

## Chapter 11

# THE REBIRTH OF THE ALGONQUIN

WHEN I CAME here in 1973, the hotel, being frank about it, was basically a run-down dump. — Jim Frise

**E**VEN DURING THE gaiety of the 1950s, the Algonquin was entering a gradual decline which would eventually result in its being abandoned by the CPR. It is difficult to identify just when this period began; it was bound up with the fortunes of the railroad, but 1958, the year in which Marguerite Shaughnessy, the daughter of Sir Thomas, passed away, may be symbolic. She best represents the second wave of vacationers that patronized St. Andrews and the Algonquin, just as her father best represents the first. In 1958, as well, the CPR discontinued passenger service into St. Andrews and St. Stephen, a harbinger of changes in the transportation business that would affect railways and railway hotels everywhere.

Staff who worked at the Algonquin in the 1950s and 1960s recall the passing of the old guard. John Hatfield, a waiter in 1965, remembers only about eight or ten tables of the older generation of hotel patrons. Howard Pillow died in 1952, Sir James Dunn in 1956, Lord Beaverbrook in 1964, Olive Hosmer in 1965, C.T. Ballantyne in 1966, and R.T. Gill in 1967. For a long time after her husband died, Mrs. Pillow continued to frequent the Algonquin, sitting at her accustomed table along the window, her bottle of wine concealed beneath for legal rather than social reasons, and looking, Hatfield says, “like something out of *Arsenic and Old Lace*.” By 1968 she was there no longer. A newspaper report warned that Kingsbrae, the Pillow home at the top of King Street, was in danger of being town down now that Mrs. Pillow was too

*The Rebirth of the Algonquin*



*Heads of Staff, 1973. Front and Center, Lila Haughn and Jim Frise.  
Rear second from right, Head Bellman George Dashner.*

AL CORBETT

SHIRETOWN ITEMS

**T**HE BUILDING AT the CPR station, which serves as such but can hardly be dignified by the name of depot, has been considerably altered internally and a decided improvement effected. Formerly the staff did their work in a small, poorly lighted and gloomy room situated between two waiting rooms. One of the latter was never used, the one set apart for ladies and so designated. The men's room was used in common and was a sort of co-educational institution. The latter was on the southwest end of the building and was bright and cheery. The partition between this room and the office has been torn down, and the door closed up, making a large, comfortable and convenient place to work in. The former ladies' waiting room, will now be used in common by the few who still travel by train.—G. Frederick Worrell, *St. Croix Courier*, Nov. 7, 1940. ~

infirm to come to St. Andrews for the summer.

The problem was not so much that the second generation was dying, as that the third generation was not coming to fill its place. A New York travel writer noted as far back as 1954 that the summer population of St. Andrews was notably elderly and that there were not many activities for younger people. Mary Jane Magee, chambermaid and elevator operator in the 1950s, wondered why a young person would come there. Except for the view, she recalls, there was not much to recommend the town. There was, in fact, not much to do for either guests or staff. Captains of industry would drop off their families and go back to work, returning periodically to visit and play a round of golf. Fewer and fewer of the old guard came back, and eventually many of the summer mansions on the hill stood vacant and could be picked up, fully furnished, for a song.

Part of the problem was that railway travel had fallen into disfavour. Already in the 1940s fewer people were arriving by train. The town lost its Sunday train in 1951 because of the competition from cars and buses. When passenger service was stopped in the fall of 1958 after the Algonquin closed for the season, the CPR reported that in the preceding twelve months it had sold only six tickets from Saint John to McAdam. In 1959 the beautiful chateau-like station at McAdam, designed by Edward Maxwell, was closed after fifty years of service. In 1960 the Maine Central Railway, connecting Boston and Vanceboro, went out of business, reporting a yearly loss of \$1.5 million.

The CPR saw the construction of the Trans-Canada Highway, which often paralleled the railway, as a direct subsidy to its competition, and the government was investing hugely in the airline industry as well. By the 1960s, the development of the jet and an extensive network of airports made a summer home in Europe almost as close for the wealthy as a summer home in St. Andrews. The CPR's annual report for 1964 summed up the situation bleakly when it concluded that, due to the advantages of improved highways and the airlines, there was no prospect of attracting sufficient rail passengers to offset costs.

The Algonquin did make a last-ditch effort to attract automobile business in the 1960s by entreating the motorist to "Visit the Beautiful Algonquin Motor Hotel" and offering week-long packages on a modified American plan. The advertised rate of about \$12.50 per night would have been for the hotel's least expensive rooms, which offered only running water, with bathroom facilities nearby.

