



## THE HOTEL GENOSHA

70 KING STREET EAST

CITY OF OSHAWA

PREPARED FOR HERITAGE OSHAWA  
BY

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2002

# THE HOTEL GENOSHA

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CITY OF OSHAWA

## CONTENTS

|    |  |
|----|--|
| 1  | HISTORICAL BACKGROUND                        |
|    | OSHAWA NEEDS A HOTEL                         |
|    | JOHN WALTER BORSBERRY AND GENOSHA HOTEL LTD. |
| 3  | UNDER CONSTRUCTION                           |
| 5  | FINANCIAL TROUBLE                            |
| 7  | HARRY A. FINER                               |
| 8  | EDWARDS INN                                  |
|    | CURRENT OWNER                                |
| 9  | ARCHITECTURE                                 |
|    | FORM AND STYLE                               |
| 10 | WALL CLADDING                                |
|    | WINDOW OPENINGS                              |
|    | ROOF AND WALL TREATMENT                      |
| 11 | STREET LEVEL                                 |
|    | SIGNIFICANCE                                 |
|    | APPENDIX                                     |

# **THE HOTEL GENOSHA**

**70 KING STREET EAST  
CITY OF OSHAWA**

**LOTS 7, 6, PART 5, NORTH SIDE KING STREET, PLAN H50003, AND PART LOT 6, 7, SOUTH SIDE BOND STREET, PLAN H-50003, FORMERLY PART LOT 10, CONCESSION 2, EAST WHITBY TOWNSHIP**

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

### **OSHAWA NEEDS A HOTEL**

The need for luxury hotel accommodation in Oshawa was recognized early in the 1920s. Following the sale in 1918 of the McLaughlin Carriage Company to General Motors, Oshawa became the centre of automobile manufacturing in Canada. General Motors expanded the facility in the mid 1920s and began holding its dealer conventions in town. This activity, combined with its strategic location on Highway 2 and the increasing motor vehicle traffic, made Oshawa an ideal location for building accommodation for the travelling public.

Between 1925 and early in 1928, several of what seem to be competing interests announced their intention to build a hotel in Oshawa. About 1925, a local group was formed with Alex G. Storie as chairman; C.N. Henry, treasurer; and E.L. Petley, secretary. "With J.J.L. Ardiel as general sales manager and four divisional sales managers namely C.M. Anderson, W.E. Clarke, W.E. Marshall and David Manning, an advertising campaign was launched to sell common stock in \$100 units."<sup>1</sup> The campaign was not as successful as hoped.

### **JOHN WALTER BORSBERRY AND GENOSHA HOTEL LTD.**

Also involved in the effort to bring a hotel to Oshawa was John Walter Borsberry. Born in England on February 21, 1856, Borsberry, a Methodist, arrived in Oshawa in 1871. He first worked as a clerk at Biamey's grocery. "Shortly after his marriage in 1876 [to Eliza Jane McIntyre, he] took a position as a travelling salesman with the Eby-Blain Co. The first Oshawa resident to own an automobile, he used it on his sales itinerary, throughout

the district years before such vehicles became popular."<sup>2</sup> Borsberry is said to have "unbounding faith in the future of Oshawa." He served on Council for several years and led by example when he revitalized his downtown block of land bounded by Simcoe, Bond, and Ontario streets. He had a grocery business, was a successful land speculator, and owned the Borsberry Music Hall on the north side of King Street, east of Simcoe.<sup>3</sup>

On March 15, 1928, Borsberry transferred several lots into the joint ownership of himself and Fred Henry Mercer Irwin of the nearby town of Whitby, as trustees. The parcel included Lots 6 and 7 on the north side of King Street, William Kerr's Plan:<sup>4</sup> "being a parcel of land at the north-west corner of Mary and King Streets" in Oshawa; and Lot 7 and part Lot 6 on the south side of Bond Street on Kerr's Plan. The transfer price was \$100,000.

