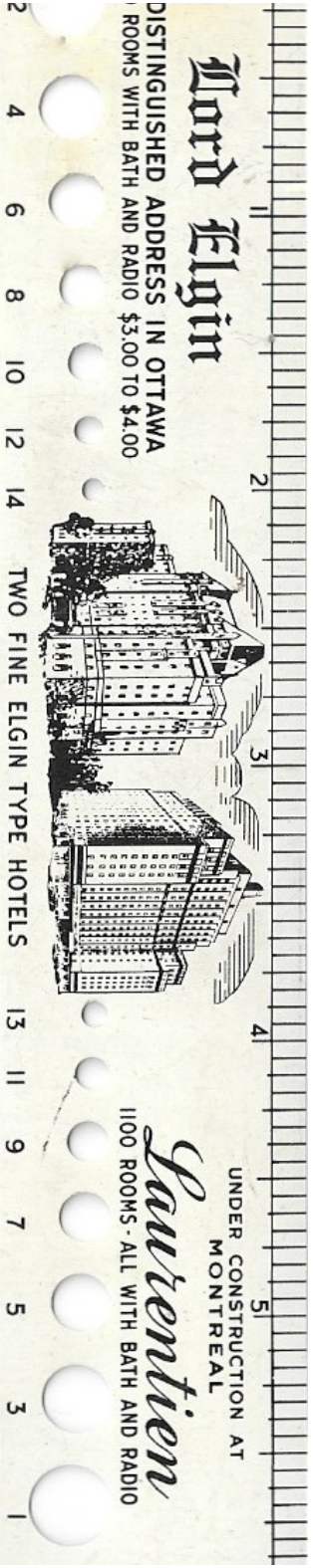
THE

Laurel Lounge



The Lord Elgin Hotel

OTTAWA, CANADA



‘That’s how I bought the Lord Elgin’

For the Massachusetts-born Chester E. Pickering, who spent just four years in school before leaving a broken home at age 13 to seek his fortune in New York City, overcoming purported impossibilities was all in keeping with his rags-to-riches destiny. First a self-described teenage “hobo” in the 1890s, then a humble travelling salesman after the turn of the century, and eventually president of the cleaning-products corporation Dustbane Enterprises, Pickering had made millions by the end of the 1930s selling a perfumed, sawdust-and-oil concoction that proved ideal for shining up wooden floors. The business grew particularly well north of the U.S. border, which had led to his emigration to Ottawa and fervent embrace of Canadian citizenship.

Pickering took his entrepreneurial flair to the political realm in 1939 — first as a downtown alderman, then as a member of the city’s powerful Board of Control — and campaigned later on his lead role in ushering The Lord Elgin Hotel into existence. In one memorable fight for office, he posted self-congratulatory campaign signs on The Lord Elgin property itself, igniting controversy over the tactic. The candidate offered no apologies for his high-profile posters claiming credit for spearheading the hotel project. Then he won the election.

Pickering, who had clearly impressed Udd during the push to get the hotel built in 1940-41, was invited to become the first local figure to join Ford Hotels’ board of directors in December 1941, less than six months after the grand opening of The Lord Elgin, and while Pickering was serving on the city’s Board of Control.

But Pickering — or “Pick” as he was known to his friends — was destined to serve The Lord Elgin in much more than an advisory capacity, and for much longer than a typical board member’s term. In 1949, when the Ford Hotel Company was acquired by Massachusetts-based Sheraton Hotels, Pickering joined Udd as a member of the parent company’s board of directors. In this role, Pickering emerged as the corporate face of Sheraton’s landmark Ottawa hotel, responsible for managerial oversight. Throughout that year, as the national capital struggled to deal with a lack of adequate convention facilities at a time when the Canadian conference market was beginning to boom, Pickering publicly explored the idea of building a 200-room expansion of The Lord Elgin — the first of



Chester Pickering played key roles in the birth, management and ownership of The Lord Elgin from the time he convinced the Ford company to construct the hotel in 1940 until his death in 1983.



A Midsummer Night's Dream

By RON SMITH

Hotel Extension May Be Erected On Slater Street

The proposed addition to the Lord Elgin Hotel may be erected on a lot on Slater street adjoining the hotel, John C. Udd, president of the Ford Hotel Company, said Monday. The addition has been planned for more than two years and the company has been marking time.

Mr. Udd said that while no final decision had been reached chances were good that the $1,250,000 addition would be erected next Fall. The same exterior design would be followed, but there would be changes in the interior with chesterfield beds so the rooms would be bedrooms at night and living rooms in daytime.

