

Quinte Hotel

Belleville's famous beauty

It once stood as a model of elegance and opulence that was the envy of nearly every city in Canada. It survived a horrendous fire in 1907 that left only the frame standing. It withstood a flood in 1936 that set much of Belleville afloat. But a decade of neglect during the 1970s almost closed the pages on a building that has seen the city's most prominent visitors and residents frolic about in a playground for the rich.

Today, major renovations promise to return the hotel to its former style and grandeur, with all the conveniences of the modern day.

In 1895 the Hotel Quinte was a sparkling new building replacing the Dafoe House hotel which had been destroyed by fire 11 years earlier. Owners Harry Corby, M.P., W.H. Higgar, M.P.P., and John Bell Q.C., spared no expense in constructing the new luxury inn. The quality of the hotel was, from its beginning, bound to attract patrons of distinction.

Upon its re-opening on February 28, 1908, former Prime Minister and Belleville resident Sir Mackenzie Bowell was present. Immediately following its opening, Mr. C. S. Laidlaw of the Bank of Montreal took up permanent residence in the hotel and a very wealthy woman named Charlotte Sills came from Boston each year to spend her summers at the hotel. She later left a large amount of money to the Bridge Street United Church. Other stories centre around the prohibition days and tell of one regular patron of the hotel departing the dining room at precise times and hurriedly making his way to the wharf. Upon returning to the hotel the gentleman would be both happier and wealthier, having picked up his payment from the night's rum-running expedition.

Despite the courtesies afforded most guests, there was one guest who did not receive preferential treatment. She was a black singer who performed at the hotel during the 1950s and because of the prejudice of the times, was forbidden to eat in the dining room. The woman was told she could heat her meal in her room only and despite her protestations and a call to her manager, she was not allowed into the dining room. It was felt the hotel's reputation as a place for the elite of society would have been damaged.

Moral character aside, the three-storey building contained many palatial features in its infancy, including a marble floor and pillars, an ornate

fireplace, a billiards room and two large chandeliers in the Tropicana Room in its basement. There were two entrances to the hotel.



While the postmark on this postcard of the Rotunda interior of the Quinte Hotel is illegible, we know it was sent from Stirling and received in Belleville on May 31 at 6 a.m. It is likely from the 1920s, as there are two one-cent stamps on the card. Faye Meagher contributed the shot.

Heritage walking tour *March 22, 1993.*

City's historic hotel comes into

By Jennifer Bell

The Intelligencer

Anyone passing the Heritage Days Inn on Pinnacle Street in Belleville might not know the luxuries contained within.

But the three-storey structure — a city landmark since the late 1800s — could be compared to the legendary Phoenix, as it rises from the ashes once again to impressive grandeur.

Participants in Sunday's Architectural Conservancy Branch of Ontario Quinte Branch's 1993 Series tour were given a first-hand look at the extensive renovations given the former Hotel

Quinte by current owners the Jinh family.

"Oohs and aahhs" were key words heard as luxuriously-appointed suites stood open for the looking, courtesy of hotel management.

From the decidedly-Greek Ethos suite with its sunken jacuzzi tub surrounded by Corinthian columns, to the Oriental influence contained in a suite labelled Shangri-la, the Heritage Days Inn has once again come into its own.

The landmark structure at the corner of Bridge and Pinnacle Streets was built in 1895, on the site of the former Dafoe Hotel, which burned several years ear-

lier.

And the Hotel Quinte had only been standing about 10 years when it was also felled by flames.

It was quickly rebuilt, however, and as the marker over the Bridge Street entrance reads, a third floor of rooms was added in 1907.

Quinte ACO president Dan Atkinson told the approximately 50 people who attended the afternoon tour that "a lot of time and money has been spent to get the hotel back to the way it used to be in the 1920s.

"It was a splendid facility then, and when you walk into the lobby today, it is apparent from the spectacular lobby that the

restoration has been beautifully done."

All first and second-floor rooms at the inn — part of the famous Days chain — feature modern amenities, such as color television, air conditioning and full bathrooms, with a carefully-preserved antique look. The inn's theme suites — Greek, Oriental and Indian — include jacuzzi-style bathtubs.



Photo by Jennifer Bell

The Heritage Days Inn has a long and interesting history.

its own -- again