

100 YEARS

The Grand Old Dâme of Nelson – the Heritage Inn reaches 100

Nelson, 1913. The city wharf is alive with activity. Moments ago, the towering, stately figure of the sternwheeler *Nasookin* had slid into her berth, the deep baritone of her steam horn echoing across the water. Passengers are filing down the gangplank, met by family members waving

By Arthur Joyce



gloved hands and shouting, "Amy! James—I'm right here!" Neatly uniformed porters follow, pushing dollies stacked high with suitcases and steamer trunks. Children weave and bob at each other through the crowd, giggling delightedly.

A row of carriages stands waiting for customers, their teams of horses snuffing and pacing slightly, the metal links in their leather harnesses clinking. Their drivers—commonly known as 'hackies'—stand above the hubbub of conversation, shouting through cupped hands, "Strathcona Hotel—this way!" "Queens! Five minutes to royal comfort!" "Hume! The hotel without equal!"

This is the scene as described in the memoirs of Freeda Brunswick Hume-Bolton, one of the daughters of J. Fred Hume, builder and until 1907, owner of the Hotel Hume. Prior to the hotel's grand opening on St. Patrick's Day, 1898, *The March 12 Tribune* wrote that, "...between Winnipeg on the east, and Vancouver on the west, no such building exists." In many ways the story of the Hotel Hume is the story of Nelson itself.

Hotel Hume Chronology 1897–1998

The following chronology is taken from Nelson's early newspapers, *The Tribune*, *Nelson Daily Miner*, and *Nelson Economist*, and the memoirs of Freeda Brunswick Hume-Bolton.

Saturday, June 12, 1897. "Work was commenced Friday morning on the new hotel to be erected on the corner of Vernon and Ward streets by J. Fred Hume, MPP, and H.D. (Horace) Hume of Vancouver," announces today's issue of the *Tribune*. Workers are preparing the ground for the hotel's foundation. As yet, Nelson's downtown is still cleaved in half by the deep ravine of Ward Creek. Passage across Vernon and Baker streets is by woodframe bridges. For this reason, a foundation of locally-hewn granite and some filling of the site is essential.

"The building will be...a frame structure," notes the *Tribune*, thus narrowly squeaking under the wire of the new fire bylaw passed in July, 1897 by Nelson's first elected city council and Mayor John Houston—a close friend of Hume's. The bylaw stipulates that, "Hereafter no frame buildings will be permitted to be erected upon the blocks taking in the business portion of the city. ...the

danger from fire (being) sufficiently great."

August 4, 1897. The contract for the hotel is granted to the construction firm McLarty and Clayton, likely chosen by supervising architect Alexander Charles Ewart. A native of Gray county, Ontario, Ewart began his career as a carpenter. Following the building booms of the West, he makes his way to Oregon during the 1880s, where he studies architecture. In 1891, he arrives in Victoria as an architect of four years' standing. Barely two months after Nelson's incorporation in 1897, Ewart makes the young city his home and centre of business. The year proves a busy one—in addition to drawing up plans for the Hume, he designs the McKillop Block, Elliot Block, Applewhaite Block, the Land Registry office on Vernon Street and Judge J.A. Forin's Dutch Colonial residence at 519 Cedar.

August 11, 1897. "The stone basement of the Hotel Hume is almost completed," reports the *Nelson Economist*, and "the general contractor will commence the superstructure next week; cost when completed will be about \$25,000." Construction costs are easily covered by the proceeds from the recent sale of the Columbia & Kootenay Steam Navigation Company by Hume and partners to the CPR for about \$250,000. The C&KSN had been responsible for putting two of the earliest steamboats in service on the West Kootenay and Arrow Lakes—the catamaran *Despatch* and the small sternwheeler *S.S. Nelson*. The hotel is a joint venture between J. Fred Hume, his brother Horace, and J.A. Kirkpatrick.

January 12, 1898. The hotel has been gradually taking shape over the winter and with it, the pitch of anticipation in the community for its opening. The *Nelson Economist* reports—prematurely, as it turns out—that the Hume is expected to open to the public by February 15.

March 2, 1898. The *Nelson Economist* reports that the Hume is "being furnished and put in readiness for opening." One can envision