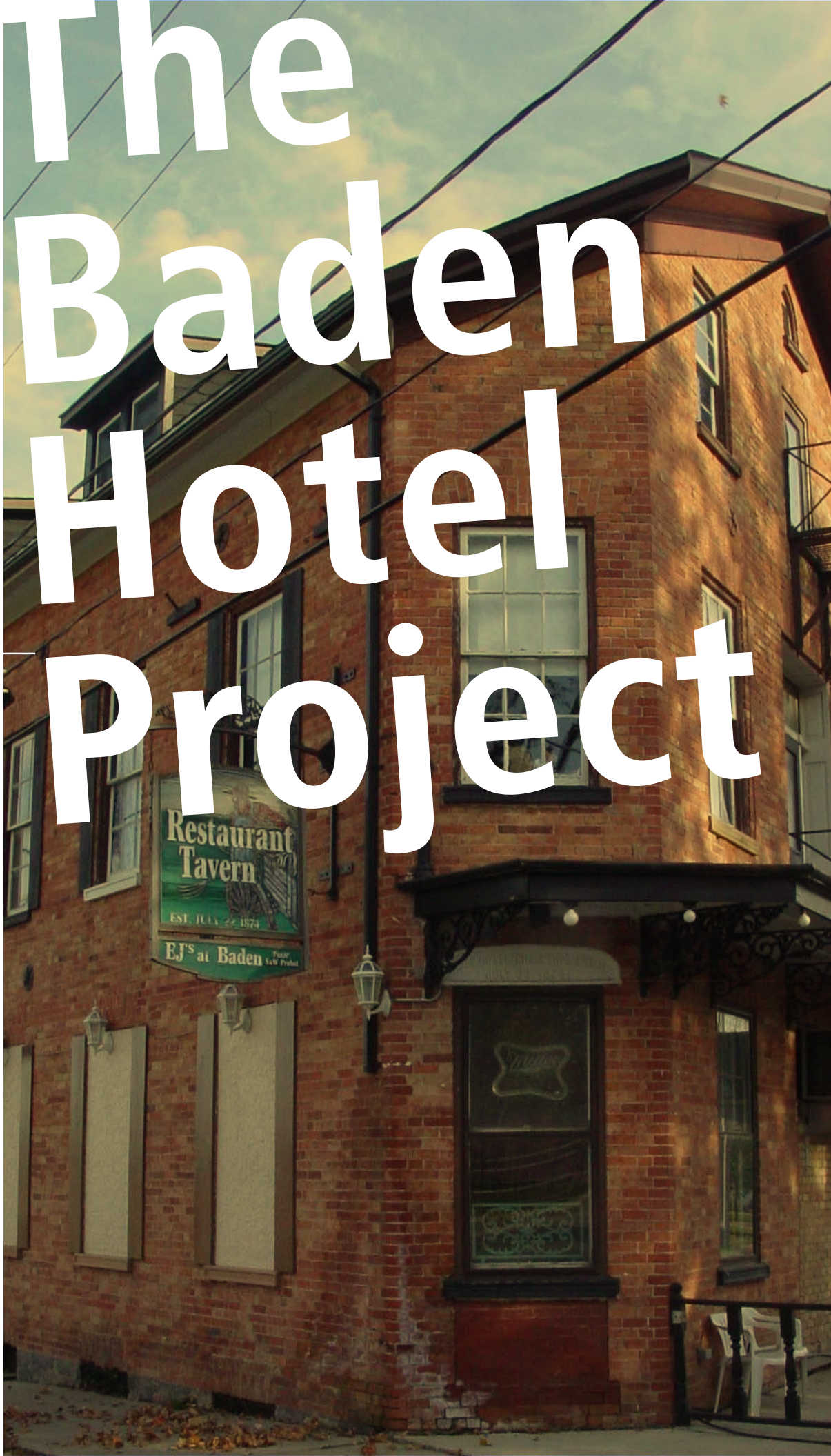


The Baden Hotel Project

Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery



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Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery
101 Queen Street North
Kitchener, Ontario
519 579 5860
www.kwag.on.ca

KWAG is pleased to acknowledge the support of



Preface

It is my opinion that no public art gallery exists successfully in isolation from its host community. Here at the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery, we are exploring new strategies to engage, provoke and perhaps even inspire our community. We believe the function of art includes creating and disseminating stories composed from the artistic lives around us — that art is about shared experience. *The Baden Hotel Project* is one such effort, and is offered under the guise of our new Vernacular Series to examine and promote shared local stories and visions.