The Borsberry's had designed their house at the corner of King and Mary streets and contracted Thomas Gale to build it in 1902. They moved to another residence at Bond and Victoria streets, just before the demolition of the King and Mary dwelling was undertaken in April 1928 by the Dominion Wrecking Company. By April 28, the last of the debris was removed and the Armstrong Construction Company was excavating the southwest corner of the lot in readiness for the erection of a six storey hotel. According to the *Oshawa Daily Times* of April 25, 1928: "The excavation work, which will be started immediately, will be a very considerable job, extending along King Street for 96 ft. 6 inches, and along Mary Street 131 ft. 10 inches." The owners were reported to be J. W. Butler & Co. of the Royal Bank Building in Toronto. "According to the permit J.W. Butler and Company are the owners and also the architects, and the Hotel Engineering Company are the contractors." <sup>5</sup>

It was not until June 6, 1928, that Borsberry and Irwin transferred their property to Genosha Hotel Limited. The name – Genosha – was formed from General Motors

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<sup>1</sup> W. Ford Lindsay. "Plans for the Genosha started in 1925." *Oshawa Times*, February 19, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> W. Ford Lindsay. "Some Served Long Helped Community." *Oshawa Times*, August 20, 1970.

<sup>3</sup> Borsberry Music Hall was also known as Wilson's Theatre and Wilcox Grand Theatre.

<sup>4</sup> William Kerr was grandfather to Mrs. J. W. (McIntyre) Borsberry.

<sup>5</sup> "Propose to Erect a Six Storey Hotel to Contain 100 Rooms." *Oshawa Daily Times*, April 25, 1928, p.3.

Oshawa. A month later, the corporation borrowed \$325,000 in bonds from the London & Western Trusts Co. Ltd., and Howard C. Wade. The mortgage agreement registers that the money was to be repaid in ten years, with the land plus the following held as collateral:

All the fixed and loose machinery, plant equipment, utensils, tools, engines, stoves and other appliances and fixtures, furniture, furnishings and tangible personal property (other than stock-in-trade and consumable stores and supplies of every kind) now or hereafter situate or to be situate in the building to be erected on the said lands, which said building is to be an hotel . . . . Not to cover such things as are owned by the tenants or guests.

In July 1928, Genosha Hotel Ltd. announced that it had sold its interests, presumably to J.W. Butler and Co. Formerly with the Prince Arthur Hotel chain, J.B. Windress was appointed manager, with Stewart Mitchell of Guelph as the assistant.<sup>6</sup>

#### **UNDER CONSTRUCTION**

The progress of the construction of the hotel was followed with excitement in the Oshawa newspapers. On June 30, 1928, the *Times* reported the arrival of three additional carloads of steel and the assembly of the derrick for erecting the steel structure. "A gang of steel workers from Sarnia is now on the job and the balance of the steel workers with the riveters, will arrive next week." The steel contract was with the Sarnia Bridge Company. By July, the derrick was being hoisted to the fifth level, with one to go. Concrete flooring was being placed on the first floor and the bricklayers were bricking the columns in the basement. J.J. Hayes was in charge of the construction work. Other contracts awarded included:

A.F. Saunders & Co., Detroit, for steel sash

Canada Wire and Iron Co., Hamilton, for ornamental iron

Canadian Gypsum and Alabastine Ltd., Paris, Ontario, for fireproofing

Turnbull Elevator Co., Toronto, two elevators

Thomson Monument Co., Toronto, granite stone

Scott Bros., Toronto, limestone

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<sup>6</sup> W. Ford Lindsay. "Plans for the Genosha started in 1925." *Oshawa Times*, February 19, 1992.

C.J. Moll & Co., Chicago, Simplex partitions

W. E. Phillips Co. Ltd., glazing (glass)

W.A. Moffat & Sons, Toronto, roofing, including the quarry tile floor of the roof garden

National Kellastone Company, Toronto, carpet strips "This is a new invention, being a plastic strip poured on the floor to which the carpet is nailed, being very permanent as it is almost an impossibility for the carpet to pull up."

W. J. Trick Co. Ltd., Oshawa, brick and tile

By September 1929, most of the brickwork was completed and tile was being laid on the walls of the roof garden. The storefronts were being installed and the plasterers were following the crew erecting the interior partitions. The *Daily Times* of September 19, 1928, gave a progress update:

*The hotel is expected to open for business on October 8, when the first and second and probably the third floor will be completed sufficiently to accommodate guests. The four stores on the first floor, including the cafeteria opening on Mary street, the drug store, with doors leading to both Mary and King streets and also into the hotel, and two stores on the west side of the King street frontage, will also be available to open on this date. A barber shop and beauty parlor is being provided in the basement.*

In spite of tradespeople working twenty-four hours a day, the hotel still was not ready by December. The painters started at the end of November and the plasterers were installing the ornamental plaster works in the lobby and dining room at the rear of the lobby. The bathrooms had "an effective appearance, and the bath fixture installation will compare with that of any hotel in Ontario."<sup>7</sup> The second elevator was in place for freight, making it easier for the T. Eaton Company to install furniture, carpets, and all other furnishings. The steel cage of the passenger elevator was trimmed in walnut and bronze. Wallpaper was ready for hanging on the bedroom walls. "A different wallpaper design will be used on each of the five floors, from the second to the sixth."<sup>8</sup> The installation of room telephones was underway and the ice machine was being tested.

