



The *Great* Canadian
Catholic Hospital History Project

Documenting the legacy and contribution of the
Congregations of Religious Women in Canada,
their mission in health care, and the founding and operation of Catholic hospitals.



Projet de la *Grande* Histoire
des hôpitaux catholiques au Canada

Retracer l'héritage et la contribution des
congrégations de religieuses au Canada,
leur mission en matière de soins de santé ainsi que la fondation et l'exploitation des hôpitaux catholiques.

A City is Born ... ELLIOT LAKE

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ALGODEN HOTEL
ELLIOT LAKE, ONTARIO

A City is Born . . .

ELLIOT LAKE

A hardy breed of pioneer Canadian men and women are building the "uranium capital of the world" among picture-like forests and wealth-laden rocks in south central Ontario.

With daring, foresight, and raw courage they are building a model community. They are working raw stuff into the concrete realization of Sir Wilfred Laurier's famous dream. With their minds and hands they are truly proving that this century belongs to Canada.

This is their story . . . the story of Elliot Lake and the wealth upon which it is founded.

The Rainbow's End

THE Algoma Basin is figuratively the rainbow's end. For deep in its rocks rests the energy fuel of the Atomic Age. It is a bonanza in billions—a lode of wealth-in-the-raw that is the reason for Elliot Lake's very existence.

This new community was born of an urgent need to accommodate the employees of the Algoma Basin's two pioneer mines, the Algom Quirke and Algom Nordic. But prospecting continued and the first plans for Elliot Lake grew apace.

Consolidated Denison led the procession of other mines to follow. Can Met, Buckles, Lake Nordic, Spanish American, Panel, Lake Milliken, Stanleigh, and Stanrock all developed in rapid succession during the following two years. The end is not yet in sight—there may be still more mines to come.

This means that out of the inquisitive tapping of the geologists' hammers, and the probing of their diamond drills, have come a dozen mines and new jobs for 7,000 men. By 1958 these working men with their families will swell the total population to at least 25,000 men, women, and children.

How It Began

The community of Elliot Lake didn't just grow. Detailed thought was given to its most complex development before a single tree was blazed. Community planning was started in the spring of 1954 by the district discoverer, Geologist Franc. Joubin, who was then president of Algom. With his engineering aides, R. C. Hart and W. H. Hutchison and several Ontario Provincial Departments including Mines, Planning and Development, Lands and Forests, Highways, and later Municipal Affairs, Education, and Health, every single aspect of a central community was considered.

The primary function of the community was to house the working forces of two mines, about 12 miles apart. There was then the distinct possibility, now realized, that more mines would be developed.

After careful study, it was decided that one central community from which all mine and mill employees could commute would offer many advantages over two or more small settlements. Some of the principal arguments for this decision were:

—One community would eliminate costly duplication of essential municipal services, thereby allowing for higher standards in a central town.

—A simple and high standard public community would be socially more desirable than several small “company towns.”

—A central community supported by several mines presumably would be longer lived than single mine villages and this, in turn, should simplify federal, provincial, and bank financing over normal amortization periods for both municipal services and housing construction.

This last assumption was not to be quickly realized, however.

Selection of Site

The decision was made in favour of one central community.

Joubin instructed Algom manager R. C. Hart, who was aided by Professor George Langford of the University of Toronto as consultant, to select the best possible site for a central community.

Engineer Hart, lanky, soft-spoken, and meticulous enough to satisfy even perfectionist Joubin, surveyed the large areas of forest.

Finally his choice was made and recommendations presented. A tour of the district was arranged. Representatives of several provincial government departments were in the party, together with officials of Algom and other prospecting companies of the district.

The chosen setting was, and is, gem-like. Trees, mountains, streams and lakes provide a deceptively pastoral scene — deceptive because during the present turbulent construction period its quiet is shattered by the roar of bulldozers, chattering rock drills, and the clatter of 20-ton trucks.

At the conclusion of the examining tour, a general meeting of the town planners was held at the Pronto mine. All present expressed satisfaction with the area nestling between Elliot Lake, Horne and Nordic Lakes which straddled the mine access road built by Algom and later to become Highway 612.

But what should the new town be called? Hart's view was asked and he suggested “Elliot Lake.” A Department of Mines official suggested “Joubin” but the discovery geologist asked to have his name withdrawn and for it substituted “Nordic.” “Elliot Lake” was the choice of the majority.

Soon ground studies, aerial photography, and topographical mapping, soil testing, drainage and water studies were all commenced. Since the area covered mining claims of the Algom company, it was also necessary to drill and study the ore-bearing conditions under the town area.

The Go-Ahead

The planning specifications read: design a community which is pleasant, safe, and convenient; provide an environment which will satisfy the physical and aesthetic needs of all its inhabitants.

The first step was to lay out the boundary. To allay fears that shack towns might fringe the planned development, 396 square miles were set aside, giving the urban section in the centre a buffer of some 18 miles of classic forest playground between it and the likelihood of undesirable building.