Decision had been delayed owing to the uncertainty about costs and hotel traffic. Business has been heavy which will help to influence a final decision.

Tenders Called For Construction

In July 1949, Chester Pickering was making news in Ottawa with a controversial proposal to create 'the world's longest skating rink' on the Rideau Canal, an idea that was deemed too costly and impractical at the time — but has been the capital's main winter tourist attraction since the early 1970s. Meanwhile, Pickering and Udd were also grabbing headlines with their planned expansion of The Lord Elgin Hotel — another good idea that turned out to be decades ahead of its time.

many serious discussions in the subsequent decades about super-sizing the hotel. An adjacent property was purchased to facilitate a potential expansion, but proposals for an addition or "new wing" of the hotel were advanced and withdrawn several times in the 1950s and '60s, never coming to fruition during that era.

Through a succession of corporate transitions in those decades, during which The Lord Elgin stayed under American ownership but was always operated by a local management group, Pickering remained the hotel's protective, nurturing patriarch. It wasn't always easy.

"I ran the hotel in that way for about twelve years for various New Yorkers who kicked it around and bought and resold it. That was a very disagreeable experience," he recalled in his memoir, lamenting the profit-obsessed approach of certain absentee owners. "They wanted to take everything they could out of the hotel, whereas I wanted to keep the place up and take a pride in it. It was an eternal battle."

Finally, when the hotel ended up in the hands of New York financier Arthur Cohen in the late 1960s, Pickering sensed he had an owner he could deal with amicably — but one who wasn't interested, alas, in actually owning The Lord Elgin.

"He didn't know one thing about the Lord Elgin and admitted that he didn't like hotel operations," Pickering stated in *Net Worth*. "Nor did he like having a foreign investment."

The stage was set for negotiations that would mark a major turning point in the corporate identity of The Lord Elgin. Cohen proposed selling the hotel to Pickering and a small group of other Ottawa investors. At a meeting in



New York in early 1970 — a "horsetrading" session recounted by Pickering with some delight in his memoir — the Canadian proposed a deal that Cohen initially rejected as being so favourable to Pickering that, within 10 years, the hotel's steady profits would essentially mean that the Ottawa syndicate could be purchasing a prime commercial property for next to nothing.

As Pickering tells the story, he then shrugged and told Cohen he was content to continue with the present arrangement: " 'You own the hotel and I'll manage it, and we'll all be happy together.' I turned for the door. 'Alright,' (Cohen) capitulated. 'You've got a deal,' " Pickering remembered hearing. "I'd called his bluff. I knew he didn't want that hotel, and I knew he didn't want a foreign investment. And that's how I bought the Lord Elgin. I took two close friends in with me but kept sixty-five per cent of the stock for myself."

On June 5, 1970, the *Ottawa Journal* reported the news under the headline "Ottawa Group Buys Lord Elgin". Pickering's chief partners in the $4.5-million deal were revealed to be prominent local businessmen Len Coulter and George Nelms, and it was announced that the deal included a $300,000 upgrade to improve the hotel's heating and air conditioning. "The sale brings control of the hotel from the United States to Ottawa," it was proudly reported. Soon, patrons of the hotel bar were sipping their drinks in a spot aptly renamed "Pick's Place."

The Lord Elgin Hotel wasn't the only great idea Chester Pickering championed during his years at city hall and as one of the city's leading businessmen. In January 1949, he sparked a year-long debate in Ottawa over his plan to create "the world's longest skating rink" along the Rideau Canal. While there were expressions of support from some Ottawa officials and city newspapers, there were also loud objections over the possible costs and the perceived impracticality of clearing snow from miles of ice. A serious study of the idea was conducted at the time and a pilot project was carried out by the city on a stretch of the canal in the winter of 1958-59. But Pickering's bold proposal was put on ice — until the National Capital Commission revived the idea in 1971 and launched what have become two of Ottawa's most celebrated tourism institutions: the Rideau Canal Skateway and the associated Winterlude festival, now held over the first three weekends of February. Winterlude and the Skateway are widely viewed as vital assets for the local hospitality industry — unique attractions that fill a snowy

capital with revellers enjoying the Canadian winter.

Over the decades, Pickering's public spiritedness took many forms, including a lead role in organizing salvage efforts during the Second World War and a United Nations relief program for displaced children in the post-war period. He supported countless charitable causes and left a major bequest to Carleton University's psychology department — where his daughter, Dr. June Pimm, has served as a high-profile professor and author— that led in 2011 to the founding of the Pickering Centre for Human Development.