The Algonquin faced new competition from within the accommodations business. After World War II the number of motels in the United States grew from approximately 26,000 in 1948 to 62,000 in 1961. While resort hotels remained more popular than motels and motor inns as final

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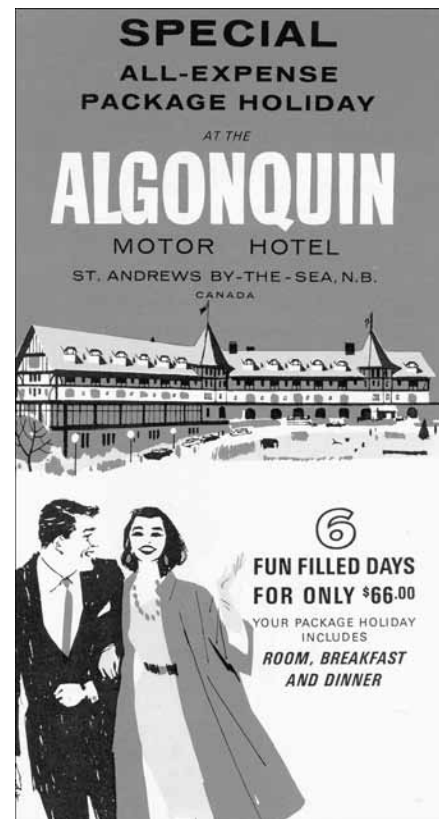
destinations, the more transient tourists preferred the cheaper, more private, and more convenient accommodations en route. In St. Andrews the Picket Fence Motel opened in the 1950s, and two other roadside motels sprang up shortly after. Private baths were standard equipment in modern motels, whereas even in 1960 the Algonquin probably did not have more than thirty-five rooms with private baths.

The CPR was also beginning to withdraw its favour from the Algonquin. This was perhaps inevitable as the grandchildren of the first wave were not coming back for the summer to enjoy the kind of privileged status to which their predecessors had been accustomed. With the creation of the CP Hotels and Resorts subsidiary in 1963, CP seriously served notice that it was now operating its hotels for profit rather than fun. Through the 1960s and early 1970s, it opened substantial motor hotels in various places, and downtown hotels like the Chateau Champlain and the Chateau Lacombe in major cities. CP was also transforming its resort operations. The old Seigneurie Club became Chateau Montebello and the Rocky Mountain resorts were beefed up as four-seasons operations. The Maritimes were no longer considered a lucrative market, and in 1965 the Digby Pines was sold to the Nova Scotia government.

The Algonquin remained a CP property at a cost. In the 1960s it was not yet the “dump” of 1973, but was certainly no longer the “thoroughly modern building” of the 1929 brochure. “Serviceable” is the best that former manager Ken McKell could come up with, when pressed for a description of the hotel’s condition in 1964. Others are less generous. They thought that the hotel was being allowed to run down. Patrick Boudreau, a waiter in 1962, remembers it as “nice, but old,” with an antiquated heating system, old wood trim that had been repainted too many times, and clean but worn carpets. Mike Perry, a storesman in 1961, was astonished to see chambermaids using pieces of cardboard for dust pans. Former Doorman Bill Francis recalls small rooms with no closets, chipped grey paint on concrete floors, and an elevator that stuck between floors.

Overall, recalls Francis, “It was kind of embarrassing sometimes because the only thing they were selling was the beautiful flowers out front and the nice town; and sometimes the meals weren’t that good, and you really had to have something else to placate them because, jeez, when they saw the little rooms. . . . It had to be who you were going to meet there, or do business with in the lobby because the rest of it was not very nice. They didn’t have that nice bar downstairs; that was a place for the staff almost. The main washrooms were poor; it was a tough business.”

How was business in fact? The evidence is only anecdotal but the year-end managerial reviews in the local press do not seem laden with superlatives. The 1957 season was described as “fairly good” and the 1960 season



*The Algonquin Motor Hotel,  
1964. FAIRMONT ALGONQUIN*



## THE ALGONQUIN



Diningroom, circa 1964, and  
room 331, 1964. FAIRMONT  
ALGONQUIN

*The Algonquin continued to put  
on a brave show in its more public  
places, but as the threadbare carpet  
in the second photo shows, the hotel  
was beginning to run down.*



as “successful.” Matthew Corrigan remembers an “egregiously low” house count in 1960. Other former staff recall reading in the elevators, knitting at the main desk, and being given extra days off for lack of business. George Dashner, who began work at the Algonquin in 1970, recalls that the Algonquin was typically the last hostelry in the area to fill. It was a common thing to have guests arrive late at night, having been directed there by officials at the border who knew that there would always be space available.

