

ALGONQUIN HOTEL

REASONS FOR DESIGNATION:

Built in 1888 by William H. Plummer, the Algonquin Hotel is of architectural significance and its history is interwoven with the development of the City of Sault Ste. Marie.

The hotel stands as a monument to the robustness of Victorian architecture in the use of brick masonry and contains a prominent painted metal cornice to the west and south elevations.

The Algonquin is the sole surviving member of the large city hotels constructed close to the turn of the century to cater to a young, rapidly expanding industrial centre.

**Algonquin Hotel
864 Queen Street East
Sault Ste. Marie**

By-Law:	83-60
Date:	February 28, 1983
G.I.S. record:	X: 705,385.486 Y: 5,153,795.102



**An Architectural and Historical Report
For The Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee
Sault Ste. Marie Historical Board**

November, 1982

***This is an edited copy of the original document
Originals included in the Municipal Heritage Committee Binder - Titled: "Algonquin Hotel"**

THE ALGONQUIN HOTEL

INTRODUCTION:

The purpose of this report is to put forth documentation supporting the designation of the Algonquin Hotel.

This report highlights both an architectural and historical designation of the building. To assist in its evaluation, information has been gathered from the City Library, newspaper clippings, etc., and photographs both past and present.

The Algonquin Hotel property is described as follows: Plan 605, Lots A and B of the Abbott Subdivision, Civic Number 864 Queen Street East.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

The exterior dimensions of the hotel are 110' X 48' and it stands 50' high. The building is of three storeys with a full basement. The exterior exit and storage add-ons around the building were not part of the original structure and the brick two-storey south elevation has replaced a two-storey wood veranda with steps up to the first floor level from Queen Street (see photos A & B). Early photographs show the polygonal corner was capped with a truncated tent roof approximately 16 feet above the roof level. The west elevation also was equipped with what appears to be a cast iron balcony at second floor level only bracketed from the wall extending the distance of the three windows in the middle of the wall. (See photo C).

The exterior of the Algonquin is all brick with the exception of an extremely heavily moulded painted metal cornice to the south and west elevations. The main feature of the cornice is a continuous row of chevron moulding. The cornice is terminated at the south end and northwest corners of the building by a corbel bearing a rounded end stop (See photo D). (A similar detail may be seen on the roof of the "New American Hotel".) The stop rises approximately 18" higher than the cornice. At each floor level a belt course of brick 12" wide runs horizontally between windows and turns to arch over each window. This rhythm is maintained on all sides of the building and although painted over today, early photographs indicate a polychromatic effect.

Both the south elevation cornice and the north wall extend as parapets above the level of the roof which slopes in a plane to the east. The majority of original wood double hung sash windows have been removed at various times and replaced with a pre-finished aluminium window. Masonry arches over the

windows are all segmental on north west and east elevations but the tower windows and the top floor of the south elevation have Roman Arches and these also originally existed on the south elevation – since concealed by the porch addition.

HISTORICAL DESCRIPTION:

The Algonquin Hotel was built in 1888 by William H. Plummer. The architect is unknown. Financing for the project was arranged through the Bank of Commerce in Toronto. Originally, Mr. Plummer eased his financial burden by selling stock in the Algonquin, but in time he secured complete control of the hotel.

The late 1880's were a time of prosperity for the town of Sault Ste. Marie. In 1887, the C.P.R. was extended to the town and joined to the U.S. rail system via the International Bridge. This was also the year that Sault Ste. Marie received its town charter. Construction of the Canadian Lock began in 1889. By 1891, about twenty small industries operated in Sault Ste. Marie.

The town experienced a rapid population increase: from 879 in 1871 to 1621 in 1890.¹ The population base of Sault Ste. Marie also underwent a change as the construction projects attracted skilled ethnic workers, notably Italians and Scandinavians. It is in this boom climate that the Algonquin Hotel was built.

