

**“We Shape Our Buildings; Thereafter They Shape Us:” The
Bessborough Hotel and its Home Community, 1927-2015**

A Thesis Submitted to the College of Graduate Studies and Research
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts in History

University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon

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Abstract

On December 10, 1935, in the midst of the Great Depression, the Canadian National-owned Bessborough Hotel opened in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. This Chateau castle-style hotel was immediately lauded as a symbol of Saskatoon's progress, impending economic prosperity, and future greatness. "The Bess", as it is locally known, joined the ranks of Canada's grand railway hotels that became important social and cultural spaces for their home communities.

The Bessborough Hotel, because of its parent company, unique architecture, central location, and overall grandeur, symbolized the community's ambitions and status as a major prairie city. Through an analysis of newspaper articles, oral interviews, and archival sources, this thesis studies the way the community used the hotel as an expression of this role and its place in the city. From its construction and opening during the Great Depression to its 1973 sale to a prominent local family to its current day status as a corporate entity, this thesis examines how this relationship developed and changed over the course of the hotel's history. It also examines three groups, Saskatoon's gay community, the long-haired young people of the 1970s, and the residents of Saskatoon's west side, who were excluded from the hotel because they did not fit into the aspirations for the city and how they carved out a space for themselves against opposition. Overall, the history of the Bessborough Hotel contributes to the important discussion of how place, and the competing histories within a space, affect our historical understanding of the past.

Acknowledgments

The last two years have been enormously rewarding for me as I dived into the history of the Bessborough Hotel and much of that is due to the people that have been part of this process. This thesis would not have been possible without the guiding hand of my supervisor, Bill Waiser. Throughout this project, he has provided guidance, support, and the occasional criticism which made my thesis (and myself) better. Bill was always available to read through whatever I was writing, be a sounding board for formulating ideas, or just to check in on how I (and my cat) were doing. I have learned so much from him as a historian and as a writer – he is an inspiration on both fronts. Thank you for letting me be number 39. It has been a truly gratifying experience.

Thank you to my committee members, Valerie J. Korinek and Angela Kalinowski, for their comments and advice over the last two years. They have helped shaped my ideas and the trajectory of this project for the better. Dr. Korinek, in particular, helped with my section on Saskatoon's gay community and generously provided her expertise on the subject. Thanks as well to my external examiner, Ryan Walker, who graciously took the time out of his summer to engage with my research and ask thoughtful and provoking questions.

Thank you to the participants, both named and unnamed, who agreed to share with me their time and their memories of the Bessborough. It was greatly appreciated. Thank you to Stefan Deprez, Gloria Erickson, and the Bessborough Hotel management who allowed me access to the Bessborough's private archives as well as their own memories of their time at the hotel. Thanks as well to the Department of History at the University of Saskatchewan for their financial support.

Thanks to the nine others who entered into this program with me – Michelle Brandsma, Alex Deighton, Lesya Lepka Frost, Erin Gallagher-Cohoon, Samuel Gillis Hogan, Colin Osmond, Daniel Palmer, Mitchell Smith, and Justin Voogel – who read many drafts of my work and

provided incredibly helpful feedback in class and during lunch at Louis'. The time we spent together and the bonds we formed have been the highlight of my time here at the University of Saskatchewan. In particular, I want to thank Michelle, Lesya, Erin, and Colin for editing my draft chapters, providing encouragement and a sympathetic ear as well as much needed downtime.

My parents, Alvin and Janet Hubert, have supported my educational endeavors since the very beginning even though I had no concrete answer to the 'what do you do with a history degree?' question. They have always believed in my abilities as a writer and a scholar and their emotional, moral, and financial support has sustained me throughout this process. There is no adequate thank you for all that they have given me.

To my partner, Steven Gnatovich, thank you for believing in me, and us, enough to pick up your life to move with me to Saskatchewan so that I could pursue my master's degree. Your support and encouragement over these last two years mean more to me than I could possibly convey here. Thank you for reading everything out loud to me so I could decide if it was any good, for waking up in the middle of the night to find the chapter I had lost, and for very good naturedly tolerating the books and papers that you had to clear off your side of the bed each night. I am blessed to be so well loved by you.

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Introduction

During Expo 67 in Montreal, Canadians sought to promote their country and its unique places. Architect and University of British Columbia professor Abraham Rogatnick wrote a piece for *The Architectural Review* that highlighted a distinctive Canadian phenomenon: the chain of luxury railway hotels built by the Canadian Pacific, Canadian National and Grand Trunk Railways that spanned the country. Rogatnick proclaimed the importance of these spaces to their local communities:

Almost any Canadian born within a reasonable distance from one of these centres will recall today that nearly all the important landmarks of his life took place or were celebrated – and even solemnized – in his local railway hotel...the functions that the church, the manse, the guild hall, and the town hall – as well as the inn – fulfilled for the ancient European, the railway hotel provided for the modern Canadian.¹

While more celebratory than analytical, Rogatnick's article examines an important aspect of railway hotel history that is almost always ignored: their relationship with their home communities. But how true is his romantic generalization? Are the railway hotels truly that important to their home communities? These hotels have generally been understood as upper class tourist destinations, and little attention has been paid to relationships between these buildings and the cities they were built in. To answer this question, I will be using Saskatoon's Bessborough Hotel as a case study. The Bessborough Hotel was built between 1930 and 1932 by the Canadian National Railways in the popular Chateau architectural style. Since its grand opening in 1935, the Bessborough has remained a vital part of Saskatoon's downtown core.

To fully understand the meaning and significance behind the building of the Bessborough Hotel in Saskatoon, what the railway hotel chain had come to represent across the country by 1935 needs to be examined. The idea of building a grand luxury hotel originated with the American

¹ Abraham Rogatnick, "Canadian Castles: Phenomenon of the Railway Hotel," *Architectural Review* 141, no 843 (1967): 367-8.

president of the Canadian Pacific Railway, William Cornelius Van Horne. In 1885, the transcontinental Canadian Pacific Railway line had been completed. Now, the Canadian Pacific had to find people to ride it. But agricultural immigrants were not coming to Western Canada, at least not in the numbers needed to turn a profit for the indebted CPR. So Van Horne turned to a new class of passengers that he saw as the answer, at least in part, to their financial problems: the first-class tourist passenger. Van Horne dreamed of building luxury resort hotels in Canada's majestic mountain ranges, and indeed all across the country, that would entice tourists to come visit Canada. They would be able to see the country's breathtaking scenery from a hotel that would rival or exceed the comfort of their own homes.²

To this end, in 1883 Van Horne began petitioning the Canadian federal government to pass a law that would grant protection to areas of Canada's grand wilderness. In the summer of 1885 when three young men took him to visit their newly discovered mineral hot springs in the heart of the Rocky Mountains, Van Horne realized that these hot springs could be the CPR's golden ticket. He paid the three founders \$675 a piece to give up any and all claim to their new discovery. Van Horne believed that tourists would flock to Banff to take advantage of the healing properties of the waters. The federal government agreed. In the fall of 1885, John A. Macdonald's Conservative government passed an order-in-council that set aside a twenty-six square kilometer area around these new hot springs.³ This small tract of land would eventually be enlarged into what is today known as the Banff National Park.

The Banff Springs Hotel, which overlooks the junction of the Bow and Spray rivers, opened in 1888. To say that Van Horne was personally involved in the execution of his plan would

² Barbara Chisholm, and John Lindsay, "Introduction and Historical Overview," in *Castles of the North: Canada's Grand Hotels*, ed. Barbara Chisholm (Toronto: Lynx Images Inc., 2001), 10.

³ Frances Backhouse, "Banff Springs Hotel," in *Castles of the North: Canada's Grand Hotels*, ed. Barbara Chisholm (Toronto: Lynx Images Inc., 2001), 29-30.

be a grand understatement. He personally designed the CPR's first class passenger cars after being dissatisfied by the cars built by the leading supplier of the day. American architect Bruce Price was chosen to design the Banff Springs Hotel, which was modelled after the famous spa resorts of Europe and drew heavily on the sixteenth century French châteaux architecture. Van Horne supplemented Price's designs with plans of his own and was on site to personally supervise its construction.⁴ Van Horne did not wait to see if he could make one hotel profitable before building another, this time on the west coast.

The first Hotel Vancouver, a "sort of glorified farmhouse", was built on Georgia Street, near Granville Street, in May of 1888.⁵ While Port Moody was designated the original western terminus of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1879, Van Horne decided that he much preferred the area of Granville. This spot, in what is now Vancouver's modern-day Gastown district, was considered "way out in the sticks" as it was a fair walk from the already established business district.⁶ Van Horne was not deterred. In 1887, the newly completed railway added an extra twelve miles of track to Van Horne's chosen harbor. Against the wishes of the residents of Vancouver Island, Van Horne named his new terminal 'Vancouver' and immediately ordered a new hotel to be constructed.⁷ Hotel Vancouver opened the following year and Van Horne's critics watched in amazement as the city slowly crept down Granville Street, closer and closer to the Hotel Vancouver.⁸ Such was the draw of a railway hotel. Hotel Vancouver would go through two incarnations before it became the imposing structure found in downtown Vancouver today.⁹

⁴ Ibid., 30.

⁵ Terry Reksten, "Hotel Vancouver," in *Castles of the North: Canada's Grand Hotels*, ed. Barbara Chisholm (Toronto: Lynx Images Inc., 2001), 253.

⁶ Ibid., 253.

⁷ John A. Eagle, *The Canadian Pacific Railway and the Development of Western Canada 1896-1914*, (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), 3.

⁸ Reksten, "Hotel Vancouver," 253.

⁹ Ibid., 261-262.

The success of these first two hotels spurred the continuation of the Canadian Pacific hotel line. Its next hotel, the Chateau Frontenac, was built in Quebec City in 1893, the first true Canadian chateau-style hotel.¹⁰ The CPR's success inspired other railway companies to build their own competing hotels. Between 1890 and 1930, the Canadian Pacific built over fifteen railway hotels all across the country, from Victoria to Winnipeg and from Quebec City to Halifax. The Grand Trunk Railway, which was building a more northern transcontinental route through the prairies, also wanted to establish railway hotels along their line. The Grand Trunk's president, an American named Charles Melville Hays, was similar to Van Horne: a talented and ambitious railway man with a daunting vision for his company. Hays' flagship hotel was to be built in Ottawa and named after the current Primer Minister, Sir Wilfrid Laurier. Laurier had supported the controversial sale of a piece of Major Hill's Park to the Grand Trunk for the location of the hotel. Just before its grand opening in April of 1912, tragedy struck the Grand Trunk. Hays, who had been returning from Europe to attend the opening, perished aboard the *R.M.S. Titanic*. The ceremony was cancelled. After six weeks, the Chateau Laurier quietly opened on June 1, 1912.¹¹

Despite its tragic beginnings the hotel proved immediately popular and the Grand Trunk continued on the path started by Hays.¹² Two more hotels were built in quick succession in the same architectural style as the Laurier: Winnipeg's Fort Garry in 1913 and Edmonton's Hotel Macdonald in 1915. However, the Grand Trunk soon fell into severe financial trouble. In 1919, Grand Trunk defaulted on its loan payments to the federal government and was nationalized later that year. In 1923, Grand Trunk and its subsidiaries were amalgamated with several other smaller

¹⁰ Frances Gagnon Pratte, "Le Chateau Frontenac," in *Castles of the North: Canada's Grand Hotels*, ed. Barbara Chisholm (Toronto: Lynx Images Inc., 2001), 132.

¹¹ Barbara Chisholm, "Chateau Laurier," in *Castles of the North: Canada's Grand Hotels*, ed. Barbara Chisholm (Toronto: Lynx Images Inc., 2001), 175-176.

¹² *Ibid.*, 175.

railways, including the Canadian Northern Railway, the Intercolonial Railway, and the National Transcontinental Railway to form the Canadian National Railways.¹³ The Canadian National took possession of the former company's rail lines, debts, and the Grand Trunk's three hotels.

The newly formed Canadian National was not content to simply own three railway hotels. It intended to build its own. In 1923, Sir Henry Thornton, the American president of the Canadian National, built the "largest single story log cabin in the world" on the banks of Lac Beauvert near Jasper, Alberta.¹⁴ It was christened the Jasper Park Lodge. Unlike the railway hotels that had come before it, Jasper Park Lodge was not built in the chateau style. Rather, it was designed to fit into its surroundings while still providing all the services guests would expect at the most prestigious hotels. But Thornton went one step further. He hired renowned golf architect Stanley Thompson to build an 18-hole golf course at Jasper Park Lodge. While going incredibly over budget, Jasper Park Lodge's golf course opened in 1925, three years before the course at the Banff Springs Hotel.¹⁵ Canadian National Railways seemed prepared to compete with the Canadian Pacific. Jasper Park Lodge was followed by construction of Halifax's The Nova Scotian and Saskatoon's The Bessborough in 1930, as well as Prince Edward Island's The Charlottetown in 1931. By 1932, Henry Thornton's management of the nationally owned company came under fire. The Conservative government of R.B. Bennett accused him of spending lavish amounts on unnecessary projects such as the Jasper Park Lodge golf course. It even went so far as to accuse the Canadian National of being the public's white elephant.¹⁶ Indeed, in 1932, Thornton was forced to resign his position and forgo his pension.¹⁷ He returned to the United States in disgrace and died a year later.

¹³ T.D. Regehr, *The Canadian Northern Railway, Pioneer Road of the Northern Prairies, 1895-1918*. (Toronto: The Macmillian Company of Canada, 1976), 469.

¹⁴ Barbara Chisholm and Robert W. Sanford, "Jasper Park Lodge," in *Castles of the North: Canada's Grand Hotels*, ed. Barbara Chisholm (Toronto: Lynx Images Inc., 2001), 54.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁶ A "white elephant" refers to an extravagant but burdensome possession that cannot be easily disposed of.

¹⁷ Chisholm and Sanford, "Jasper Park Lodge," 58.

While Canadian Pacific and Canadian National still constructed several more hotels, the golden era of the railway hotel was coming to a close.

1888 to 1935 was a period of unparalleled growth for Canadian railway hotels. By the 1930s, every province had at least one railway hotel and most major Canadian cities had one. The success of the hotels during this time clearly demonstrates their popularity and their importance: “from the 1890s through to the 1960s, if an event of social consequence was taking place, it was taking place at one of the hotels...No other place had the splendor so evocative of European court life.”¹⁸ They were destinations for international royalty and celebrities, such as the King and Queen of Siam, King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, and even The Beatles. They provided an air of glamour and sophistication to Canada’s major cities and luxury mountain resorts.¹⁹ The hotels’ unique architecture style also played a part in their symbolic importance in Canada. While the Canadian Chateau style, a mix of Scottish and French styles, was created by American architect Bruce Price, “by the thirties, the style had acquired such strong nationalistic symbolism” that it became as something uniquely Canadian.²⁰ The hotels’ opulence, architecture, and European connections all played a part in their incredible popularity throughout the first half of the 20th century. They are important spaces that contribute to our understanding of how communities’ social and cultural mores have changed and developed.

The hotels were clearly beloved by their home communities, but how have they been understood by the academic community? The first – and most often cited – article on the Canadian railway hotel line was written by Canadian-American architect and University of British Columbia

¹⁸ Chisholm and Lindsay, “Introduction,” 7.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Harold Kalman, *The Railway Hotels and the Development of the Chateau Style in Canada* (Victoria: University of Victoria Maltwood Museum, 1968), 25.

professor, Abraham Rogatnick entitled “Canadian Castles: Phenomenon of the Railway Hotel (1967).”²¹ This article’s main goal is to celebrate Canada’s railway hotels as an “architectural phenomenon unique to that country.”²² While this article appears in the *Architectural Review*, it includes little discussion about the “unique” architectural style. It does, however, spend considerable time celebrating the narrative history of the railway companies and hotel lines and their general importance to Canada. Given that this article was written in preparation for Expo 67, the celebratory bent of the article is not surprising.

The influence of the Chateau style in Canadian architecture is an aspect of the railway hotel’s influence that is examined in other works. In the short monograph, *The Railway Hotels and the Development of the Chateau style in Canada*, Harold D. Kalman, a former University of British Columbia professor and current historical consultant, explores how the Chateau style was conceived, constructed, and changed over time. Kalman is only interested in the design of the railway hotels built in this style, as well as the influence that this style had on other buildings in Canada, such as the Central Post Office and the Supreme Court Building.²³ *The Railway Hotels and the Development of the Chateau Style in Canada* provides the most in-depth understanding of the way the Chateau style evolved as more hotels were built. Kalman also ties the changes in the chateau style to changing attitudes, noting that “during the twenties and thirties the style became appreciated as something uniquely Canadian.”²⁴ Kalman links this emerging attitude to the building of the Bessborough Hotel in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, stating that “by exaggerating the chateau characteristics one aspired to greater nationalism; hence the profuse detail on the

²¹Rogatnick, “Canadian Castles,” 365.

²²Ibid.

²³Kalman, *The Railway Hotels*, 25.

²⁴ Ibid., 21.

Bessborough Hotel.”²⁵ Both Rogatnick’s and Kalman’s pieces were written at a time when “architects and critics, like many of their artist-colleagues, had viewed the articulation of nationality as a crucial task for Canadian architecture.”²⁶ While both Rogatnick and Kalman’s work shed light on some important aspects of these railway hotels, they do so in a way that is uncritical of the idea of Canadian nationalism and the role these hotels played in nurturing it.

In 1993, University of British Columbia art history professor Rhodri Windsor Liscombe wrote an article for *Architectural History* entitled, “Nationalism or Cultural Imperialism?: The Chateau Style in Canada.” In this article, Liscombe discusses what Kalman briefly addresses in his work: the idea that railway hotels were used as nationalizing agents, or as Liscombe argues, as agents of cultural imperialism. Liscombe discusses the building of these hotels through their ties to powerful Scottish-born Canadians, who “ensured the extensive adoption of the [Scottish] Baronial-chateau style in railway hotels and bank architecture.”²⁷ Like Kalman’s work, Liscombe only looks at the railway hotels in terms of the architects and specific styles, arguing that there were different motivations behind the development of such a style. Liscombe argues that while the style initially reflected the popular tastes of Canada’s men of influence’s home countries, the Chateau style became increasingly tied to images that were “seen as susceptible to the interpretation in terms [of the] astute, if misleading, political concept of ‘Two Founding Peoples’”.²⁸

²⁵ Ibid., 20-21.

²⁶ Christopher Thomas, “‘Canadian Castles’? The Question of National Styles in Architecture Revisited,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 32, no. 1 (Spring, 1997): 1, accessed December 10, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/203556309?accountid=14739>.

²⁷ Rhodri Windsor Liscombe, “Nationalism or Cultural Imperialism?: The Chateau Style in Canada,” *Architectural History*, Vol. 36, (1993):130.

²⁸ Ibid., 135.

In 1997, Christopher Thomas wrote an article entitled “Canadian Castles? The Question of National Styles in Architecture Revisited” that also took up the question of Chateau style hotels as an agent of nationalism, but came to a different conclusion. Thomas argues that “the use of these styles in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Canada contributed to the construction of Canadian national identity according, first, to British and, then, to American desire.”²⁹ Stressing the development of the Chateau style according to the whims of Van Horne and his American architect. Bruce Price, Thomas suggests that the “Canadian” style came by way of American influence and design. Thomas also specifically critiques the Rogatnick and Kalman pieces. Thomas stresses that, while Rogatnick and Kalman meticulously studied the hotels and the relevant documents, their interpretation of “the data was clearly of its own day, conditioned by the political and cultural temper of Canada in the 1960s and 1970s.”³⁰ In short, they were a part of the larger “nationalist historiography of Canada dominant in the twentieth century.”³¹ Ultimately, Thomas concludes that “Canadian National identity was initially constructed not from domestic impulse, but to fulfill British and American politico-economic desire,” and Canadians “went on to wear the garments assigned us by others to represent ourselves to ourselves.”³² In Thomas’s view, the Chateau Style was used as a foreign colonizing agent, not as Liscombe argued, a domestic one.

In the case of the Canadian Pacific Railway and its hotels, tourism and nationalism go hand-in-hand. The CPR may have created a propaganda machine to entice wealthy travelers to vacation in Western Canada, but historians have linked the CPR’s advertisements and pamphlets to the promotion of the myths of Canadian nation-building that permeated popular and historical

²⁹ Thomas, “Canadian Castles?,” 1.

³⁰ Ibid., 4

³¹ Ibid., 4.