Pickering was 101 when he died in 1983. He'd lived long enough to see the Skateway hit full stride and The Lord Elgin Hotel become a beloved heritage attraction in a National Capital Region modernized, beautified and animated in ways that even he and Mackenzie King — visionaries though they were — couldn't have foreseen back in the 1940s.



A National Capital Commission three-dimensional map of Ottawa-Gatineau's Confederation Boulevard, located near the entrance to Confederation Park, directly across Elgin Street from the hotel, shows a miniature Lord Elgin Hotel in bronze.

A noble link: the 11th Earl of Elgin

In 1968, the 10th Earl of Elgin died and was succeeded by his son, Andrew Bruce, the 11th Earl and present Lord Elgin. Along with various titles, the family estate Broomhall House and the high honour of serving as Chief of Clan Bruce — leading descendant of Robert the Bruce, fabled warrior and 14th-century King of Scots — Lord Elgin inherited a sense of pride in his noble family's association with The Lord Elgin Hotel.

It's fitting, then, that the present namesake of the hotel — a place that stands as a symbol of Allied faith and resilience in the Second World War — served with great distinction in that conflict and overcame serious wounds to eventually fulfill his public duties as a Scottish peer. He nearly lost his leg when the Churchill tank he commanded was destroyed during the Allied invasion of Normandy in August 1944. As Lord Elgin, he has made the commemoration of military heritage a principal focus of his public activities in Scotland.

A frequent visitor to Canada over the years, Lord Elgin was particularly active on this side of the Atlantic in the 1970s and '80s, when he organized friendly curling competitions between Scottish and Canadian rinks and served as honourary colonel of the St. Thomas, Ont.-based Elgin Regiment (Royal Canadian Armoured Corps).

He also served for a time as the honourary chairman of the hotel named for his great-grandfather. Lord Elgin was more than a titular figure during those years, giving advice and loaning personal items when the hotel was given a Scottish-themed makeover that included tartan bedspreads, paintings of Canadian scenes by the 19th-century Lady Elgin, a main floor mini-museum showcasing Bruce family heirlooms, and a Scottish gift shop near the hotel's front desk.

There have been several interior restylings since the hotel's memorable Scottish phase. But among the constant features of The Lord Elgin are framed photographs,





The 11th Earl of Elgin, above, during a visit to the hotel in 1978, sporting a fur coat once worn by the 8th Earl, shown in marble; the present Lord and Lady Elgin in 2008, accompanied by hotel manager David Smythe. The hotel (right) as it appears today.

proudly exhibited on the main floor, showing hotel staff enjoying one of the many memorable visits to Ottawa by the 11th Earl and his wife, Lady Elgin, true friends of the hotel.



The Gillin era: renewal and growth

For a few years after Pickering's death in 1983, The Lord Elgin remained under the majority ownership of C.E. Pickering Investments Ltd., headed by the late entrepreneur's son-in-law, Gordon Pimm. Then, in 1987, Ottawa construction giant Patrick Gillin — his own company headquartered in the Gillin Building on Laurier Avenue, just steps from the hotel — purchased The Lord Elgin.

The agreement ensured that another local businessman with deep Ottawa roots and a powerful community-building impulse would guide the next phase of the hotel's existence.

Gillin, builder of several signature office towers in the nation's capital — Place Laurier, Sir Guy Carleton Building, Standard Life Building and Commonwealth Building among them — was a pillar of the local business community and named Ottawa Business Person of the Year in 2003. Active in various service organizations — including the Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa, Shepherds of Good Hope, Elisabeth Bruyère Hospital and Guide Dogs for the Blind — and a major player in the Building Owners and Managers Association, both locally and nationally, Gillin seemed to invest as much time and energy in his philan-





Ottawa construction engineer Pat Gillin (above) bought The Lord Elgin in 1987, and over the next 15 years undertook two major rebuilding projects that modernized and then dramatically expanded the hotel to create more spacious guest rooms and additional accommodation for meetings and conventions. Left, old meets new where the original facade, including 1941 cornerstone, blends with the limestone addition housing Grill 41.



In July 1991, as the Lord Elgin celebrated its 50th birthday, hotel manager Don Blakslee welcomed then-Ottawa mayor Marc Laviolette and an actor in the role of prime minister Mackenzie King. Owner Pat Gillin is seen enjoying the ceremony over Laviolette's shoulder.

thropic endeavours as he did in his construction and real estate activities.

