

WATERTON HISTORICAL BUILDINGS

“Prince of Wales Hotel”

Follow turnoff road from above the staff dormitories

#22 on the History Walking Tour



Whole books have been written about the iconic Prince of Wales Hotel, full of great stories and anecdotes. The last of the lodges in Waterton-Glacier to be built by the Great Northern Railway, this grand Swiss chalet-themed hotel firmly placed Waterton on the tourism map. No expense was spared on the \$1 million hotel. Great Northern’s boss himself Louis W. Hill changed the blueprints from a four-storey structure to the seven storey building with the great sweeping roofline that pays tribute to the mountain peaks all around. Rooms started at \$8.50 a night when it opened July 25, 1927, and included three meals a day. Spend some time at the towering windows in the lobby to soak in the view that inspired the construction of this marvelous architectural treasure.

BUILT: 1927

BUILDERS: Designed by Thomas D. McMahon (Great Northern Railway) , and built by Oland and Scott Construction

OF NOTE: Impressed with the beautiful Waterton Dance Pavilion, Louis W. Hill hired the builders, Doug Oland and Jim Scott, to construct his dream hotel.

PARKS CANADA HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT:

Construction of the Prince of Wales Hotel was a pivotal event in the history of Waterton Lakes National Park. Until its completion, the park lacked the type of large-scale resort facility then commonly associated with Canada’s national parks, and regarded as vital to their success as tourist destinations. While fulfilling a perceived need from the standpoint of Canadian park administrators, it also rounded out the network of resort facilities that the Great Northern Railway had been developing south of the border in Glacier National Park since 1912.

The Great Northern Railway built its new hotel on the scenic bluff overlooking Waterton Lake and the townsite on the understanding that the National Parks Branch would upgrade existing road links to the park, and build a new route to the border which would permit the railway to bus patrons directly from its resorts in Glacier Park. Much of the subsequent road development that took place in and around Waterton Lakes Park over the next decade can be linked to this commitment.

The Great Northern's expansion into Waterton Lakes Park fostered a linkage between the Canadian and American Parks that was subsequently formalized through the creation of the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park in 1932, and the completion of the Mountain Chief Highway in 1935.

From an architectural standpoint, the Prince of Wales Hotel embodies the Swiss Chalet theme which the Great Northern Railway had previously developed for its network of hotels and subsidiary chalet resorts in Glacier Park. The Prince of Wales was the last in this chain, and the most overtly Swiss in its visual references. The vast six storey wooden structure was purposefully designed to capitalize on its spectacular site, and to be readily identified with the Great Northern Railway's resort system. Within Waterton Lakes Park, the Prince of Wales Hotel functioned as a solitary landmark, linked through its architecture to a theme devised by the Great Northern, rather than to one that developed within the park itself. This aspect is accentuated by the building's geographical isolation from the townsite itself.

The Prince of Wales Hotel is a unique architectural landmark, without immediate parallels within the National Park system. As such it constitutes a major cultural resource both for the park and for the system as a whole.

Character Defining Elements

The visual impact of the Prince of Wales Hotel derives from the integrity of its exterior and its site context. The



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building's dramatic appearance is due in large measure to the consistent handling of wood detailing. Inlaid wall paneling, timber bracketing and exterior balconies, wood roof shingling; all contribute to the visual effect of the chalet form. Remarkably, these features have been retained to the present time, with minimal evidence of intrusive substitution of modern synthetic materials for wood originals. Every effort should be made to encourage the owners to maintain this consistency when contemplating future repairs or alterations to the building.

Of similar importance is the maintenance of the building's physical setting. Future additions that might alter the historical building-site relationship should be discouraged.



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Cover of "The Call of The Mountains: Vacations in Glacier National Park and Waterton Lakes National Park," published by the Great Northern Railroad