William H. Plummer arrived in Sault Ste. Marie in May 1873 at the age of 26. He set up a merchandising business in partnership with Tom Marks. When the latter moved from Sault Ste. Marie, Plummer carried on the business under the name of Plummer & Co. By 1888 he was an established businessman and one of the leading citizens of Sault Ste. Marie. His commercial interests centered around the Plummer general store at the corner of Pim and Queen Streets, an area which came to be known as "Plummer's Corner" (formerly the site of Phipp's store and dock which Plummer had purchased).

Today, W. H. Plummer is remembered as a former mayor of Sault Ste. Marie, having held that post from 1892-1895, 1899-1900 and 1903-1905, a record nine times equalled only by Jack McMeeken in 1937-1945. The Plummer Memorial Hospital bears his name after his heirs donated the Plummer estate, Lynnehurst, to what was then the Royal Victoria Hospital in 1919.

A number of forces contributed to the building of the Algonquin Hotel. In 1888 the International Hotel was built by N. M. Neald and J. C. Meagher on the

¹ J.E. and E. Bayliss, *River of Destiny*, p.247 and *Municipal Handbook 1981-1982*, p.85

east corner of Bruce and Queen Streets. It could accommodate 500 guests in 225 rooms, had a dining room capacity of 400, was open all year round, and boasted of all the modern conveniences of 1888. Soon it was referred to as “the grandest house of all.”²

Plummer immediately saw this as a threat to his business interests. A debate was raging in the 1880’s and 1890’s as to where the centre of town should be located. Plummer argued for Pim and Queen Streets since his interests was based there, while others preferred Bruce and Queen Streets. The westward location of the International threatened to transfer the bulk of the business activity of the community to the west end, away from Plummer’s Corner.

Although the Pacific Hotel, owned by Jim Miller, operated on lower Pim Street and had a reputation as a leading hotel serving a high-class clientele, it was too small to offset the growing influence of the International. Recognizing this, Plummer resolved to build the Algonquin.

It is interesting to note that the construction of the Post Office in 1904 at the corner of Queen and East fixed the centre of town for many years in the general vicinity of Plummer’s Corner. The election of W. H. Plummer to the mayoral office and the success of the Algonquin as a viable competitor to the International had won the day for the Plummer interests.

During the years the Algonquin Hotel has played a moderate role in the history of Sault Ste. Marie. It was here that Francis Hector Clergue stayed in September 1894 after he successfully negotiated the purchase of the municipally owned water power company, thus launching the Clergue industrial empire in Sault Ste. Marie.

The dining room of the Algonquin was the site of a luncheon held in honour of H.R.H. Arthur, Duke of Connaught and His Royal Highnesses, the Duchess and Princess Patricia when they visited the City in August 29, 1912.

There is also a reference in the Sault Star to the movie actress Bette Davis staying in the hotel, although no date is mentioned.³

Today the Algonquin looks basically as it did in 1888. The most obvious changes being the removal of the triple-decker wooden porches in 1956 and then conical roof structure advertising the hotel’s name.⁴

The Algonquin Hotel stands as an important link to the early history of the town of Sault Ste. Marie and its growth into a modern city. It reminds us of the

² Aileen Collins, *Our Town*, v.1, p.27

beginnings of the modern tourist trade and of the contributions of William H. Plummer to the city.

EVALUATION:

The Algonquin Hotel demonstrates both architectural and historical significance in the development of Sault Ste. Marie. Its architectural design has been utilized in other buildings in the city.

Of historical significance, the site links early commercial and trade activities of the City. The hotel was built by a prominent businessman, W. H. Plummer, who also served as mayor of the city for nine terms between 1892 and 1905.

Today the building offers potential as an excellent opportunity for rehabilitation.

Photos Taken: July 2003/2004



Photos Taken: July 2003/2004



Photos Taken: July 2003/2004



Photos Taken: July 2003/2004



A



Algonquin Hotel
View from South -
West 1982.

B



Polygonal tower at
S-W corner.
(The exit to the west and
the two storey brick
addition to the south
are of mid 1950's vintage)



Algonquin Hotel.
South East Corner
detail showing
pressed metal cornice.



North Elevation.
1982.



Photo courtesy of the Sault Ste. Marie Museum