The project began in a serendipitous fashion during a field expedition where Curatorial and Collections Consultant Allan MacKay and I happened upon the Baden Hotel — now named EJ's at Baden Restaurant and Tavern. The establishment was formerly a hotel dating back to the mid point of the 19th century. Aside from the obvious rustic charm of the building, Allan and I noticed the embossed tin ceiling of the tavern featured some wonderful small vignettes — landscapes and motifs painted by a trained hand. No one knows the name of the artist, only that it was someone who stayed at the inn in the early part of the 20th century, and worked on the 26 tiles one by one in exchange for room and board. The mystery of the unknown artist and the charm of these images that had been maintained all these years convinced us that the ceiling works should be documented in the context of a KW|AG project.

Within the Gallery program strategy, KW|AG has developed a principle by which to use the methods of art to frame, discuss and present projects wherever possible. We aspire to develop our programs following the conditions of art itself, and by encouraging cross disciplinary collaboration wherever possible. Toward that end, Jane Urquhart was lured into *The Baden Hotel Project*. Much enthused by the story, Urquhart subsequently fictionalized the identity of the ceiling artist as a character in her new book, *A Map of Glass*. On two fronts the unknown person who wielded the brush in Baden returned to life: as a rediscovered historical fact, and as the fictional character Branwell Woodman in Urquhart's book.

We are so delighted with the result of the project, its publication and the surrounding events. I would like to thank Jane Urquhart for her wonderful and artful participation, the Musagetes Fund at the Kitchener and Waterloo Community Foundation and the Ontario Arts Council for supplying the means, Kim Clarke for his photography of the Baden site, and of course the anonymous artist for the images that has remained across generations. We are also grateful for the enthusiastic support of Matt and Jackie Rolleman, the owners of EJ's at Baden Restaurant and Tavern, who have cared for the works and burnished the story and pleasant visions of the unknown painter from those distant years.

Alf Bogusky

Director General



Intro- duction

A few years ago I began to write my sixth novel. As is often the case at the beginning of a book, I had only the faintest of notions of how the characters would develop or where the narrative might be going. Fortunately, however, discovery is, for me, a driving force behind the writing. If I am very lucky, characters will walk into the story, events will unfold, and many, many surprising images will surface. Imagination plays a large part in all this, of course, but my own daily life and the world around me is tremendously important as well. What I bring to the early stages of a work of fiction is a kind of inner cabinet of curiosities that I have assembled from the places I have been, and the ideas and images that have intrigued me in recent years.

And so, when I sat down to begin the book that would eventually be entitled *A Map of Glass*, I did so knowing that I wanted to explore the following things: the timber industry in 19th century Canada, a commission struck by the British Parliament to map the bogs of Ireland, the current decline of the old settler society in Ontario, a Georgian inn — now deserted

— on the Huron Road between Kitchener and Stratford, a hotel in Prince Edward County which had been buried a hundred years ago by dunes of sand, the 17th century painter Joachim Patinir and his renderings of Saint Jerome, the ideas behind the work of earth artist Robert Smithson and those artists who followed in his wake, the life of emerging artists as it is lived right now in Toronto and, last, but by no means least, the murals of 19th century itinerant artists in Ontario. It was this notion of itinerancy that would cause me to create one of the main characters in the book; Branwell Woodman, the son of a 19th century great lakes timber merchant who, as an adult, would become an innkeeper and itinerant artist.

