

222 BROADWAY
HOTEL FORT GARRY

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222 BROADWAY – FORT GARRY HOTEL

Although completed in 1913, the Fort Garry Hotel is still a vestige of the Victorian period. An era in which architecture was characterized by a multiplicity of eclectic styles, the nineteenth century is often considered as the time when a building reflected a national sentiment. The Fort Garry Hotel represents Winnipeg's only example of what many deem a uniquely Canadian national attitude - a truly "Canadian style".¹

It is generally acknowledged that the Victorians conceived of architecture as having "meaning", a notion derivative of the nineteenth century concern for morals. Thus symbolic associations became the leading characteristic in a Victorian building. As the eminent Canadian architectural historian Alan Gowans notes,

The novelty of Victorian architecture ...[lies] in the idea of using borrowed forms for purposes of specific extrinsic symbolism, in valuing and employing forms...primarily for the ideas associated with them: Roman for strength or republican virtue; Greek for liberty, etc.²

Similarly, the idea of a national style, with its personified characteristics and identifiable traits, was reaching its full state of development at this time.

Around the 1880s a controversy was being carried on, especially vigorously in the United States, over what exactly constituted an American architectural style. The architects Sullivan and Root were the prime antagonists in this debate.³ The question most often revolved around the definition of Nation in light of the American situation. These definitions, supposedly, were then "translated" into architecture. A national style can therefore be defined as the combination of the personification

¹ Harold D. Kalman, The Railway Hotels and the Development of the Chateau Style in Canada (University of Victoria, Maltwood Museum, Studies in Architectural History, No. 1. Victoria, B.C.: University of Victoria, Maltwood Museum, 1968).

² Alan Gowans, "The Canadian National Style", in The Shield of Achilles, W.L. Morton, ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 1968), p. 211.

³ Sherman, Paul, Louis Sullivan: An Architect in American Thought (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1962), pp. 40-41.

of Nation with that of symbolic association.

Gowans considers the High Victorian as Canada's national style, with the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa as our most outstanding example. However, Harold D. Kalman has more convincingly narrowed the style down to the "Medieval Château",⁴ born in 1893 with the completion of the Château Frontenac in Quebec City.⁵

An offshoot of the neo-Gothic, the Château style was a cross-Canada phenomenon dominated by the great railway hotels built in the first quarter of this century. By the 1920s and 1930s, the style had been established in the public mind as being uniquely Canadian⁶ and soon became "official" by government adoption. From the Supreme Court Building in Ottawa, built in 1938, to the Department of Trade and Commerce Building of 1954-58, the style served a nationalistic symbolic function, reinforcing a familiar and established Canadian conception of Nation.

But why was this style unique to Canada and how did it reflect late nineteenth century Canadian character and attitudes? The Gothic revival was generally considered as a style suitable for northern countries. Had not Gothic originally emerged in Northern Europe? It had developed because of its suitability to cold climates.⁷ And furthermore, it was a style which blended with the rugged northern land. Who still is not enchanted by views of the Banff Springs or Lake Louise Hotels in their beautiful wilderness locations! The scenes are reminiscent of landscape paintings. And it was from the late eighteenth and nineteenth century love of landscape painting that the idea of architecture designed to fit the romantic notion of the picturesque developed.⁸ The Château style was a Canadian

⁴ Kalman, p. 5.

⁵ Kalman, p. 11.

⁶ Kalman, p. 21.

⁷ The Minister of Public Works, as late as 1927, still enforced this idea when he wrote that Gothic, including the Château style, was "the type of architecture most suitable to our Northern climate". J.C. Elliot, "Report to Council", April 27, 1927, as quoted in Kalman, pp. 30-31.

⁸ See Chapter 3, "The Influence of the Picturesque" in Peter Collins, Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture: 1750-1950 (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1965), pp. 42-58.

adaptation of this aesthetic ideal. Here truly was an aristocratic Canadian style which could evoke Victorian romantic sentiments in a distinctly Canadian setting. Moreover, the Château style was seen as having been influenced by the medieval environment of Quebec. These origins, however, had been "legitimized" by English tastes, especially by Van Horne, the railway magnate responsible for commissioning the American architect Bruce Price to build the Château Frontenac.