³² Ibid., 8.

culture during the twentieth century. In 1983, E.J. Hart, the head archivist and executive director of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, published a book entitled *The Selling of Canada: The CPR and the Beginnings of Canadian Tourism*. The book describes the tactics that the CPR and Van Horne employed to entice the ‘class that travels’ to come visit Canada’s Rocky Mountains on the CPR line and stay in the CPR’s luxury railway hotels.³³ Hart uses William Van Horne’s correspondence, CPR promotional materials, tourists’ accounts, and the unpublished autobiography of Van Horne’s successor in CPR promotion, John Murray Gibbon as evidence.³⁴ Hart describes the ways in which the CPR used the work of Canadian artists and testimonials of prominent citizens in their pamphlets, as well as their support of the creation of national parks as evidence for his argument. Another major piece of evidence Hart focuses on are the cultural festivals Gibbon organized and held at several railway hotels that showcased and promoted the work of Canadian artists. These festivals “proved highly beneficial for both the CPR and the country, graphically illustrating the significance of CPR tourist promotion in Canadian culture.”³⁵ Ultimately, Hart argues that for the “fifteen years after the completion of its transcontinental line [the CPR] had been virtually the only agency promoting tourism in Canada . . . the CPR made [Canada] better known to both the world and itself.”³⁶

While Hart’s work does not make the connection between the CPR’s promotion of Canadian tourism and the rise of nationalism in Canada explicit, later writers do. Daniel Francis, a Canadian historian and journalist, tackles Canada’s most prolific myths in *National Dreams: Myth, Memory and Canadian History* (1997). Francis looked at the CPR promotional pamphlets

³³ E.J. Hart, *The Selling of Canada: The CPR and the Beginnings of Canadian Tourism*, (Banff: Altitude Publishing, 1983), 41.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 177.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 176.

as not only ‘selling’ Canada to tourists but also tying the CPR to the formation of the Canadian nation. Francis argues that the “myth of the CPR as the creator of the country is, in fact, as old as the railway itself, which is not surprising given that it was the railway itself that created the myth.”³⁷ He cites an early CPR publication in which it proclaims that “the construction of the Canadian Pacific consummated Confederation” as linking the completion of the railway with the founding of a nation and thus “the mundane act of constructing a railway was transformed into a heroic narrative of nation building.”³⁸ But Francis argues the CPR did more than proclaim itself as a father of Canadian confederation. He writes “the ‘CPR ‘created’ Canada not by binding it together with steel rails, but by inventing images of it that people began to see as uniquely Canadian.”³⁹ These distinctly Canadian images were promotional posters depicting the splendor of the Canadian railway hotels for tourists, but they were also seen by everyday Canadians. The CPR, which fashioned itself as a nation-builder, promoted the images. These images were seen as evidence of a great Canadian nation. Francis’s aim here is to debunk the myth of the CPR (and its subsidiaries) as the makers of the Canadian nation. However, his work also allows for a better understanding of how this myth came about and how it was embraced by earlier writers.

The historiography of the Canadian railway hotels is dominated by the question of nationalism. In the earliest works, there is an uncritical acceptance of the railway hotels as a tool and symbol of Canadian nationalism. Historians have a long history of promoting nationalism and even seeing themselves as nation-builders and these ones are no exception. Later works in this area show that the role the railway hotels played in constructing Canadian nationalism is complex and

³⁷ Daniel Francis, *National Dreams: Myth, Memory, and Canadian History*, (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1997), 17.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 27.

needs to be studied critically. However, these later writers do not dismiss the idea of a ‘national’ style outright. Yet this limited historiography still leaves much out. From the 1960s onward, western historical thought was experiencing a change, moving away from exclusive political and economic interpretative frameworks towards a more cultural and social history. This move towards social history was not the case, however, with the historiography of the Canadian railway hotels. The social and cultural impact of these hotels on their home communities and the relationship between the Bessborough Hotel and the residents of Saskatoon has never been examined. While the railway hotel’s relationship with Canadian nationalism needs further examination, a new social or cultural interpretive framework would provide a greater understanding of the Bessborough’s relationship with the city of Saskatoon.

The relationship between the Bessborough Hotel and the residents of Saskatoon is complex. This thesis focuses on the development of this relationship from the hotel’s construction and opening to present day, as well as its role in its home community, both practically and symbolically, over its eighty-year history. The Bessborough Hotel, because of its parent company, overall grandeur, distinctive architecture, and central location, developed a unique and enduring relationship with the people of Saskatoon. Upon its opening in 1935, the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* proclaimed that the hotel was “a new step forward in Saskatoon’s progress from a settlement to a Prairie commercial centre”⁴⁰ The hotel was seen as a symbol of the city’s aspirational hopes and representation of the city’s future progress and prosperity. The hotel’s symbolic role affected how the community perceived its city and, over time, its history. However, this relationship varied across different facets of the community – particularly for those who were discriminated against in the larger community based on race, class, sexual orientation and socioeconomic status.

⁴⁰“Great Hotel Busy Spot on Opening; Many Registered,” *The Saskatoon-Star Phoenix*, December 10, 1935, 3.

Because it was perceived as a symbol of Saskatoon's economic and social aspiration, the Bessborough Hotel was both inclusive and exclusive, depending on which group was attempting to enter and use the space. Those who were excluded tended to be marginalized more broadly within the larger society as they did not fit into the ambitions the city leaders had for Saskatoon.

Research for this thesis came primarily from oral interviews and archival sources. Participants were found through a variety of venues, including an advertisement on the University of Saskatchewan PAWS system, the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix's* online letter to the editor, radio interviews with CBC Saskatchewan and The Gormley Show, as well as letters, emails, and phone calls. The study was approved by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioral Research Ethics Board. In total, eighteen people were interviewed for this study and, in keeping with the consent form, three of these participants chose to remain anonymous. Of the fifteen identified participants, seven responded to a participants needed ad or one of my media interviews. Generally, these seven were former or current Saskatoon residents who frequented the Bessborough as patrons. Only one interviewee had never been a resident of Saskatoon, but a regular guest at the hotel since the 1970s. Eight of the participants were sought out due to their involvement with the hotel, including current and former staff, or participation in events that took place there, such as political events or who frequented the Bessborough as a gay hangout. These participants were often recommended through other interviewees. Four were former or current staff members who were interviewed because of their extensive knowledge of the hotel's history. One former owner was interviewed. The participants' ages ranged from eighteen to eighty-three, but the majority of the participants were middle aged or older. The gender of the participants was evenly split, with seven women and eight men interviewed.

All participants were asked about their experiences with the hotel and how they perceived the Bessborough and Saskatoon more generally. The participants were also asked about their first memories of the Bessborough Hotel, how often they frequented the hotel, and their experiences with the hotel during their visits and, if possible, how these experiences changed over time. Former and current staff were asked about their experiences as an employee of the hotel as well as how they believed the hotel patrons viewed and interacted with the hotel. Along with the questions about the participants' hotel experiences, they were also asked about their perceptions of the city of Saskatoon, what they liked and disliked about it and how they thought the city had changed throughout their lifetime. They were also asked about their understanding of the Bessborough's history, how they thought the Bessborough fit into the city's makeup, whether they thought the Bessborough was a unique or important part of Saskatoon, and what the Bessborough's role in Saskatoon would be going forward. These interviews with these participants comprised a large part of the evidence regarding people's historical and current perceptions of the hotel. Interviews with former and current staff also contributed greatly to specific aspects of the hotel's history, such as the 1973 sale and the various renovations the hotel went through. Because there is limited secondary work on the Bessborough Hotel's role in the city of Saskatoon, oral interviews were an important part of the overall research for this project.

Newspaper sources also comprised a large part of the research for this thesis. The majority of the newspaper articles came from the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* and the University of Saskatchewan student newspaper, *The Sheaf*. The *Saskatoon Star Phoenix* heavily documented important events at the hotel, including the grand opening, the 1973 and 1989 sales and the 1970 hippie sit-ins. *The Sheaf* provides evidence on University of Saskatchewan events held at the Bessborough, as well as an alternative opinion of the 1970 hippie sit-ins. A 1955 *Maclean's* article

on Saskatoon's relationship with the Bessborough Hotel provided important insights into both historical perceptions and the different relationships the community had with the hotel during the first twenty years of the hotel's life. Limited secondary work on the history of Saskatoon, the University of Saskatchewan and the Meewasin Valley Authority were also helpful in providing historical context and background.

As this is a study of the Bessborough's relationship with Saskatoon, the idea of 'community' is featured prominently throughout. Geographer Emma Waterton and anthropologist Laurajane Smith, in their article "The Recognition and Misrecognition of Community Heritage," define the idea of community as an "incomplete process through which people construct and create identities and bond themselves to others, whether geographically, virtually, or imaginatively."⁴¹ The authors also take issue with the uncritical discussion of the idea of 'community' as homogenous, equal, safe, and cohesive. They contend that the "artificial idea of community works to reinforce presumed differences between the white middle class and 'the rest'" and that "communities are thus not always sources of empowerment and positive identity; indeed, predetermined ideas of community are often imposed onto groups of people, who suffer as a result from lack of self-esteem, self-worth, and self-identity."⁴² By focusing on the history of Saskatoon through interactions the residents had with and inside the Bessborough, these hierarchies and conflicting goals in the community can be seen. The Bessborough was a prominent space in which the dominant community tried to celebrate its own achievements and goals and tried to segregate or ban certain groups from the building. These actions and events can provide important insights

⁴¹Emma Waterton & Laurajane Smith, "The Recognition and Misrecognition of Community Heritage," *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 16: (2010), 8. DOI: 10.1080/13527250903441671

⁴² Ibid., 5, 9.

into the broader community and its own history. This space holds important memories that are vital to the understanding of the development of Saskatoon.

This thesis is divided into two main chapters. The first chapter argues that the Bessborough symbolized Saskatoon's aspirations of the city's economic prosperity and progress as an important prairie centre. This chapter also focuses on the individuals, institutions, and groups that used the hotel as an expression of this idea including the University of Saskatchewan, the Saskatoon business community, the Saskatchewan provincial government, and the Meewasin Valley Authority. It further examines how the perceptions of the Bessborough changed and developed throughout its eighty-year history because of changing hotel ownership and the evolving tastes of Saskatchewan society.

Chapter Two focuses on groups in Saskatoon who were excluded from the hotel based on race, class, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic circumstances. While not an exhaustive list, chapter two concentrates on Saskatoon's gay community during the 1960s and 1970s, the hippies and student radicals of 1970, and Saskatoon's historical and current residents of the city's west side. These groups, while all experiencing discrimination and exclusion from the hotel differently, were all told in some way that they were not welcome inside this space. Just like the exclusionary tactics used, each group fought back against this discrimination in different ways with varying degrees of success.

To understand the significance of the hotel for the people of Saskatoon today, the way that people thought about and responded to the hotel at its beginning must be examined. In 1926, Canadian Pacific Railway began construction of a hotel in Regina, Saskatchewan. This hotel, located on Victoria Street, was Regina's second attempt at a railway hotel. The first, proposed by the Grand Trunk Railway in 1910, was abandoned in 1913 with only a foundation and five stories

of steel framework to mark its spot in Wascana Park.⁴³ Opening in 1927, Hotel Saskatchewan was built in the popular modern classical style. While not everyone was happy with such a relatively plain design, the city was pleased that they had been granted Saskatchewan's first railway hotel. At the hotel's grand opening, the President of the Canadian Pacific cited the Hotel Saskatchewan as proof of the "progressive development of Western Canada on a sound and permanent basis."⁴⁴ Twenty-one years after Winnipeg and thirteen years after Edmonton and Calgary, Saskatchewan's capital finally had its railway hotel.

Saskatoon was not so pleased. Since the early 1900s, "Saskatchewan communities had been madly swept up in a reckless race to outdo one another, each obsessed with becoming the leading city in the province, if not the prairies" and a railway hotel was a definite signifier of their status as an important city.⁴⁵ Indeed, Saskatoon's "transformation was so dramatic, so swift, so unbelievable, that it aggressively promoted itself as the 'Wonder City.'"⁴⁶ This booster mentality remained strong throughout the first half of the 20th century and is fundamental in understanding the desire of Saskatoon to secure a railway hotel for themselves and not be outdone by their rival, Regina.

Once the Hotel Saskatchewan opened, the Saskatoon Board of Trade began to lobby Canadian National Railways for its own hotel. It worked. In December 1928, Canadian National's President, Sir Henry Thornton announced in his New Year's address to Saskatoon's mayor, G.W. Norman, that the construction of "a hotel consistent in size and character with an enterprising and

⁴³ Barbara Chisholm, "Chateau Qu'Appelle, Regina, Saskatchewan," in *Castles of the North: Canada's Grand Hotels*, ed. Barbara Chisholm (Toronto: Lynx Images Inc., 2001), 279.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Barbara Chisholm, "Hotel Saskatchewan," in *Castles of the North: Canada's Grand Hotels*, ed. Barbara Chisholm (Toronto: Lynx Images Inc., 2001), 222

⁴⁵ Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History* (Calgary: Fifth House Ltd, 2005), 141.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 156.

progressive city” would be begin immediately.⁴⁷ The following February, Canadian National purchased land on Spadina Crescent at the end of 21st street and began excavation.

By 1928, post-war Saskatoon had undergone a tremendous transformation from the city that had entered into the Great War. Between 1921 and 1931 Saskatoon’s population increased by seventy-two percent.⁴⁸ While the first five years of the 1920s were plagued by economic hardships, the last five years saw the city’s second economic boom, reminiscent of the first that occurred in 1912. The University of Saskatchewan as well as the City Hospital both expanded and new high schools and medical facilities were also built. The provincial government also allocated three major projects to the city: a Normal School, a School for the Deaf and a tuberculosis sanitarium.⁴⁹

But it was not just education and medical facilities that experienced growth in Saskatoon. A new facility was built for the public library in 1929 with two new branches completed in 1928 and 1931.⁵⁰ More park space was designated and new recreational facilities were created. Saskatoon even had a professional ice hockey team.⁵¹ Technology, in the form of automobiles, radios, and even airplanes had a great impact on the city as well. In 1926, the first permanent automobile camp was opened south of the city’s exhibition grounds, which proved immensely popular. In 1928, 1200 tourist vehicles made use of the camp, one from as far away as Miami, Florida.⁵² Saskatoon’s first permanent radio station went on the air in 1922. The second one followed in 1924 and the third in 1925. All three stations shared one frequency, and each was allotted two hours of broadcast time a day.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Delta Bessborough, *History of the Castle on the River*, Saskatoon: Delta Bessborough, 2010. Promotional Pamphlet.

⁴⁸ Don Kerr and Stan Hanson, *Saskatoon: The First Half Century* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1982), 231.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 239-242.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 254.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 260.

Saskatoon's arts and culture scene was also developing in the 1920s. The Saskatoon Little Theatre Club was established in 1922 with 25 members who met in their homes to read plays. By 1929, the club had almost 300 members and were performing two three-act plays at the Regent Pavilion.⁵³ The Saskatchewan Music Festival, which had been put off during the war years, was being held annually in Saskatoon and Regina by 1923. Perhaps the most exciting event that took place in the Saskatoon art scene occurred in 1928 when a collection of about 30 paintings from the Group of Seven were put on display at a local gallery.⁵⁴ In almost every aspect of its development, Saskatoon was becoming an important centre.

It was in this prosperous and optimistic era that the plan for the Bessborough Hotel was conceived. The city of Saskatoon offered Canadian National a twenty-five-year tax exemption in exchange for a 200-room chateau style castle.⁵⁵ Canadian National hired Montreal architect J.S. Archibald to draw up the plans. The Bessborough was the last railway hotel he would design before his death.⁵⁶ It would also be the last great railway hotel built in the Canadian chateau style. While there was a significant economic downturn in Saskatoon in 1929, the city did not begin to feel the true weight of the Great Depression until the fall of 1930. Wheat prices dropped below the price of production, unemployment associations were formed and the exhibition grounds were turned into a winter relief camp for the city's single men. Like other prairie cities, Saskatoon initially turned to make-work relief projects to employ the 2153 on relief and the hundreds still left unemployed by the fall of 1931. These make-work projects included sewage work, the Nineteenth Street subway, and the Broadway Bridge.⁵⁷

⁵³ Ibid., 269.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 274.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 303.

⁵⁶ Barbara Chisholm, "Main Architects," in *Castles of the North: Canada's Grand Hotels*, ed. Barbara Chisholm (Toronto: Lynx Images Inc., 2001), 286.

⁵⁷ Kerr and Hanson, *Saskatoon*, 303.

These make-work projects, however, did not include The Bessborough Hotel. The Canadian National Railway President Sir Henry Thornton, had lauded the Bessborough as a “hotel commensurate with the city’s needs.”⁵⁸ By 1931, Thornton’s words proved correct, just not in the way that he had imagined. Under the general contractor of the Saskatoon-based company, Smith Brothers and Wilson, 46 subcontractors were hired to build the still unnamed castle. Construction took place in fits and spurts. It was plagued by “a series of delays, resumptions of work, and more troubles that had Saskatoon boosters leaping from despair to joy and back again.”⁵⁹ These issues included one “in May 1930, [when] work stopped and the footings were redesigned when the contractor struck quicksand. Then, as the depression deepened, all work ceased in March 1932.”⁶⁰ At a time when the Canadian National was losing money at an alarming rate, it is a wonder that they did not halt construction earlier. They would not have been the first to build half a hotel. In 1932, Canadian National lost over 61 million dollars. That year they poured \$450,000 into the hotel on Spadina Crescent, a project which would eventually cost the company 3.7 million.⁶¹

Yet even during its construction, the Bessborough was already making an impact on the city. The hotel was an important employer during the early years of the Great Depression. Between 1930 and 1933, over 300 people would apply for jobs on this construction site. Hundreds of hopeful would-be employees hung around the edge of the construction site, waiting for a position to become available. The workers were in no hurry to finish the job but the foremen expected

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹ Leslie F. Hannon, “Saskatoon’s Love Affair with a Hotel Named Bess” *Maclean’s Magazine*, February 15, 1955, 85.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid.

expediency. Any worker who stopped to take a cigarette break was fired on the spot and replaced with someone from the waiting crowd.⁶²

The Bessborough's impact was not just felt economically. Rodney McLean, a teacher who attended the University of Saskatchewan from 1967-70, remembered his parents telling him about living in Saskatoon during the early 1930s. Rodney's mother, who attended Saskatoon City Hospital's School of Nursing between 1931 and 1933, recalled the immense scaffolding of the Bess during its construction in the 1930s and the possible dangers for the men working on it. She remembered how "foreign" the scaffolding and the building were to Saskatoon and its residents and how the hotel dominated the city landscape – it was "unworldly" to them. Even during its construction, the Bessborough was the heart of the city – it defined Saskatoon as something very special and very different. Rodney's mother talked about the hotel positively – how important it was for work at the time. His parents thought the hotel construction was a timely project in the 1930s economic climate.⁶³

The Bessborough Hotel was completed in 1932 with the gardens and landscaping finished the following year. But the hotel did not open. Canadian National could not afford to furnish it. Over the next three years the Bessborough would sit empty except for three occasions: a Shriner's charity ball and two visits from the hotel's name sake, Canada's Governor General, the Earl of Bessborough. During this time, the Saskatoon Board of Trade even appointed a Bessborough Hotel Committee to "accomplish the opening of the new hotel as soon as conditions warrant."⁶⁴ Clearly, the opening of the hotel was of some concern to more than just Canadian National. Finally, seven years after Thornton's original announcement, Canadian National declared that the hotel would

⁶² Barbara Chisholm, "Bessborough Hotel," in *Castles of the North: Canada's Grand Hotels*, ed. Barbara Chisholm (Toronto: Lynx Images Inc., 2001), 228.

⁶³ Rodney McLean, Telephone Interview with Author, August 20, 2015.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Kerr and Hanson, *Saskatoon*, 304.

open on December 10, 1935. Saskatoon, in the midst of the greatest economic crisis to ever descend on the city, would finally get its castle. With this elation, also came a sense of responsibility. Because of the city's vocal efforts to have the Bessborough built in Saskatoon, one CN executive stated that "Saskatoon has at least a moral responsibility in the successful operation of the hotel."⁶⁵

In celebration of the grand opening, the *Saskatoon Star Phoenix* ran an eleven-page special commemorative edition focused solely on the Bessborough Hotel. Sixty-seven businesses, many of them local Saskatoon operations, took out ads to congratulate the hotel on its opening. The paper informed its readers about every aspect of the hotel's grandeur and efficiency: from its fire alarms, to the technological advancements of its elevators, to the "magic" of the refrigeration system, even down to the disposal of razor blades. Canadian National's full-page ad did not compare to the *Star-Phoenix's* coverage: the *Star-Phoenix* proclaimed that this "building will stand as [a] monument to ingenuity of man."⁶⁶

The *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* was not the only one elated to see the Bessborough finally open. As Canadian National's regional public relations officer wrote for the CNR magazine, "It was a Carnival night in Saskatoon and the citizens turned out *en masse* to give thanks to the Gods of Fortune who provided them with a hotel of which any city on the continent would be proud."⁶⁷ It was a romanticized picture of the grand opening but not entirely inaccurate. On December 10, a luncheon for 300 Saskatoon businessmen was held. That evening a supper dance was put on. Over 1000 people attended.⁶⁸ By opening day, eight conventions had been booked for the following

⁶⁵ Hannon, "Saskatoon's Love Affair," 85.

⁶⁶ "Great Craftsmanship Shown in Hotel Construction," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, December 7, 1935, 6.

⁶⁷ Hannon, "Saskatoon's Love Affair," 85.

⁶⁸ Chisholm, "Bessborough Hotel," 230.

year. Most the of the conventions were for Saskatchewan based organizations.⁶⁹ The public's fascination with the hotel did not end on its opening day. For the next few weeks,

as they got acquainted with the jewel they had so long desired, the citizens of Saskatoon, shedding their high rubbers and mackinaws under Leon V. Solon's lobby mural – and sometimes not shedding them at all – tramped all over the CNR's investment of \$3,700,000... The early visitors solemnly inspected Saskatoon's first black-and-silver elevator doors, rode up to the top floors to inspect the sample rooms especially designed for commercial travelers, rode down to marvel at the engine room where the hotel makes its own power and its own ice.⁷⁰

In every sense, Saskatoon's Bessborough Hotel was meant to inspire awe and the citizens of Saskatoon were awestruck by it.