The second step was to set up an organization to plan, to execute those plans, and administer the community. A council of three trustees was appointed by Order-In-Council until such time as the posts can become elective. The first Board of Trustees consisted of Franc. Joubin, as Chairman, E. B. Gillanders as Vice-Chairman (now resigned) and W. E. Willoughby, all of Toronto. The trustees are served by a capable municipal staff under Percy Brown, Secretary-Treasurer. They are advised on town planning and land use by the Department of Planning and Development and counselled in municipal administration by the Department of Municipal Affairs. They work closely with numerous other government departments as specific problems arise.

The third step was: full speed ahead with a crash construction program. The world wanted and needed uranium and to get it Elliot Lake had to be built soundly—and fast.

The greatest problem that this uranium centre had to face was prejudice born of ignorance. Uranium is a new metal and the skeptical or over-cautious looked to the five-year duration of the present production contracts and they could not see beyond. This "five-year phobia" as Joubin calls it has led to much muddled thinking and more than the usual amount of red tape from officialdom.

Although many of the world's great financial houses, including major banks of Britain, the U.S. and Canada have readily financed the opening of mines, Canada's own governmental and private municipal and housing finance institutions have been reluctant to participate in this new community.

Most communities enjoy a 20 to 25 year amortization period for municipal services and housing finance. At Elliot Lake, however, this is not yet (1957) possible. Provincial-municipal financing is being forced to comply with a ten-year pattern.

This, then, is the paradox. Insistence on the highest possible standards of municipal development in the face of exceptional financing problems. One answer would be to lower the standards. However, the provincial government departments concerned and the Board of Trustees have been firm in their view that no compromise with the highest of standards will be allowed.

The How of It All

Some one had to take the initiative and Algom did. With some assistance from the Department of Mines and the vigorous direction of Joubin and Hart the mine access road from Highway 17 to Quirke Lake was built. The Consolidated Denison mine later helped toward its cost and maintenance. Two years later, in December, 1956, the Department of Highways completed construction of the \$2 million Highway 612, essentially over the same route as the Algom access road.

Hydro-Electric power was soon delivered to the district thanks to the personal interest and attention of the late Hydro-Electric Power Commission Chairman, Robert H. Saunders.

The first discoveries in the Basin area occurred during 1953. Presence of the first two mines was established by 1954. The spring of 1955 saw the start of the "Elliot Lake" townsite clearing, improvement and construction.

The community was planned as a city of predominantly single-family self-contained houses on lots large enough to provide "living space" both in and out of doors.

The topography, a rather hilly terrain of sandy flats and rock ridges, physically dictated a

"neighbourhood" type of community. To date, five neighbourhoods are planned and in course of development. Each neighbourhood contains 300 to 1,500 single-family residences with its own neighbourhood shopping centre and school. There is, in addition, one large central commercial district, a heavy industrial district, a municipal office centre and a high school centre to serve all neighbourhoods.

All lots, either business or residence, are to be cleared, stumps removed, water and sewer mains laid, roads built, and preparations for power and telephone service are arranged by the municipality. Residence lots, so improved, are leased for a stated period at a fraction of the total cost of improvement. If the lessee builds within a stated period of about one year, he is granted clear title to the lot. This procedure effectively prevents land speculation and insures that improved lots are built upon promptly.

Only business lots are cleared of all timber. Residence lots retain an attractive green belt between rows of houses. Beachland along the shores of Elliot Lake has been excluded from private sale and will serve the municipality for boating, swimming, parks and picnics sites.

Some 300 homes were finished and another 500 started during 1956-7 while land improvements prepared additional areas for 1,500 homes to go up during 1957-8. A section set aside as a temporary shopping centre, which has served adequately since 1956, will disappear sometime in 1957 when the central commercial district will be ready for permanent occupancy.

Population during the summer of 1957 was composed of some 3,000 permanent residents and about 7,000 construction workers. By the end of 1957, permanent residents will number over 10,000. By late 1958 the population of Elliot Lake is expected to be over 20,000.

The first public school, of three rooms, was built by Algom Mine in 1956. A modern 10-room municipally financed school was completed in 1957. Also under construction in 1957 were a second 10-room school and a 10-room high school. It is expected that provision will soon be made for a separate school.

Both for the present and the future, Elliot Lake's plans for education are as big as the uranium field that is around it. Franc. Joubin, the present Chairman of Trustees and Chairman of the

School Board, would like to see the district support a mining industry technical institute at Elliot Lake.

A hospital of up to 100 beds is planned and construction should start late in 1957. It will be financed jointly by the federal, provincial, and municipal governments, the mines, and public subscription.

Police and fire services were among the first municipal responsibilities to get attention. The police corps is a well-staffed detachment of the Ontario Provincial Police. Fires are fought by experienced salaried officers and a large corps of volunteer firemen. The department of Lands and Forests will have a forest fire fighting station within the community as well.

