

# TIMES COLONIST

Landmark inn opened in 1917  
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For almost 90 years, the Island Hall Hotel has been a part of the Parksville tourist scene.

The local landmark dates to 1917, when business partners Joan Foster and Winnifred Philpott -- two English citizens who had discovered Parksville during a world trip -- opened their establishment to the public on Easter weekend.

Originally on an acre of beachfront land, it now sits on almost four hectares. It also grew from 28 rooms to 100 through the decades.

The Island Hall was designed to resemble an English country lodge and to appeal to well-heeled international travelers. At the centre of the original complex was an expansive fireplace with a mantle of polished Douglas fir almost five metres long.

The guest list through the years has included political luminaries like Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent and such celebrities as Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who rented the entire place in 1963 for 10 days. In 1951, a then-Princess Elizabeth (she became Queen in 1952) and Prince Philip enjoyed tea at the hotel, dropping in from their lodgings at Eaglecrest in Qualicum.

Eileen Brookbank, 89, who worked at the Island Hall as a teenager, remembers the elegance of her surroundings and the white-linen tablecloths in the dining room.

"We had no menus in those days," said Brookbank, who began her four-year stint at the Island Hall in 1929. "You had it in your head and just told people what there was."

Running past the hotel in the early years was a gravel thoroughfare that served as the highway, while on the other side the ocean almost lapped at its walls.

Today, the tidal reach stops much farther away, explained Marjorie Leffler, Brookbank's sister-in-law and a member of the Parksville and District Historical Society.

"What happened was people came here early on, they brought their children, and then their children came and brought their children."

Inspired in part by the redevelopment of the Island Hall, the historical society is creating an exhibit on area tourism in its downtown museum, beginning in late May. Anyone with pictures or memorabilia they would be willing to contribute is asked to call (250) 248-6966.