The residents of Saskatoon welcomed the construction of a railway hotel for many different reasons. First, the hotel's construction during the early years of the Great Depression provided much needed jobs for men and for local construction businesses. When the hotel opened in 1935, it once again became an important employer in the city and provided a variety of full-time jobs for both men and women. Its economic value in such a dark time is certainly part of the reason for the celebration surrounding the hotel. Secondly, when the hotel finally opened in 1935, it was a sign that the government-owned Canadian National believed that it would be able to turn a profit – that better times must be ahead. Finally, the presence of a railway hotel in the city was a sign of progress, prosperity and a way for Saskatoon to compete with its rival prairie cities. Essentially, the hotel was representative of Saskatoon's aspirations, both economic and cultural. These aspirations were seen through the Bessborough's location, size and architecture.

The Bessborough Hotel, nestled on the banks of the South Saskatchewan River, is located at the end of Spadina Crescent, its front doors directly in line with the former Canadian National train station, located four blocks down on First Avenue. The Bessborough's location was meant to

⁶⁹“Many Conventions Scheduled by the Bessborough,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, December 7, 1935, 7.

⁷⁰ Hannon, “Saskatoon's Love Affair,” 86.

link it to the CN Train Station, not the South Saskatchewan River. While it can be difficult for modern residents of Saskatoon to understand due to the removal of the train station and the Bessborough's subsequent identification as the "Castle on the River", the Bessborough was meant to be the first thing that passengers saw as they left the train station. This intention can further be seen in the Bessborough's layout and design. The hotel's luxury rooms, the Vice Regal Suite on the hotel's third floor, did not face the river. It faced the CN train station. Like many Saskatchewan towns, "the main commercial street either fronted on the train station or, more commonly ran at right angles or perpendicular to the tracks."⁷¹ In Saskatoon, the train station and the Bessborough stood as twin pillars on opposite ends of one of Saskatoon's main business streets. Aside from dictating the layout of Saskatoon businesses, the CN tracks also played another role in Saskatoon. They separated the immigrant communities on the west side from Anglo-Canadian Saskatoon and, after 1935, the Bessborough. The Bessborough's size also played a role in how it was perceived by newly arrived visitors looking at it from the station. It dwarfed all the other buildings in the downtown area in 1935. Inside the downtown core, it was tallest building for thirty years.⁷² Even today, the Bessborough still commands a dominating presence in Saskatoon's skyline and is one of the most photographed buildings in Saskatoon.

The hotel's architectural style, the Canadian Chateau style, was specifically requested by the Saskatoon Board of Trade. One reason was the Hotel Saskatchewan's relatively plain design. The other was because by 1935, the Chateau style had been granted an almost legendary status in Canada. The grandest and most famous railway hotels – the Banff Springs Hotel, The

⁷¹ Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History* (Calgary: Fifth House Ltd, 2005), 151.

⁷² Lloyd Landa, "Tall Buildings Dot the Skyline but Flour Mill Still Tallest," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, August, 3 1967, 8.

Chateau Frontenac and the Chateau Laurier – were built in this style.⁷³ It was regarded as something uniquely Canadian, so much so that the Canadian Parliament building as well as the Federal Post Office were built in this design.⁷⁴ This style evoked a sense of Canadian nationalism as well as grandeur, sophistication, and class. Even though the style was going out of vogue, Saskatoon, an expanding and diversifying city, wanted to represent all these things in 1935. Because of these elements, and the prominence and history attached to railway hotels as a whole, the Bessborough Hotel was more than simply a new tourist destination or even an important employer in the city. It allowed the citizens of Saskatoon to announce to themselves and to the rest of Canada that they were on the path to greatness. Its initial struggles helped personify the determination and resilience cherished by the settler community of Saskatchewan, while also showing that they were more than simply a small service-centre city.

⁷³ Kalman, *The Railway Hotels*, 18. The Chateau Style was comprised of unadorned walls with the majority of the detail on the upper portion, pitched roofs, and dormers.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

Chapter One

The Castle on the River: Saskatoon's Love Affair Revisited

It did not take long for the Bessborough Hotel to become a symbol for the city. According to the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, it did not even take one full business day. On December 10, 1935, the hotel's opening day, a *Star-Phoenix* editorial, entitled "Symbol of Recovery," reflected on the place of hotels in a community. It argued that hotels "have in a sense become symbolical [sic] of the community in which they are placed. Their atmosphere is moulded to that of the community and perhaps they help to shape the community spirit in some degree."¹ As a Canadian National Railways' "super-hotel," it was meant to be a place "where quiet decorum prevails but where either the ultra-smart or the ordinary working citizen feels himself as much at home as in his own private residence."² The editorial ended by proclaiming that "the Bessborough may be counted symbolical of the future of Saskatchewan."³ But what exactly did the Bessborough symbolize to the residents of Saskatoon? A monument to British civility? A celebration of French and British nationalism? Economic progress and prosperity? Saskatoon, and by extension Saskatchewan, coming into its own as a prairie center?

According to newspaper sources from the 1930s, the Bessborough symbolized all these things. In an article detailing a visit from the hotel's namesake, Canada's Governor-General, the Earl of Bessborough and his wife, the paper wrote that they "represent the two great nationalities of Canada, the British and the French" and that the hotel "will perpetuate the record of [the Earl of Bessborough's] distinguished service to the British Empire."⁴ On the hotel's opening day, the *Star-Phoenix* stated that the opening of the hotel "marks, perhaps, the beginning of a recovery that

¹ "Symbol of Recovery," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, December 10, 1935, second edition, 13.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ "Vice Regal Pair Given Colourful Reception in City," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, August 22, 1932, 3.

will carry Western Canada further than any previous period of prosperity carried it.”⁵ After having sat empty for three years, the Bessborough’s opening in 1935 was seen as a sign that economic recovery from the Great Depression was on its way. In the *Star-Phoenix*’s special commemorative edition, a congratulatory ad taken out by thirty-two local businesses announced that the “opening of the Bessborough is another indication that Saskatoon is in the front line of progress and another expression of belief in her future greatness.”⁶ Clearly the opening of the Bessborough was being heralded as a pivotal moment in the history of Saskatoon and the city’s developing status as a major centre. The hotel was seen as aspirational of the city’s growth and development as an important prairie centre and this symbolic nature affected how the community perceived its city and, over time, its history.

Today, eighty years later, the hotel still stands at the end of Spadina Crescent overlooking the river. The outside of the hotel remains largely unchanged. Its interior would be unrecognizable to the residents of 1935 Saskatoon. Eighty years later, the question remains: What kind of relationship developed between the Bessborough and Saskatoon’s residents over its history? The Bessborough Hotel, because of its architecture, location, parent company, and overall grandeur, was representative of the city’s aspirations as an important commercial and cultural prairie centre. While the hotel promoted itself as a conference hotel for upper-class businesses from all over Canada, Saskatoon’s local community used the hotel as an expression of these ambitions. Individuals used the hotel to celebrate weddings, anniversaries, birthdays, high school and university graduations, and all manner of important milestones in their lives. But the hotel was not limited to individual moments of celebration. Almost immediately, its ballrooms were popular venues for University of Saskatchewan student formals. The hotel’s role in Saskatchewan politics

⁵ “Symbol of Recovery,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, December 10, 1935, second edition, 13.

⁶ “To the Management of the Canadian National Railways Ad,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, December 7, 1935, 12.

is well documented from hosting the political party conferences to being the site of negotiations during the 1962 Saskatchewan Doctor's Strike. Its status as an important heritage structure was cemented in its inclusion in the Meewasin Valley Authority's plan for the river valley in 1979.⁷ The Bessborough's aspirational role affected how different groups in the community interacted with it. Because of its symbolic nature, the hotel became an important social space within the community that helped lend prestige and a certain cachet to several groups. The various organizations that built long standing relationships with the Bessborough were prominent educational, political, and business groups that were seen as important to the development of the city and the province. Thus, the hotel, as these organizations' choice of venue for their events, was an appropriate, and even natural, choice.

The University of Saskatchewan was one of the first organizations in the city to use the hotel's facilities for functions. The first event that the students from the University of Saskatchewan booked at the Bessborough Hotel was the Junior Prom on January 24, 1936, just forty-five days after the hotel's opening.⁸ However, with the death of King George V on January 20, classes at the University of Saskatchewan were cancelled and formal events were postponed. The first event that actually took place was the Frosh Prom on February 6, 1936. The Ladies Prom, a Sadie Hawkins style dance, followed on February 21. The Bessborough fast became the place to be for University of Saskatchewan's social student formals, both those put on by the university's Social Directorate and by the different colleges. While other social events, including formals, were also held in other venues including Convocation Hall on campus, the Legion Hall and the Avenue

⁷ Roy Romanow, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, August 26, 2015.

⁸ "Junior Prom for First Formal Event," *The Sheaf*, January 17, 1936, 1.

Ballroom downtown, the Bessborough remained a popular place to hold these events throughout the 1940s and the first half of the 1950s.⁹

While the formals generally took place during the winter term, by the end of 1936 certain proms were being moved to November and December due to the surplus of events during the post-Christmas season. There was also the issue of overcrowding in the university rooms. In January 1937, five colleges petitioned the University Council to allow them to hold their dances downtown as Convocation Hall was too small. The University Council allowed the colleges of Arts and Sciences, Engineering, and Agriculture to hold their dances downtown as long as the council approved the venue beforehand.¹⁰ The Bessborough, an upscale and well respected hotel, would have been more than appropriate in the eyes of the council and its reputation may have contributed to the popularity of the hotel during this era. Dances were very closely regulated. Curfew was at 12:30 am and the dances were chaperoned.¹¹ Patrons, usually wives of senior university administrators, were almost always present.¹²

Attending a formal at the Bessborough Hotel required students to have significant disposable income. In 1938, tickets for a couple to attend a formal at the hotel was \$2.25.¹³ In contrast, admission to the Avenue Ballroom, another venue utilized for University formals, was only \$0.20.¹⁴ The price of attending a formal at the Bessborough was steep and in 1938 there was some discussion on ways to bring the price down. At the Medical formal, in an effort to “make the price of admission less prohibitive” the usual 10 pm lunch was cancelled.¹⁵ Even without lunch,

⁹ Survey of editions from *The Sheaf*, 1937-1956.

¹⁰ “Permission Granted for Three Major Colleges to Hold Dances Down Town,” *The Sheaf*, January 22, 1937, 1.

¹¹ Kathleen McCorkell, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, July 23, 2015.

¹² “Formal Ball Next Week,” *The Sheaf*, January 28, 1938, 1.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ “Pente Kai to Hold Dance Tomorrow,” *The Sheaf*, September 29, 1939, 1.

¹⁵ “Formal Ball Next Week,” *The Sheaf*, January 28, 1938, 1.

the price of attending a formal at the Bessborough was \$1.25 a couple.¹⁶ However, this action seems to have only happened once because the lunch came back due to “popular demand” and the price of admission was set again at \$2.25.¹⁷ At the time, University students were paying around twenty-five dollars a month for room and board, so the Bessborough formals admission price clearly limited the attendees to students of middle or upper class backgrounds.¹⁸ On top of the admission fee, the students attended the events in formal attire. For men, they would either own a tux or rent one. For the women, floor length gowns were purchased, most likely a new one each year.¹⁹ The fact that these formals were well attended and sometimes sold out sheds some light on the desire of the students to take part in such events held at the hotel, even at the steeper prices.

There were a variety of dances held at the Bessborough during these years, including the freshman and junior proms, proms put on by the respective colleges, a ladies’ night ball, Christmas extra dance, election night galas, and the annual Arts Colour Night. The Arts Color Night, the last formal of the social season, doubled as an awards night. The formals at the Bessborough continued uninterrupted throughout the Second World War and were just as extravagant. For example, the Greystone Dance, which took place in December 1940, rented out two ballrooms at the hotel with two separate orchestras.²⁰ The Bessborough’s popularity continued throughout the rest of the 1940s and into the early years of the 1950s. In November 1951, two social events were held on back-to-back evenings at the Bessborough – The Women’s Arts and Sciences Association’s ‘Belles at the Bess’ and the St Thomas More Formal. The ‘Belles at the Bess’ is probably one of

¹⁶ “Social Directorate Announce Last Prom.” *The Sheaf*, February 28, 1936, 1.

¹⁷ “Formal Ball Next Week,” *The Sheaf*, January 28, 1938, 1.

¹⁸ “Questionnaire Shows University Students Spend \$453,425 yearly with City Merchants,” *The Sheaf*, February 15, 1938, 1.

¹⁹ The University of Saskatchewan, *The Greystone 1938 Yearbook* (Saskatoon: Student’s Representative Council, 1938), *University of Saskatchewan Archives and Special Collections*, 62.

http://scaa.usask.ca/gallery/uofs_yearbook/thumbs.php?Year=1938

²⁰ “Festivities Feature Dancing, Drawing, Fun, in the Bessborough,” *The Sheaf*, November 26, 1940, 1.

the more well-known social events that took place at the Bessborough throughout the 1950s. *The Sheaf* first mentioned this event in 1950 and it seemed to have been held annually in November until about 1955. By this time, events at the Bessborough had started to decline. New venues had opened up. On campus, the new gymnasium opened in 1950 and the Memorial Union Building in 1955.²¹ These new venues on campus, as well as Club 400 downtown, proved to be popular alternatives. Club 400, while not as upscale as the Bessborough, proved to be the biggest competition for the hotel. Perhaps Club 400's less upscale tastes were more in line with this new generation of university students. Whether it was new competition or new sensibilities, by the late 1950s the Bessborough had become less popular for formals and other social events.²²

The University of Saskatchewan's formals and dances were not the only events of this kind to be held in the Bessborough. Since its opening, the Bessborough Hotel held "supper dances", most likely in one of the hotel ballrooms, every Saturday in the winter months. However, like the University's dances, a disposable income was required for a family to attend one of these events. In 1937, these supper dances cost \$1 a person to attend; In 1945, the price cost to \$1.50.²³ These dances were so successful that they continued into the 1960s.²⁴ By contrast, dinner in the first floor cafeteria cost an average of \$0.40 in 1939.²⁵ Another Bessborough dance that became a Saskatoon tradition was the New Year's Eve dinner. The hotel management "encouraged local families to

²¹ "Building Chronology," *University of Saskatchewan Archives and Special Collections*, Accessed December 12, 2015. http://scaa.sk.ca/gallery/uofs_buildings/.

²² Survey of editions from *the Sheaf*, 1950-1957.

²³ The University of Saskatchewan, *The Greystone 1962 yearbook* (Saskatoon: Student's Council Representative, 1962), *University of Saskatchewan Archives and Special Collections*, 120; Bessborough Hotel Supper Dance Menu, December 8th, 1945, *Bessborough Hotel Archival Collection*.
http://scaa.usask.ca/gallery/uofs_yearbook/thumbs.php?Year=1962

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 120. The Bessborough ad placed in the Greystone mentions the supper dances, which occurred every Saturday night.

²⁵ The University of Saskatchewan, *The Greystone 1939 yearbook* (Saskatoon: Student's Council Representative, 1939), *University of Saskatchewan Archives and Special Collections*, 62.
http://scaa.usask.ca/gallery/uofs_yearbook/thumbs.php?Year=1939

dine out that night with their children and the affair has grown into a traditional festival. Between seven hundred and eight hundred dinners are served” each New Year’s Eve.²⁶ In 1945, the New Year’s Eve Celebration cost \$3.50 per person and children 10 and under cost \$1.00.²⁷ While the Bessborough marketed itself as “Saskatoon’s finest hotel and social centre [with] very moderate prices,” these prices could still be prohibitive for parts of Saskatoon’s population and would have kept some patrons on the first floor and out of the hotel proper.

Saskatoon’s infatuation with the Bessborough did not go unnoticed. In 1955, *Maclean’s* published an article entitled “Saskatoon’s Love Affair with a Hotel named Bess” which focused on Saskatoon’s relationship with the hotel. It posited that Saskatoon’s devotion to the hotel stemmed partly from its status as Saskatoon’s iconic landmark. The article stated:

Each of the proud cities of the world demands that the visitor pay homage to some venerated landmark. In Paris, it’s the Eiffel Tower; in New York, it’s the Statue of Liberty; in London, it’s Westminster. In Saskatoon, Saskatchewan – no less proud than any of these – it’s the Bessborough Hotel.²⁸

Like the other structures mentioned, part of the reason the Bessborough was considered a landmark was its size. Within the downtown core, the Bessborough was the tallest building from its construction in 1932 until 1968 when it was surpassed by the Milroy Apartment Condo, which was just 3 meters taller.²⁹ It dominated the city skyline and was made even more picturesque by its location along the South Saskatchewan River. The hotel’s Chateau style architecture also contributed to its landmark status as “the Norman towers of the elegant twelve-story Bess make a surprising and glamorous break in the skyline usually dominated by grain elevators.”³⁰ Its

²⁶ Leslie F. Hannon, “Saskatoon’s Love Affair with a Hotel Named Bess,” *Maclean’s Magazine*, February 15, 1955, 84.

²⁷ Bessborough Hotel December 8th, 1945 Supper Dance Menu, *Bessborough Hotel Archival Collection*. December 8th, 1945.

²⁸ Hannon, “Saskatoon’s Love Affair,” 14.

²⁹ Lloyd Landa, “Tall Buildings Dot the Skyline but Flour Mill Still Tallest,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, August, 3 1967, 8. The tallest building in Saskatoon was the Robin Hood Flour Mill.

³⁰ Hannon, “Saskatoon’s Love Affair,” 14.

landmark status was undoubtedly cemented by its size, location, and architecture, as well as its status as a railway hotel, as the railway in Canada also has its own history as an important national symbol.³¹ As a landmark in Saskatoon, the Bessborough had become a local symbol of the city and its ambitions to rival the great cities of eastern Canada. The idea of the Bessborough as an important landmark for the city has been utilized by the hotel throughout its history. For example, during the Bessborough's 65th anniversary, the hotel hosted the "Bessborough Heritage Day" to celebrate "Saskatoon's most distinctive landmark."³²

As the city's most famous landmark, the hotel has developed a unique relationship with the residents of Saskatoon: "For a hotel – a dry one, at that – to command this kind of reverence and affection is undoubtedly unusual, yet the intimate relationship between Saskatoon's rugged and close-mouthed citizens and the Gallic elegance of "the Bess" is even more unusual."³³ It is clear that twenty years into its life, the Bessborough had established itself as the social hub of Saskatoon. One of the major reasons *Maclean's* identified for this 'love affair' was the unassuming General Manager, Claude Finlay. Finlay, like many of the hotel's general managers, worked in several different railway hotels before coming to the Bessborough in 1951. He was "a key figure in the quiet romance between Saskatoon and its Bess, perhaps for the very reason that he has none of the outward embellishments of the big-hotel manager."³⁴ Finlay and his wife lived in a room at the hotel where they kept a loom. Finlay, in his role as the hotel manager, was so undistinguished, that when the Archbishop of Canterbury visited the hotel in 1954 he mistook the general manager

³¹ For more on the symbolism of the Canadian railway, see Daniel Francis, *National Dreams: Myth, Memory, and Canadian History* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1997.)

³² Delta Bessborough, "Bessborough Heritage Day." Promotional Advertisement, *Bessborough Hotel Archival Collection*, December 10, 2000.

³³ Hannon, "Saskatoon's Love Affair," 14.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

for a lay preacher.³⁵ But in an agriculture-service city that prided itself on ‘western hospitality’, Finlay’s, as well as former general managers’, ability to make ordinary Saskatoon residents feel at home in such a grand and opulent building was part of the reason the hotel was so beloved. Throughout the hotel’s history, the actions and reputation of the general manager was an important factor in promoting or hindering the hotel’s reputation, something seen again in later years.

The hotel’s ‘western hospitality’ reputation extended past the general managers during its early years. The first floor contained a cafeteria as well as other small business and display cases while the hotel proper began on the second floor.³⁶ Along with the cafeteria, the hotel included a formal dining room. But “this determination to give Saskatoon a cuisine that any Ritz would be proud of wins a curious reaction from the citizenry. They boast about it, but they won’t eat it themselves.”³⁷ Instead, while some Bessborough guests “eat alone on sparkling linen in a seventy-five-foot paneled chamber... with as many as six uniformed servitors awaiting an upraised finger... the cheerfully noisy self-serve cafeteria is jammed.”³⁸ Thursday’s chicken pot pie was famous. One interviewee was even able to describe the dish it came in nearly forty years later.³⁹ Apparently, the formal dining room at the Bessborough was used so infrequently that first-time guests who asked the elevator operator to take them to the hotel’s restaurant were often dropped off at the cafeteria floor.⁴⁰ The Bessborough management seemed to realize that the local population preferred this dining option as the cafeteria was prominently promoted in many locally placed advertisements, while the formal dining room was rarely mentioned.⁴¹

³⁵ Ibid., 15.

³⁶ Stefan Deprez, guide, Bessborough Hotel Tour, Bessborough Hotel, Saskatoon, SK, June 7, 2015.

³⁷ Hannon, “Saskatoon’s Love Affair,” 84.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Nancy Allan, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, August 11, 2015.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Hannon, “Saskatoon’s Love Affair,” 84.