Once Branwell began to take shape on the page, I knew I would likely want to do some research concerning the world he would have inhabited as a child. I had seen an exhibit at the Kingston Marine Museum of the Great Lakes concerning a timber empire which had developed on nearby Garden Island, and I suspected that the archives of the museum might contain some material pertaining to the family who ran the business. As it turned out, not only did the archive hold all the account books and ledgers associated with the island, but it also housed a series of diaries begun by the fifteen year old son of the founder of that business. Although this fifteen year old did not grow up to be an itinerant artist, I nevertheless had the uncanny feeling that I was reaching out and touching the hand of a character who, until that moment, I had believed was purely imaginary. Coincidences of this nature had happened to me before when I was working on my previous novels, and I had always looked on them as gifts on the one hand, and an indication, on the other, that I was on the right path.

But the appearance of the diary was not the only gift that I was to be given. A year or so later, just at the time when I was deciding that, in some way or another, Branwell should visit south western Ontario where he would eventually (I hoped) paint the murals that still exist above the fireplaces on the walls of the beautiful and now empty Georgian Inn on the road to

Stratford, I was contacted by Allan Mackay, Curatorial and Collections Consultant at the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery. Would I be interested, he wondered, in writing something for the Gallery about the images on the tin ceiling of the Baden Hotel. These painted images, likely from the 19th century, were undoubtedly by an itinerant artist. It is important to note here that, until that moment I had never discussed my novel with Allan, (or with anyone else for that matter). Allan did not know about Branwell. In fact, he did not even know I was writing another book.



Not long after this magically synchronistic invitation, I found myself sitting in the Baden Hotel, now called EJ's at Baden Restaurant and Tavern, with a beer in my hand and my eyes pointed toward the ceiling. Whoever had done the small paintings had made use of the square shapes stamped into the tin as a framing device for each of several modest renderings depicting either simple landscapes or a floral motif. His or her hand was more "primitive" than the one that had produced the murals at the inn on the road to Stratford and therefore, I decided, even though his or her technique would have been hampered by the awkwardness of painting on the ceiling, the two jobs could not have been done by the same person. Luckily, I am a writer of fiction and, as such, when the facts don't suit me, I simply change them. I was thinking about this, nursing my beer, and looking through the window at falling snow, when I heard a train rumble by on the tracks that cut through the town of Baden. Branwell, I decided, would come to Baden on what, for him, would be the new railroad. The weather would be bad, and he would be forced to put up at the tavern before heading out to the inn on the Huron Road.