Of the hotel he'd purchased for an undisclosed sum, Gillin said: "It's a fantastic location, a landmark in the city, a beautiful building tied into the heritage of Ottawa."

But the Lord Elgin was also, by the end of the 1980s, in need of refurbishment. "Being 50 years old, we felt its time had come; it was outdated on the inside." During 1988 and 1989, just before the hotel reached the half-century mark in 1991, the most significant makeover in the life of the building was undertaken by the Gillins — an $11-million facelift that would renovate and modernize the rooms and common areas, and substantially expand and improve the hotel's capacity to host business meetings and other gatherings — an increasingly important part of the hospitality market. It was a colossal undertaking, nothing less than creating "a brand new hotel in a heritage structure," as Gillin put it at the time.

Because the hotel's interior required significant upgrades and added features, the total number of rooms at the Lord Elgin actually decreased substantially — from 360 to 312 — during the two-year refurbishment period. "We've brought it up to standard for the next 50 years," Gillin said upon completion of the project.

In July 1991, to mark the 50th anniversary of The Lord Elgin, then-Ottawa mayor Marc Laviolette and an actor

playing the role of Mackenzie King performed a reenactment of the hotel's official opening in July 1941.

A little more than a decade after the hotel's extensive interior renovation, The Lord Elgin was reborn with a major, two-year expansion that began in 2001 and saw two eight-storey towers added to the north and south sides of the original historic structure. The stunning additions would bring the total number of rooms back to 360 — close to the hotel's original capacity — and create space for what would eventually become a new street-level restaurant on the Slater Street side of the building (Grill Forty One, named for the year the hotel was built) and a Starbucks coffee shop on the Laurier Avenue side.

The hotel's famously elegant proportions were also artfully maintained by keeping the height of the new towers to eight floors alongside the taller 1941 building.

The added space produced new and bigger meeting rooms, expanded pool and fitness facilities, an escalator and a host of other improvements aimed at maintaining The Lord Elgin's position as a premier destination for families, large tour groups, convention visitors and other travellers to Canada's capital.

While heritage advocates are understandably wary of major expansion projects involving historic structures,





The Changing of the Guard, including the daily summertime parade of personnel past The Lord Elgin, is a tourism staple in Ottawa

fearing they can compromise the architectural integrity of the original, The Lord Elgin's new bookend towers were planned with the utmost attention to integrating the additions sensitively.

In the end, the careful planning and design won the confidence of municipal planners and earned recognition from Ottawa's heritage community for the successful blending of new and old. Chiefly praised were the retro design of the two new towers and their cladding in limestone blocks carefully selected, arranged and adorned to complement The Lord Elgin's original façade — parts of which were also painstakingly preserved and repurposed.

"Original limestone cladding units were recorded, removed and later integrated into the new construction," noted the Certificate of Merit presented to the hotel at the 2006 Ottawa Architectural Conservation Awards. "Where new limestone cladding was introduced, it was selected to match the original as closely as possible."

For Gillin, a civil engineer with a powerful sense of history, carrying out a much-needed expansion of The Lord Elgin while preserving its original character — and then earning the City of Ottawa's recognition for the delicate feat — was another achievement to be proud of in a long line of noteworthy accomplishments.

Upon Pat Gillin's death at age 84 in July 2009, his son Jeff remembered his father telling him to "'always bite off a little more than you think you can chew.' I believe he had said this to me," the younger Gillin went on, "as his way of letting me know that all he had done had not come easily to him ... He had not simply been lucky in life... He was trying to tell me that what he had done was not about genius or divine inspiration, but about showing up for life every moment of every day."

Nearly 30 years after the 1987 purchase of the hotel, and following in Pat Gillin's footsteps, sons Jeff and Chris Gillin and other members of the family are continuing the tradition of strong local ownership and commitment to protecting and celebrating the historic hotel property.



Hotel manager David Smythe (right) accepts portrait of Lord Elgin from the NCC's CEO Mark Kristmanson, February 2015



The century-old, oil-on-canvas portait of Lord Elgin, acquired by Lord Grey during his time as governor general in 1907, had been on display at Rideau Hall for more than 25 years. It now hangs in a prominent place in the lobby of The Lord Elgin.

