

# Royal Hotel's early grandeur came at a price

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THE COUNTY

Constructed by Jonathan Mottashed, in the early 1880s, Picton's Royal Hotel is slated for a return to its original splendour.

New owners Elliott Sage Design and Construction plan to transform the first three floors to a refined boutique hotel, while added condominium spaces will reflect their owners' gracious lifestyles.

There will also be restaurants, boutique shopping and live entertainment incorporated within the grand plan for The Royal.

Rooms will be renovated to the highest standards and special attention and quality craftsmanship will be focussed on historic details, throughout the hotel.

At the time of its construction, The Royal was considered the most modern hotel between Toronto and Montreal. However, its grandeur came at a price. With his finances stretched to the limit, by this ambitious building project, Mottashed found it necessary to sell most of his property to John Soby.

The builder, who constructed Main Street's Mottashed Block (later known as the Newman Block), Victoria Terrace on King Street, and numerous other Picton stores and houses, was reported to have died without money. His legacy was The Royal Hotel, which today is regarded as his greatest achievement.

In 1928, Mottashed's son, George, visited Picton from his home, in Shreveport, Louisiana. It was the first time he had returned to the town of his birth, in more than 40 years. He recalled that he was born at the site of the Quinte Hotel, which his father ran for a time.

John Soby owned The Royal Hotel, until 1886, when he sold it to E. James Healey, who was active in its operation for more than 50 years. His career as a hotelier began in 1881 when he operated the Roblin's Mill hotel in Ameliasburg Township. Later, he operated the Paisley Hotel in Napanee.

Healey was well-known in harness racing circles. He owned a stable of fine pacers and trotters and competed on international racing circuits in Canada and the United States. His horses were driven by Dr. E.M. Herrington of Picton.

Mr. Healey's son Fred, a graduate of the Royal Military College, joined his father in the hotel business in 1922, following his retirement from a successful career as a railroad construction engineer.

James Healey, who was living in a suite of rooms at The Royal Hotel, died in 1947, at the age of 91. His son, Fred, died just two years later. He was 68.

At his father's death, Fred Healey became the sole proprietor of The Royal. He was also the proprietor of Prince Edward Motors (now the location of County Blossoms), a modern garage and service station.

The Royal Hotel later was purchased by former Picton mayor and construction magnate Harvey J. McFarland, who owned it for a number of years. Many local residents recall that he established it as "the place to go" for fine dining.

Mrs. Evelyn Drew of Picton, a cousin of John Soby, who purchased the hotel from its builder, Jonathan Mottashed, remembers enjoying many pleasant dinners at The Royal.



Elliott Sage Design and Construction's plan to transform Picton's Royal Hotel.



The Royal Hotel in the late 50s, early 60s.

"There was a lovely dining room with beautiful draperies and white linens on the tables when Harvey took over," she says.

The Royal was often the scene of elegant cocktail parties, wedding receptions and wedding rehearsal dinners, she adds.

Mrs. Drew also remembers The Royal in earlier days, when it was managed by James Healey. She says the late Merle Pearsall, a local beautician, operated a hair salon on the premises. Later, Merle and her husband purchased the former North American Hotel where she



opened a beauty parlour. She called it The Royal Beauty Salon, presumably the name under which it operated when located at the Royal Hotel.

Mrs. Drew recalls that the late Dayton Wark was the manager of The Royal Hotel for a time. He was followed by Douglas Boland.

"I remember the Sunday dinners at The Royal. It was a lovely spot, really a posh place and it wasn't expensive," Mrs. Drew notes.

Throughout its long and colourful history, several other businessmen have owned The Royal, briefly. Among them were Waggott and Clapp, J.P. Thorn and VanVlack and Hicks (1889).

For many years, The Royal Hotel has been owned by Len Kordy. Under his management, this historic building has retained its popularity as a favourite gathering place. Today it stands on the threshold of a new era.

## Hotelier was chief instigator of horse racing on Main Street

An early proprietor of The Royal Hotel, E. James Healey was born on Wolfe Island in 1856.

He came to Picton, in 1880, and in 1881 married Charlotte Martin. In the same year, he also purchased the Roblin's Mills Hotel.

The young businessman farmed for a year in Corbyville, then opened a livery in Napanee, with partner William Hatch. A year later, he purchased the Paisley Hotel. In 1886, he bought The Royal.

For many years, Healey was a member of the Prince Edward County Agricultural Society. He was also a buyer of hops and apples and operated evaporators in Picton and Wellington. He owned a farm at RR 2, Picton and ranches in Alberta. In 1907, he bought the Dougall property on Main Street East. It later became the home of his son, Fred Healey.

At the time of his death, at the age of 91, James Healey was believed to be one of the oldest hotel operators in Canada.

His passion for fine horses was well-known. Every year

he attended the feature Canadian and American meets and during his lifetime, owned many outstanding trotters and pacers. His horses competed in the principle racing circuits in Canada and the northern United States.

In partnership with Dr. Ed Herrington and Brigadier Bernard Hepburn, Mr. Healey at one time stabled more than 30 horses in Picton.

It was noted that he rarely drove his horses, when they raced, but he did take the reins when competing with "Billy Mac" at the May 24th races at Picton fairgrounds.

At the time of Mr. Healey's death, Picton's Chief of Police, Bert Biddle recalled that the hotelier was the chief instigator of horse racing on Main Street. Horsing on the town's main thoroughfare was a popular sport in the late 1800s.

In Mr. Healey's obituary, his fondness for horse racing was observed and it was noted that one of England's leading trotting sires "Guy West" was exported from Picton by "Jim" Healey.

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