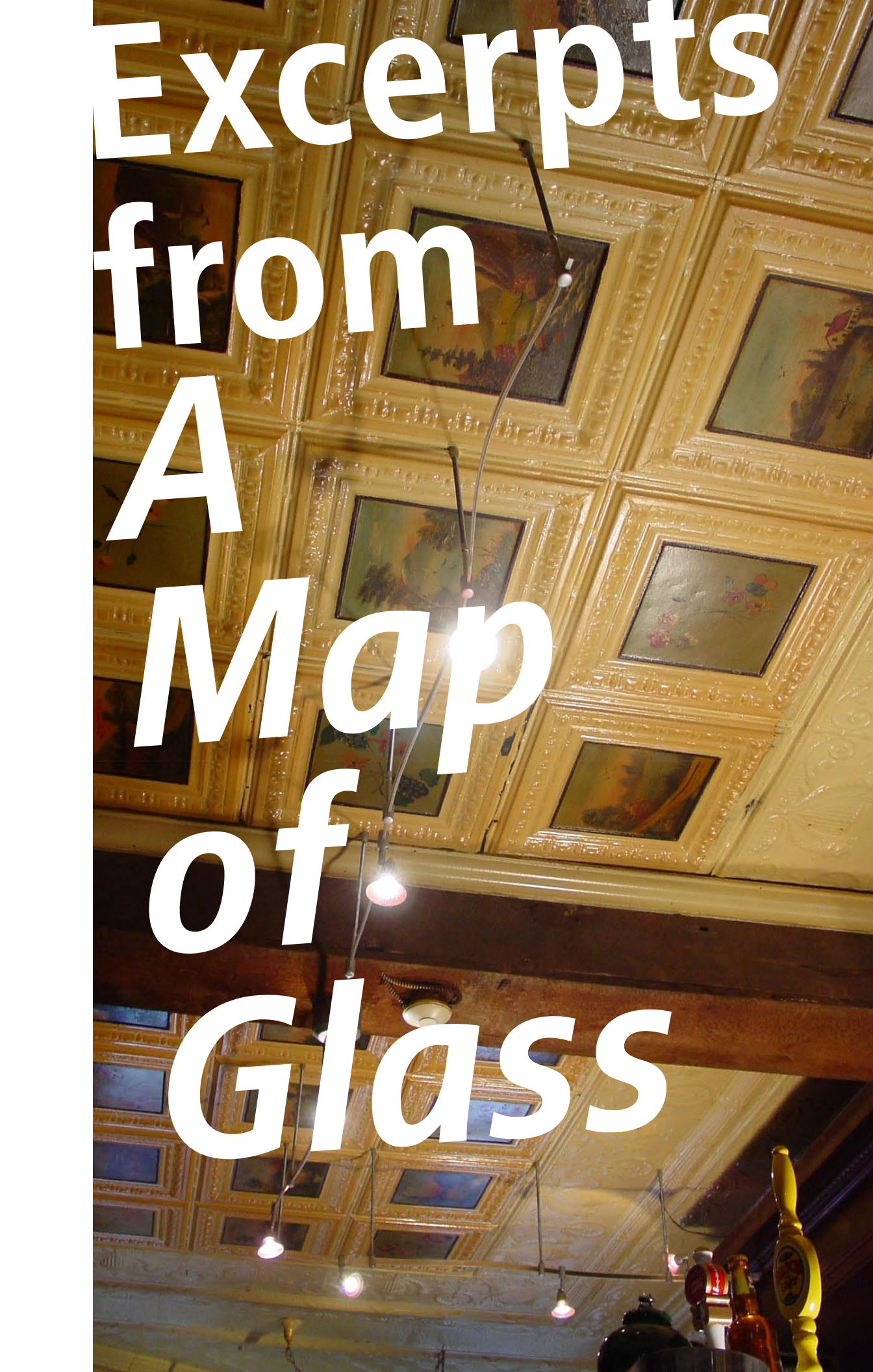
After that, everything seemed to cooperate with my plan. The weather worsened on my drive back to Stratford and, because I was snowed in at home for several days, I was able to enter Branwell's world at the tavern. A character called "Ghost" appeared and became Branwell's tavern friend, subsequent travel companion, and eventual saviour. And, finally, after some time had passed, Branwell was able to make paintings in both the tavern and the inn. It seemed, and continues to seem, absolutely right that what was conceived as a visual arts project should enter a novel that was and is, at least in part, about visual arts projects.

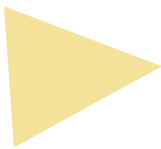
As for the little paintings themselves; we'll probably never know what inspired them or who decided to paint them on a ceiling of stamped tin. They remain, therefore, as a result of anonymity, a playground for the imagination, mine as well as others. I will continue to wonder, for example, what arrival left

in its wake the buggy tracks and the horse hoof prints that mark the road leading to a small painted house, or why a painter in a tavern should find himself to be so interested in waterfalls.

Jane Urquhart

Excerpts from *A Map of Glass*

The background image shows a detailed, ornate ceiling with a grid of square panels. Each panel contains a small, colorful painting, possibly of a landscape or a scene. The ceiling is made of a light-colored material, possibly plaster or wood, with intricate carvings around the edges of the panels. Several small, round, white pendant lights are hanging from the ceiling by thin wires. The lighting is warm and focused on the ceiling. In the bottom right corner, a portion of a bar is visible, featuring a yellow beer tap handle and some bottles.



The new Baden Tavern was made of brick and not of logs, its windows were surrounded by decorative moulding, and there was a large wood burning furnace in its deep cellar. These architectural details would be the only differences, as far as Branwell could tell, that would enable him to separate his current stay in the district from the one he had endured ten years before. Each day, he pulled aside the burlap curtains in his room and stared, as he had in the past, into a sea of swirling white. Each evening he fell asleep to the sound of howling winds tearing around the snow bound village, and each night he was awakened intermittently by the moan of train whistles. Kelterborn was gone, Lingelbach, the present owner, was so like Kelterborn, both in his taciturn manner and in his physical appearance, that he hardly qualified as a noteworthy change.