THE ALGONQUIN HAD doubtlessly been on the CP chopping block for some time, but nothing very definite was evident to staff until the early fall of 1970, when Lila Haughn, secretary to the manager, received a mysterious visit from two burly strangers. This happened after the hotel had closed for the season and had moved its main office, as was customary, to Cottage Number 5 on Carleton Street. The men did not identify themselves but posed some very specific questions about hotel operations. The manager was away, and Haughn felt it inappropriate to divulge information which might be confidential. The strangers then tried the banking department and also attempted to question the chief engineer about hotel maintenance, but, getting no better response, they left and were not seen again.

The incident was small but disturbing. Rumours began to swirl that the CPR was about to sell the hotel: a Jewish group from southern Maine wanted to turn it into a private club; Pentecostals were considering setting up a convention center; the Catholics intended to establish some sort of nunnery. It was all speculation and nobody really knew who might buy the hotel if it were indeed being sold. Many townspeople feared that the Algonquin might either be handed over to potentially undesirable private interests or be closed altogether.

The nervous reaction from business made it very clear that the local economy depended very heavily on the Algonquin. Donald Clinch, president of the Charlotte County Board of Trade, stated that Charlotte County would receive its greatest setback if the Algonquin were shut down, though he thought changes in the operation of the hotel could potentially be beneficial for local tourism, which had been on the wane of late. The mayor of Milltown, John C. Driscoll, stated that “St. Andrews depends on the Algonquin Hotel, and Milltown and St. Stephen depend on St. Andrews.” Without it, he stated, Charlotte County tourism would have to re-invent itself. In St. Andrews itself, Charles Deering, president of the Chamber of Commerce, stated that the loss of the hotel would be a crippling blow for the town.

On November 5, 1970 it was officially announced that the CPR had sold the Algonquin to Algonquin Properties Limited, a consortium of local interests headed up by Murray Vaughan, a Saint John businessman and husband

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ST. ANDREWS IS WHERE IT IS.**

A TOWN NAMED St. Andrews has to have a golf course and this one has two, a nine-hole course and an 18-hole championship course. Both are owned by the Algonquin Hotel but operated separately and open to the general public. The Algonquin is a rambling 200 room pile built by the Canadian Pacific Railroad in 1914 during the year when St. Andrews was the Canadian equivalent of Bar Harbour. The town became a millionaire’s playground in those days and spacious Edwardian mansions joined the stately homes of the loyalists along St. Andrews’ leafy streets. For the well-heeled visitors, most of whom had made their money with the railroad, the Algonquin was the club house and social center. Like similar resort hotels in New England, the Algonquin had been in a decline in recent years, but an aggressive new management is trying to revitalize it. Rates are \$20 to \$29 per person per day for a couple, including breakfast and dinner, and most of the rooms have a superb view of Passamaquoddy Bay. As a promotion the Algonquin offers a “King for a Week” plan during the first two weeks of September that lets you live like an old-time railroad Baron. For \$277 each per couple, the hotel offers accommodations for six nights and seven days, use of the golf course and all Algonquin facilities and all the food you can eat and liquor and wine you can drink.—  
Boston Globe, Quoted in the St. Croix Courier, Oct. 5, 1972. ~

## THE ALGONQUIN

of Marguerite Pillow, only daughter of Howard Pillow. Lady Beaverbrook was said to be a backer, Hosmer money was involved, and there were probably other investors who chose to remain behind the scenes. The hotel was sold for approximately \$550,000, not a bad price for the hotel, Casino, residence, powerhouse, five cottages, private beach, two golf courses, and 245 acres of prime real estate.

According to the official press release, the Algonquin would continue to operate on a long-term basis and was accepting reservations for the summers of 1972, 1973, and 1974. It would be managed by Gabriel Management Limited of Montreal, hotel and restaurant consultants, a company owned by D.M. Mumford, chairman of the board, president of Hilton Canada, and vice-president of Hilton International. The present general manager, N.E. Kennedy, would be transferred to another position within the CPR system, and the new manager would be David MacMillan, former assistant manager at Mont Gabriel Lodge. Haughn would retain her position as secretary to the new manager, and all pre-existing CPR bookings would be honoured as a matter of course.

*Bellstaff, 1970.*  
AL CORBETT

Local fears were not entirely allayed. Vaughan and Beaverbrook, for all their personal wealth, were unlikely to have pockets quite as deep as the CPR's. The vice-

president of Gabriel Management, Jurgen Barteis, attempted to placate the nervous. Gabriel Management, he said, came with excellent references, including among its clients Mont Gabriel Lodge, Mont Gabriel Ski Area, Mont Gabriel Curling Club and Hotel Le Totem, not to mention its properties in Ottawa and the Barbados. Mumford had always been associated with successful operations, and he saw no reason why the hotel operation might not be made a successful and prestigious one. As a part of its plan to restore confidence and make the property profitable, Gabriel would hire completely within New Brunswick, do all its purchasing within the province, and extend the hotel season from three to five months. When pressed,

Gabriel could not state categorically that operations

