

## Haunting Memories of Winnipeg's Fort Garry Hotel

The Fort Garry Hotel is a pretty impressive property in the heart of downtown Winnipeg. It has amenities that appeal to travellers of all generations, as well as an old world charm harkening back to its roots in 1913 when it opened as a Grand Trunk Pacific Railway hotel. But it was also in that year, specifically on December 10 during the hotel's grand opening, when the legacy of ghosts seems to have manifested itself.

The hotel's original name was to be the Selkirk Hotel, in deference to the Selkirk Settlers; Scottish immigrants who came to colonize the Red River area in 1812 and 1813 under a project set up by Thomas Douglas, the 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Selkirk. At the last minute the name was changed to the Fort Garry Hotel, after Upper Fort Garry which was located near the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers in the area known today as The Forks. The gate of the Fort can be found just east of the hotel's Broadway Avenue main entrance.

The hotel is visually charming inside and out. It was built in what has been called the "Chateau" style, with features that recall New York's Plaza Hotel (built in 1906-07) as well as Ottawa's Chateau Laurier Hotel, another Grand Trunk Hotel, built from 1909 to 1912 to provide luxury accommodation to train travellers.

Check-in takes place in the comfortably, chandeliered lobby. The hallways are broad and well-lit, the rooms are tastefully decorated, and the service throughout the hotel is friendly and helpful. The pool, sauna, spa and fitness centre only add to the sense of 'restful escape'. Some of the rooms and suites on the upper floors overlook Union Station and the now iconic Canadian Museum for Human Rights.

Now, knowing that Room 202 has been one of the rooms in which ghosts have been reported, I requested, and was assigned that room. I checked it thoroughly when I entered, cringing when the closet door creaked ominously when I opened it, but all that was inside was an empty bathrobe.

And then it happened. I was alone (or so I thought) around 10:30 that evening when I heard someone (or something) attempt to open the locked door connecting my room to the next. The door knob started to turn this way and that, and then a force started pushing on the door. I dispassionately got up, banged on the door, and all the activity stopped. It was either the people next door who thought that my door was one of their closets, or it was one of the hotel ghosts trying to contact me!

The real ghost is said to be a woman who committed suicide following the death of her husband outside the hotel (he was hit by a horse-drawn cart). But other reports are of a woman dressed in white who can be traced to Lady McMillan, one of the attendees at the grand opening in 1913. And still other reports relate to a 'presence' climbing into beds, eating in the kitchen, and lighting candles in the ballroom.

Haunting memories are simply those we remember vividly. My stay at the Fort Garry provided me with some very pleasant thoughts, and certainly I will stay there again. Perhaps then, when the ghosts feel more comfortable with my presence, we can connect.