

First Residence On Camp



Above: LBR in its early years of existence. Below Right: 1939 King George VI and his wife Elizabeth after a reception at the dining hall of the LBR

Lady Beaverbrook Residence (or the 'LBR' as it is popularly known celebrates sixty years of existence in 1990. Since its beginnings, the residence has reflected many of the changes in the society in general, in education and particularly in student life..

The residences was one of many generous gifts made by the Aitken family to the University of New Brunswick. It was the intention of the Right Hon. Maxwell Aitken, first Baron Beaverbrook and his first wife, Glayds, to establish a residence on campus. The firm of Forbes and Brown of Devon were awarded the contract for the erection of the building in 1928, following a Canada-wide competition. The chief architects were Alward and Gillies of Saint John. The Chancellor of the University, Dr. C.C. Jones, estimated that the cost would be about \$150,000, though in the event the lowest, successful tender was for \$196,364. Upon completion, the residence was intended to accommodate fifty students, who were to be Beaverbrook scholars. In addition to accommodation, the original plans included provision for a swimming pool, racquet court, and billiard room (the latter of which was never completed on the third floor, thereby increasing the amount of space available for student accommodation).

The site of the proposed building at he northwestern corner of the campus, was said at the time to have made necessary a diversion from "the rocky path to knowledge" used as a short cut by students proceeding from Queen's Square to the campus! In architectural terms, the residence was to be modelled on the style of the Oxford or Cambridge college system and its interior Georgian design was intended to conform with that of the Old Arts Building. The building was to be of brick and of three stories, 155 feet by 40 feet. A central feature was to be a common room to he front, with a dining room at the rear. Building operations began in the fall of 1928. By June 1929 the general shape of the structure was becoming apparent: the roof was partly in position, the exterior was taking shape; and the interior was being finished, with attention given to staff quarters, kitchens, and the serving rooms. The dining hall, corridors, and rooms were being plastered. As yet incomplete were the swimming pool and the clock tower. The interior finish was to be of birch, and the lobbies were to be trimmed with finished marble.

The turret clock with a chime of eight bells was purchased from Gent & Co., Leicester, England, and shipped from Manchester to Saint John. In his choice of chimes Lord Beaverbrook was concerned that they "should not be a disturbance to neighbouring property". He chose "the Jones Boys", a tune he liked from the Miramichi where he grew up, to be the tune for the chimes. He stipulated that the following inscription be used: "In memory of Gladys Beaverbrook. I give thy gay voice to speak now hers is still. February 15th 1930", but did not specify whether it should go on all the bells or only on the largest. The bells and related equipment of their operation cost over-750-pounds. The final account in 1931 shows that the cost of building came to \$213,431; furniture \$13,478; and kitchen equipment \$5,000. With other costs the entire amount came to almost \$244,000. The LBR was one of a number of new buildings erected on campus in the late 1920s and early 1930s, the others being the Forestry and Geology Building and the Library.

The residence was completed and ready to receive its first students in the fall of 1930. In October 1930 *The Brunswickan* reported that the LBR was "one of the finest buildings of its kind on the continent. In fact, a party of American college professors told the editor this summer that they had never seen anything to compare with it anywhere, not even at Harvard or Yale". This comment is understandable when one remembers that the building was almost lavishly furnished, that a full maid service was provided (residents were not required to make their beds not to do any housekeeping), and that residents were obliged to wear jackets and ties in the dining room, where a full table service (including white tablecloths, table napkins with silver napkin rings, quality silverware, and fine china) was provided.

In its first year LBR housed fifty-two male students. A Student Society was formed for, as it was said, "the peace, order, and good government of the students". The Society of Lady Beaverbrook Residence, adopted as its insignia the Greek letters Sigma, Lambda, Beta, Rho, which it still retains today. In its first year it organized two dances, and of that in March 1931 it was reported: "Dancing was carried on in the dining hall, which was decorated with Chinese

lanterns and red and black streamers". The fall 1932 dance was very elaborate as an orchestra from Saint John was booked for the occasion; that held in the spring of 1933 was a cabaret of which only lady friends of the residents were invited. In 1934 highlights of student social activities included: a first-class dance; a first-class fight; cancellation of a proposed masquerade due to bad weather; and "the annual spring drenching of unsuspecting residents-by"! The tradition of the Residence Formal with formal attire and a professional band present lasted into the 1960s. The formal was lavishly decorated for the event, with special attention given to the pool over which a bridge spanned.

During the summer months of 1939 considerable renovations were carried out, and it was at this time that the portrait of Lady Beaverbrook, now hanging in the dining hall, was replaced. Both improvements were a result of the generosity of Lord Beaverbrook. In June 1939 King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, the present Queen Mother, came to Fredericton as part of a Maritimes tour. The provincial government hosted a luncheon in their honour at LBR, there being no other establishment in Fredericton at that time which could have hosted such a high-ranking official. The Lieutenant Governor, Dr. Murray MacLaren provided a flag pole, from which the Union Jack could be flown over the residence. It remained in place after the royal visit had ended and was removed before the beginning of term in September 1939. In an act of daring, however, some students removed the flag pole from outside the Lieutenant Governor's house on the morning of September 29 and using concrete from the construction of a new gym, erected the pole in its old position. The ground crew in attempting to take down the pole saw it slip and break into pieces which, being useless, were dumped behind the Engineering building. The pole was later cut up into six-inch pieces and these were sold to raise money for the Spitfire fund, during World War II.

During the war years, the LBR was used by the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) for training programmes at UNB in 1941-43. Members of the air force were housed at LBR during the summer months and the dining room was used by the military during the war years. In June 1940 the university agreed to make LBR available for the temporary housing of refugee children when they were brought to Fredericton for distribution to different homes.

The LBR provided accommodation for ex-service students. In the opening of term in September 1945, when a student population of 750 was anticipated, compared with 325 before the war, it was expected to take in additional residents by allocating single rooms. The cost was \$9.75 per week for room and board. In 1945, there were 80 men in residence of whom 50 were veterans and 30 were younger non-veterans. In the early 1940s a new flag pole was erected in front of LBR where it remained until 1967 when official university flag poles were erected in front of the Old Arts Building.

The former Don of LBR, Alvin Shaw (1954-1970), recalled that about 1956 there were elaborate security arrangements for the visit of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip of whom had visited UNB and probably LBR in 1952 before the death of her father). On the morning of the visit a driver driving down the hill lost control and plunged his car into the north entrance of LBR, just three hours before the royal party was to arrive! However, prompt work by the grounds staff ensured that there was little evidence of the fairly serious damage to the brickwork. In August 1958, the LBR was the scene of a royal visit, when Princess Margaret visited the residence and was treated to a civil luncheon by the Mayor of Fredericton, T. Walker. The dining hall was decorated with palm trees, corners and fresh flowers on each table. The new Trans-Canada highway bridge in the city was named after Princess Margaret in honour of her visit. Other persons of note to have been housed at LBR over the years include Georges P. Vanier, John Baker, and John and Robert Kennedy (the latter unscheduled). The 1960s was a period of major expansion in the