⁴¹ University of Saskatchewan, *The Greystone 1937 Yearbook* (Saskatoon: Student’s Council Representative, 1937) University of Saskatchewan Archives and Special Collections, 62.
http://scaa.usask.ca/gallery/uofs_yearbook/thumbs.php?Year=1937

According to the *Maclean's* article, the Bessborough and its staff had to walk a fine line between opulence and hospitality – castle-like enough to make any event held there special, but also not out of reach of the ‘everyman.’ However, *Maclean's* did acknowledge that frequenting the Bessborough was also a status symbol for Saskatoon’s local community.

More than any other hotel in any other Canadian city, the Bessborough is the social hub of Saskatoon, its front door, its linchpin, its arbiter. To be welcomed by name by the captain of the main dining room... is to have Arrived. To be a familiar at the Saturday night dances is the young matron’s dream.

However, to become personally known by name at the Bessborough would have required frequent visits to the main dining room and the weekly supper dances. This regular patronage would have only been financially possible for the middle and upper class members of Saskatoon society.

Along with its local patrons, the Bessborough was also loved by its competitors. Initially, according to *Maclean's*, the proprietors of Saskatoon’s other hotels worried that the Bessborough would put them out of business. But it had done just the opposite and the increased profits of the hotel’s competitors was part of the reason the Bessborough was so well regarded. In fact, “the Bessborough claims it’s making Saskatoon the biggest convention centre west of Toronto.”⁴² In 1954, the Bessborough hosted thirty-six conventions which brought 10,549 delegates to Saskatoon. According to the Canadian National Railways, “for every dollar the hotel makes from conventions, businessmen in the city make ten.”⁴³ When the Saskatoon Board of Trade was lobbying the CNR in the late 1920s, it argued that since Saskatoon was the “Hub City” – the convergence point of Canada’s competing railway systems – it would make it the optimal city to build a conference hotel. After all, rail was the predominant method of travel. By the 1950s, the Board of Trade had been proven right. But it was not just the CNR that thought the Bessborough’s

⁴² Hannon, “Saskatoon’s Love Affair,” 84.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 84.

business was good for competing establishments. The competitors knew it too. Harry Haskamp, the then owner of the Senator Hotel just up the street, proclaimed “The Bess is the best thing that ever happened to the city.”⁴⁴ To show their gratitude, the local hotelmen met for lunch at the Bessborough biweekly to discuss issues facing their trade.⁴⁵ To the surrounding hotels, the Bessborough was no longer a competitor but an important part of the city’s economic and cultural makeup.

It soon became part of the city’s political makeup as well. The Bessborough was the setting for the negotiations for the Saskatchewan’s Doctor’s Strike of 1962, where a bitter twenty-three-day strike took place over the implementation of Medicare. The Bessborough was the site of many key moments of the strike. On July 18, in the midst of the strike, the New Democratic Party government held their annual convention at the Bessborough. At this conference, Dr. Harold Dalglish, the president of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, addressed the NDP delegates, an important turning point in the ongoing negotiations. During the negotiations mediated by British physician and politician, Lord Stephen Taylor, Premier Lloyd and the cabinet representatives worked out of the Bessborough. The doctor’s negotiators stayed just down Spadina Crescent in the Parktown Motor Hotel, and the doctors used the Medical Arts Building penthouse next door for their meetings with Lord Taylor.⁴⁶ During the negotiations, Lord Taylor drove the two blocks between the Medical Arts Building and the Bessborough Hotel. He parked his car in the ‘no parking’ zone at the entrance to the hotel with a single piece of House of Lords stationary under the windshield wiper to deter any parking enforcement officers. He never received a ticket.⁴⁷ While

⁴⁴ Ibid., 85.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 85.

⁴⁶ Robin F. Badgley and Samuel Wolfe, *Doctor’s Strike: Medical Care and Conflict in Saskatchewan* (Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada, 1967), 72.

⁴⁷ Allan Blakeney, *An Honorable Calling: Political Memoirs* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 61.

the doctors met with Lord Taylor on their turf, it was not where they signed the Saskatoon Accord. The Saskatoon Accord, which ended the twenty-three day Saskatchewan Doctor's Strike, was signed on July 23, 1962 in a suite at the Bessborough Hotel.⁴⁸ The Saskatchewan's Doctor's Strike and the implementation of Medicare in Saskatchewan is an event that changed not only the lives of the residents of the province, but eventually all Canadians. The fact that the Bessborough was the site of the signing of the Saskatoon Accord – the site of the birth of Medicare – makes it an important part of Saskatchewan's political history and, according to former Saskatchewan premier Roy Romanow, “confirms its status as an iconic building.”⁴⁹

But why was the Bessborough chosen as the site of the medicare negotiations? The premier and his cabinet likely stayed in the Bessborough because it was also the site of the pre-planned NDP annual convention which took place in the middle of the Doctor's Strike. Former Premier Roy Romanow, who at the time of the Saskatchewan's Doctor's Strike was a law student volunteering with the NDP⁵⁰, speculated that the reason many political conventions were held in the Bessborough was because it was central, convenient, neutral, as well as a prestigious building.⁵¹ At the time, there were not many other buildings that were able to hold the same number of people as the Bessborough. Indeed, political conventions were being held in the Bessborough as early as the 1950s.⁵² He recalled that political meetings held in Regina typically were held at the Hotel Saskatchewan – the Bessborough's Regina railway hotel counterpart – for the same reasons. However, he did mention that it was possible that the CCF party, which was criticized by its opponents for always holding its meetings in union or community halls, held its political

⁴⁸ Badgley and Wolfe, *Doctor's Strike*, 72. Check Lord Taylor's recording at SAB. Prime Minister's suite?

⁴⁹ Roy Romanow, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, August 26, 2015.

⁵⁰ Gregory J. Machildon, “Roy Romanow” in *Saskatchewan Premiers of the Twentieth Century* ed. Gordon L. Barnhart, (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2004), 357.

⁵¹ Roy Romanow, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, August 26, 2015.

⁵² Hannon, “Saskatoon's Love Affair,” 84.

conventions in the Bessborough as a way to silence its critics.⁵³ Stefan Deprez, the current Director of Marketing and the hotel's unofficial historian, speculated that since the hotel employees were unionized, the hotel attracted quite a bit of union business and this factor could have played into the pro-union party's decision to hold events at the hotel as well.⁵⁴

One of the most telling events in the Bessborough's history that truly demonstrated the importance of the hotel to Saskatoon was its 1973 sale to the Baltzans, a prominent Saskatoon family of doctors made up of Marc, Donald, and Richard Baltzan. The Baltzan family, who owned several other hotels across the country, saw the purchase the Bessborough in 1973 from the Canadian National as a good business opportunity.⁵⁵ The citizens of Saskatoon were deeply – and vocally - unhappy. The announcement of the sale, at the time to an undisclosed owner for an undisclosed amount, was made on July 30, 1973 and in August, the *Star-Phoenix* was dominated with articles about the sale. Provincial Progressive Conservative Party leader Dick Collver acted as the spokesperson for the new owners. Saskatoon NDP MLA Bev Dyck protested the sale of the Bess saying that “it is a real tragedy that this elegantly designed structure and famous Saskatoon landmark should slip from public control.”⁵⁶ An August 24 article questioned whether it was “ethically right” for CN to withhold the Bessborough's sale price and that the reasons for withholding the price were “not solid reasons, be it noted, but excuses which are almost tenuous enough to sound just a little like alibis.”⁵⁷ Time did not soften the blow. In October, NDP MP Alfred Gleave raised the question in the House of Commons about the hotel's sale price. His questions proved fruitless but his comments shed some light on the importance of the hotel to the

⁵³ Roy Romanow, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, August 26, 2015.

⁵⁴ Stefan Deprez, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, November 3, 2015.

⁵⁵ Dr. Richard Baltzan, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK,

⁵⁶ “MLA Objects to Hotel Sale,” *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, August 15, 1973, 3.

⁵⁷ “Secrecy is Insupportable,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, August 24, 1973, 25.

community. In his remarks, Gleave referred to the Bess as “a piece of property owned by the people through CN” that is “one of the most valuable pieces of property in the city.”⁵⁸ He suggested that perhaps the price was so low “the government dare not inform the people.”⁵⁹ A month later, after repeated questions from MP Gleave, CN did release a ballpark number of under \$2.3 million, less than the total cost to build the hotel. On a provincial level, hotel shareholder and Progressive Conservative leader Dick Collver accused Gleave of using the hotel’s sale to attack him politically. Collver “angrily stated criticism of the sale by elected representatives of the New Democratic Party is an attempt to embarrass him personally as the leader of the provincial Progressive Conservative party.”⁶⁰

But it was not only a political issue. Phil Wade, a long time *Star-Phoenix* columnist, wrote a scathing editorial regarding the sale. He referred to the sale as the “disgraceful demise of an old friend.”⁶¹ Harking back to the idea of the Bessborough as a symbol of the city’s progress, Wade lamented that “Saskatonians can now take shame in the fact that this is the only major city in Canada without a railway-operated hotel.”⁶² Wade even went as far as to suggest that the citizens of Canada could sustain the Bessborough as a losing enterprise to keep it in public hands.⁶³ Wade was not alone in this opinion. Steve Lewis, a research assistant in the University of Saskatchewan’s Department of Economics and Political Science, wrote a similar editorial. He bemoaned the loss of public ownership, stating, “As a taxpayer, I could care less if the Bessborough lost money, as long as it provided disinterested service to the public.”⁶⁴ Lewis believed that many Saskatoon residents would be “unwilling to settle for service more, shall we say cavalier, than is to be had at

⁵⁸ “Bess Sale Made Commons Issue,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, October 29, 1973.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Tom Cooney, “Hotel Price under \$2.3 million, says CN Official,” *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, November 28, 1973, 2.

⁶¹ Phil Wade, “The Demise of an Old Friend,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, December 11, 1973.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Steve Lewis, “Saskatoon Stands to Lose,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, August 14, 1973.

publicly-owned hotels.”⁶⁵ It was not the new owners specifically who would disrupt the high level of service. It was the very nature of private ownership: “the present level of service and prices cannot logically be maintained, if the owners are to make a profit.”⁶⁶ Clearly, the issue was not that the Baltzan family bought it; it was that the Canadian National sold it.

The Bessborough under CN was not doing well financially. When the Saskatoon Board of Trade lobbied CN to build a hotel in Saskatoon, they attached a twenty-five-year tax exemption to the deal. By 1955, this deal had expired and even though CN asked for the tax exemption to be extended, the city refused and CN began to pay the city \$30,000 a year in taxes. While the citizens of Saskatoon loved the hotel, the occupancy rates had never been high enough to make a good profit. Between 1936 and 1953, the CN made a net profit of \$1,052,983, which averaged out to about \$58,500 a year.⁶⁷ \$30,000 a year in taxes would have been more than half of that profit. This trend worsened. By the 1970s, the hotel was losing money: it lost \$505,501 in 1970, \$417,600 in 1971, and \$396,000 in 1972.⁶⁸ But low profits were not a problem plaguing only the Bessborough Hotel. The 1970s and 1980s were a dark time for all prairie railway hotels. The CPR demolished Winnipeg’s Hotel Alexandria in 1971.⁶⁹ Calgary’s Hotel Palliser almost received the same treatment; the CPR intended to build a newer hotel and construct office buildings where the old one stood. However, this decision was reversed and the hotel is still there today.⁷⁰ Edmonton’s Hotel Macdonald was closed in 1982 for renovations and the hotel did not reopen again until

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Hannon, “Saskatoon’s Love Affair,” 86.

⁶⁸ Tom Cooney, “Bessborough sale Price Under \$2.3 million: says CN Official,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, November 28, 1973, 2.

⁶⁹ Barbara Chisholm, “Royal Alexandria Hotel,” in *Castles of the North: Canada’s Grand Hotels*, ed. Barbara Chisholm (Toronto: Lynx Images Inc., 2001), 209.

⁷⁰ Harry M. Sanders, “Palliser Hotel,” in *Castles of the North: Canada’s Grand Hotels*, ed. Barbara Chisholm (Toronto: Lynx Images Inc., 2001), 241.

1991.⁷¹ Regina's Hotel Saskatchewan went into receivership in the late 1980s.⁷² While it seems hard to believe now, the Bessborough was in real trouble.

Gloria Erickson, a former employee who began as a cashier in the Willows Cafeteria in 1969, remembered the last years of CN ownership of the hotel as being run down. CN had stopped putting money into the hotel: the sales people had nothing to work with, hotel supplies were low and the hotel was dingy and out of date. Because of these issues, Erickson said that the hotel staff was excited to have new ownership when the Baltzan family bought the hotel.⁷³

Nevertheless, the loss of public ownership – of the people's ownership – of the hotel changed the way the hotel was seen by some members of the community. One interviewee remembered that the hotel was no longer seen as a symbol of the city but of a symbol of one family's wealth.⁷⁴ The hotel was also seen by another interviewee who worked at the hotel in the 1980s as the new owners' personal private playground.⁷⁵ These new perceptions of the hotel and its ownership had an important impact on the relationship between the hotel and the people of Saskatoon. As the Bessborough's symbolic role in the city changed, so would the way residents interacted with the hotel. However, these perceptions, while telling, do not tell the whole story. The hotels that did survive struggled to conform to the tastes of the period as railway hotels across Canada attempted to modernize in an effort to encourage guests to stay. Historic charm was no longer what modern travelers wanted and the hotels adapted as best they could. The Hotel Macdonald in Edmonton put in a false low ceiling in their main ballroom to cover up the ornate,

⁷¹ Harry M. Sanders, "Hotel Macdonald," in *Castles of the North: Canada's Grand Hotels*, ed. Barbara Chisholm (Toronto: Lynx Images Inc., 2001), 250-1.

⁷² Barbara Chisholm, "Hotel Saskatchewan," in *Castles of the North: Canada's Grand Hotels*, ed. Barbara Chisholm (Toronto: Lynx Images Inc., 2001), 225.

⁷³ Gloria Erickson, Interview with Author, November 23, 2015.

⁷⁴ Anonymous 1 Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, October 19, 2015.

⁷⁵ Anonymous 2 Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, October 14, 2015.

hand carved roof.⁷⁶ The Royal York in Toronto covered their lobby's marble pillars with wood veneer.⁷⁷ Shag carpet was a fixture at many hotels, including the Empress in Victoria. The Bessborough was no different. In the mid-1960s, the Canadian National renovated the hotel in this more "modern" style that was sweeping across the country. The renovations, which began in 1963, cost \$350,000 and updated virtually every aspect of the hotel's interior. The 1960s style was seen in the main floor lobby as it boasted "a bright new look achieved through the use of wood paneling, fresh colors and new vinyl wall covering, and wall-to-wall carpeting."⁷⁸ While some residents remembered the Baltzan family as the ones who completed the "offending renovations", the truth is that the hotel was firmly in the grip of the 1960s tastes by the time the Baltzan's bought the hotel.⁷⁹

Stefan Deprez acknowledged that it is possible "some people may have thought that [the Baltzans] scooped it up, picked it up for a pretty penny... took it away from the community."⁸⁰ But Deprez stressed that "the CNR was ready to walk away, and if it hadn't been for the Baltzans and their investment over the course of the 16 years that they owned it, the city very much risked losing this hotel."⁸¹ The public's fear that the Baltzan family did not have deep enough pockets to keep the hotel running was not completely unfounded. The new owners were "selective in what they did to the hotel just because it could have been a money pit."⁸² Then general manager, Wayne Chophonis, who began at the Bessborough as a elevator operator, recalled that the Baltzan family spent a lot of money behind the scenes upgrading the elevators, plumbing, and the kitchen.⁸³ But

⁷⁶ Sanders, "Hotel Macdonald," 249.

⁷⁷ Andrew Turnbull, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, September 10, 2015.

⁷⁸ "Bessborough Room Last Touch to Bessborough Facelift," *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, September 9, 1966.

⁷⁹ Anonymous 2 Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, October 14, 2015

⁸⁰ Stefan Deprez, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, November 3, 2015.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Wayne Chophonis, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, November 23, 2015.

not all the money was spent behind the scenes. The new owners “tried to diverse the income stream” through ventures such as new restaurants, retail space, office space and opening up the back part of the hotel that used to house the laundry service and put in an indoor pool and recreation area.⁸⁴ Deprez said that from his point of view, the Baltzan family “did a number of things correctly, I believe, and I think they’ve stood the test of time.”⁸⁵ Choponis echoed these statements, mentioning that the Bessborough’s Samurai restaurant, which opened in the 1970s, is currently one of the longest running restaurants in Saskatoon. Choponis remembered that during the last years of CN ownership, the public began to disengage with the hotel due to its lack of upkeep, but when the Baltzan family began their renovations and new projects, the community reengaged with the hotel.⁸⁶ Like Deprez, he viewed the Baltzan as an integral factor in the hotel’s survival.

Along with their new projects, the Baltzans kept many of the hotel’s features from the CN’s ownership, such as the series of small bars on the mezzanine level. An interviewee, who worked in the Library Bar in the mid-1970s, remembered the bar being an incredibly dark room, which they classified as “risqué.”⁸⁷ The interviewee described the Pioneer Room as a tavern with a pool table and red terry towel bar cloths. In the early 1970s, the Pioneer Room was the place to go on Thursday nights, especially because it was a place where teenagers could drink underage. It was a popular spot for hippies and beatniks, but not the “cool groovies” who hung out at the Ritz Hotel’s Apollo Room or the Sheraton hotel nightclub. The Pioneer Room was where university students would buy off-sale beer and bike back across the bridge.⁸⁸ These memories show how much

⁸⁴ Stefan Deprez, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, November 3, 2015.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Wayne Choponis, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, November 23, 2015.

⁸⁷ Anonymous 1 Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, October 19, 2015.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

evolving tastes changed the Bessborough from a hotel noted for its “grace and charm,” as advertised by the CN to the hotel trying to find its niche in the 1960s and 1970s.⁸⁹

In the 1970s, the Bessborough Hotel once again was caught up in a controversial political battle, this time over the creation of the Meewasin Valley Authority. The MVA was a joint venture between the City of Saskatoon, the R.M. of Corman Park, the Province of Saskatchewan and the University of Saskatchewan, which owned large sections of Saskatoon’s river valley. On the advice of a consultant report, the MVA was created to address concerns over private and public development of the riverbank, and the declining water quality.⁹⁰ Similar to Saskatoon’s Hotel Saskatchewan envy during the 1920s, Saskatoon wanted what their rival city, Regina had – the Wascana Centre Authority. In 1978, renowned architect Raymond Moriyama presented his report, *The Meewasin Valley Project: 100-Year Conceptual Master Plan*. On May 4, 1979 the Saskatchewan Legislature unanimously passed the act creating the Meewasin Valley Authority.⁹¹

As a central building along the downtown section of Saskatoon’s riverbank, the Bessborough featured prominently in this plan. As Roy Romanow, one of the driving forces behind the formation of the MVA explained, the MVA was meant to:

beautify over a period of time the river bank and all the structures which were there, including the Bessborough Hotel. We viewed it as a real serious heritage structure... The MVA was not designed only for the Bessborough Hotel... [but the hotel] was the centre... The idea was that the Bessborough was going to be one of the central features, of course the river and the valley [also] being one of the central features to beautify the city.⁹²

Of the three main features identified by the MVA, only one of these was a commercial space owned by private citizens. Yet, by being one of the focal points of the MVA, the Bessborough became part of a special space within the city. While it had been a part of the river bank since its

⁸⁹ “The Bessborough”, *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, December 7, 1935, 1.

⁹⁰ Paul Hanley, *Meewasin: 25 Years in the Life of a River Valley*, (Saskatoon: Meewasin, 2006), 7, 12.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹² Roy Romanow, Interview with Author, Saskatoon SK, August 26, 2015.

construction, it would now be part of a newly protected, natural space, making it even more unique within the city.

The MVA was hugely controversial within the community. Certain residents worried about the extent of the MVA's "authority." Wallace Hamm, a resident of the Rural Municipality of Corman Park, formed the River Edge Heritage Association to protect private property rights within the MVA's jurisdiction. This backlash culminated at a meeting at the Saskatoon Travelodge on January 3, 1980 to discuss the R.M. of Corman Park's role in the MVA.⁹³ Some of the ratepayers accused the R.M. of Corman Park and the MVA of "taking away basic human rights inherent in property ownership."⁹⁴ The meeting snowballed into an attack on the MVA. Former Mayor Cliff Wright said later that "there is no way that you could describe to a Canadian the intensity of that meeting, or the hostility that existed in that room."⁹⁵ A year later, Corman Park withdrew from the MVA.⁹⁶ When the NDP lost the 1982 election, the newly elected Conservative government severely limited the scope, funding and powers of the MVA.⁹⁷ Even though the MVA boundaries were diminished, the Bessborough Hotel still remained within its jurisdiction.⁹⁸

Today, the MVA is an incredibly popular and important part of Saskatoon. It routinely makes *Planet S's* "Best of Saskatoon" list as well as similar lists in national publications such as West Jet's *Up! Magazine* and *Reader's Digest*.⁹⁹ Many of the interviewees mentioned the river and trail systems as the best part of the city, along with the Bessborough. By incorporating the Bessborough Hotel into the early, and ultimately the final, MVA plans, the Bessborough's

⁹³ Bill Cleverly, "Ratepayers Pressure Corman Council over MVA," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, January 4, 1980, 3.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Cliff Wright, Interview with Samuel Derksen, Saskatoon, SK, March 8, 2013.

⁹⁶ Hanley, *Meewasin*, 82.

⁹⁷ Larry Johnsrude, "Government Curbs MVA Powers," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, March 31, 1983, A15.