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<sup>7</sup> *Times*. November 26, 1928.

The final cost of the six storey, 105 room Hotel Genosha reached \$500,000. In September 1929, the Gray Coach Lines moved its terminal from Prince Street to the west part of the main floor of the hotel. A stockbroker occupied one of the stores (later a coffee shop). At last, the Genosha Hotel was opened:

*On Dec. 5, 1929, 50 of Oshawa's most prominent citizens were guests at a luncheon given by Mr. Butler to mark the opening of the hotel. Mayor T.B. Mitchell and George W. McLaughlin, second president of the chamber of commerce signed the register. Ernest England was managing director of the hotel and F.E. Irwin, president of Hotel Genosha Co., said the principals had encountered great difficulties which had been surmounted. Harry Falls, former manager of the Cornwall Hotel was the manager at the time.*<sup>9</sup>

The Canadian Society of Gideons soon donated a hundred bibles to be placed in each hotel room. The Gideons is an organization of Christian travellers responsible for making the scriptures available in thousands of hotels in the United States and Canada. John Borsberry, a commercial traveller himself, was one of the first three Gideons in Canada.

### **FINANCIAL TROUBLE**

The "great difficulties which had been surmounted" was an endless list of financial problems and mechanic's liens filed against J. W. Butler Co. Ltd. between May and October 1929. It must not have helped that the stock market was in a rapid decline and about to collapse. The crushing Black Day for the stock market was October 29, 1929.

The following are among those who registered liens against Butler:

- Alexander Donald of Hamilton, Canada Wire & Iron Goods Co. for "miscellaneous and ornamental ironwork," \$3208.00
- Watkins Bros. (James Beresford Watkins) for plaster, \$1079
- Charles J. Moll, C.J. Moll & Co. for partitions, ceiling, wire, lather, etc., \$3580.00
- Henry C. Malow Co., Toronto, "the carpentry and finished hardware work," \$6690.00
- William J. Bavington, Bavington Bros. of Toronto, for painting and decorating the exterior and interior," \$2472

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<sup>8</sup> *Times*. December 1, 1928.

<sup>9</sup> W. Ford Lindsay. "Plans for the Genosha started in 1925." *Oshawa Times*, February 19, 1992.

On August 28, 1929, the Genosha Hotel Co. Ltd leased the unfinished hotel for nine years to the Oshawa Hotel Co. Ltd of Oshawa. The rent was to equal all the indebtedness against the property, including the \$325,000 in bonds. This manoeuvre was not enough to financially rescue the company. On May 12, 1930, an execution was filed with the Registrar, County of Ontario:

*By virtue of an execution issued out of the County Court of the County of Ontario, whereby I am commanded to levy of the goods and chattels of the Oshawa Hotel Company, \$681.23 for debt and \$37.00 for costs, lately adjudged to be paid by the Oshawa Hotel Company to John B. Windross, besides the costs of execution, I have this day seized and taken in execution all the estate, right, title and interest in a Lease made by Genosha Hotel Company to Oshawa Hotel Company bearing date 28<sup>th</sup> August, 1929, and registered in the Registry Office for the Registry Division of the County . . . Sheriff of the County of Ontario*

This did not end the trouble. In July 1930, Harry Griffiths of H. Griffiths & Co., Toronto, filed a mechanic's lien in the amount of \$604.94 against:

*The Estate of Genosha Hotel Company Limited of Oshawa, Ontario, The London & Western Trust Company Limited and Henry C. Wade, Trustees, the Sterling Trusts Corporation Limited, Trustee, and Harry A. Newman all of Toronto, Ontario, and all others, if any, interested in the undermentioned land in respect of the following work and materials, that is to say, the furnishing and installing of the plumbing and heating equipment in the building erected or being erected upon the lands hereinafter mentioned, which work or service was done and materials were furnished for J.W. Butler Company, Limited, of Royal Bank Building, Toronto.*

Genosha Ltd. soon defaulted on the mortgage and the Supreme Court of Ontario appointed London & Western Trusts Co. and others, as Receiver and Manager. On February 27, 1932, William D. Glendinning was appointed as the trustee, replacing Howard C. Wade who had signed, on behalf of several others, the \$325,000 bond mortgage registered in July 1928. On June 27, 1932, an order was issued to sell the property and its assets.

