

## *Chapter One*

# XANADU

*Someone has said that we never know our great men till we see them at play, till we watch them throw off the vexing cares of business and allow themselves to be themselves. Now that Sir William Van Horne has gone from us, we like to think of him, not so much as a phenomenally successful business man, who possessed, as few have done, the Midas touch, who saw visions and dreamed dreams of Canada's future greatness, and who did not a little to realize his own dreams; but we like to think of him as he revealed himself when far from the madding crowd he enjoyed his happy and beautiful home at Covenhoven, St. Andrews.—A. Wylie Mahon, Toronto Daily News, 1915*

## MINISTER'S ISLAND

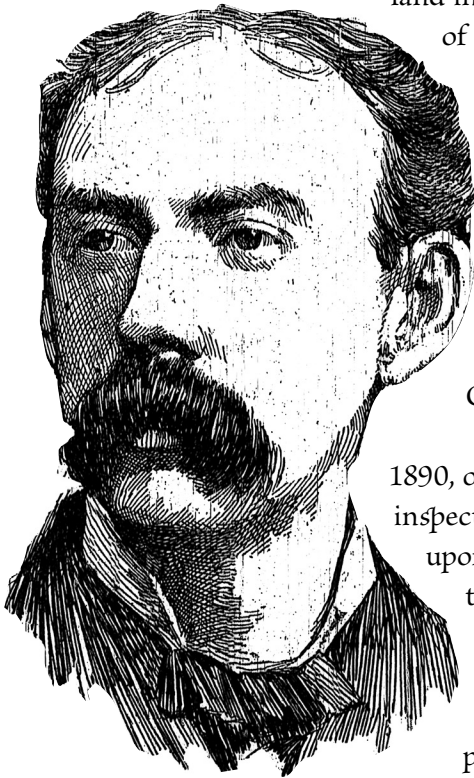
"VAN HORNE is coming!" affirmed a gentleman in early October of 1889, in the tiny town of St. Andrews, New Brunswick, when it was learned that a special train with the CPR magnate on board was headed that way. The refrain was taken up and spread through the town. Speculation was rife, reported the local newspaper, the *St. Andrews Beacon*, as to the objects of his visit.

William Van Horne, the great railway man, to visit St. Andrews! The man who, as General Manager of the CPR, had bound the country together with bands of steel, spanning the rock-bound fastnesses and fearful morasses of the Canadian shield, driven off rival railroad companies in the Prairies, and carved a line through Rocky Mountain passes where previously only mountain goats and packhorses had ventured. The man with the big belly, big cigar and brusque personality, whose keen intelligence, amazing organizational skills and indomitable will had not only completed the job that many said could not be done, but brought it in an incredible five years ahead of schedule.

Nor had the CPR stopped there. Since the driving of the last spike just four years earlier, it had continued to expand, snapping up smaller railroad companies all across the country and extending feeder lines into the hinterland. That very year it had completed the long-awaited Short Line across Maine, connecting Montreal with New Brunswick at McAdam, a line which MacDonald's Conservatives had promised in the election of 1878 would deliver a wealth of new trade to the Province. Now negotiations were afloat to transfer the holdings of the New Brunswick Railway to the CPR as well. No doubt the townspeople of St. Andrews felt a shiver of anticipation at the imminent arrival of a man whose transportation company—now one of the biggest in the world—could do so much to make or break a town.

The much anticipated Pullman disgorged not Van Horne, however, but the relatively diminutive figure of Sir Donald Smith, though in strict railway terms Sir Donald took no back seat to Van Horne. Sir Donald had driven the last spike for good reason. As the richest man in Canada, largely with money acquired in the Minnesota Red River rail business, not to mention his post as Director of the Hudson's Bay Company, he along with his cousin George Stephen, the current President of the CPR, had been major bankrollers of the CPR. They had staked everything on the success of the CPR—and won. But Sir Donald was not in town on railway business, as it turned out. He had been in the area and, along with Frank Cram, General Manager of the New Brunswick Railway, had decided to stop into St. Andrews to inspect his newly acquired property on the Bar Road. Sir Donald was a major shareholder in the St.

Andrews Land Company, which had been formed a few years earlier by New England businessmen from Boston, Bangor and Portland, and which had as its goal the transformation of this somewhat decayed backwater into a rustic watering place for vacationers fleeing the crowds of Old Orchard Beach and Mount Desert Island. It was headed up by Cram, originally a Bangor railway man; Robert Gardiner, vice-president of the Rand Avery Supply Company of Boston, and other railway and steamship men of note, along with signal help from the Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick, Sir Leonard Tilley, one of the Fathers of Confederation. The Land Company had snapped up major tracts of land in St. Andrews with the avowed purpose



of spurring a large-scale cottage development. It had constructed the Algonquin Hotel, as a way of attracting visitors to the area, and guaranteed 12-hour, no-change, rail connections with Boston, New York and Montreal. Sir Donald's visit seemed more connected with St. Andrews the summer vacation spot than with the development of a new CPR terminus.