⁹⁸ "Jurisdiction Map," Meewasin Valley Authority, accessed December 1, 2015

<http://meewasin.com/about/#jurisdiction>

⁹⁹ "Meewasin in the News," Meewasin Valley Authority, accessed December 1, 2015,

<http://meewasin.com/about/meewasin-in-the-news>

contributions to Saskatoon's heritage and culture were recognized and ensured the hotel would remain an important structure in the development of Saskatoon. As part of the MVA, the Bessborough was cemented as an important and protected cultural space. By being the only commercial venue within the MVA's jurisdiction, it became even more of a singular structure.

When the hotel was put up for sale again in the late 1980s, just after the hotel's 50th anniversary, the public's response was less pronounced than it had been in 1973. While the *Star-Phoenix* still followed the sale of the hotel, the articles contained none of the outrage that characterized the 1973 sale. The Baltzan family put the hotel up for sale in November 1987 through an Edmonton-based commercial real estate agent. While, according to the *Star-Phoenix*, there was an offer on the hotel by Stel Hotels Ltd just a month later, the Bessborough did not sell for another two years. Delta Hotels did not emerge as a possible buyer until June 1989. In its discussions of the sale, the *Star-Phoenix* consistently mentioned the renovations done to the hotel by the Baltzan family and the rumor that the hotel was "in difficult financial straits."¹⁰⁰ In June, Delta revealed that it was conducting a feasibility study to ensure that the Bessborough was in the advertised state.¹⁰¹ On November 10 1989, Delta Hotels announced their purchase of the Bessborough Hotel from the Baltzan family and renamed it the Delta Bessborough. Delta announced that they would spend \$13.5 million to buy and begin renovations on the hotel, including guest rooms, hallways, exterior entrances, lobby areas, dining rooms, banquet facilities, and recreation areas.¹⁰² Neither Delta nor the Baltzan family revealed how much of the \$13.5 million was for the sale of the hotel. Marc Baltzan did, however, comment on the Bessborough's financial state, which always seemed to be under scrutiny by the paper and the public during the Baltzan's tenure. According to the

¹⁰⁰ James Parker, "Deal of Bessborough Struck with Delta Hotels: Sources," *Saskatoon, Star-Phoenix*, June 9, 1989.

¹⁰¹ "Delta Studies Bessborough." *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, June 17, 1989.

¹⁰² James Parker, "Delta Seals Bessborough Purchase," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, November 11, 1989.

eldest Baltzan, “the Bessborough [was] coming off one its best years in history” and that they sold the hotel to be able to devote more time to their medical practices.¹⁰³ This time around, the *Star-Phoenix* viewed the sale and the new owners as positive, and were looking forward to an exciting future for the hotel. Delta, as a national chain, was seen as a company with deep enough pockets to return the Bessborough to its former glory. There was no outrage that a local icon, owned by a prominent local family, was being sold to a west coast-based national hotel chain. There seemed to be no concerns that this new owner would not understand the needs of the hotel as Saskatoon’s historical icon and of the hotel’s relationship to the community.

Yet despite the Bessborough’s new influx of cash, the hotel’s relationship with the community suffered. Under the Baltzan family, the hotel’s general manager was Wayne Choponis, who had started as the elevator operator and worked his way up the general manager position, which he held for the majority of the Baltzan’s sixteen years of ownership. After Delta purchased the hotel, the Bessborough went through a quick succession of general managers partly because the company used the Bessborough, a hotel with 225 rooms, as a training ground for their larger hotels. Over the first ten years of ownership, Deprez estimates that the Bessborough went through seven or eight general managers and “they were all from ‘away’, they weren’t from this community.”¹⁰⁴ Because of the quick manager turnover, the relationship between the hotel’s upper management and Saskatoon’s business community faltered. Saskatoon is a small city and Deprez remembered the feeling when he and former general manager Andrew Turnbull first came of “how long are these guy’s going to last, because people had just seen it, the business community had just seen it, that he’s just another guy who [is just using the hotel] as a stepping stone to somewhere

¹⁰³ James Parker, “Delta Seals Bessborough Purchase,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, November 11, 1989.

¹⁰⁴ Stefan Deprez, Interview with Author, Saskatoon SK, November 3, 2015.

else.”¹⁰⁵ Since the other major hotels were locally owned and their local business networks were more established, Turnbull and Deprez had a more difficult time breaking through those barriers as outsiders to the community, especially because their predecessors never were able to build these relationships. But as time went on, Deprez sensed a reengagement of the hotel with the community, which he attributed to several factors. One, as stated before, was the longevity of both he and Andrew Turnbull’s time at the hotel; Turnbull served as General Manager for fourteen years before retiring in October 2014 and Deprez is currently in his fifteenth year as Director of Sales and Marketing. The second factor Deprez identified was their reengagement with the history of the hotel and their ability to tell the hotel’s story in a clear and concise manner. Hotel management understood and were passionate about the hotel’s history and importance in the city, and the community responded to that.¹⁰⁶ The third factor were the events the hotel put on in an attempt to reengage with the community. One interviewee organized sleepovers for their grade eight students in the Bessborough Hotel’s Adam Ballroom, a tradition they conducted for many years.¹⁰⁷ However, one of the main events that most of the interviews pointed to was the Saskatoon Jazz Festival, which is held in the Bessborough Gardens every summer. One interviewee, Makenzie Frizzle, eighteen, had only visited the Bessborough to attend the Festival.¹⁰⁸ The Jazz Festival clearly helped bring the younger generation to the hotel. Another interviewee remarked on the specialness of the venue. While the uniqueness of music concerts in the backyard of a castle is part of it, the intimacy of the space was another reason. The Saskatoon Jazz Festival musical acts rivaled those who performed in Canada’s bigger centres like Montreal and Vancouver, but the Bessborough Gardens was still small enough to change the atmosphere of the event, a change the

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Stefan Deprez, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, November 3, 2015.

¹⁰⁷ Anonymous 1 Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, October 19, 2015.

¹⁰⁸ Mackenzie Frizzle, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, July 31, 2015.

interviewee thought was for the better.¹⁰⁹ Deprez agreed. He said that “so many people have many connections with the hotel, you just need to give them a window of opportunity to rekindle those emotions [and] hopefully they are creating new connections for the future as well.”¹¹⁰ These ‘windows of opportunities’ came in other forms. The Bessborough hosted events for the hotel’s the 65th and 75th Anniversaries and hosts tours for the annual Doors Open, which gives the community a peek into the city’s private heritage buildings. Other events, such as the Rock the River Festival and the Frosted Gardens ice carving exhibit became yearly events at the Bessborough. Because of these actions by the hotel, Deprez said that in the last few years the hotel’s relationship with the community had become strong once again.

Deprez’s perception of the hotel’s relationship with the community was not universally held. Among the interviewees, there were varying perceptions of the hotel’s present place in Saskatoon. Some interviewees cited the hotel’s human element as one of the reasons for the hotel’s relationship with the city. Former General Manager, Andrew Turnbull thought the hotel was special because of the human connection. As he said, “it does take people to bring it to life. Its bricks and mortar - beautiful bricks and mortar but it does take people to bring it to life.”¹¹¹ Jan Kay, who had stayed in the hotel hundreds of times since 1970s, said she thought what made the hotel special were the traditions people created around the hotel, whether attending Sunday brunch at the beginning of every month, or celebrating wedding anniversaries there, or even using the hotel as a backdrop for photographing special events.¹¹² The hotel was something that people incorporated into the milestones of their lives, and it is this chosen connection to the building that is a large part of the hotel’s relationship to the city. However, almost all the interviewees identified

¹⁰⁹ Anonymous 1 Interview with the Author, Saskatoon, SK, October 19, 2015.

¹¹⁰ Stefan Deprez, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, November 3, 2015.

¹¹¹ Andrew Turnbull, Telephone Interview with Author, September 10, 2015.

¹¹² Jan Kay, Telephone Interview by Author, July 17, 2015.

two major aspects that have cemented the hotel as an important part of Saskatoon: the hotel's downtown location and its unique and opulent architectural style. The Bessborough's nickname "The Castle on the River" was brought up repeatedly as a way of discussing how these factors made the hotel Saskatoon's landmark.

The idea of the hotel as Saskatoon's landmark was not new. The 1955 Maclean's' article, "Saskatoon's Love Affair with a Hotel named Bess" suggested that the Bessborough's status as Saskatoon's most prominent landmark was part of the reason it is so beloved.¹¹³ This idea of the hotel as a landmark or an icon of the city was expressed by several participants as the reason for the hotel's relationship with its community. As an icon, the Bessborough represents Saskatoon, both to itself and to others. While the sentiments of what the hotel represents were not expressed the same way as they were in 1935, the core idea remains the same. As Andrew Turnbull put it, "The hotel gives [Saskatoon] a more worldly feel... This hotel could be anywhere... you could take the Bessborough and drop it in any city in the world and people would take pictures of it... It gave people something to be proud of."¹¹⁴ Michael McCoy, a long-time resident of Saskatoon, also expressed the community's pride in the Bessborough through a story he relayed about a visit from his friend:

A friend of mine came to visit from London and we drove down Spadina Crescent and I was so proud showing him this little bit of nicety that we had and I remember taking a look at the Bessborough, sort of coming up on it and I remember him saying 'what's that pile of bricks' and I was almost crushed thinking oh, well I think that's the best we have to offer... My reaction is indicative of what a lot of people think. I think we have gotten a certain amount of pride in the building itself and its placement on the river and it is iconic.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Hannon, "Saskatoon's Love Affair," 14.

¹¹⁴ Andrew Turnbull, Telephone Interview with Author, September 10, 2015.

¹¹⁵ Michael McCoy, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, October 14, 2015.

To its community, the hotel is a source of pride, culture and sophistication. In many ways, it says the same thing about Saskatoon that it said in 1935: the hotel is evidence that Saskatoon has come into its own, that it is no longer some simple prairie city.

The size of Saskatoon also plays a part in how the Bessborough is perceived. Stefan Deprez and Andrew Turnbull, who have both worked at other historic railway hotels in Canada, commented on the affect the city of Saskatoon has had on the Bessborough. Deprez likened the Bessborough to a larger version of a small town hotel or hockey arena – it’s the community focal point or gather place.¹¹⁶ Turnbull agreed. He stated, that while he believes all railway hotels hold a special place in their community, the Bessborough’s place is “amplified” because of its size, location, and the lack of other historical buildings in Saskatoon. To illustrate his point, Turnbull cited the difference with Toronto’s Royal York. While the Royal York is much bigger – 1600 rooms to the Bessborough’s 225 – Toronto is still much larger than Saskatoon. Toronto also has a number of upscale hotels, including a Four Seasons, as well as a multitude of heritage buildings that make the Royal York *a* hotel, not *the* hotel.¹¹⁷ Other interviewees expressed these sentiments as well. Jan Baxter-Jones, who emigrated to Saskatoon from the British Isles in 2000, cited the lack of historic buildings in Saskatoon as what makes the Bessborough special. She thought the Bessborough has a unique atmosphere and culture and there is not any other building like it in the city.¹¹⁸ Mackenzie Frizzle, a young, lifelong resident of Saskatoon, believed that the Bessborough adds an important piece of history to Saskatoon and Saskatchewan, since it is a relatively new province and does not have the same historical buildings as Quebec or Nova Scotia.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Stefan Deprez, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, November 3, 2015.

¹¹⁷ Andrew Turnbull, Telephone Interview with Author, September 10, 2015.

¹¹⁸ Jan Baxter-Jones, Interview with Author, Saskatoon SK, July 31, 2015.

¹¹⁹ Mackenzie Frizzle, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, July 14, 2015.

Almost every interviewee who believed the hotel still has an important relationship with its community cited the location and the architecture as important factors. The hotel's placement along the riverbank strengthens the Bessborough's picturesque image, as well as tying it to another major focal point of the city, the river. The hotel's downtown location allows the hotel to act as an anchor for the city. Several interviewees cited the hotel as an important historic architectural building. The Bessborough's castle-like architecture allows it to be perceived as older than it is. Built in 1935, the Bessborough is not even the oldest building on 21st Street. The Land Titles Office, located two blocks from the hotel, was completed in 1909.¹²⁰ In terms of Saskatoon's designated built heritage, the 'newest' municipally designated building is the Superintendent's Residence at the Forestry Farm, which was built in 1913.¹²¹ The oldest, the Marr Residence, was built in 1884.¹²² Indeed, the Bessborough Hotel has not been designated as a heritage site by any level of government. A lack of official designation does not mean the Bessborough is not an important heritage site in the city. It is. But it seems that the hotel's European style architecture overshadows the older, more 'modest' historical spaces in the city.

However, none of the interviewees directly cited British or French influence on the hotel. At most, the interviewees mentioned the hotel as a European castle but more often they simply called it a castle without citing any ethnic influence. It is probable the Bessborough's ties to the British Empire were diminished as Canada's relationship to the British crown changed and became less pronounced. McCoy, a long-time resident of Saskatoon, expressed the sentiment that while the hotel "still has a certain place... definitely I think its lost is exclusivity."¹²³ Likewise, the idea

¹²⁰“Land Titles Office,” *Saskatoon Heritage Society*, Accessed 29 November 2015, http://www.saskatoonheritage.ca/designated/land_titles.html.

¹²¹“Superintendent's Residence,” *Saskatoon Heritage Society*, Accessed 29 November 2015, http://www.saskatoonheritage.ca/designated/superintendents_residence.html.

¹²²“Marr Residence,” *Saskatoon Heritage Society*, Accessed 29 November 2015, http://www.saskatoonheritage.ca/designated/marr_residence.html.

¹²³Michael McCoy, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, October 14, 2015.

of the Bessborough as a sign of economic prosperity seems firmly rooted in the past. While some interviewees mentioned the economic importance of the construction and opening of the Bessborough Hotel in Depression-era Saskatoon, only one mentioned the commerce the hotel brings to the city today. Today, only the idea of the hotel as a marker of Saskatoon's ambitions and progress can still be found in the community today.

Yet, not everyone believed that the Bessborough's relationship with the community was still strong. Kathleen McCorkell, a long-time resident of Saskatoon and the daughter of former Senator Ralph Byron Horner, remembered the dances from her university years as well as the ones put on by the hotel. McCorkell believed that the dances gave the city's young people somewhere to go and socialize. These dances, she thought, were what made the hotel special and that is something that is missing today. While McCorkell acknowledged the hotel has been supportive of important events like the Jazz Festival and is still an important heritage building, the relationship between the Bessborough and the community is not what it once was.¹²⁴

Another interviewee, whose parents had their business office in the Bessborough during late 1980s, recalled the hotel always being busy during their childhood but now it seems much quieter. Visually, the hotel has a big reputation in town. The interviewee stated the hotel has become much more of a convention space for out-of-town business but staying at the hotel still holds some prestige for the local community. The interviewee saw the hotel as more of a backdrop to events that happen downtown and in the surrounding park. It is an important visual part of Saskatoon's skyline but most people do not necessarily go inside. The interviewee believes the Bessborough no longer serves an important role downtown. The exterior matters because of its

¹²⁴ Kathleen McCorkell, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, July 23, 2015.

unique architecture and location of the river. The interviewee speculated that Delta is happy to have their hotel be a landmark but is less concerned about how the local community utilizes it¹²⁵

Alison Norlen, a visual artist and professor at the University of Saskatchewan, thinks the hotel gives off an ominous feel, especially in the empty spaces in the upper parts of the hotel. Norlen wondered if guests hear the hotel's ghost stories, and when they visit, if they capitulate to that experience. In other words, do visitors hear the ghost stories and the foreboding feelings the stories inspire become part of their experience at the hotel? Norlen also believed the contemporary renovations of the hotel has caused it to lose its historical authenticity, but she said that the historic photographs of the hotel in the Bessborough are great because visitors are able to see the hotel's transformation throughout its life. Norlen suggested the hotel is, in many ways, a time capsule of Saskatoon. When you think about all the people who have gone to the Bessborough and all the things that have gone on there, its clear that the Bessborough has a strong connection to the social, political, economic and cultural development of the city.¹²⁶

What the hotel means to Saskatoon is not universal. The degree to which interviewees thought the hotel is important to the community varies. Some of them believed that the hotel has lost what made it special. But for the most part, the interviewees agreed that the Bessborough is special to Saskatoon because of its architecture and location. This belief in the hotel's specialness can be seen in how the community has interacted with the hotel for its eighty-year history.

The Bessborough Hotel's 65th anniversary took place on December 10, 2000. While not a traditional 'big' anniversary, the hotel's management decided to hold an event to unveil the Bessborough's new lounge, which was named after its first registered guest, radio broadcaster Bill Stovin, sixty-five years to the day that he checked in to the hotel. Along with the unveiling, the

¹²⁵ Anonymous 3, Interview with the Author, Saskatoon, SK, October 5, 2015.

¹²⁶ Alison Norlen, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, August 25, 2015.

hotel hosted an open house and led tours of the hotel. On the morning of Sunday, December 10, Saskatoon's temperature was hovering around -35 degree Celsius. Stefan Deprez, who had only worked at the hotel for eleven months, feared the cold would dampen the turnout. However, an estimated 1500 people came through the hotel that day to celebrate its anniversary. Deprez remembered people coming up to him to share their memories of staying at the hotel, even bringing souvenirs with them, such as the receipts of special nights they had spent at the hotel.¹²⁷

This anecdote highlighted the importance of the hotel in the lives of Saskatoon's residents and their desire to celebrate its role in their lives. The Bessborough Hotel has been the site for important personal moments for the residents of its community and for significant events in the development of Saskatoon as a city. Events, such as the signing of the Saskatoon Accord and the creation of the Meewasin Valley Authority, helped to change the identity and culture of the city and the province. The various groups that developed relationships with the hotel, such as the University of Saskatchewan, the provincial government, and the Saskatoon business community, are all entities that were and continue to be seen as important to the development of Saskatoon and Saskatchewan more broadly. These events and relationships helped shape the community's perceptions of the Bessborough as an iconic heritage landmark in the city. While the memories made inside the hotel are part of the reason for the hotel's relationship with its community, what the hotel represents plays a large role as well. When the hotel opened, it seemed to represent a monument to the British Empire and a symbol of Saskatoon's future progress and prosperity. As Canada's relationship with Europe became less prominent, so too did the Bessborough's representation of this relationship in the minds of its home community. But the idea that Bessborough represents Saskatoon's aspirations as an important prairie centre is still found in the

¹²⁷ Stefan Deprez, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, November 3, 2015.

community today, largely due to the Bessborough's location, architecture, and history. The hotel is still a source of status and pride for Saskatoon – it still has the power to suggest to visitors and even to the residents of Saskatoon that the city is important economically, socially, and culturally.

Chapter Two

Nothing to Celebrate: A Saskatoon Landmark's History of Exclusion

The Bessborough hotel also had a history of exclusionary practices towards several factions of the Saskatoon community. Many times, the treatment of these groups within the hotel mirrored the attitudes of the larger community. In some instances, their exclusion was precipitated when other hotel patrons complained about their appearances or behavior, claiming that it was not appropriate for a hotel such as the Bessborough, and threatening to boycott the hotel if these groups were not removed.¹ If the hotel was symbolic of Saskatoon's aspirations as an economic and social centre of the prairies, then these groups were not seen as part of these aspirations. These factions – Saskatoon's gay community, the 'long haired young people' of the 1970s, and the residents of Saskatoon's west side – were some of the groups excluded from the Bessborough Hotel. Moreover, within these groups, the experiences varied greatly. The exclusionary practices towards each group were not uniform in design, intent, or length of time. But members of each group were told, either directly or indirectly, that they were not welcome at the Bessborough Hotel for a variety of reasons, including class, race, political beliefs, and sexual orientation. These practices, and the methods used to fight back against them, shed light on Saskatoon's growth as an urban centre and the role of the Bessborough Hotel in the community's social, cultural, and economic makeup.

For Saskatoon's early gay community, the Bessborough Hotel and the surrounding park were important meeting places.² In Saskatoon, like many prairie centers, "older queer spaces

¹ "Bessborough Pub Dress Rules Rankle Young Patrons," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, June 9, 1970, 3.

² I would like to gratefully acknowledge Dr. Valerie J. Korinek for her help and guidance in preparing this part of my thesis. Valerie J. Korinek, "A Queer-Eye View of the Prairies: Restoring Queer Histories to the West," in *The West and Beyond: New Perspectives on an Imagined Region*, eds Alvin Finkel, Sarah Carter and Peter Fortna (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2010), 286; Valerie J. Korinek, "Activism = Public Education: The History of Public Discourses of Homosexuality in Saskatchewan, 1971-1993" in *I Could Not Speak My Heart: Education and Social Justice for Gay Youth*, eds. James McNinch and Mary Cronin (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 2004), 112; Valerie J. Korinek, "The Most Openly Gay Man for at Least a Thousand Miles: Doug Wilson and the Politicization of a Province, 1975-83," *Canadian Historical Review* 84, 4 (2003): 521-2. Accessed

[were] located in working-class bars, railway hotel bars, public toilets (tearooms), and outdoor parks and cruising areas that marked primarily male queer spaces prior to the early seventies.”³ Along with these downtown spaces, older gay men in the city held private house parties but “according to Tom Warner, a former resident of Prince Albert, it took perseverance to find these links to the underground community and once known, invitations were restricted to those who were popular, or who did not displease the organizers.”⁴ While members of the gay community were not outright barred from the Bessborough, they were permitted to visit the hotel only if they hid their homosexuality. In other words, they had to publically fit into the parameters the dominant society deemed appropriate. The park was a slightly different matter. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the public park next to the South Saskatchewan River was used as a “cruising ground” as early as the 1930s, prior to the Bessborough’s construction. The park was probably used as a cruising ground due to its sheltered nature as well as its proximity to Saskatoon’s YMCA, which at the time was located at Spadina Crescent and 20th Street, just a block from where the Bessborough would be constructed.⁵

Kiwanis Park, “which ran from the Broadway Bridge, behind the Bessborough Hotel to the University Bridge,” and was known more informally as Bessborough Park or simply ‘the park’, was a popular cruising ground for gay men in the 1960s and 1970s.⁶ In his memoir, “Adventures

November 15, 2015, <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.cyber.usask.ca/ehost/detail/detail?sid=34597da6-57f5-448a-aa18-ab545895d652%40sessionmgr110&vid=0&hid=102&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtG12ZQ%3d%3d#AN=11657567&db=31h>

³ Korinek, “A Queer-Eye View of the Prairies,” 286.