A Memorandum of Agreement for sale was signed on May 23, 1933, between Eric A.



Leach of Oshawa, and the London & Western Trusts Co. Ltd. and William D. Glendinning as trustees and receivers of the property and assets of the Genosha Hotel Company Ltd. Leach was a hotel manager as well as president and general manager of a new company formed to acquire the Genosha. This local company was headed by G.W. McLaughlin, Gordon D. Conant, George Hart, and others. They bought the property for \$50,000 and the contents for \$25,000. The next step in this complicated financial manoeuvre was an Agreement filed on June 5, 1933, between Leach and Hotel Genosha Ltd. Leach was issued 350 shares of Genosha Ltd. capital stock "and for other valuable considerations moving from the Purchaser (Genosha) to the Assignor (Leach)."

Even after his death on October 28, 1933, John Borsberry's estate may have been liable for some debts. His executor, Temperance Mary Ellen Nash, issued a Caution on October 10, 1936, that she may need to sell all property pending any financial claims. The Caution was repeated in September 1939.

#### **HARRY A. FINER**

Several transactions and transfers between corporations followed 1933. It was the Hotel Genosha (Oshawa) Ltd. that sold the property on June 30, 1952, to Genosha Hotel (Ontario) Ltd. Harry A. Finer was the principal in the latter and is the individual remembered by many Oshawa residents when recalling the Genosha.

When Harry Finer was owner and manager, guests and locals could drop in anytime to the coffee shop, one of a few in the country offering 24-hour service. He spent over \$250,000 to open the Picadilly Room with banquet space for 450 guests; Fleetwood Room for 90 guests, and the Corvair Room with accommodation for 40 diners. His Starlite Lounge is remembered by many as a popular night spot. The hotel averaged an annual 20,000 overnight guests enjoying the walnut panelling, twin beds, radios, telephones, tiled baths and showers, valet and laundry service, and roof garden. Finer also opened Harry's Hideaway bar and the Rib Room, renowned for its rib roast buffet.

The Hotel Genosha was the centrepiece and social hub of downtown Oshawa. It was the place where families held their weddings, celebrated special occasions, or met for dinner and dancing. Business was discussed over lunch or during a conference, and community organizations like the Oshawa Rotary and Kiwanis clubs held their meetings. It was the bus terminal and on October 5, 1946, T. W. Elliott launched radio station CKDO in the Genosha.<sup>10</sup> Whether it was the local Flying Club holding their inaugural meeting in 1945, or the handful of collectors who met in the Corvair Room on October 17, 1970, to found the Canadian Antique Phonograph Society, the Genosha has been the venue of choice.

### **EDWARDS INN**

Finer sold to Stan and Arron Edwards of Edwards Inn Ltd. in July 1977. In the first year, they transformed the Starlite Lounge into Morgan's Lounge, and Harry's Hideaway into a downstairs rock n' roll bar called Main Street. About \$200,000 was spent in new interior furnishings and upgrades.

In 1981, the Edwards sold to Eric Leatherbarrel (possibly known as Sirroco Developments). Two years later, it was in receivership. Stan Edwards returned as the manager, bought the property back in 1985, and then sold again about 1987. He is said to have spent about \$750,000 in renovations in ten years of ownership and management.

### **CURRENT OWNER**

In 1992, the Genosha was bought by the current owner, 757028 Ontario Ltd. By 1998, it was home to a striptease bar, Million Dollar Saloon, and Main Street sports bar. The top two floors were closed to guests, leaving 87 of the original 105 rooms available. That year, the owners were issued a work order by the municipality for ninety property standard infractions.

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<sup>10</sup> It was there until moving to 16 Centre Street in 1948.

## **ARCHITECTURE**

### **FORM AND STYLE**

J. W. Butler & Co. of the Royal Bank Building in Toronto are attributed with the 1928 design of the Hotel Genosha. The Hotel Engineering Co. was the general contractor.