Ghost, however, who had wandered all over the townships, insisted that there *were* changes. More than one track, a proliferation of new farms, villages like New Hamburg to the east and, now that the Irish had arrived in droves, places called

Dublin and St. Columban were appearing to the west. “My father would have been beside himself,” Branwell told his friend, all the while thinking as he had in the past, ‘why these European names?’ Almost everyone had horses and buggies now, Ghost explained, and several blacksmiths shops had opened as a result. The gorgeous mansion going up across the street was said to have ten marble fireplaces, all made in Italy, and the two painters Fryfogel junior had referred to were, indeed painting naked ladies on the walls, ladies so real you almost thought you could touch them.” He paused here, closed his eyes for a few moments, then said that he didn’t see Branwell painting naked ladies in the future, mores the pity. “General Stores in every village,” Ghost said, “and churches everywhere. An undertaker. A tombstone maker.”

“I imagine I’ll have to take all this on faith, though,” Branwell said, “I’ve never been able to see anything but the inside of a tavern, a different tavern, yes, but still a tavern much like all the others.”

Ghost pointed heavenward, explaining that none of the other taverns had tin ceilings like this one. “Not a crack in it and there never will be a crack in it. Even if the tavern fell down there would not be a crack in that ceiling.”

Branwell looked at the ceiling, the ceiling Ghost was so fond of. The decorative swirls were confined to borders that surrounded flat square panels like an embossed baroque frame. He wondered briefly about the machine that would be required to make such a thing as a ceiling. Must the tin be heated or was it soft enough to be pushed into the shape required? Nonetheless, to his eye, there was a monotony about the resulting effect, exaggerated by the rather dirty pale yellow paint that covered it, or perhaps it was white paint, discoloured by the pipe smoke that, he was beginning to discover, filled the bar room day and night.

Ghost asked about Branwell’s financial situation which, admittedly was shaky at best but which he hoped would improve once he got out to Fryfogel’s. Linglebach, who was pretending



to be absorbed by the task of wiping down the bar with a damp cloth, moved closer to the side of the room where Branwell sat with Ghost. "Road's disappeared," he offered.

Again? Thought Branwell. What was it about him that made particles of almost everything want to accumulate wherever he went? What else could possibly happen to him? He half expected a plague of sawdust, or of iron filings to appear in his future. He wouldn't have been surprised if brimstone began to descend from the sky. Linglebach was speaking again. "You'll have to pay me," he was saying to Branwell. "There's the room, the board. You'll have to pay me one way or another."

On the fourth day of the storm Branwell descended the stairs at the tavern to be confronted by a strange scaffolding made up of two tall step ladders placed about six feet apart with a couple of wide pine boards resting between them. Ghost, who had clearly been supervising the placement of this scaffold, took Branwell by the arm. "I see pictures on this ceiling," he said, "and," he nodded his head in the direction of the bar, "so does Linglebach. We both see you painting these pictures, starting this morning."

Branwell had no desire to paint a ceiling. He was tired, sad, and slightly disoriented by being in the company of others after his solitary life in the hotel. He thought about snow falling on the roof of his old home and wondered how the shingles would hold up in this storm were to travel eastward. Looking at the scaffolding, he said, "I'm not Michelangelo, you know, I'm not Tiepolo."

"Who?" asked Ghost.

"Who?" echoed Linglebach, once again pretending to be absorbed in sponging down the bar. When Branwell answered with nothing but a sigh, the owner of the establishment added philosophically, "No matter, whoever they were, they would have had to pay for room and board."

Maintenance, thought Branwell, is so central to human life, it's a wonder the very enormity of it didn't cause hopeless



exhaustion in those who thought about it. Maintenance and money. There was a price to pay for sleeping at night and a price to pay for waking up in the morning. There was a price to pay for shaving your face and cutting your hair, for the clothes on your back and the food that you ate. And there was an even bigger price to pay, as far as he could tell, for having experienced happiness. I've lost everything, he concluded.