⁴ Korinek, “Activism = Public Education,” 112.

⁵ Neil Richards, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, September 21, 2015.

Mr. Richards recalled talking to an elderly gay couple who told him that the Bessborough Park was a cruising ground before the hotel was built. In Gens Hellquist’s Memoir “Adventures of a Prairie Fag” he also writes that in 1965 “I also learned that gay men drank at the bar in the Bessborough Hotel as well as the bar in the King George Hotel. Apparently, both had been places where gay men met for decades.” These two statements suggest that cruising of the area stretches back farther than the 1960s. Unfortunately, those that would have remembered these decades are not available to be interviewed.

⁶ Korinek, “The Most Openly Gay Man,” 521.

of a Prairie Fag”, Saskatoon-born gay rights activist Gens Hellquist explained the Bessborough Park was a place to go and meet other gay men. Hellquist came to this realization while “cruising magazine racks in the corner drug store... in my efforts to meet someone else like me.”⁷ During his cruising of the drug store physique magazines, Hellquist did meet, as he put it, “someone else like him”. Hellquist wrote that

we both noticed each other checking out the physique magazines and when he left the store I got up the nerve to follow. As I exited the store I noticed him peering into the store window next door. Somehow I summoned up the courage to approach him. We talked for a few minutes and he informed me that gay men met one another in the park around the Bessborough Hotel.⁸

Michael McCoy, another long time Saskatoon resident, also remembered learning about the Bessborough Park is a remarkably similar way.

The first gay person I met would have been at a little place called New Way Confectionary on 20th Street. I would take the bus there every Saturday to check to see because they had these muscle magazines and you would go there and just hope maybe one day there would be somebody else looking at one and then eventually there was. And I think maybe even through that person, they would say ‘oh you should come to the park’.⁹

Word of mouth was one of the main ways that local men found out about the park. Even though cruising never took place inside the hotel gardens, the park surrounding the Bessborough was identified with the hotel and ironically, known as a gay meeting place.

Hellquist and McCoy frequented the gardens in the mid to late 1960s. Hellquist remembered the park as “a form of community centre, or family, for those who were fortunate enough to find it.”¹⁰ He also remembered that meetings in the park were not always sexual in nature. Even though “many went down there with thoughts of finding sex or perhaps even a relationship, for most it was primarily a place where we had space to be who we were and support

⁷ Gens Hellquist, “Adventures of a Prairie Fag,” *Perceptions* 19, vol. 2 (2001): republished on University of Saskatchewan’s Archives *Saskatchewan Resources for Sexual Diversity* webpage in four parts, part one. http://library2.usask.ca/srsd/memoir_hellquist.php

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Michael McCoy, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, October 14, 2015.

¹⁰ Hellquist, “Adventures of a Prairie Fag,” part one.

for who we were.”¹¹ McCoy stated that in the late 1960s, there was usually one or two other gay men in the park at night, but not necessarily someone you would know.¹² Retired University of Saskatchewan librarian Neil Richards, who moved to Saskatoon in 1971, also remembered the park as just a place to go and hang out with your friends. Richards recalled the park being very busy - there could be thirty gay men in the park at one time.¹³

During these years, the park was predominantly, if entirely, a male space. Saskatoon’s lesbian community had alternate venues to meet like-minded companions such as private gatherings or meeting through sport organizations.¹⁴ That Hellquist had never met a lesbian in the gardens or any of the bars he frequented during the late 1960s indicates that these spaces were not a place where lesbians visited. Overall, the park “drew a cross section of Euro-Canadians and Aboriginal middle-and working-class men ranging in age from teenagers to retirees.”¹⁵ The park was a place where younger gay men could go before they were able to legally enter bars. Both Hellquist and McCoy began searching out like-minded companions while they were in their late teens. The park, along with a few downtown coffee houses, was one of the few venues open to them at this age.¹⁶

Bessborough Park was not without its dangers. In his memoirs, “Or Words to That Effect,” former University of Saskatchewan English Professor Peter Millard discussed the cruising area around the hotel. Since “Saskatoon is one Canada’s most amiable and civilized cities, so is her cruising space,”¹⁷ Millard wrote “Bessborough Park, is probably one of the safest and most

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Michael McCoy, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, October 14, 2015.

¹³ Neil Richards, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, September 21, 2015.

¹⁴ Korinek, “The Most Openly Gay Man,” 524.

¹⁵ Korinek, “The Most Openly Gay Man,” 521.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Peter Millard, “Of Words to That Effect,” *University of Saskatchewan Archives and Special Collections*, n.d., 282.

congenial in the country, although, of course, there is still a certain danger of assault from hunting groups of young straight males.”¹⁸ Michael McCoy also recalled that the park had an “element of danger” and remembered when he and two other men were chased out of the park by a group of young men. The trio made it to their car and the group of young men attacked and kicked the car. McCoy and the two other drove to the police station, but were afraid to go inside and report the incident because of the stigma surrounding homosexuality at the time.¹⁹ Neil Richards also remembered the occasional group of young people coming into the park to ‘bash’ those they found there and the reluctance to report such incidents to the police. Richards also remembered sporadic police shakedowns where police would question and card individuals in the park but let them go in exchange for cash.²⁰ These instances of discrimination seemed to mirror those in other prairie centres. For example, in Winnipeg, “gay men who cruised the hill in the late sixties commented on the risks posed by gay bashers who targeted them for sport, or possibly as compensation for their own conflicted sexuality.”²¹ For the most part, though, the Bessborough Park was remembered as relatively safe.

Gay activity was not limited to the park surrounding the hotel during the 1960s and 1970s. It also took place within the Bessborough Hotel. The Harlequin Room, one of smaller bars located in the north wing of the hotel’s second floor, was a popular unofficial gay bar in the city. It was one of three main public spaces, including the King George Hotel’s Cove Room and the Apollo Room at the Ritz Hotel, for gay men in the city.²² According to Gens Hellquist, “gay men drank

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Michael McCoy, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, October 14, 2015.

²⁰ Neil Richards, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, September 21, 2015.

²¹ Korinek, “We’re the Girls of the Pansy Parade,” *Social History* 45, no. 89 (2012): 149. Accessed June 25, 2016. <http://muse.jhu.edu.cyber.usask.ca/article/482027/pdf>. In Winnipeg, the provincial legislative grounds, a popular cruising ground, was known as “the hill.”

²² Korinek, “The Most Openly Gay Man,” 520-1.

at the bar in the Bessborough Hotel as well as the bar in the King George Hotel. Apparently, both had been places where gay men met for decades.”²³

The Harlequin Room was promoted through international gay directories. These directories listed places where travelers could find desired companionship or even just a safe space to drink. The *Barfly West* 1974 guide, for example, published in Los Angeles and covering the 22 most western states and all of Canada and Mexico, listed the Harlequin Room as a Saskatoon destination for dancing, entertainment, liquor, and mixed ages and types. The Apollo Room at the Ritz Hotel was also listed in this edition.²⁴ Through these guides, the Bessborough Hotel was internationally known as a place for gay individuals to meet. This reputation could have been a factor in where travelling businessmen chose to stay.

According to the interviewees, the management at the Bessborough Hotel was aware of the gay activity in the Harlequin Room. But for the most part, they turned a blind eye as long as the patrons refrained from scruffiness, flamboyant dress, or public affection.²⁵ These rules were not localized to Saskatoon but were found in other prairie centres as well. As Valerie J. Korinek noted in her article, *We're the Girls of the Pansy Parade: Historicizing Winnipeg's Queer Subcultures, 1930s-1970*, in Winnipeg during the late 1940s and 1950s, “particular codes of behavior were observed. Newcomers were taught the ‘rules’ by those in the know, including where to sit, what bars to frequent, and how to conduct oneself in the baths or on the trails.”²⁶ These codes of behavior also included how to dress. Gay men “dress[ed] appropriately to go out for the evening in suits, ties, and often hats, they obeyed the drinking rules of the day... and they avoided ‘camping it up’

²³Hellquist “Adventures of a Prairie Fag,” part one.

²⁴Bill Rand, Tyke Brown, and Bob Doggett, *Barfly West 1974*, Los Angeles: Advocate Publishing Inc., 1974.

²⁵Neil Richards, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, September 21, 2015.

²⁶Valerie J. Korinek, “We’re the Girls of the Pansy Parade,” 140-1.

too much in public establishments.”²⁷ It seems that the desire to fly under the radar to avoid detection or discrimination, as well as the methods implemented to do so, was something that took place across the prairies during this time.

But the gay presence in the Bessborough was not limited to patrons at the time. Both Richards and McCoy remembered the Bessborough employing gay staff throughout these decades. However, the Bessborough was not always a tolerant space. There was at least one episode of discrimination. In August 28, 1973, the Zodiac Friendship’s Society submitted a *Brief Regarding the Saskatchewan Bill of Rights Act and Other Provincial Human Rights Act* to Saskatchewan provincial Attorney General Roy Romanow. In the statement, it wrote that:

In Saskatoon, the maître d’ of the Bessborough Hotel asked two women to stop dancing together because they were upsetting a customer. He also threatened to throw them out if they didn’t quit. He also refused to seat people who he suspected of being homosexual, claiming there were no tables available even though there were clearly a number of empty tables available. He stated that he would like to rid the place of all homosexuals.²⁸

While it is not clear how often these episodes of discrimination took place or if the maître d’ described above was ever reprimanded, the presence of gay men in the hotel’s bar was not always accepted both by the customers and by the staff. While they were permitted in the hotel, gay men were only allowed to do if they were discreet about their sexual orientation. This demand for discretion was in contrast to the Ritz Hotel which protected its lucrative, gay clientele and “anyone hassling the gays would be turfed out.”²⁹ Clearly, both hotels were willing to project different images of themselves with regard to the clientele they allowed into their establishments. However, while the Ritz Hotel was more accommodating than other venues, discrimination against Saskatoon and Saskatchewan’s gay community was widespread, and sadly, “the fear of

²⁷ Korinek, “We’re the Girls of the Pansy Parade,” 141.

²⁸The Zodiac Friendship Society, and The University of Saskatchewan Homophile Association, “A Brief Regarding the Saskatchewan Bill of Rights Act and Other Provincial Human Rights Acts, Submitted to the Government of Saskatchewan and Members of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan,” August 28, 1973, pg 3.

²⁹Hellquist, “Adventures of a Prairie Fag,” part two.

homosexuals in Saskatchewan [is] that they have no recourse and this is in itself is perhaps the cruelest form of discrimination.”³⁰ This prevalent discrimination and the gay community’s lack of avenues in combatting such acts was a driving force in creating their own spaces in the early 1970s.

The Bessborough Hotel was not the only Canadian railway hotel known as a cruising area. It was part of a larger network of railway hotels across the prairies, and even other parts of Canada that were sites for male same-sex activity. In Winnipeg during the late 1940s and 1950s,

Main St. was a safe place to cruise day or night. The street’s crowning jewel was the Royal Alexander Hotel at the corner of Higgins and Main. It was elegance at its greatest and attracted many queens who hoped that some of its glitter would rub off on them... East of the hotel was the CP Station... It was a bustling place both day and night as train travel was at its peak.³¹

Regina’s Hotel Saskatchewan and Ottawa’s Hotel Laurier were also both named by the interviewees as other hotels they frequented.³² While the glamour of the hotels undoubtedly was a factor, many of these hotels had something in common that helped explain their roles as successful cruising grounds – the proximity to parks. The Bessborough is nestled along the river bank and is the only commercial space located on the river side of Spadina Crescent. The area had also been more densely treed in the 1970s than it is today.³³ In fact, the city removed much of the shrubbery in this area in an effort to curb gay activities in the park and make police surveillance easier.³⁴ The Hotel Saskatchewan is located across the street from Victoria Park, a fairly large, well-treed park. Hotel Laurier is located within Major Hill Park, another large, densely treed urban park. The

³⁰ The Zodiac Friendship Society, and The University of Saskatchewan Homophile Association, “A Brief Regarding the Saskatchewan Bill of Rights Act and Other Provincial Human Rights Acts, Submitted to the Government of Saskatchewan and Members of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan,” August 28, 1973, pg 3.

³¹ Korinek, “We’re the Girls of the Pansy Parade,” 139. The Royal Alexandra Hotel was built by Canadian Pacific Railway in 1906. The hotel closed in 1967 and was demolished in 1971.

³² Michael McCoy, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, October 14, 2015; Neil Richards, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, September 21, 2015.

³³ Neil Richards, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, September 21, 2015.

³⁴ Homo Hike: A Historical Walking Tour.” *Saskatoon Pride*, 2003. Accessed January 7, 2016.

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=znOjSvjx-ZBo.kkEhkAb7d0DM&ie=UTF8&hl=en&oe=UTF8&msa=0&ll=52.129358%2C-106.664376&spn=0.011723%2C0.020417&t=m&source=embed>

combination of a hotel with a commercial drinking space and a secluded, protected outdoor space provided an environment that was well suited to the needs of the gay community during this era. The Bessborough Hotel was not unique as a space utilized by gay men. Indeed, the Bessborough's status as a railway hotel and its setting most likely contributed to its development as a popular cruising space.

In 1971, Gens Hellquist and a small group of gay men and women began the task of forming an official gay organization.³⁵ Before this, "there was no sense of a 'gay community' then but only fragmentary social circles."³⁶ Saskatoon was not the only prairie centre to begin establishing its own spaces during this time. "Members-only social clubs are a hallmark of post-1970s Western Canadian gay and lesbian community formation" and Regina, Edmonton, Calgary and Winnipeg all opened their own clubs during this time.³⁷ In April 1971, the *Georgia Straight*, a newspaper published in Vancouver, ran an ad for the Saskatoon Gay Liberation. In the fall of that same year, two organizations, the Saskatoon Gay Action and the Gay Students Alliance, were formed. In January 1972, the Zodiac Friendship Society was created with a constitution, by-laws, and an elected board of directors. These new groups began to move out of the shadows and into spaces of their own. On Friday, February 11, 1972, the first public gay function in Saskatoon – a Valentine's Day Dance – was held at the Unitarian Church of Saskatoon. These dances became a weekly occurrence, always at the Unitarian Church's hall, until the near the end of 1972. In the early part of 1973, the Zodiac Friendship Society rented a space downtown on 2nd Ave. In March of that year, the first dance was held in the new space and the events expanded to include drop ins with one designated especially for lesbians, phone lines, and weekly dances.³⁸ Unlike some of the

³⁵ Korinek, "Activism = Public Education," 112.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Korinek, "A Queer-Eye View of the Prairies," 286.

³⁸ Hellquist, "The Adventures of a Prairie Fag," part two.

other prairie centres, part of the Zodiac Friendship Society's mission was activism in the form of public education. This activism began immediately. In 1972, Saskatoon Gay Action, the political activist committee of the Zodiac Friendship Society, met with numerous groups, did television interviews, and placed newspaper advertisements all in an effort to "inform the public of the truth about gay people."³⁹ As new, more visible spaces were slowly opened up for Saskatoon's gay community, including the first gay club in 1980, the old spaces were slowly becoming less frequented. By the 1980s, the Harlequin Room at the Bessborough Hotel was no longer advertised in the gay directories.⁴⁰

But the relationship between the hotel and the gay community was not forgotten. It was celebrated during the City of Saskatoon's centennial program through a photograph presentation that showcased spaces important to the history of Saskatoon's gay community and through the 2013 Saskatoon Pride Week's "Homo Hike: A Historical Downtown Walking Tour."⁴¹ This relationship is also important to the historical understanding of the wider community. It provides a greater understanding of the spaces the early gay community utilized in forming connections with one another and how these spaces can hold contradictory histories and different meanings for groups within the same community.

Saskatoon's gay community was not the only group who found resistance when trying to create a space for themselves in Saskatoon during this period. In the summer of 1970, the Bessborough implemented a dress code for their lobby floor pub, the Pioneer Room. At the time,

³⁹ Korinek, "Activism = Public Education," 114.

⁴⁰ Various gay directions from the 1980s, University of Saskatchewan Special Collections.

⁴¹ Saskatchewan Archives Board, Neil Richards Collection, F-413-11, Photograph, "Bessborough Park," 1982.; Homo Hike: A Historical Walking Tour." *Saskatoon Pride Association*, 2003. Accessed January, 7, 2016.

<https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=znOjSvjx-ZBo.kkEhkAb7d0DM&ie=UTF8&hl=en&oe=UTF8&msa=0&ll=52.129358%2C-106.664376&spn=0.011723%2C0.020417&t=m&source=embed>

the Pioneer Room was a popular hangout for Saskatoon's hippies, students, and leftists.⁴² The dress code, instituted on June 8, 1970, stipulated "for men shoes or sandals and socks, clean slacks or jeans with no holes or patches, Bermuda shorts but not cut off blue jeans, clean shirt or sweater, visible ears and no shoulder length hair or headbands."⁴³ George McCabe, the general manager at the time, complained about the men's "unwashed hair, filthy clothes, unruly language. Standing up to drink beer, and rumors of marijuana"⁴⁴. There had also been reports of women coming barefoot into the pub. McCabe defended the need for a dress code because some of the hotel guests refused to mingle with the dress code's target group. According to McCabe, other patrons even feared bringing their wives to the visit the Bessborough's other cocktail bars. Hotel guests had started staying at the Bessborough's competitors because of the 'objectionable' pub clientele in the Pioneer Room.⁴⁵ The University of Saskatchewan student newspaper, *The Sheaf* chalked up McCabe's decision to implement a dress code to placate "the businessmen and convention goers who gave the Bessborough a running chance at financial breaking even" since the "long-hairs, whether from toleration or penury, were not large spenders in the pub."⁴⁶

The 'long haired young people' as they were generally referred to by the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, tended to be a mixture of student radicals and hippies.⁴⁷ The student radicals were loosely affiliated with the hippie movement, as they both sported long hair, critiqued the social, political,

⁴² Anonymous Interview 1, with Author, Saskatoon, SK, October 19, 2015; Neil Richards, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, September 21, 2015.

⁴³ "Public Meeting Set on Pub Dress Rules," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, June 12, 1970, 3.

⁴⁴ "Bessborough Pub Dress Rules Rankle Young Patrons," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, June 9, 1970, 3.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Murray Campbell, "The City Beautiful Shows its Seamy Side," *The Sheaf*, July 22, 1970, 1.

⁴⁷ In Canada, the student activist movement was initially tied to the anti-nuclear campaign but eventually focused on a variety of issues similar to its American counterpart, including the American Civil Rights and the anti-Vietnam War movements. Doug Owsram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 221.

and economic systems of 1960s Canada and used marijuana as a recreational drug.⁴⁸ Both these groups were cause for societal anxiety. In Saskatoon, “kids grew their hair, wore weird clothes, smoked dope; everything in fact, to make them candidates for degeneracy,” but unlike their rival, Regina” no vigilante groups were formed.”⁴⁹ At least not until June 1970 when these long haired youths were kicked out of the Bessborough Hotel’s Pioneer Room. According to *The Sheaf*, the hippies “sat there, feeling perhaps a mixture of elation about finally being a target for discrimination, angered at this discrimination, and delighted about what an absurd, hilarious and farcical trip this was.”⁵⁰ They were “sure that they were going to be in the limelight for the next little while.”⁵¹ However, it is unlikely that even they could have foreseen how much attention the Bessborough’s exclusionary practices and their ensuing protests would garner.

Support for the Bessborough’s position was not universal. In fact, some of the Bessborough’s clientele opposed the hotel’s dress code. The *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* reported in June 1970 that two guests at a convention were refused service when they tried to buy drinks for a group of long-haired patrons. In response, “the merchant said he would... recommend to the association that it holds its convention in another hotel next year because of the management’s discriminatory policy towards the long-haired youths.”⁵² Others also told the *Star-Phoenix* the Pioneer Room was one of the city’s quieter drinking establishments.⁵³ Other downtown hotel bars downtown, including the Sheraton-Cavalier, the KG Motor Hotel, the Hotel Senator, and the Ritz Hotel tried to take advantage of the Bessborough’s dress code. They told the *Star-Phoenix* that

⁴⁸ Marcel Martel, “‘They Smell Bad, Have Diseases and are Lazy’: RCMP’s Officers’ Reporting on Hippies in the Late Sixties,” *The Sixties in Canada: A Turbulent and Creative Decade*, ed. M. Athena Palaeolougu. (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2009), 172.

⁴⁹ Murray Campbell, “The City Beautiful Shows its Seamy Side,” *The Sheaf*, July 22, 1970, 1.