There are trailer residences (mobile houses) by the hundreds in and around Elliot Lake. Most of them are occupied by transient construction workers. However, it appears that hundreds may soon be required for the mine employees for varying periods of time. The municipality will provide some properly serviced trailer parks which will be subject to rental and municipal assessments; in other cases it will designate "selected areas" where trailers may be permitted to stay.

Pioneers in Plush

Elliot Lake, because of its newness, is a frontier. But because of its accessibility (18 miles from the mid-way point on the Trans-Canada Highway stretching between Sudbury and Sault Ste. Marie) many of the usual frontier hardships are removed.

Public spirited citizens have donated a public library; Kinsmen and Lions Clubs are formed; a Rod and Gun Club is rapidly filling its membership rolls; the Chamber of Commerce is formed and active; a Boating club is planned; curling, boxing, wrestling and hockey are already organized winter sports; a hilltop beauty spot is set aside for construction of an auditorium and community centre; a radio station, television transmitter and local newspaper are planned.

The community already is serviced by a completely modern and licenced 40-room hotel with excellent dining room.

Churches of several denominations are building. A Roman Catholic Church and community hall are already finished. Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, the United Church, and Salvation Army Corps groups are proceeding with construction.

The Why of It All

There are many "whys" for Elliot Lake's existence.

Geologist Franc. Joubin supplied the first "why." He and his team of prospectors and geologists discovered immense quantities of uranium in a basin-like formation within the rocks.

Another "why" rests in the faith and energy of people. People like Hirshhorn the financier who had faith in Joubin and in uranium. It is faith that does not falter despite the physical problems, financial frustrations, early government timidity, and originally sceptical public, and even an over-cautious "five-year phobia" that regards the uranium industry as lasting only as long as its first production contracts.

Prosaic figures, however, give a clearer picture of what the Algoma Basin uranium district means.

Present production contracts already total more than \$1.1 billion for the 12 mines.

The annual rate of uranium production from this district will be over \$220 millions. This will be derived from 11 mills treating 34,300 tons of ore per day.

More than \$60 millions will be paid to labour each year. Over \$5 millions will be paid annually in provincial taxes; over \$100 millions will be paid in federal taxes after 1960.

To start production flowing, more than \$265 millions have been spent or committed in equipping the mines and mills for production. Most Canadian banks, together with some American and United Kingdom banks have participated in this financing.

To provide a townsite thoroughly planned for healthy and happy living, more than \$20 millions worth of municipal services are required and are in the process of installation.

Cost of housing for miners' families is boosting the total community investment by an additional \$36 millions.

Businessmen are expected to spend a further \$10 millions in store and other business premises to profit from the tremendous purchasing power this new community commands.

And these are only the surface statistics.

They do allow, however, for the drawing of interesting comparisons. For example, as much capital is going into the readying of the mines for production as will be spent in construction of the entire Trans-Canada gas pipeline. The annual gross value of uranium produced in this district by 1958 will be more than 80% of the value of all metals produced in the 25-year-old Sudbury district last year.

Uranium is the Start

The ore that contains the uranium also contains pyrite (iron sulphide) and therein lies a clue to a further industrial dream. If/when realized it will have a major impact on Elliot Lake.

Pyrite is about half iron and half sulphur. Potential production of pyrite could be as high as 300,000 tons per year if markets for the processed products—sulphur, sulphuric acid, and iron ore sinter—encouraged its recovery. So far, this is entirely in the realm of speculation but it cannot be overlooked that this district is easily accessible to important established steel, chemical, pulp and plastics industries which use the ingredients of pyrite.

Thorium, too, may become a commercially attractive product. There are important quantities of thorium in the Algoma Basin and it can be extracted on a low-cost by-product basis. Thousands of pounds of thorium could be produced daily once markets are developed.

Prospects are present for some copper and cobalt production in the area as well.

The district has other resources besides minerals. The Algoma district has always been rich in soft and hardwood timber, with scenery and game too, which spell tourism: both major industries in themselves.

But it is obvious that uranium production is the purpose of the current Algoma Basin activity and the reason for Elliot Lake's amazing development and growth.

Accomplishment

What is so amazing about this accomplishment is that Canada's most modern small city is building in record time despite many difficulties.

The results will be important and long lasting. The Algoma Basin's \$1 billion-plus production during the first five years of its life will be a national record for mineral output. Few other Canadian mining districts have produced as much wealth even over a 25-year period.

It will be producing a metal which, theoretically, can produce from one pound the energy contained in 1,300 tons of coal. It and its derivatives, the isotopes and radio-isotopes, can do many wondrous things in the fields of industry and medicine. The technique of controlled uranium fission, in fact, has been compared in importance to man's discovery and harnessing of fire.

In turn, Elliot Lake stands as a monument to the free enterprise system. It was the scientific and financial courage of free enterprise that revealed the uranium riches of the Algoma district and produced Elliot Lake to serve this new Ontario industry. Because of its remarkably accessible location, huge orebodies, and large mills with low production costs, it appears that Elliot Lake will not only soon attain but continue to hold for many years to come the title of "URANIUM CAPITAL OF THE WORLD!"