

Banff Lodging Co.

Story Articles.

FROM HERITAGE HOME TO HOTEL SUITE: OPENING THE DOOR TO A PEEK INTO BANFF'S PAST

'The Corner House' - Est. in 1913 - Now Welcomes Overnight Guests with a Taste for Traditional

Thursday July 27, 2017 (Banff, AB) – One of Banff's original homes - a quaint, early 1900s, wooden house that stood on the corner of Banff Avenue and Moose St. for an estimated seventy years - is now fully restored and officially open to overnight guests.

Formerly holding the address of 349 Banff Avenue and now standing centre-stage in the courtyard of *The Moose Hotel & Suites*, 'The Corner House' - as it's been affectionately named - recently revealed a storied past, and a connection to some of Banff's notable residents of yesteryear - including the well-known composer and musician, Leonard Leacock.

Through some of its former residents and artifacts found within the home itself, the house's history has been carefully pieced together by Banff Lodging Co., the owners of the property where the house now sits.

"We came across a unique opportunity to protect a part of Banff's history, and in turn, share its story with our guests," says Gordon Lozeman, President of Banff Lodging Co.

It was during the construction planning stages of *The Moose Hotel & Suites*, which opened in June 2016, that the property development team of Banff Lodging Co. started to unravel the history of the charming house that stood in the location of the new hotel site - enhanced by a chance encounter with the granddaughter of one of the house's original owners, Jim Serra.

Lozeman continues: "We were already intrigued by the house and its past, when the Architect behind the restoration of the hotel, Ted Darch, proposed the idea that we preserve the house as a local heritage interest piece. We made the decision that the house was far too interesting to not protect, so we got to work in building a plan where the home would be a permanent feature, to fit within the new hotel's courtyard."

Lozeman's property team were then contacted by Anne Serra, who had lived in the house with her grandfather Jim from the ages of three to 13, between 1953 and 1963.

Visiting from her home in New Zealand, Anne expressed she'd like to return to her former Banff home and have a look at the work being done. Lozeman was happy to oblige and arranged for Anne to take a tour of the house.

"From meeting with Anne, we were able to understand much more about the house's past," Lozeman adds. "She brought us many family photographs, letters, newspaper clippings and general context to the home she fondly remembered."

The Traynor Family, who had lived in the house in the 1980s, also approached Banff Lodging Co. with some books they'd discovered in a crawl space of the house - some of which were signed by Dante Serra, Anne's father, as well as some autographed by Leonard Leacock. These books now sit within a bookcase, as a permanent feature of The Corner House.

Thoughtfully designed to reflect the period, complete with claw foot bathtub, traditional fireplace piece, a brass bedframe and antique dresser, the house was gently restored from the state of disrepair that the property team found it in.

"The house didn't have a heritage designation, but we really embraced this concept around protecting a delicate piece of Banff's past, that had been enjoyed and lived in," says Banff Lodging Co.'s Shawn Birch, who oversaw the construction of The Moose Hotel & Suites and made all the preparations for restoring the house to its former glory.

He continues: "The house was in a pretty bad state when we came across it, but we were committed to its restoration. The first stage was replacing some of the damaged wooden structure, just so it was stable enough to move it to its temporary location."

The Corner House was transported by Banff Lodging Co. via crane to Banff Heritage Train Station so that the hotel construction could begin, where it stayed until it was ready to be placed in its new location of *The Moose Hotel & Suites'* courtyard.

"Once the house was in place, there was then a lot of discussion internally, as to what its best use would be, whether it would be a small museum for guests to explore, a reading room, or a traditional teahouse," says Peter DuBeau, General Manager of The Moose Hotel & Suites.

He continues: "Ultimately, as it's such a unique space within the hotel, we came to the conclusion it would be best suited to being a guest Suite. It's a hotel experience, complete with all the amenities you'd expect, but guests of The Corner House are actually staying in one of Banff's original houses; a museum of sorts.

We wanted to deliver a feel of what life would have been like in Banff at that time, but with modern plumbing, automatic heating, and all the creature comforts found within a contemporary hotel room. It's a pleasure to now be in a position to allow our guests to enjoy a piece of Banff's history during their stay with us."

Outside of guests, passers-by are warmly welcomed by Banff Lodging Co. to view The Corner House by visiting the hotel's reception desk - please note, tours are subject to availability.

To view video footage of former resident Anne Serra visiting the house to see its finished look, and the house's move into its current courtyard location, see: moosehotelsuites.com/corner-house-story/

For further information on The Corner House and to book, see: moosehotelsuites.com/corner-house/

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MEDIA INFORMATION

The Corner House was originally purchased as a pre-designed home in what was known as the 'Eaton Catalogue', from Winnipeg's T. Eaton Co. Limited. It would have arrived by train, before being constructed in nearby Bankhead; a now abandoned, former mining town.

From 1904 to 1922, Bankhead supplied coal for the locomotives of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Once the coal mines closed, it was time for all the homes, community buildings, even the railway station, to move on from the town. This is when the house would have arrived in Banff, to its new address of 349 Banff Avenue.

Perhaps one of The Corner House's most renowned occupants was Mr. Leonard H. Leacock (1904-1992), a passionate mountaineer who became a highly-respected musician. Leacock was a music teacher at Calgary's Mount Royal University – which still has a facility that bears his name, 'The Leacock Theatre'. Throughout his career, he would write dozens of pieces for piano, violin, orchestra, organ. Leacock was awarded the Licentiate Diploma from the Royal School of Music in London, and also became a recipient of the prestigious Order of Canada.

Another of the house's former owners was long-time Banff resident, Jim Serra [Anne Serra's grandfather]. Along with his brother John, Jim, arrived in Canmore as an Italian immigrant in 1898 and worked as a miner. Later, an entrepreneurial opportunity presented itself to Jim; to be the co-owner of a Banff grocery store with a mining colleague, Louis Trono, which he went ahead with. Trono was another well-known Banff resident, best known for being a trombonist and performing locally in Banff throughout the 1930s and 40s, and later playing at the Banff Springs Hotel throughout the 70s and 80s. Serra purchased The Corner House in 1945, and would own it until 1985.

Some of the books in The Corner House's bookcase were signed by Dante Serra, Anne's father, as well as a framed portrait of her grandparents, Jim and Nina Serra, alongside autographed books from Leonard Leacock.

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