The Genosha is a six storey, flat-roofed, rectangular structure that occupies a block of land stretching between Mary, Bond, Victoria, and King Streets. The prominent (entrance) facade faces south to King Street East. It has a two storey wing on the north, with an east facing front facade.

A conservative and late example of the Chicago Style, with some Art Deco influence, is probably the closest description of its architectural style. The term Chicago Style is applied to certain commercial buildings erected in large urban centres from the 1890s to the 1930s. The most striking characteristic is the grid-like organization of the window openings and wall surfaces. The elevations are divided into zones beginning with a commercial street level with storefronts and display windows. The intermediate section contains the bulk of the floors. The attic storey is often capped by cornices and parapets in a contrasting material. The Art Deco influence is evident in the use of vertical ribbons of projecting brick, simulating columns, which either terminate in an upper level loop or intersect rectangular limestone (?) blocks near the street level. The effect is less evident now as most of the corresponding roof ornamentation has been removed.

By 1928 when the Genosha was under construction, two late nineteenth century inventions had become standard practice – the passenger elevator and structural steel framing. Combined with reinforced concrete, the need for load bearing walls and columns was all but eliminated. The exterior brick cladding became simply the shell, with the interior taking on a new significance. The Genosha incorporates all three techniques: steel framing, reinforced concrete, and elevators. It was "Modern Fireproof Construction."

## **WALL CLADDING**

The north and east walls of the Genosha are clad in unpainted variegated buff-yellow brick believed to be supplied by the W. J. Trick Co. Ltd. of Oshawa. The bricks are soiled and have some damage. The west and north walls are light grey in colour. The decorative details may be cast concrete although Scott Bros. of Toronto did supply limestone for the project. Limestone may have been used for accent features and the street level facade, now clad in multi-coloured brick, laid partially in a herringbone pattern.

## **WINDOW OPENINGS**

Most of the existing window openings and sashes are original. The fenestration (window placement) is grid-like, with each flat opening featuring a concrete (limestone?) flat lintel (head) and a lugsill. The multipane sashes have steel muntin bars. The window design is an interesting combination of casement sashes with an upper transom-like band.

On the top floor, pairs of openings have been enlarged to create doorways to balconets – a nice feature for a penthouse unit.

## **ROOF AND WALL TREATMENT**

The original design of the Genosha emphasized the King and Mary (southeast) corner, drawing guests west on King to the marquee entrance. The corner featured a projecting cap or cornice assemblage at the roof. Two of the lesser roof ornaments at that corner have survived, but the key central feature at the corner point is missing. A pair of roof caps survive at the southwest corner.

The central frontispiece of the building is two columns of windows, with doors and balconettes at the top floor. The doors share a recessed lintel. The original crown or projecting cornice that defined the frontispiece at the roof level, is missing.

Dropping from each roof element are vertical projecting brick ribbons. Some terminate in a loop while others drop until they intersect a limestone rectangle, then terminate at the first floor.

The roof line is trimmed with heavy, light coloured dentiling on the south and east, with a short turnback at each corner.

#### **STREET LEVEL**

The commercial street level is the most altered. It is now clad in a multi-coloured, herringbone patterned brick, and is divided from the upper massing by a heavy entablature or wood band that replaces the original. The main entrance on King Street has been altered. Some of the window openings on the east are boarded.

#### **SIGNIFICANCE**

The need to bring a first class hotel to Oshawa in the 1920s was part of the emerging identity of the town as a corporate centre. General Motors was in the midst of a modernizing and expansionist program and the future prospects for the town were good. When it opened in 1929, the Genosha Hotel offered luxury accommodation. The unfortunate timing of its inaugural year, coinciding with a severe downturn in the national economy and the ensuing depression, undermined its financial viability for several years. In spite of this circumstance, the Genosha was popular with the travelling public and proved to be the hub of community activities. Whether it was for a Club meeting, family gathering, business luncheon, coffee, dinner, or dancing, the Genosha was the venue of choice. It was the bus terminal, radio station, and home to a variety of offices and shops. Although currently in a period of decline, the Genosha is fondly recalled for its place in the life events of many local residents.