History remains at the heart of the hotel's identity. In May 2005, present general manager David Smythe and the then-recently retired Don Blakslee teamed up for a touching gesture honouring Canada's war veterans — a unique gift wrapped in two vintage flags that re-stirred emotions felt 60 years earlier, during that unforgettable VE-Day celebration in May 1945, when revelers had paraded along Sparks Street before grabbing a bite at Murray's. A never-used Red Ensign and Union Jack, the flags commonly flown when Canadian soldiers were fighting the Second World War, were discovered by Blakslee in a hotel storage room and eagerly unfurled by Smythe on two poles rising above The Lord Elgin's main entrance. It was a particularly special display on May 8, 2005, not only because of the 60th anniversary of victory in Europe, but because the newly built Canadian War Museum was also inaugurated that day in downtown Ottawa.

"War veterans from across Canada," the *Citizen* reported the next day, "were moved to see the Union Jack and Red Ensign flying proudly in front of the Lord Elgin Hotel over the weekend, amid VE-Day celebrations and the opening of Ottawa's new war museum."

A decade later, in February 2015, it was the hotel's turn to receive a gift of history: a century-old, three-quarter length oil portrait of the 8th Earl of Elgin, which had been acquired in 1907 by Canada's then-governor general Lord Grey and displayed for many years at Rideau Hall.

Beautifully framed and placed in a prominent loca-



tion in The Lord Elgin's lobby, the painting of the hotel's namesake was offered as a loan by the National Capital Commission.

"The Lord Elgin Hotel has displayed Canadian historical artifacts connected to Lord Elgin and the Bruce family for the better part of its 74-year history," stated the NCC's CEO Mark Kristmanson.

"As we approach the 150th anniversary of Confederation in 2017, I invite visitors and residents of the national capital to take advantage of this rare opportunity to view a special piece of Canada's heritage." The hotel's general manager graciously accepted the offer.

"The Lord Elgin Hotel is pleased to display this iconic painting that has hung on the walls of Rideau Hall for over 25 years," said Smythe. "This loan from the NCC will ensure that Lord Elgin's image will grace the walls of our lobby and reaffirm our hotel's link to Canada's history."

Under a warm light near the interior entrance to the hotel's dining lounge, just a few steps from a meeting room named for Mackenzie King, the 8th Earl is shown in military dress adorned with medals, gazing at some distant sight while one hand grasps the hilt of his sword.

King, a great admirer of the 8th Earl and a key architect of the both the NCC and the nation's capital — as well as The Lord Elgin Hotel itself — would surely have approved.



Evolving styles, from the late 1960s (above) to the late 1980s (opposite), are reflected in the interior design and furnishings of The Lord Elgin's common areas. Regular makeovers to keep pace with changing times have been a hallmark of the hotel.

