

Famed King Edward Hotel was built as a barrier

In 1883, the richest man who ever lived in Toronto built a hotel on King St. and named it the King Edward Hotel after the new king, Edward VII.

The hotel was the last great extravagance of George Goodenham's life, for two years later he was dead.

His father, William Goodenham, had been one of the two original founders of the Goodenham and Warty distillery which became the largest distillery of its kind in the British Empire.

George Goodenham inherited his father's wealth and was an even more successful businessman. He succeeded him as president of the company and also became president of the Bank of Toronto.

When Sir John A. Macdonald died in 1891, George Goodenham succeeded him in the position he had held as president of the Macdonald's Lumber Company.

Serious purpose

In 1882 he built Toronto's famous "Palace" building, the Goodenham Building, at the corner of Wellington and Church Sts. as a head office for his distillery company.

Shortly afterwards, he formed the Toronto Hotel Company and began plans for an immense hotel two blocks north on King St. that would be on a site only occupied by the Walker Astoria Hotel in New York.

What few people realized at the time was that there was a deadly serious purpose behind his plans for the hotel.

Goodenham was determined to do everything he could to stop the business section of the city from moving west across Yonge St.

For most of the 19th century, the heart of Toronto lay east of lower Yonge Street. As late as 1875, the Canadian Illustrated News wrote that there were only two principal streets in Toronto that were paved, well-lit and lined with shops.

The chief one was King St.

The other was Yonge St. but, in the words of the News, Yonge St. was the street of "the business man, the middle-class and the beggar."



**HISTORICAL
TORONTO**
Donald Jones

King St. was the street of the aristocrats.

Five years there was a custom in Victorian Toronto known as "Doing King." In the late afternoon, around 5 p.m., fashionable Torontonians would promenade along the south side of King St., east of Yonge St. to show among the elegant set and to meet friends.

The hotel office of almost every bank was east of Yonge St. and until the 1890s the city hall was at it. At the same address it had occupied since 1844. It the building known today as the David St. Lawrence Market.

But, by the end of the century, the city had moved its offices into a new city hall with a grand clock tower at Bay and Queen Sts. and business had begun to move across Yonge St.

In the early 1890s, Goodenham decided he would spend all the money he could afford to keep the heart of the city in the old part of town and help prevent the other companies' land values.

An architect for his glass and hotel, he commissioned the most famous architect of the day, Eli Lutton, who had designed the new city hall.

Lutton decorated the face of the hotel with French renaissance designs and the main diningroom looked like a vast and lavish interior in one of Louis XV's palaces.

First guest

To decorate the hotel's reception rooms, Goodenham acquired an almost priceless collection of antiques, including 17th Century tapestries, a Canadian painting, Greek statues, a three-rod gold Buddha and the great bust of Diane de Poitiers, mistress of Henry II of France, which was placed in the middle of the latter's lounge.

When the hotel was officially opened on May 21, 1883, with a ball held by the Royal Canadian Yacht Club, an aerial reporter from The Toronto Star described its rooms as

"made to the point of vertigo—over-heat."

The first guest to register was George Goodenham. The first dollar earned by the hotel was donated and presented to him. It was an American \$1 bill and had been spent in the bar.

Goodenham knew it was unlikely that his hotel would ever flourish the investment he had made in it.

It had been a rare extravagance for him. Despite his wealth, he was a basically unpretentious man whose life centered around his family and who preferred to ride the streetcar to his office rather than ascend to his office rather than ascend to his carriage.

The only other two extravagances in his life were his yacht and the palatial home he had built for his family at the corner of Bloor and St. George Sts. which later became the York Club.

Private charity

In 1905, when he died, he left an estate worth more than \$2 million at a time when millionaires were a rarity in Canada.

He had never transferred a single share of his stock to evade taxation duties because he said it wouldn't be honest.

The vast amount that he gave to charities and schools was always given privately, without publicity.

For many years after his death, his hotel still kept the fashionable center of the city east of Yonge St. and proved so popular that in 1923 a library addition was made to it.

As late as the 1950s, it continued to be the main heart of Toronto's society, and in 1956 the official ceremonial luncheon that celebrated Toronto's 100th anniversary as a city was held in its ballroom.

But nothing could stop the business community from moving across Yonge St. and into the skyscrapers that were beginning to line Bay St. and later University Ave.

The hotel had been a valiant gesture, its architecture was extraordinary.

Next month, the Toronto Historical Board will allow one of its plaques beside the main entrance on King St. and declare the old hotel one of Toronto's landmarks.