Canada clung tenaciously to the Gothic style long after England and Germany had rejected it. It had become comfortably familiar.

The Fort Garry Hotel commands an admirable position in the development of this Canadian architectural form. The hotel possesses all the essential elements of the Château style, the most obvious being the steep roof lines, expansive wall surfaces and turrets. Modeled on the then recently completed first stage of the Château Laurier in Ottawa, the Winnipeg hotel was built and operated by the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway until the formation and take-over by Canadian National in 1918.

Originally planned as having ten stories, the hotel was to be named "The Selkirk".⁹ However, before its completion the architects of Ross and MacDonald had added four more floors, making it one of the most monumental hotels in Western Canada. The name was also changed to the Fort Garry Hotel.

The hotel has a steel frame resting upon a foundation of gray granite. The massive walls, running up to the copper-covered roof, are of Indiana buff limestone. The Gothic Château style elements are familiar. The roof, is of truncated hip type with multiple peaks. Typically, the attic storey is surrounded by windows set in fanciful stone work crowned by Gothic finials. Four long rows of bay windows run in continual vertical lines up the north face of the building. On the south side is a massive chimney, the height of the hotel, with a cap decorated by a bracketed cornice. There is even

⁹ "Winnipeg's New Hotel 'The Selkirk' to be Erected on Historic Ground", The Dominion, June, 1911, Vol. 2, No. 6, p. 65.

a small rounded turret topped by a conical roof on the same side. Full two storey windows encircle the lower and upper levels of the hotel. They, too, bear Gothic Château influence having cross windows paired and divided by mullions and transom bars. And finally, quite characteristic of the style, are the large basket-handle arches spanning the two light-wells on the south side.

Many changes have been made to the building since its opening in December of 1914. All the entrances have been altered. The grand entrance at the front, or north side, is still used, but a recent addition at the rear (south) is now the main entrance. Originally large double doors to the west of the north entrance led directly into the magnificent dining room but because the dining room was converted into a banquet hall, the stairs and entrance awning were removed and the doors permanently locked. The same fate applies to the private entrance on the east side which opened into the bar. (See attached plans)

The main rotunda, reaching up two flights and surrounded by a mezzanine, is an impressive forty-four by fifty-six feet.¹⁰ Four large corner piers support the mezzanine balcony above, and are joined by expansive arches, each having a keystone bearing the emblem of either Manitoba or Canada. The walls are of imported artificial Caen stone. Unfortunately the marble floor of Napoleon gray inlaid with Belgian block has been covered by rugs.

In the south-west corner of the lobby is the Hauteville marble stairway, with its intricate iron bronze balustrade, leading up to the mezzanine. Still an impressive lounge area with its gold trimmed piers and mouldings, the mezzanine is enclosed by an ornamental bronze railing. Glassed-in offices now span the north side of the mezzanine floor. The ladies' writing rooms have been converted into reception rooms and the stairs and entrances to the musicians' gallery, the dining room gallery and the café gallery are now sealed.

The main dining room, today the Frontenac Room, still retains much of its former splendour.

¹⁰ All measurements and descriptions of materials from "The Fort Garry Hotel, Winnipeg", Construction, June 1914, Vol. 7, No. 6, pp. 217-235.

Occupying the full length of the west side of the ground floor, the room extends up two floors. It is an incredibly well lit room, as are all the public function rooms, due to the large windows. Botticino marble lines the bottom of the wall. The beautiful original bronze sconces extend from the wall, matching the many bronze chandeliers hanging from the decorative ceiling. The panelled green and gold ceiling is arrayed with modelled bas-reliefs which include dragons, porcupines, thistles, pine cones and tulips. The bronze door handles on the French doors are ornamented with the swirling Art Nouveau logo of the Grand Trunk Pacific (GTP).