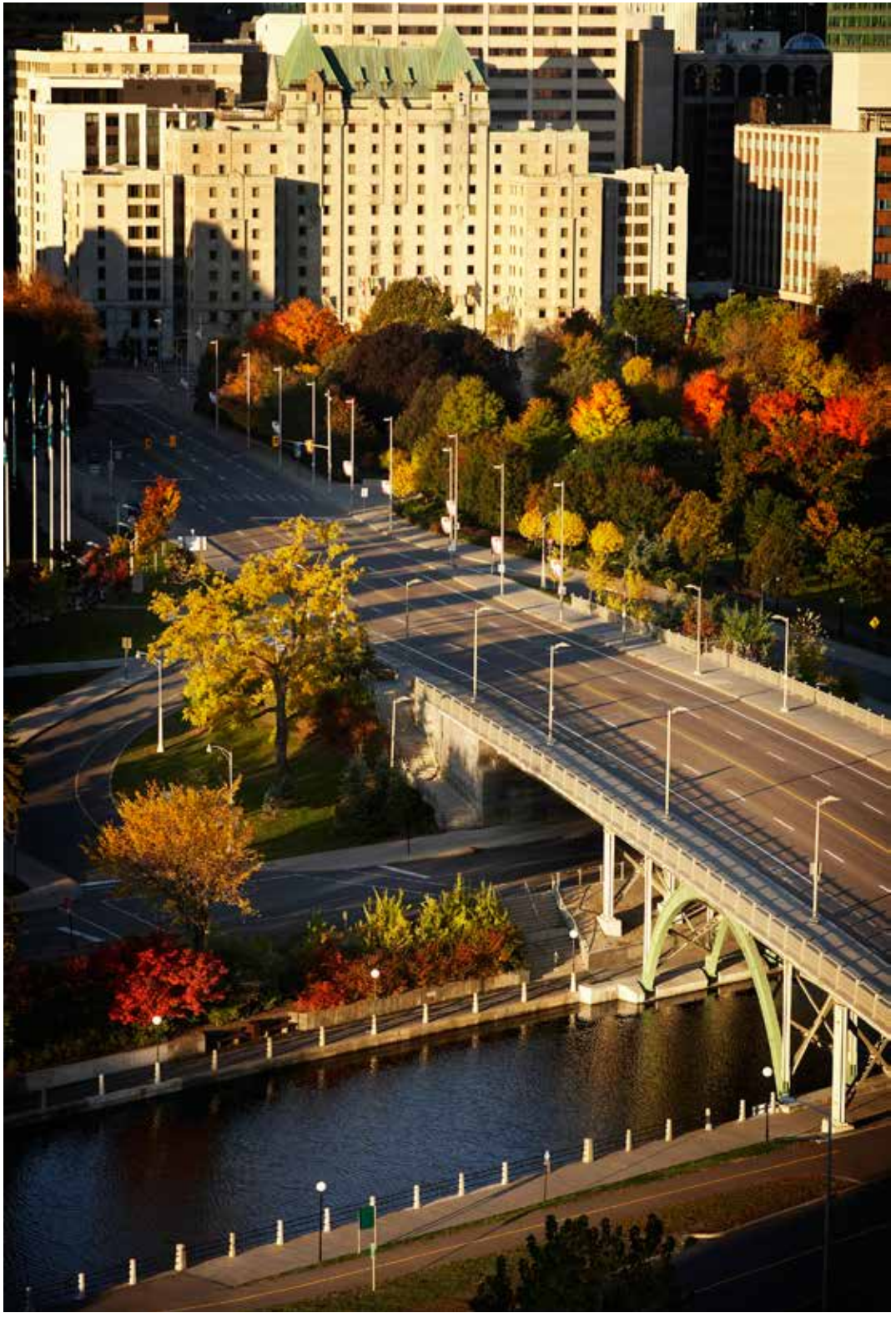




A portrait of The Lord Elgin Hotel from the late 1970s by the renowned Ottawa photographer Malak Karsh, younger brother of Yousuf Karsh and a specialist in corporate and landscape photography. This image helped advertise the hotel for years. Busts of Lord and Lady Elgin (opposite) remain a popular feature of the main lobby; and the hotel's proximity to the Rideau Canal (far right) is a big draw for many guests — especially in winter when the frozen surface is transformed into the World's Largest Skating Rink.

















Opposite: **The Lord Elgin has inspired many artists to photograph, sketch or paint the hotel and its surrounding streetscape; the oil painting by an unidentified artist (top) captures a dreamy evening scene from the 1940s; Prime Minister Paul Martin and U2 frontman Bono (left) visited The Lord Elgin in 2004 to speak at an international conference on the fight against HIV/AIDS; the Changing of the Guard parade past the hotel in the 1960s (centre); the Dalai Lama being welcomed to the hotel in 2007 (right), one of several stays at The Lord Elgin for the Tibetan spiritual leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner.**
Above: **An evening view of the hotel's main entrance.**
Back cover: **Detail of painting of The Lord Elgin and Confederation Park by Ottawa artist Robert Hyndman.**

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Photo Information

Images of The Lord Elgin Hotel's design phase, construction, cornerstone ceremony, official opening, etc., are from the hotel's corporate collection (cover, inside cover, ii-top, 5-7-bottom, 8-right, 14-19, 20-left, 21-23, 27-r, 29-33, 39-41, 46-7, 48-r, 49-51, 53, 56, 57-r, 58-top, bottom-centre, bottom-r, 59, back cover [Robert Hyndman]; 75th anniversary logo (inside cover) designed by McGill Buckley; images from Wikipedia Commons (p. 1, 2-r, 3, 10, 12-l, 20-r, 24, 26, 27, 35); photos by Randy Boswell (p. ii-bottom-l, bottom-r, 7-top, 12-r, 34, 45, 48-l, 57-l); photos from *Net Worth* memoir by Chester Pickering (p. 2-l, 38, 42, 44); images courtesy Mike Dickson, *photosforlife.ca* (p. ii-bottom-c); *Looking Back: Pioneers of Bytown and March*, By Naomi Slater Heydon, (p. 8-l); Joseph Légaré/McCord Museum (p. 9); Edwin Whitefield/Library and Archives Canada (p. 11); americanairmuseum.com (p. 37); National Capital Commission (p. 52); CP/*Vancouver Sun* (p. 58-bottom-l); *Ottawa Evening Citizen* (p. 4, 25, 28); *Ottawa Journal* (p. 13, 19, 36, 43).