## SUMMARY

The need to bring a first class hotel to Oshawa in the 1920s was part of the emerging identity of the town as a corporate centre. General Motors was in the midst of a modernizing and expansionist program and the future prospects for the town were good. When it opened in 1929, the Genosha Hotel offered luxury accommodation. The unfortunate timing of its inaugural year, coinciding with a severe downturn in the national economy and the ensuing depression, undermined its financial viability for several years. In spite of this circumstance, the Genosha was popular with the travelling public and proved to be the hub of community activities. Whether it was for a Club meeting, family gathering, business luncheon, coffee, dinner, or dancing, the Genosha was the venue of choice. It was the bus terminal, radio station, and home to a variety of offices and shops. Although currently in a period of decline, the Genosha is fondly recalled for its place in the life events of many local residents.

## SOURCES

Conveyances Abstract and related documents. *Durham Land Registrar's Office*

East Whitby census, 1891 and 1901. *Barrie Public Library*

Family and Hotel Genosha Files. *Oshawa Community Archives*

Thomas Bouckley Collection. *The Robert McLaughlin Gallery*

## APPENDIX

Promotional literature, undated. *Oshawa Community Archives*

Postcard views, undated.: King Street East Looking West, "Mercury Service Station became Ontario Motor Sales and the Oshawa Times (1968)" Nos. 1835 and 1836. *Thomas Bouckley Collection, The Robert McLaughlin Gallery*

Photographs 2002

- 1 South (facing King Street East) and east facades
- 2 South (facing King Street East) and east facades
- 3 South (facing King Street East) facade
- 4 South and west facades
- 5 East facade
- 6 Window detail, east facade
- 7 East and north facades
- 8 East and north facades
- 9 East and north facades



# HOTEL GENOSHA

*A modern, comfortable Hotel in  
Canada's Motor City*

THERE is no service in which the traveller demands a higher degree of comfort, convenience and cleanliness than in his hotel accommodation. You will find these requirements in every detail in the Genosha. No where except in the larger cities like Toronto and Montreal will you find such personnel, equipment and convenience featured.

The lounge is unusually large for a hotel of the capacity of the Genosha. Deep, cosy chairs, thick pile carpets and a variety of modern lamps, combine to make a setting so inviting, that the urge to spend half an hour there after dinner becomes almost irresistible. Adjoining the spacious rotunda is the "hall of good food," efficient service at spotless counters.

For those who enjoy a delicious meal well served in a quiet restful atmosphere, the Genosha dining room has an immediate appeal. A table d'hote luncheon and dinner is served, as well as a la carte service.

The numerous banquet halls of the Genosha have become very popular for social parties and gatherings and are fast becoming the real rendezvous of such activities.

The convention facilities of the Hotel Genosha are very commodious as the rooms range in size to accommodate from 10 to 500 persons. Many organizations and clubs have chosen the Genosha and it is increasingly becoming the convention centre.

OSHAWA ❖ ONTARIO



# HOTEL GENOSHA

*You can pick no better place for  
an overnight stop*

THE GUEST rooms are tastefully furnished in walnut, each with twin beds, telephone, spotless tile bathroom and shower, and radio. The installation of radio in each room is typical of the care taken to make your visit to the Genosha most enjoyable. Simply plug in the switch to hear the programme which is coming over the master radio in the rotunda.

The Valet Service is operated to give immediate attention. A phone call to the desk and your requests shall be promptly attended to.