⁵⁰ Murray Campbell, “The City Beautiful Shows its Seamy Side,” *The Sheaf*, July 22, 1970, 1.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1, 5.

⁵² “Bessborough Pub Dress Rules Rangle Young Patrons,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, June 9, 1970, 3.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

long-haired individuals were welcome in their bars as long as they were “neat, clean, and well mannered.”⁵⁴ While these qualifications seemed to mirror the Bessborough position, other hotels were more lax in applying them. The Ritz Hotel, for example, welcomed a group of evicted youth from the Bessborough. The beverage room manager, W.K. Pontikes, told the *Star-Phoenix*, “I was pleased to have them; they behaved themselves.”⁵⁵

The Bessborough dress code led to several protests in an effort to be permitted to secure service in the Pioneer Room. On Monday, June 8, at about 9pm, roughly 200 protestors packed into the Pioneer Room, the lobby, and the other hotel cocktail lounges, carrying signs that read “Power to the People” and “We Want Beer, Not Dope.”⁵⁶ According to the *Star-Phoenix*, the protestors either sat or milled around until about 10pm when they began chanting “We want beer.” General Manager George McCabe was present in the Pioneer Room for the demonstration but did not ask for any police assistance in removing the protestors from the hotel.⁵⁷

The following night, a second, more disruptive protest was staged. Between 250 and 300 protestors took over the Pioneer Room once again, bringing with them outside beer and wine. The crowd blocked the entrance to the bar and service was shut down completely. This time, the demonstrators denounced the hotel manager George McCabe. According to the *Star-Phoenix*, they were “standing on tables and shouting, ‘Pigs’ the youths called down the hotel manager... several times when rumors of a police invasion were heard, demonstrators formed the now classical American sit-down position.”⁵⁸

⁵⁴“Hotel Managers ask for Good Grooming,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, June 9, 1970, 3.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶“Bessborough Pub Dress Rules Rankle Young Patrons,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, June 9, 1970, 3.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ “Second Protest Staged Against Pub Dress Rules,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, June 10, 1970, 4.

The Star-Phoenix's linking of the Bessborough's demonstration to the American civil rights movement was heavily critiqued by *The Sheaf*. In the July 22, 1970 edition, it stated: "missing from the *Star-Phoenix* Bessborough-as-microscopic-America analogy was the part to be played by hotel (plantation) owner George McCabe."⁵⁹ The alignment of the long-haired youth with the American Civil Rights Movement is a common theme throughout the 1960s in Saskatoon. But if the demonstrators were akin to Civil Rights Movements activists, then George McCabe was the slave owner and the Bessborough Hotel the plantation. The night of the second sit-in, the protestors also circulated a petition to rescind the dress code regulations. Again, George McCabe sat in the Pioneer Room during the protests, and while the police were on scene, they did not intervene stating that they would only do so at the hotel's request. The protestors announced that they planned to hold a sleep-in protest, but it does not appear to have happened.⁶⁰

On Wednesday, June 10, a slightly smaller crowd of 100 protestors gathered in front of the hotel. The hotel management created a blockade at the front entrance to keep the protestors out, but after a "pushing and shoving match at the hotel's revolving door... demonstrators hoist[ed] one of their number over the heads of the hotel staff and through the doorway."⁶¹ While the protestors "caused no trouble" once they were inside the lobby, George McCabe began having a shouting match with one of the members of the demonstration, twenty-three year old Loran Steuart. McCabe demanded that both sides sit down for a meeting to discuss the dress code and taunted him by shouting "now have you got the guts, have you got the guts? Come on big boy, let's go."⁶² Steuart requested an open forum so that all the protestors could attend and be heard. Ultimately, both sides agreed that five representatives from the protestors would meet with

⁵⁹ "The Senate Attacks George McCabe," *The Sheaf*, July 22, 1970, 5.

⁶⁰ "Second Protest Staged Against Pub Dress Rules," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, June 10, 1970, 3.

⁶¹ "Demonstrators," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, June 11, 1970, 3.

⁶² "Youth Agree to Meet Hotel Manager," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, June 11, 1970, 3.

McCabe to discuss the dress code with a neutral moderator, Professor Michael Adams, from the University of Saskatchewan. McCabe closed the pub entirely to allow for a cooling off period while the meeting took place.⁶³

The same tensions flared during the initial meeting the next day. Insults, threats of legal action, and accusations of mob rule were all thrown back and forth between the two sides despite the attempts at moderation by Professor Adams. The two sides also had differing views on how to resolve the issue. The demonstrators' leader, Barry Singer, who was the owner of the Sol Store, suggested that a public meeting be held where both sides of the issue could be presented. He warned that "a public meeting might produce a boycott of the hotel" but reasoned that since "the Bessborough was a publically-owned building, the public should decide."⁶⁴ While McCabe disagreed with his suggestion, stating, "you can turn out a mob faster than the silent majority," he agreed with the need for the public's input.⁶⁵ Instead of a public meeting, McCabe suggested "a discussion between citizens and young people, with a panel of judges to produce some suitable dress and conduct regulations."⁶⁶ At the end of the meeting, a two-hour open air radio broadcast was scheduled for Saturday evening with a public meeting the following afternoon at city hall where Professor Adams would present both sides of the debate.⁶⁷ A smaller, more subdued protest of about thirty people took place Thursday evening. The protestors spent much of the time discussing the issue with the delegates to a Lutheran convention the hotel; some delegates went on record stating that they disagreed with the hotel's policy.⁶⁸

⁶³ "Beverage Room Remains Closed," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, June 14, 1970.

⁶⁴ "Public Meeting Set on Pub Dress Rules," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, June 12, 1970, 3.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

The dispute over the Pioneer Room dress code generated considerable interest. The community, for example, played a large role in the debate leading up to the forum. George McCabe, meanwhile, held meetings with the Saskatoon Chief of Police J.G. Kettles and Mayor Sid Buckwold to keep them apprised of the situation.⁶⁹ The matter was even discussed in the Canadian Senate, which came down squarely on the side of the demonstrators. Saskatchewan Liberal Senator Hazen Argue called the Bessborough managements actions “arbitrary, high-handed, and in my opinion [wrong].”⁷⁰ Like McCabe and Singer, Senator Argue brought up the issue of public ownership stating that “the hotel is owned by the public, but the public are not able to frequent the beverage room unless they comply with certain very rigid, and I would say, very ridiculous standards.”⁷¹ Ontario Liberal Senator Andrew Thompson raised the question of minority rights. He stated that while some may think the demonstrations at the Bessborough were minor, he disagreed, seeing it as an infringement upon the rights of the demonstrators:

As senators, we should always be ready to protect the rights of minorities. I suggest that in some ways these young people are a minority and wish to assert the rights of citizens... One of the things that sometimes cause concern in Canada is the dull conformity, the greyness that can develop across our country because of the lack of individuality... I object strongly that a government agency should not give public access to young people who are asserting that right [to express themselves].⁷²

The Senate advised the Senate Leader, Senator Paul Martin Sr., to urge the Minister of Transport to intercede in the matter and possibly even remove George McCabe from his position as general manger.⁷³ Saskatchewan Liberal Senator Herb Sparrow also came to Saskatoon to investigate the situation, conferring with both the hotel management and the protestors.⁷⁴ The involvement of the

⁶⁹ “Beverage Room Remains Closed,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, June 14, 1970

⁷⁰ Canada. Parliament. Senate. Debates. 2nd session, 28th Parliament, June 18, 1970, 1286.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1287.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 1289.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 1288.

⁷⁴ “Separate Pub Entrance Suggested for Bessborough,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, June 22, 1970, 4.

Canadian Senate in these demonstrations speaks to how important it was for the Bessborough and the City of Saskatoon to resolve this issue.

The Saskatoon public also waded into the debate. Opportunities for wider community consultation took place in the form of a two-hour open line radio program on CKOM on Saturday, June 13 and a public meeting the next day where forty attendees aired their views. Callers from both sides made vague threats of violence. An unidentified caller announced that a group called the 'Citizens of Concern' had been created and announced: "I would like to warn these kids that if they start getting out of line the Citizens of Concern will start doing something about it. We can't have this disruption of business and personal property by 100 or so people; something has to be done about it."⁷⁵ Violence was also mentioned by the opposing side when one protest supporter stated that "violence could easily happen – we're already feeling mental suppression."⁷⁶ No acts of violence, however, were ever reported at any of the demonstrations or meetings.

The protest supporters also argued that larger issues were at play in the dispute. In the Sunday meeting, for example, many of the protestors said that "they equate the Bessborough's refusal to let them into its pub with discrimination against blacks and Indians, stating that in all three cases personal appearances was seized upon as an excuse for restrictive action."⁷⁷ While simplistic in its understanding of racial relations, this statement echoed the concerns of the Canadian Senate regarding minority rights violations and also helps shed light onto the protestors understanding of what was happening inside the Bessborough.

Class was also a factor in the discussion. The *Star-Phoenix* reported that "others said they saw [the Bessborough's refusal to let them in] as one manifestation of what they termed a money-

⁷⁵ "Meeting Fails to Settle Pub Apparel Dispute," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, June 15, 1970, 4.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

conscious, profit-orientated society.”⁷⁸ This sentiment was echoed throughout the dispute. During the second protest, some of the protestors announced that they were “liberating” the Pioneer Room from “fascist attempts to discriminate against the youth’s clothing and appearance [and] those involved in the CN [were] using economic power to discriminate” against them.⁷⁹ During the Sunday meeting, a protestor named Jim Jessburger stated that

the protest of the hotel’s regulations was ‘challenging the value system of the generation that has led this country into one hell of a mess’ [and that] young people deplore their seniors ‘drive for material things’ and that his generation is trapped between visions of what life is and what it could be.⁸⁰

The cultural and economic values associated with the Bessborough made the hotel an easy target for those seeking to transform society: a government-owned business that symbolized upper class luxury and economic wealth that was representative of the city’s aspirations. Jessburger went on to say that “if we have to get The Bessborough closed down forever... it’s worth it to change the social structure.”⁸¹ Clearly, the Bessborough was seen by some as representative of the capitalist system. Their fight had an ideological component to it. For their part, the hotel management maintained throughout the ordeal that the ban was simply economic; it was refusing entry to those “who have a detrimental effect” on the hotel’s business.⁸² Eventually, George McCabe bowed to public pressure, and the hotel management and the demonstrators came to an agreement. The hotel management rescinded its rules regarding long hair as long as the pub patrons wore clean shirts and shoes. Senator Sparrow recommended to the Minister of Transport Don Jamieson that a separate entrance to the beverage room be installed stating that it was the root cause of the issue and that “it was a case of misunderstanding on both sides.”⁸³ While the separate entrance was

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ “Second Protest Staged Against Pub Dress Rules,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, June 10, 1970, 3.

⁸⁰ “Meeting Fails to Settle Pub Apparel Dispute,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, June 15, 1970, 4.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ “Separate Pub Entrance Suggested for Bessborough,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, June 22, 1970, 4.

installed and the issue seemed to be resolved, the demonstrations surrounding the Pioneer Room were more than a mere misunderstanding.

The Bessborough was not the only place in the city that discriminated against “long-haired hippies” during the 1960s.⁸⁴ Yet the hippies who frequented the Bessborough Pioneer Room had the most pronounced reaction. Hundreds of people protested at the Bessborough over four consecutive nights while the larger community was involved through public meetings and radio call-in shows. The dispute also concerned the mayor and other high-ranking city officials as well as the Canadian Senate. The protests at the Bessborough were a statement against the economic and social beliefs associated with the hotel. The demonstrators were permitted at other downtown bars and pubs which welcomed their patronage without imposing dress standards. Yet the demonstrators demanded to be able to drink at the Bessborough. Part of their desire to do so stemmed from the Bessborough’s status as a publicly owned hotel. As members of the public, the demonstrators fought for their right to enter this building. By demanding the right to be able to drink in a building that had long been seen as a traditional place for white, upper and middle class patrons, the demonstrators were attempting to make a statement about their place in society. Entering that contested space was a small way to force change within the current social structure.

This identification of the hotel with certain social and economic values can be seen in the statements made by the demonstrators. Some of them wanted the Bessborough to close either temporarily or even permanently, suggesting that this closure would signal a change in the current social structure. Clearly, the hotel was associated with materialism, as evidenced by its ornate

⁸⁴ The Bessborough was not the only place in the city that discriminated against the long-haired hippies during the 1960s. At the downtown Commodore Restaurant in 1967, the three men were asked to leave because of their long hair and they did without incident and no protest ever took place. In 1969, after a few instances of discrimination at the Hudson’s Bay Cafeteria, a more organized, deliberate protest of 30 people took place. The police were called but eventually the HBC management allowed some of them to return and be served. Julian Rachey, “Long Hairs Banned from Downtown Café,” *The Sheaf*, December 8, 1967, 5; Kent Martens, “Long-hairs Hassled,” *The Sheaf*, February 11, 1969, 4

European style architecture. For the anti-establishment youth, the hotel represented *the* establishment. For those opposed to the demonstrators, the hotel's traditional role in the community continued to dictate who should be allowed onto the premises. The long-haired youth did not fit into this ideal of Saskatoon – they symbolized the counter-culture of the 1960s and 1970s – and consequently, they were not wanted in the hotel unless they conformed to the standards of appearance consistent with the hotel's 'traditional' patrons. While the 'hippie' sit-ins and the subsequent community dialogue around the Bessborough lasted only a few weeks, these events show how the city of Saskatoon struggled to deal with the changing society of the 1960s and the development of the hotel's role, both practically and symbolically, in this new era.

Not everyone was as deliberately excluded from the Bessborough as the long-haired hippies. For some Saskatoon immigrant groups, their exclusion was a by-product of the discriminatory practices of the 1930s and 1940s and the larger divide that plagued Saskatoon. Understanding the nature of this divide is important in recognizing what the Bessborough symbolized to the residents of the west side. The Canadian National tracks, which next to the station on 1st Ave, divided the city economically, socially and ethnically.⁸⁵ In 1906, the western communities of Riversdale, Saskatoon and the eastern community of Nutana amalgamated into the city of Saskatoon. During Saskatoon's first boom, the majority of the new immigrants, especially those from continental Europe, settled on the west side of the river. In the early years "what cultural diversity Saskatoon could boast in those days was concentrated largely on the west side. It was here – particularly in bustling, brawling Riversdale that the most affordable housing and broadest range of employment were to be found."⁸⁶ This division, while partly cultural, was also was the

⁸⁵ The CN Railway tracks ran in front of the CN Railway Station, which is now Midtown Plaza. Today, Idylwyld Drive is considered the demarcation line of the east-west divide.

⁸⁶ Jeff O'Brien, Ruth W. Millar, and William P. Delainey, *Saskatoon: A History in Photographs* (Regina: Coteau Books, 2006), 9.

result of economic segregation: “The division of the city centre into two zones was both a result and further cause of a clear segregation of the two business districts. There *was* another side of the tracks in Saskatoon.”⁸⁷ Because of cheaper housing on the west side, it would be a logical settling place for newly arrived immigrants with little to no means. As more immigrants came to Saskatoon, the added benefit of settling near those of the same ethnic, cultural, and religious background would have been obvious. Yet the divide was not solely based around the monetary limitations and cultural benefits for the new immigrants, but also the discrimination faced by these new residents to Canada. This discrimination took many forms, including being legally barred from holding certain jobs or hiring employees of a different race, excluded from certain schools, clubs or associations, or being raided by the police under suspicion of illegal activity. These and other forms of discrimination helped to marginalize specific groups and maintain the ethnic and class divide with the immigrant communities on the west side and Anglo-Canadian society on the east.

While the west side was a diverse mix of ethnic and cultural groups, the Jewish, Ukrainian and Chinese immigrant communities dominated by the 1930s.⁸⁸ The first Jewish family immigrated to Saskatoon in 1907. By 1911, the community opened a permanent Talmud Torah on Avenue I and 19th Street; the first permanent synagogue was built on Avenue F and 18th Street the following year.⁸⁹ Saskatoon’s Jewish community lived predominately on the West Side. Former mayor Sidney Buckwold recalled that since his family resided in Nutana in the 1920s they “were called by the west side residents the ‘voisa hoizen’ (the white pants) because we were regarded as

⁸⁷ Don Kerr and Stan Hanson, *Saskatoon: The First Half Century* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1982), 285.

⁸⁸ Arlean McPherson, “Riversdale Businesses: An Historical Sampler,” *Research Report for the City of Saskatoon*, 123, and Feldman, 123.

⁸⁹ Anna Feldman, “History of the Jewish Community in Saskatoon 1907-1998” in *History and Heritage: The Saskatoon Jewish Community* (Saskatoon: Agudas Israel Congregation, 1999), 31-32.

being uppity.”⁹⁰ Clearly, the lower socio-economic circumstances of the West Side were felt even within the same ethnic communities. However, even though some families were moving to the east side, the community as a whole still experienced widespread discrimination. Indeed, “while there may have been some non-Jewish businesses and organizations that had their ‘token Jew’ the dominant society’s attitudes towards Jews was restrictive.”⁹¹ By 1931, there were 1,931 Jews living in Saskatoon and while many of them still lived on the west side, the move of the second generation Jewish immigrants to Nutana and City Park had begun in earnest. While Saskatoon’s Jewish community was crossing the physical divide between the west and east sides as early as the 1920s, the racial, cultural, and socio-economic divide was still there.

Chinese immigrants, many who were former railway workers, also moved to Saskatoon. During the 1920s, Saskatoon’s Chinatown developed on 19th Street along the south downtown area, and businesses included laundries, restaurants and grocery stores. Racism towards Chinese immigrants was common in this era in Canada as well as in Saskatoon. Accusations of ‘white slavery’ and opium use were levelled at the community.⁹² Saskatoon’s Chinatown was demolished in the late 1920s to make way for the Saskatoon Technical Collegiate and the Chinese community moved farther into Riversdale.⁹³ In 1931, of the 17 cafes in the Riversdale area, 11 of them were Chinese-operated. According to the Canadian Census, in 1931, there were 261 Chinese living in Saskatoon; 10 of them were women.⁹⁴ It was not until 1947 that the families of these Chinese men were able to emigrate to Canada to join them.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Sidney Buckwold, “Saskatoon at Forty,” in *History and Heritage: The Saskatoon Jewish Community* (Saskatoon: Agudas Israel Congregation, 1999), 13.

⁹¹ McPherson, “Riversdale Businesses,” 125.

⁹² O’Brien, Millar, and Delainey, *Saskatoon: A History in Photographs*, 47.

⁹⁴ McPherson, “Riversdale Businesses,” 125.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

While there is no direct evidence that Saskatoon's Jewish and Chinese populations were excluded from the Bessborough during the first half of the 20th century, it is more than likely given the discrimination they faced in Saskatoon society, and in Saskatchewan more widely. As historian Bill Waiser notes in his monograph, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, at the end of the Great War, "many residents of British origin regarded the persistence of ethnic identities as a blight on the province's future...What really distinguished Saskatchewan in the 1920s was how non-British were perceived and treated. Gone were the days of toleration."⁹⁶ This lack of toleration can be seen in specific instances of discrimination against both the Chinese and Jewish communities throughout the province. In 1912, the Saskatchewan provincial government enacted The Act to Prevent the Employment of Female Labour in Certain Capacities, which prevented white women or girls from working in Chinese or Japanese businesses. While partly motivated by labour concerns, there was a societal fear that "the indiscriminate use of drugs would dissolve boundaries between the races and encourage sexual contact across the colour lines" and that "unsuspecting white women might be tricked into interracial sexual liaisons."⁹⁷ The act was the first of its kind in Canada although several provinces including Manitoba, British Columbia, and Ontario, enacted similar legislation, which speaks to the wide spread discrimination against Canada's Chinese community at the time.⁹⁸ Anti-Chinese sentiments remained high throughout the first half of 20th century in Saskatchewan. In 1924, a Regina Chinese-Canadian restaurant owner, Yee Clun, applied to the Regina City Council to hire a white woman. His request was opposed, most notably, by the Regina Local Council of Women, who even brought in their own legal counsel to speak of

⁹⁶ Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, (Calgary: Fifth House Ltd, 2005), 232.

⁹⁷ Constance Backhouse, *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 142, 144.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 146. The bill was supported by a wide range of groups including the Saskatchewan Trades and Labour Council, the Saskatchewan Retail Merchants' Association, the Saskatchewan Social and Moral Reform Council, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, and the National Council of Women and its local chapters. Backhouse, *Colour-Coded*, 137, 140, 141.

their behalf. Yee Clun's petition was rejected by Regina City Council.⁹⁹ The Act was not repealed until 1969.¹⁰⁰ Given the societal fears among Saskatchewan's white population regarding interaction between white women and Chinese men, it is highly unlikely that the white upper class elite of Saskatoon would have tolerated mixing with the Chinese community, especially inside such an aspirational space as the Bessborough Hotel, which, at the time, was seen as a monument to the British Empire.