The circular room at the south of the main floor, measuring about forty-four feet in diameter, was once an elegant, brightly lit dining room known as the Palm Room. Sunlight poured through the large windows, with their southern exposure, onto diners who sat among the luxurious surroundings of the fountains, palms, marble floors, Donegal rugs and highly decorative pilasters and ceiling. Music drifted from the musicians' gallery. The room is now painted black, the floors covered and the windows sealed.

The café, or breakfast room in the north-east corner, has been extensively re-modelled to fit the theme of the present restaurant, The Factor's Table. The bar room to the south has been made smaller in order to accommodate kitchen facilities for the restaurant. The remaining space in the south-east corner is now a coffee shop.

In the basement, the grill room, with its Flemish oak wainscotting and stained glass windows, has been renovated and converted into a cabaret.

Although the main floor dining rooms have undergone extensive changes over the years, the seventh floor with its banquet hall and ballroom, has remained fairly original. Stepping from the main elevators, one enters the long foyer with its high oak beamed ceiling hung with ornamental tapered lanterns. Beyond this hall is the loggia, spanning the same length as the foyer. One enters it through handsome oak French doors set in arched spaces. The loggia, possessing a cross-vaulted ceiling, reaches across the central portion of the large windowed north wall. (See attached plans.)

At the east end of the foyer is the ball room. The entrance doors are crowned by a stained glass panel and flanked by a pair of fluted wood columns. Wood wainscoting runs around the base of the room. Overhead is a Caen stone frieze. Large crystal chandeliers hang from the elaborately decorated stained birch ceiling. Placed above the windows are stained glass portraits of musicians. The musicians' gallery at the south end of the room is now blocked off.

On the other side of the seventh floor is the richly oak panelled banquet hall. As in the ballroom, the doors are surrounded by magnificent oak columns with a carved pediment. The large, delicately painted beamed ceiling accentuates the rich setting. Light emanates from the windows on the north and west walls and from the brass chandeliers. There is a large stage at the end of the hall. Both the ball room and banquet hall are serviced from a kitchen which extends along the south façade.

Renovation has been extensive. In all there are 265 guest rooms, including State apartments. All have undergone modernization. The most extensive alterations took place in 1929, when modern bathrooms, shower facilities and telephone service were installed. These were even further improved in 1965-66 with an expenditure close to \$600,000.¹¹

¹¹ Canadian Inventory of Historic Buildings, Fort Garry Hotel. Unpublished report, n.d., no pagination.

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Plate 1 – Broadway, looking west from Donald Street, ca.1910. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)



Plate 2 – Broadway, looking west from Main Street, ca.1915. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N10955.)

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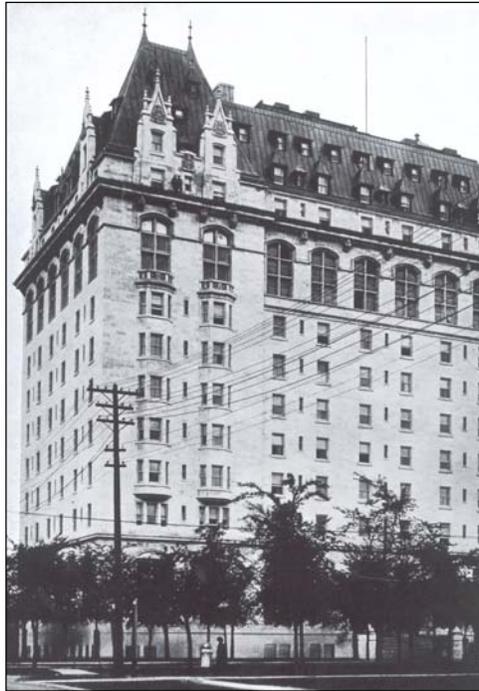
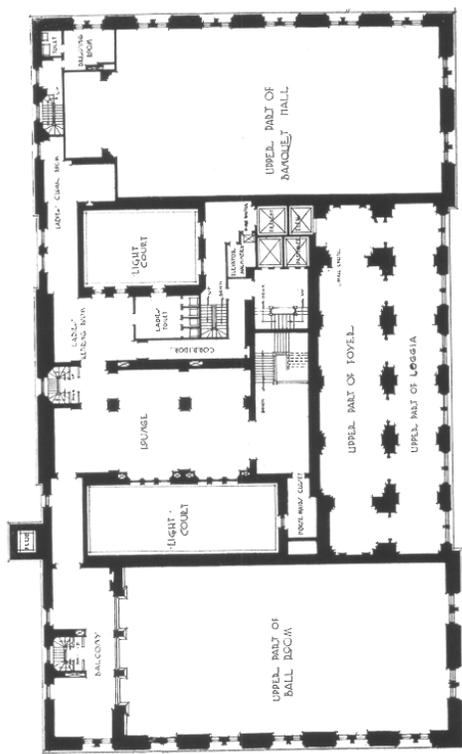


