

# This town's a nice place to visit --unless you're a hosteller

People touring Canada this summer were able to find inexpensive food and lodging in Fredericton at the Fredericton Youth Hostel.

Although the title includes the word youth, all ages were welcome. The hostel, financed by the federal State Secretary Department, provided a bed for fifty cents per night, dinner for fifty cents, and breakfast for thirty-five cents.

The operation, which ran from June 15 to Labour day, had trouble starting. The original plan was to locate in a former variety store building in Kingsclear, a 28-foot by 28-foot two-storey building.

Shortly after this site was obtained a petition opposing the location was circulated among the local residents by Manley Miller. The petition, bearing 63 signatures, stated that the hostel would be harmful to the citizens and children of the area.

The objections listed by the petition were "enticement of our children, fire hazard, enticement of drugs, unsanitary conditions (lice, bedbugs, VD), devaluation of property, theft of personal property, disturbing the peace, no local law enforcement, the would be located in the middle of

a community, government property is available within two miles, and possible damage to properties.

The local residents "apparently" indicated not to Earl but to others that they had weapons and were "prepared to use them." The committee "spent a lot of time and effort in locating the hostel there," said Earl. However, it was "not our intention to operate in the community if the citizens" were "opposed to the idea."

Consequently the Fredericton Youth Hostel Committee Inc., responsible for operating the hostel, announced the shelter would not be established in Kingsclear. The committee has operated local hostels for the past four years with federal government financial assistance.

Committee chairman Prof. John Earl said if an alternate site wasn't found there would be no hostel in Fredericton.

Another location was found at 271 Regent St. The committee's troubles weren't over at that time, though. This building, three stories high, was inspected on June 20 by city fire prevention officer Glen Henry and an official from the fire marshal's office. After inspection a fire marshal's

order was served calling for the hostel to end its activities until the building was brought up to standards.

The order indicated the need for a stairway and ceiling to be repaired, construction of an exterior fire escape on the third floor, changes in one of the windows, and installation of a fire alarm. The committee could not meet those standards so the building was closed. The fire marshal's office later permitted the hostel to re-open if only the bottom floor was used.

As a result the hostel could handle only twenty to thirty travellers per night instead of the desired sixty. Earl said that sometimes in August three times as much room was needed. Travellers needing accommodation when the hostel was full spent the night in sleeping bags or tents in the backyard or at Holy Cross House, Harrison House, the city jail and "quite a few private residences," according to one staff member, Ruth Assaff. There were four on staff this summer.

Some were housed by local religious orders. While the hostel was closed travelers were referred to the city's crisis response centre, CHIMO; the Salvation Army and the city police.

Another problem with the hostel was that some people didn't know about it because it was not included in the pamphlet telling where the various hostels are located. This problem was caused by the fact that it was not known until too late whether or not the hostel would exist at all, according to hostel director Robbie McMenammon.

When asked whether or not the Fredericton Youth Hostel was affiliated with the Canadian

Youth Hostels Association (CYHA) Prof. Earl said no. However, there will be a proposal in Ottawa in October for a permanent union between the Secretary of State-financed hostels and the CYHA in the spring.

Most travellers came from across Canada though some were from the U.S. and Europe. Most often when someone came to the hostel he was tired and just wanted to eat and go to bed; travellers had to be out by 9 a.m. since the hostel was only open from 7 p.m. to 9 a.m. The hostel was generally filled a few hours after opening. The first night the was open there was a limit of 24

people. It was filled to capacity and about 30 people spent the night in a bus in the driveway.

Though there were only four staff members no one was turned away. According to Assaff if prospective guests couldn't pay they could fill out welfare forms available at the hostel and help out at the hostel.

There were some complaints from the travellers about noise and the crowded conditions. In the average hostel each guest has his own room. In this case there were only two rooms available, thus large numbers of male and female transients shared each room. Another item expected was for all meals to be served at one regular time. This was not the case at this hostel.

In answer to the question, "Were there any hassles with runaways or assaults?" Earl said that he didn't know as he has not yet had a report from the director. He added that there was some problem in this area last year.

The number hosteling this year seems to be leveling off across Canada. Earl said this year's participation in Fredericton was roughly the same as the previous year, about 8000. The year before that, 16,000 transients stopped at Fredericton. These travellers are largely hitchhikers.

McMenammon said a few guests were aged 25-30 and a few 60. Often the latter stayed for maybe a week. However, hostelling is largely a youth activity and Earl stated that he didn't know if other age groups will ever become very interested in the idea. He said he hopes to find out in various conferences this fall. One of these conferences was supposed to have been held in the SUB September 13-15.

Earl's answers for hostelling being more popular in other places than it is in Canada (example: Canada-some 50, Germany-over 700) are because cycling is much more popular in Europe than in Canada and the hostel systems in other countries are more developed. Earl added that more funding for hostels is hoped for and that Canada's hostel system should be permanent, rather than being set up each summer for that summer only.

When asked about the outlook for next year Earl said that he had no idea. Everything depends on Federal government action in March or April.



271 Regent St.: 'some people didn't know about it'

Photo by Steve Patriquen