Van Horne himself arrived in May of 1890, on what he claimed was a simple tour of inspection. But actually Cram had impressed upon Van Horne, as upon Smith, the beauties of the town and its opportunities for port development. It was raining heavily and the big man didn't come away with a very favorable impression of the place. He was back again in August. This time the weather was brilliant, and he was much taken with the area. In an interview with Robert E. Armstrong of the *Beacon*, the first of many such over the years, Van Horne said: "I am very much pleased, though I must confess I formed rather an unfavorable opinion of it when I was last here, a few weeks ago. The day was wet and gloomy, I was in a hurry, and I got rather a gloomy idea of the place. But after today I will take back all that I said against it. It is a beautiful place, and should become a popular resort." He brushed off any ideas that the CPR might develop the town's port facilities, noting that this would take millions and that it was always the Company's policy to

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*Frank Cram. Cram was General Manager of the New Brunswick Railroad and one of the leading spirits in the St. Andrews Land Company. He is credited with the idea of inviting William Van Horne to St. Andrews.*

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ST. ANDREWS BEACON, 1892

## MINISTER'S ISLAND

go to the cheapest port—in this case Saint John, though at some future date St. Andrews might garner a little spillover traffic in the coal trade.

No, if St. Andrews had any special attraction for Van Horne, it was as a vacation spot. As a result of the Land Company's exertions and the completion of the Short Line, St. Andrews was being much written about in New England and Montreal newspapers, and tourist traffic was picking up. Later that August Van Horne's wife Lucy Adaline, daughter Adaline, and son Richard Benedict (Benny) were registered at the Algonquin. They stayed until late September, were written up as part of a large group of distinguished guests at a celebratory birthday party for Judge Emory Speer of Georgia, a Hotel guest, and finally left the town, the local paper pronounced, "so pleased that they propose returning next summer." In October the *Beacon* noted that Minister's Island, the 500-acre island lying at the foot of the Bar Road on the north side of the town's peninsula, had been bonded for \$20,000 by "some western people having fancied it as a site for summer cottages." In December of that year, in response to a petition from the town requesting attention to its potential for port development, Van Horne wrote a letter to the *Beacon's* Mr. Armstrong, again brushing off any interest there, but recommending the creation of decent bathing facilities and some general attention to town improvement. He seems to have been thinking at least partly of himself in this connection. In April the *Beacon* announced that Manager Van Horne was to erect a palatial residence on Minister's Island, on a piece of land secured for him earlier by Mr. Cram, and that Sir Donald Smith, Thomas Shaughnessy, Vice-President of the CPR, and other gentlemen from both Montreal and New England were planning to build in St. Andrews as well. In May a 150-acre lot on Minister's Island was officially deeded from Edwin Andrews to William Van Horne, and the Van Horne occupation of Minister's Island had begun.

MINISTER'S ISLAND IS a 500-acre tract of partially cultivated land lying just outside the St. Andrews peninsula. It is a geographical oddity in that it is an island only at high tide. At low tide it is accessible by a wide gravel bar. The Island was initially settled in 1777 by two Loyalists fleeing the newly formed United States—John Hanson and Ephraim Young. It then passed into the hands of a British Naval Captain named Osborn and thence, in 1791, to the town's first Anglican Minister, Samuel Andrews—hence the name. Andrews' son Elisha, High Sheriff of the County, was born there, as was his son after him, Marshall, and his son after him, Edwin. Since the site Van Horne had fixed upon was at the southern end of the Island, with a spectacular view down the Bay

William returned from St. Andrews. Had visited his recent purchase there, was much pleased with it.—Mary Van Horne's Diary, July 8, 1891.—LAC MG29 A60 VOL.86

to Eastport but distant from the bar crossing, the big railroad man was forced to secure a right of way across the Andrews' property. Van Horne initially considered putting in a bridge, but soon dropped that thought. At this time he made a property arrangement with Sir Donald Smith as well. Smith owned land at the corner of the Bar Road and Mowatt's Drive, but was interested in Minister's Island too, so in exchange for a \$1,500 cheque Van Horne agreed to keep a part of his property undeveloped in case Smith later decided to build there.

Van Horne was in St. Andrews in July of 1891 to pick out a site for himself and Sir Donald. At this time the *Beacon* got wind of his plans for a summer residence. They were quite modest. It would be a two-story house only 40 feet square, with four 16 x 16 foot rooms downstairs, including kitchen and laundry facilities, with bedrooms on the upper floor. Van Horne soon decided on something a bit more spacious. The revised version would be 84 x 60 feet, including a veranda. Though built of wood, it would be faced with field stone 16 inches thick and sport veranda columns of red Island sandstone, both to be obtained on the Island. There was a large quantity of field stone piled up on the beaches, refuse from the clearing of the Island's fields, and the red sandstone of which the beaches were composed was easily cut.

In the fall of 1891, after Edwin Andrews was set to work gathering the field stone, Van Horne decided on red sandstone for the entire edifice, and a quarry was opened a short distance from the proposed house site. CPR master mason John McAvity of Saint John was put in charge of this operation. Under him probably worked Charles Horsnell, a Scots immigrant and local hotelier whose interest in masonry would eventually become a full-time profession and include many Van Horne projects, not to mention those of Van Horne's friends. By December the foundation walls of grey granite were in place, but by January of 1892 operations were suspended. The work was being done not mainly by local artisans but by a CPR work gang whose first priority was to finish a train depot in Fredericton. Though construction was renewed in the summer it was too late for Van Horne to occupy his home that year.

The town naturally took a keen interest in the Van Horne project, and the *Beacon* published a description of the building as it was expected to look by the summer of 1893:

The building will be two stories in height, with a broad verandah surrounding the front and sides, the general effect, as seen from the architect's plans, closely resembling what one would expect to meet among the paintings of the old Dutch masters. A large recess in the