Plate 3 – The Hotel Fort Garry, shortly after its opening. (Reproduced from Construction, Vol. 7, No. 6 (June 1914), p. 215.)

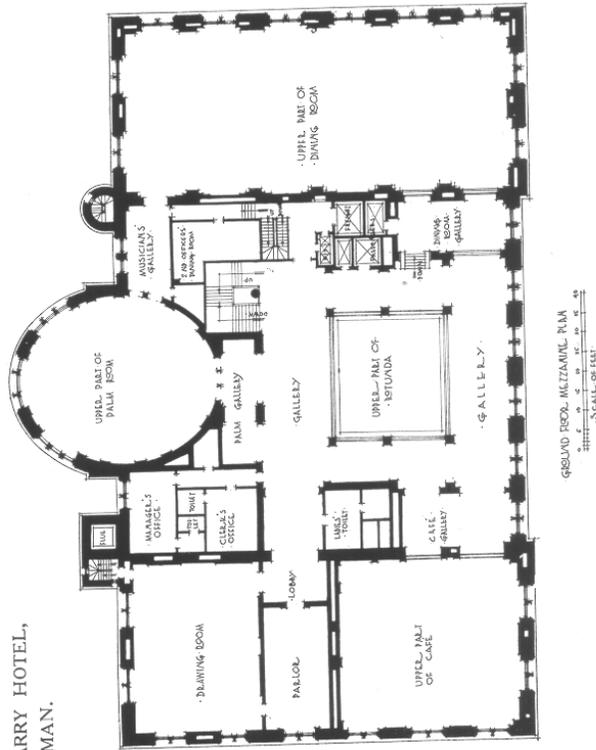


Plate 4 – Part of rotunda and mezzanine gallery, ca.1914. (Reproduced from Construction, Vol. 7, No. 6 (June 1914), p. 216.)

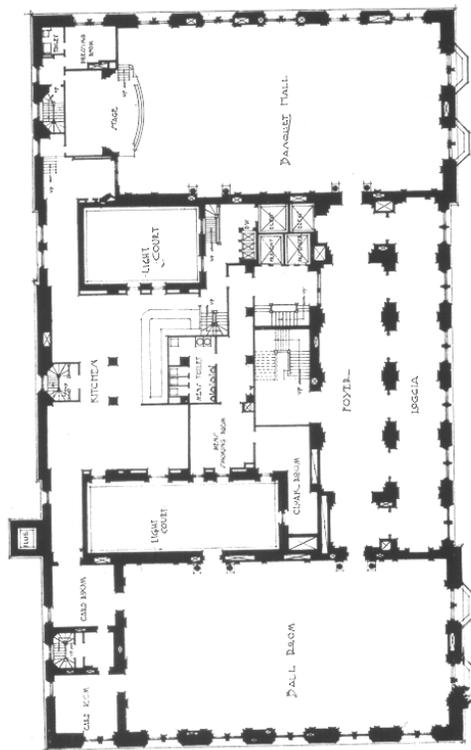
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BALL ROOM MEZZANINE FLOOR PLAN