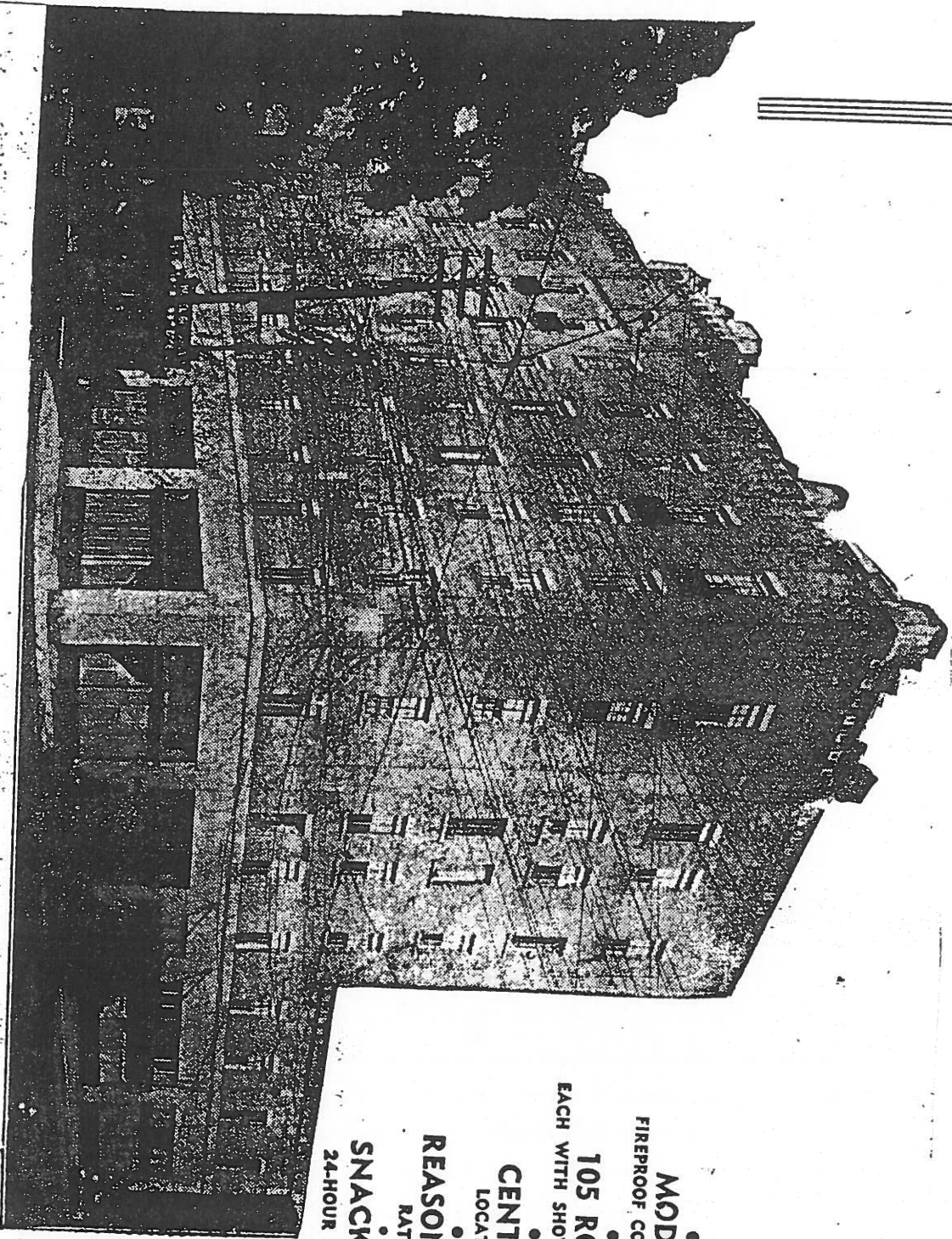
Guest Laundry Service—An eight hour service is available for linens, toggery and dry cleaning.

The Genosha Management are always ready to make special arrangements for hunting and fishing parties who desire to use the hotel as their headquarters. Also to arrange accommodation for those who desire to play golf on Oshawa's fine 18-hole course.

Efficiently, without fuss or bother, everything you want is at your hand. With all its extra comfort and convenience, rates at the Genosha are remarkably moderate. Plan to stop here. You will enjoy the hospitality and good service for which the Genosha is noted.

OSHAWA ❖ ONTARIO

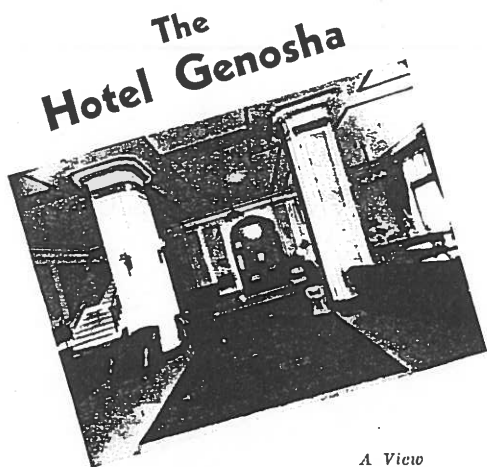
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**MODERN**  
●  
FIREPROOF CONSTRUCTION  
●  
**105 ROOMS**  
EACH WITH SHOWER AND BATH  
●  
**CENTRAL**  
LOCATION  
●  
**REASONABLE**  
RATES  
●  
**SNACK BAR**  
24-HOUR SERVICE