Likewise, Saskatoon's Jewish population was also barred from certain institutions within the city. For example, Jews were not permitted to work at the Bay Department store and many of them worked for other Jewish businesses, including Adilman's and Lehrer's Department Stores. While the Saskatoon School Board hired a Jewish woman in 1918, another one was not hired until the late 1940s. The 'token Jew' philosophy was also practiced by the University of Saskatchewan as evidenced by a letter sent to a Jewish man applying to the medical college in 1944. While accepted, the letter cautioned "in the past we have had, as a rule, two Jewish students in each class" and this year four Jewish students had been accepted.¹⁰¹ While this might seem like progress, the letter states that the University believes it would be "impossible to find places for four students...[and] that the four of you should consider among yourselves the wisdom of accepting all of the places that are open to you."¹⁰² Like Saskatoon's Chinese community, Jewish people struggled to be admitted into traditionally white, middle and upper class spaces within the city and as such formed their own spaces and businesses. Indeed, by 1931, "despite being the most ethnically diverse province in Canada, Saskatchewan was still an Anglo-Canadian stronghold

⁹⁹ Backhouse, *Colour-Coded*, 161. The rejection of the application was appealed and overturned by the Court of King's Bench.

¹⁰⁰ Waiser, *Saskatchewan*, 241.

¹⁰¹ Feldman, "History of the Saskatoon Jewish Community," 49.

¹⁰² Ibid.

whose political, economic, and social life was dominated by people of British's backgrounds."¹⁰³

As the most prominent symbol of Canada's British identity in Saskatoon as well as its social center, it is entirely probable that the Bessborough Hotel would have been largely off limits to the city's Jewish community along with its department stores, public school systems, and the university.

Saskatoon's west side also had a large Ukrainian presence. By 1931, the Ukrainian population of Saskatoon was 1,766. Former Saskatchewan Premier Roy Romanow, who was born in Saskatoon in 1939 to Ukrainian immigrant parents, remembers a diverse range of immigrants, including Jewish, Polish, and German, living on the west side. They were working class and they were poor. As a child, he grew up on Avenue L and remembers that they did not have indoor plumbing for the first several years.¹⁰⁴ Growing up on the west side, Romanow remembers the divide between the east and west sides of the city; a 'demarcation line' between the lower socio-economic working class immigrants on the west side and the those who had achieved some prominence professionally or in the business community on the east side. This demarcation line "was very important when it came to our view of how residents on the east side of the city lived and I think it did for the people on the east side when it came to those on the west side too."¹⁰⁵ The demarcation line did not mean that residents of the west side never ventured over to the east side. In 1916, for example, the Ukrainian community created the St. Petro Mohyla Institute, a cultural residence for students attending secondary school, university and the normal school, at 401 Main Street in the Nutana area.¹⁰⁶ In general, though, immigrants living on the west side did not stray far from their communities. Part of the reason was undoubtedly practical: their religious and cultural events took place on the west side. Many of these immigrants also owned their own

¹⁰³ Waiser, *Saskatchewan*, 248.

¹⁰⁴ Roy Romanow, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, August 26, 2015.

¹⁰⁵ Roy Romanow, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, August 26, 2015.

¹⁰⁶ "History," *St. Petro Mohyla Institute*, <http://www.mohylainstitute.ca/history.html>. Accessed February 3, 2016.

businesses or worked in businesses within these communities. As working class families, money spent on entertainment or dining out would have been scarce or possibly spent supporting their own communities. Another factor may have been the discrimination that they experienced, both overt and systematic, outside their own communities.

This discrimination was widespread and included RCMP surveillance. Saskatoon's Petro Mohyla Institute, like many Ukrainian schools, was under RCMP surveillance during the 1920s as "there was an accepted belief among that Anglo-Canadians that radicalism was synonymous with certain ethnic groups. Ethnicity, and to a lesser extent class, were important factors in determining who might be a threat to the security of the nation."¹⁰⁷ The Ukrainian community in Saskatchewan and Alberta caused particular societal anxiety during the interwar period as they were seen as being especially susceptible to Russian socialist ideals.¹⁰⁸ This "susceptibility" was further compounded by the desire of these Ukrainian communities to maintain their language and cultural traditions, something former Premier Roy Romanow noted was an integral part of his upbringing.¹⁰⁹ Anglo-Canadian society viewed this desire as "an unwillingness to be assimilated, or in the words of the police, were 'averse to being Canadianized.'"¹¹⁰ In fact, "the presence of certain groups, far from being a nuisance, seemed to threaten the Canadian state and Anglo-Canadian hegemony."¹¹¹ The interwar period on the Canadian prairies was rife with anti-Ukrainian sentiment by the more dominant British society and would set the tone for Ukrainian discrimination during this time.

In the 1930s, the Bessborough commanded an imposing presence across Saskatoon and could be seen from miles away. The citizens of Saskatoon immediately embraced the Bessborough.

¹⁰⁷ Steve Hewitt, "Policing the Promised Land: The RCMP and Negative Nation-Building in Alberta and Saskatchewan in the Interwar Period," in *The Prairie West as Promised Land*, eds. R. Douglas Francis and Chris Kitzan (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007), 318.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 316.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 319.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 319.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 314

But did the new immigrants of the west side embrace it as well? Or rather, were they permitted to enter the building heralded as symbolic of Saskatoon's future greatness? While not overtly barred, Romanow explained that

It's a landmark, a beautiful building. We all knew where it was but it just sort of wasn't our place to visit. I don't mean our place in the sense of our cultural, linguistic, that yes, but it wasn't our place in the context of station in life to be there, I think... It wasn't because it was a no-go zone, although there was an element of that. Mainly because it was the hotel that belonged to the rich, if I can put it that way.¹¹²

Romanow also remembers that his family and community were much more interested in their own community and their own heritage and did not pay much attention to the Bessborough. His parents believed it was important for him to have a knowledge of the Ukrainian language, dances, poetry, music, as well as their homeland's struggle against Moscow. He also stated that "we didn't feel resentful that I can remember, at least around my family they weren't resentful of it at all... I never heard in any of the circles that I was around comments which exhibited envy or anger at this and certainly not in class terms or ethnic terms."¹¹³

In fact, Romanow saw the hotel in a more positive way. To him, the hotel was aspirational. He saw it as a symbol of the dream his parent's had for him - that if he worked hard, he could achieve what his parent's wanted for him: to be better educated and have a better life. Like many children of immigrants, Romanow did achieve success, becoming educated and achieving prominence within the community and moving out of the west side. He began visiting the Bessborough during his university years in the late 1950s, as it was an important social hangout for university students. As he began to become more involved in politics, he attended many events at the hotel.¹¹⁴ In Romanow's experience, his rising prominence was directly tied to the amount of time he spent in the Bessborough. Romanow's political rise also came at a time of increased

¹¹² Roy Romanow, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, August 26, 2015.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

integration. Even though “Regina and Saskatoon remained essentially ‘British’ cities at the end of the 1950s, ethnic differences increasingly became less pronounced as the children of European immigrants integrated into society at large.”¹¹⁵

While Romanow stated that, to his knowledge, his family and community members never spoke of the divide and the Bessborough as off limits in class or ethnic terms, class and ethnicity did play a large role in the creation of the east-west divide. Just as the experiences and levels of discrimination faced by the west side residents varied by a multitude of factors, so would their experiences with and attitudes toward the Bessborough. Class, and ethnicity were factors that contributed to the Bessborough as a possible ‘no-go zone’ for the west side Ukrainian community. It is unclear if the various ethnic communities on the west side also felt this division. For example, the Young Judaeans Conference, held in Saskatoon in 1939, took their group photo in the river side park in front of the Bessborough Hotel.¹¹⁶ It is uncertain if the conference itself took place in the hotel or in one of the Jewish community buildings on the west side. But the fact that the Young Judaeans took a photo of such an event in front of the Bessborough indicates that they may have also regarded the hotel as aspirational, or at the very least special as the icon of the city. While there is no evidence to suggest that the Bessborough Hotel actively excluded patrons based on class and ethnicity, the discrimination of different ethnic and socio-groups by the dominant society, possibly coupled with the hotel’s opulent nature, created a sense that the hotel, similar to other establishments during this time, was off limits to them.

Even though the children of the original immigrants moved out of the west side, the east-west divide did not disappear. The demographics simply changed. With the rapid urbanization of

¹¹⁵ Waiser, *Saskatchewan*, 393.

¹¹⁶ “Young Judaeans” in *History and Heritage: The Saskatoon Jewish Community* (Saskatoon: Agudas Israel Congregation, 1999), 158.

Saskatchewan's Aboriginal population in the 1960s, both Saskatoon and Regina were popular destination cities for this migration. By 2001, 9.11% of Saskatoon's population identified as Aboriginal.¹¹⁷ 80% of Saskatoon's Aboriginal population lived on the west side. Some neighborhoods had up to 30% of their population identify as Aboriginal. By contrast, on the east side, the highest percentage of Aboriginals in one neighborhood never rose above 10%.¹¹⁸ According to Statistics Canada, 65% of Saskatoon's Aboriginal population lives below the poverty line and "Saskatoon has been identified as maintaining the largest rate of economic segregation in Canada."¹¹⁹ Clearly, the class and ethnic divide of Saskatoon still exists and can be found along the same geographical lines – with the Bessborough on the east side. While in recent years, there has been a 'gentrification' of the west side Riversdale, it remains to be seen how this economic development of the area will affect the rest of the west side and the underlying issues that have allowed the east-west divide to exist for so long. While there is direct evidence of discrimination against certain groups, including Saskatoon's Chinese, Jewish, and First Nations communities, throughout Saskatoon's history by the governing Anglo-Canadian society, that evidence does not clearly extend to their relationship with the Bessborough. The discussion surrounding these groups is largely speculative based on their treatment by the dominant society and the symbolic nature of the Bessborough Hotel. More research needs to be done to better understand the social and spatial experiences of these groups in Saskatoon.

Saskatoon's early gay community, the long-haired young people of the 1970s, and possibly the early west side immigrants experienced a history of exclusion at the Bessborough Hotel. In

¹¹⁷ Cara J.A. Spence, *An Analysis of Race Relations in Saskatoon Saskatchewan: The Contributions of the Housing Sector*, (Saskatoon: The Bridges and Foundations Project on Urban Housing, 2004), 9. In this report, the term Aboriginal includes all peoples who identify as one of the following: North American Indian, both treaty and non treaty, Metis, Inuit, and those with multiple groupings.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 10.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 29.

each case, this experience mirrored the attitudes of the larger, dominant community. But their relationship with the hotel was not all the same. While members of the gay community were permitted in the Bessborough, they were forced to conceal their sexual orientation. Even then, they were sometimes met with hostility and discrimination by both the hotel staff and the patrons. The young long-haired hippies were subjected to a dress code because of their physical appearance. Finally, the citizens of the west side may have viewed the Bessborough as part of the larger Anglo-Canadian society that were not tolerant of certain immigrant groups during the first half of the twentieth century.

The exclusion of these groups can only be understood by examining the aspirational nature of the Bessborough in its home community. The hotel was representative of the Saskatoon's economic prosperity and its development into an important prairie centre. Because of its location, architecture, and parent company, the Bessborough symbolized all that Saskatoon aspired to be economically, socially, and culturally. These desires played an important role in how the community interacted with the hotel and vice versa. For the dominant community, the Bessborough symbolized how far they had come from its temperance colony origins and its history as a humble agricultural community to a centre of commerce, trade, and culture. For Saskatoon's gay community, the hippies of the 1970s, and residents of Saskatoon's west side, the Bessborough was a space where they experienced varying levels of discrimination and utilized different methods in an effort to fight back and carve out new spaces for themselves.

Conclusion

In October 1943, while discussing the rebuilding of the Palace of Westminster's Commons Chamber after the Second World War, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill famously said: "We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us."¹ In Saskatoon, no building has shaped the city's identity as much as the Bessborough Hotel. The Bessborough is the icon of the city; it is its most famous and photographed building. Originally conceived during the twilight years of the economic boom of the 1920s, Canadian National Railways began construction on the 200-room Chateau style hotel in the spring of 1930 at the behest of the Saskatoon Board of Trade. The building of a railway hotel in Saskatoon was a source of status for the city. With the onset of the Great Depression, construction on the hotel stalled several times, but eventually the hotel was finished in 1932. However, it sat empty for three years, a grim reminder of the economic times. Its grand opening, on December 10, 1935, was cause for celebration. It proved that Saskatoon had finally arrived, and according to one local business, its opening had "usher[ed] in a new era for our city."² This new era would be one of progress and prosperity, of Saskatoon achieving its status as an important prairie centre.

The Bessborough's home community embraced this new era with pride. Not only was the hotel symbolic of the economic recovery and prosperity that was to come, but, in 1935, it was also a monument to Canada's "two founding nations," named after Canada's Governor General, the 9th Earl of Bessborough. Since 1935, this idea of the hotel as a celebration of Canada's British and French heritage has faded, perhaps as Canada's ties with the Europe became less important. Yet even while the Bessborough's is no longer seen as fulfilling Anglo-Canadian nationalism, current

¹ "Churchill and the Commons Chamber," *United Kingdom Parliament*, Accessed 18 March, 2016.
<http://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/building/palace/architecture/palacestructure/churchill/>

² "Another Tribute to Saskatoon Ad," *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, December 7, 1935, 8.

Saskatoon's residents still take great pride in its aesthetic look as a more broadly European castle. While not in specifically nationalistic terms, the Bessborough stills hold the power to suggest that Saskatoon is cultured, cosmopolitan centre. The feeling expressed in 1935 that the Bessborough was symbolic of Saskatoon's progress, prosperity, and its ambitions as an important economic, educational, and cultural centre is still present within its home community, eighty years later.

The Bessborough's perceived aspirational nature affected how the community viewed and used the hotel throughout its history. It made the hotel both an inclusive and exclusive space, depending on which facet of society was attempting to enter the hotel. Those who used – and were approved to use – the hotel as an expression of these aspirations tended to be white, middle and upper class or from prominent social, political, and educational institutions in the city and the province. The University of Saskatchewan, the Saskatoon business community, the Saskatchewan provincial government, and the Meewasin Valley Authority were all groups that used the Bessborough as a site to celebrate, to discuss issues related to the city, to fight for new legislation, and to promote their city and their province – all important events in the continuing development of Saskatoon. While some of the actions of these groups were seen as controversial for the city or the province, the presence of these groups inside the hotel never was. As the (usually white, male) leaders of the city, the Bessborough was the natural, even appropriate, place to carry out these activities.

Those who were not welcome tended to be excluded on the basis on race, class, sexual orientation, and socio-economic circumstances – groups of people who did not fit into the dominant community's larger ambitions for the city. Those who were excluded from the Bessborough were also marginalized within society more broadly. The hotel was one site of their exclusion, but it did not begin or end there. While not an exhaustive list of historical and current

marginalized populations in Saskatoon, the gay community, the hippies of the 1970s, and the socio-economically disadvantaged groups from the West side all experienced varying degrees of discrimination at and from the hotel. Their experiences inside the hotel would have varied immensely. For Saskatoon's gay community, their presence was tolerated as long as their behaviour and appearance conformed to the hetero-normative expectations at the time. Essentially, as long as they looked and acted straight, they would be permitted to stay. Any public demonstration of their true selves and they would be removed from this space. For the hippies and the student radicals in 1970, their appearance gave away their 'deviance' and so they could not negotiate their presence in this space by conforming their behaviour to meet the social norms of the time. Since they refused to conform their appearances, they were removed. For the historically disadvantaged groups from the West side, the hotel comprised part of a larger no-go zone. It represented the wealth and status of those living on the East side and was aspirational to at least one child of immigrant parents who saw the hotel as a symbol of personal development and belonging. While the children of these Eastern European immigrants moved out of the west side and became important members of the community, the larger socio-economic mechanisms in place and the arrival of First Nations in the city have perpetuated the cycle of ghettoization of the west side. Unlike Saskatoon's gay community and the hippies, these privileged spaces remain off limits to these new west-siders and the mechanisms that keep them on the west side remain firmly entrenched in today's society.

Each of the groups responded to the exclusion in different ways: through performing public hetero-normativity while developing their own underground communities in these spaces, through unrestricted protests and demonstrations, and through simply building better lives for their children. Yet they all represent histories that contradict the mainstream history of the Bessborough

as a celebratory and aspirational space. The Bessborough Hotel is a space where competing and contradictory histories reside - and where one competing history is given more credence than the other. This valuing of one history over another highlights which group is prized more by the larger community and what that says about the history of Saskatoon more generally.

As Emma Waterton and Laurajane Smith argue, an uncritical acceptance of the dominant group as *the* community “all too easily ‘flips into homogeneity, a denial of difference, and an assimilation of the Other’”. It washed over disharmony, power and marginality, thereby heightening misrecognition.”³ Along with the events and relationships discussed in Chapter One, specific events at the Bessborough were and continue to be celebrated and promoted – royal visits, stays by Canada’s prime ministers, and more recently, the grand opening day and the hotel’s first guest, Bill Stovin, a pioneer in the development of radio in western Canada.⁴ Several of the interviewees mentioned the royal visits to the Bessborough as something they thought was special for Saskatoon; former Premier Roy Romanow recalled how special it was to meet Princess Margaret in the Bessborough during her visit.⁵ On the Bessborough Hotel’s historical tour, the hotel’s namesake, the Earl of Bessborough, Pierre Elliot Trudeau’s visit to the hotel in the 1970s, and Stovin’s Lounge as tribute to the hotel’s first guest are highlighted as important moments in the hotel’s history.⁶ Over the last ten years of the Delta Hotel’s ownership, the Bessborough marketed itself as “Saskatoon’s landmark place of occasion and grand old lady of hospitality,” to tie the hotel’s image back to these grand events that helped promote the hotel’s European feel and heritage.⁷

³Emma Waterton & Laurajane Smith, “The Recognition and Misrecognition of Community Heritage,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 16: (2010), 9. DOI: 10.1080/13527250903441671

⁴ Stefan Deprez, guide, Bessborough Hotel Tour, Bessborough Hotel, Saskatoon, SK, June 7, 2015.

⁵ Roy Romanow, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, August 26, 2015.

⁶ Stefan Deprez, guide, Bessborough Hotel Tour, Bessborough Hotel, Saskatoon, SK, June 7, 2015.

⁷ Delta Bessborough, *History of the Castle on the River*, Saskatoon: Delta Bessborough, 2010, Promotional Pamphlet.

While these events are celebrated, other events, other connections to the hotel, are ignored or even actively disregarded. While Saskatoon's gay community has commemorated the Bessborough Hotel as an important space, the larger community does not seem aware of this relationship. It is not recognized as important to the hotel's history and to the city. The same can be said for those involved in the counter-culture movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Throughout my research, one interviewee recalled the "pub was kind of causing some problems too, but they cleaned that up."⁸ Aside from this brief mention, the hippie sit-ins at the hotel seemed to be a forgotten piece of the hotel's history. At the very least, they do not reside in the collective historical memory in the same way as the more celebrated events. The historical and current residents of the west side are even more hidden from view, not only through the lens of the Bessborough but the city more generally. The ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic issues plaguing Saskatoon's west side are present in day-to-day life in Saskatoon but rarely discussed in a meaningful way. Waterton and Smith suggest that

we can speak of misrecognition or status insubordination, though which swathes of individuals are comparatively thought of as being unworthy of esteem. If recognition is not extended to someone, they are, in effect 'not seen – as a full human being whose presence matters'.⁹

One way to combat this misrecognition of marginalized groups in Saskatoon is to make their history in the city more visible, especially their interactions with important spaces in their home communities. These spaces have layers of memory that tell the story of the city. To gain a more thorough understanding of the history of the Bessborough, of Saskatoon, and of space and place more generally, all the layers, contested and conflicting though they may be, must be examined

⁸ Kathleen McCorkell, Interview with Author, Saskatoon, SK, July 27, 2015.

⁹ Waterton and Smith, "The Recognition and Misrecognition of Community Heritage," 11.

and must be made visible. The Bessborough's history is one of symbolism, of inclusion, and of exclusion, which are all important to the history of Saskatoon.

As the General Director of Canada's National Historic Sites and Monuments, Christina Cameron wrote, Canada's historic spaces are a

connecting fabric that links us together... Our relationship to historic places helps define who we are. They [are] important to our identity, feelings of attachment and sense of country... They offer a physical link to the past that enhances our understanding of where we have been.¹⁰

The Bessborough is all of these things: it's a gathering place for the people and institutions of Saskatoon. Its presence along the South Saskatchewan River changed the way Saskatoon's identity was forever understood. The Bessborough is a physical link to Saskatoon's past – a past that must focus on all members of its home community and the hidden histories within this space.

Yet the hotel's history is not just in the past. The Bessborough's history is still being made. As the physical building, and the business inside it, continue to change and adapt to the economic and cultural times, its relationship to its home community will continue to transform as well. The Marriot hotel chain bought Canadian-owned Delta Hotels in January of 2015 and became the Bessborough's new owner.¹¹ Its vision for the hotel is still unfolding. As seen with the previous two sales in 1973 and 1989, when the Bessborough was sold, the relationship between the community and the hotel had to adjust. In 1973, the community's sense of ownership over the building caused anxiety when the hotel's purpose and direction was reconsidered by new ownership. In 1989, the hotel's new management did not continue to maintain the previous management's ties to the community and a fracturing of the relationship between the hotel and

¹⁰ Christina Cameron, "The Spirit of Place: The Physical Memory of Canada," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 35, 1 (2000): 77.

¹¹ "Marriot Buys Canada's Delta Hotels for \$168M," *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation*, January 27, 2015, Accessed March 18, 2015. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/business/marriott-buys-canada-s-delta-hotels-for-168m-1.2933336>

community was seen. New ownership and a changing economic and cultural climate are all factors that will continue to affect the Bessborough's symbolic role in the city as well as its relationship with all the members of its home community in the coming years.

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