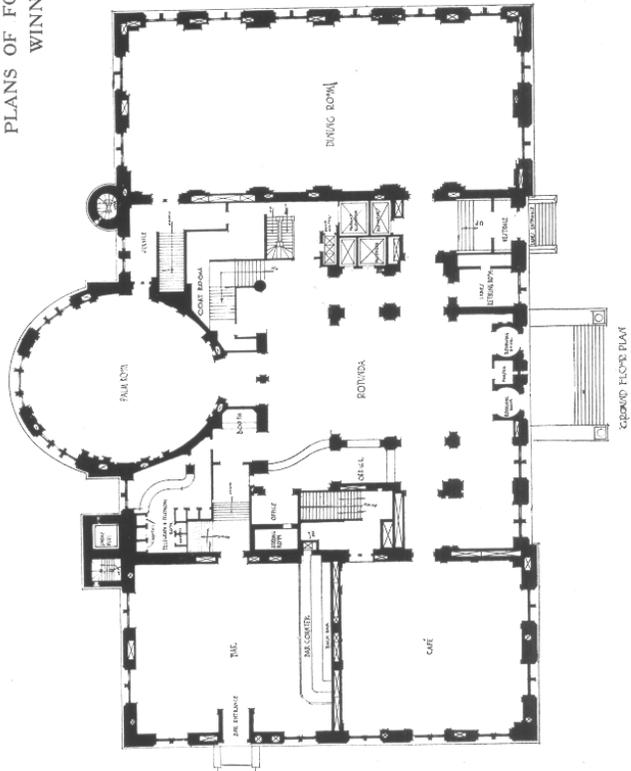


GROUND FLOOR MEZZANINE PLAN
SCALE OF 1/4" = 1'-0"



BALL ROOM GROUND FLOOR PLAN
SCALE OF 1/4" = 1'-0"

PLANS OF FORT GARRY HOTEL,
WINNIPEG, MAN.



GROUND FLOOR PLAN

222 BROADWAY – HOTEL FORT GARRY

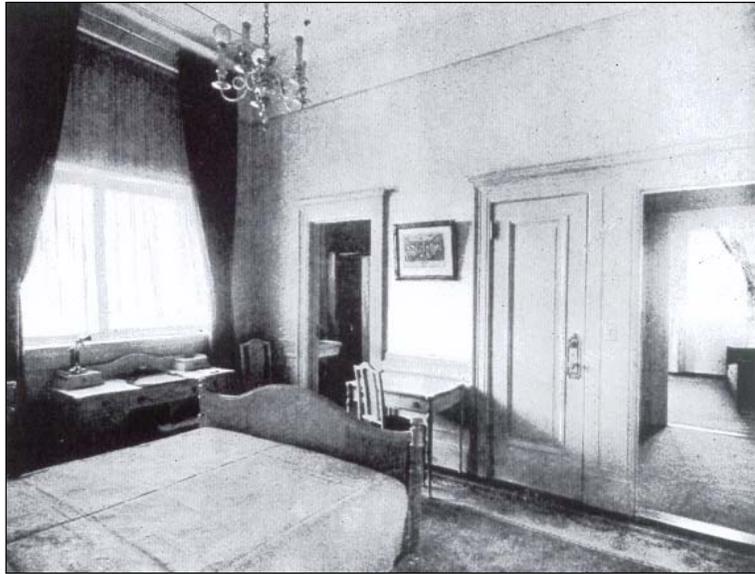


Plate 6 – Bedroom in a typical suite. (Reproduced from Construction, Vol. 7, No. 6 (June 1914), p. 224.)



Plate 7 – Part of the Palm Room. (Reproduced from Construction, Vol. 7, No. 6 (June 1914), p. 226.)

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Plate 8 – Part of the main Dining Room. (Reproduced from Construction, Vol. 7, No. 6 (June 1914), p. 227.)

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Plate 9 – Detailing in the rotunda, n.d. (Courtesy of the City of Winnipeg, Planning Department.)