For Reservations Write or Wire

**GENOSHA HOTEL, 70 KING ST. E., OSHAWA, ONT., CANADA**



*A View  
of the Main Rotunda*

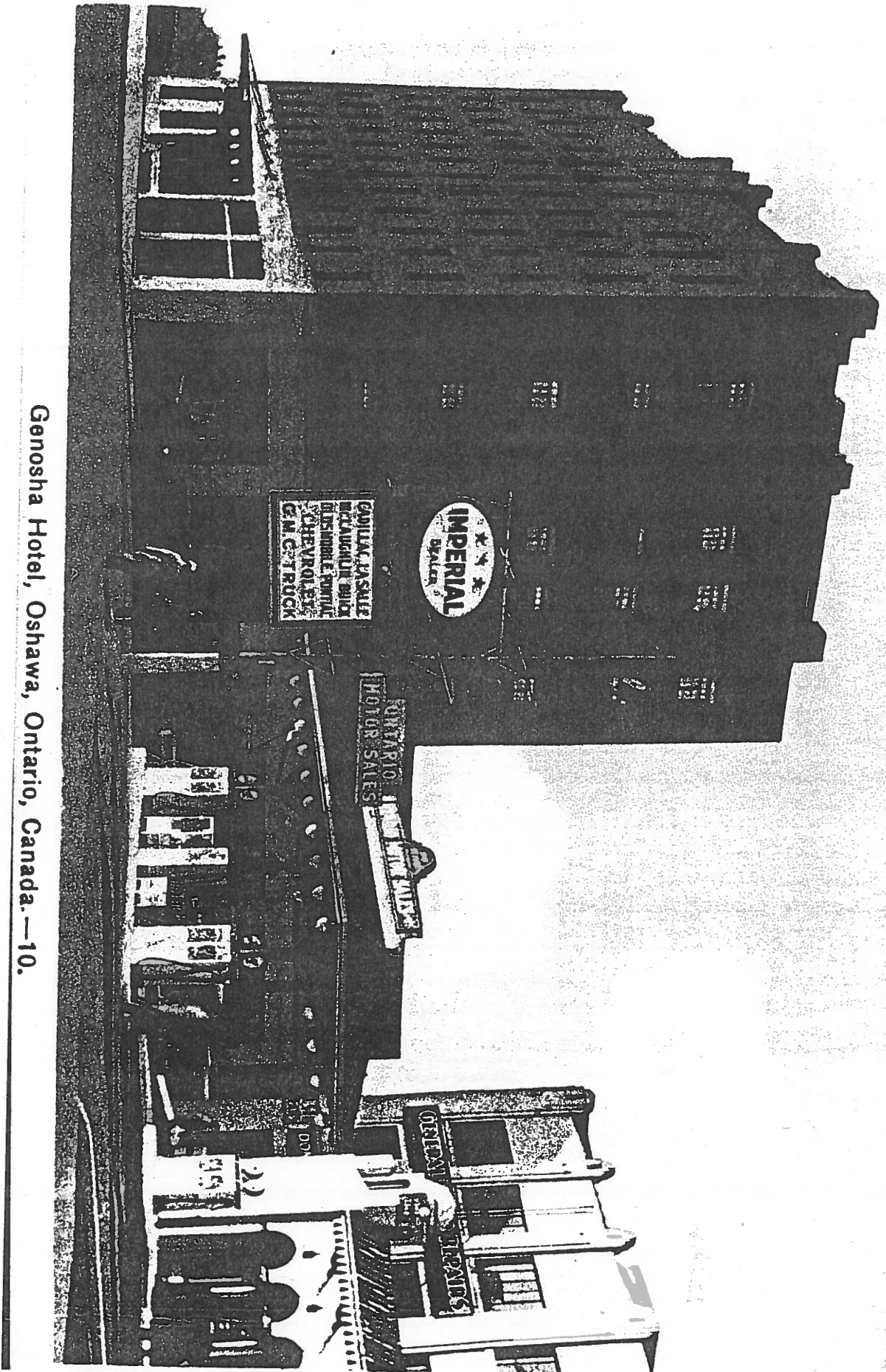
105  
Comfortably  
Furnished  
Guest  
Rooms

•  
A  
Radio  
in  
Every  
Room

From every standpoint — personnel, equipment, convenience — you will find in the Genosha just what you want in an hotel. It is one of the finest on the Kingston Highway. Plan your trip to include a stop at the Genosha.

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Genosha Hotel, Oshawa, Ontario, Canada.—10.