"You haven't lost me," said Ghost, reading his mind.

When he wasn't eating or drinking, Branwell spent his remaining few days at the tavern lying on his back. As his friend had predicted several years before, paint did indeed drip into his eyes as well as into his moustache and onto his face. But there was one comfort, and that comfort had to do with the weather. Branwell painted nothing but scenes relating to summer; a still millpond at twilight, a farmhouse with buggy tracks visible on a road leading to its door, a few sunny water scenes punctuated by the curve of a sail, several waterfalls.

"I see *another* waterfall," said the Ghost enthusiastically as he watched from below, "a much larger waterfall that will be painted by you in the future. I see Niagara." And then, in his hew self appointed role as supervisor, "So you can use turquoise... so show me something else! I see other colours! I see flowers. Paint some flowers every second square!"

The aesthetes from across the road, took a break from their trompe l'oeil efforts to inspect, scoffed at Branwell's little landscapes, and went away again. The blacksmith arrived, announced that tin was not a real metal, that it would rust in a decade, and that therefore all of this painting was a waste of time and then, he too went away again. Branwell lay on his back for several afternoons, a brush in his hand and unsolicited memories of his childhood in his mind. He remembered an iceboat moving across Back Bay, snow falling on a young oak tree in the yard, a girl arriving at the wrong door in late winter. All this while he continued to paint a warm season, flower by flower.





After a few days of intimate engagement with the tin ceiling, having slept late because there was no wind rattling the sashes of the window, Branwell was awakened by a spear of sunshine touching his face. He lay quite still, waiting for the wind to pick up, waiting for the light to soften as snow entered it. But the spear remained crisply defined on his pillow and the sharp, ferrous smell of water was in the air. When he opened the curtains he was delighted to see that the icicles hanging from the eaves above the window were releasing glistening drops of water from their tips, but even more exciting, the entire village was chiming with a sound he had never before heard in this district — that of sleigh bells.

He was packed and downstairs in a minute and was standing halfway up the step ladder placing tubes of paint and brushes back into the wooden box when Ghost entered the room. “January thaw in February,” he said. “Better get out of here before Lingelback gets back from the store. You’re not going to finish the ceiling.”

This seemed self evident to Branwell but he told Ghost that he would get back to it after he finished the commission at Fryfogel’s.

“Doubt that,” Ghost replied. “I don’t think I’ll be seeing you for a couple of years.”

“Why not come out to the Inn? It’s only a few miles.”

“The current Fryfogel thinks fortune telling is un-Christian and, for some reason, Spectre doesn’t like his horses... maybe they are too pure. Besides, a January thaw in February is always short lived. Don’t forget about Niagara Falls though. I see it painted overtop a fireplace in a room upstairs on the brook side of the Inn. And a mountain scene would be good too, there being no mountains in this district. Paint a moonlit mountain scene in another room.”



















About the Baden Hotel

The building of the Baden Hotel, now known as EJ's at Baden Restaurant and Tavern, was designated in 2002 as a historical building under the Ontario Heritage Act for architectural, historical and contextual reasons. The establishment became EJ's when Edward John purchased the building in 1988. Here are excerpts from writings onsite at EJ's, courtesy of Matt and Jackie Rolleman, current owners of the restaurant and tavern.

The Building

This early hotel in the Georgian style was built in 1874 by Christopher Kraus, a pioneer innkeeper in Wilmot Township and the village of Baden. It is constructed of buff brick common bound on a fieldstone foundation consisting of rubble stones with a medium gable roof and is two and half stories tall.

This building has several architectural features of particular interest including the odd cut corner on the Mill Street side with the detailed datestone with the inscription “Baden Hotel Christopher Kraus July 22, 1874”. The hand painted tin ceiling and its crown molding located in the bar and the actual bar itself are very interesting and are included as reasons for designating the Baden Hotel.

The manner in which the Baden Hotel was built to confirm to the corner on which it is located provides a contextual reason for designating this building. The fact that it has served continuously as a hotel since its construction is of contextual interest. Its proximity to the former Grand Trunk Railway Station in Baden also provides an interesting context as the hotel was built in response to the number of visitors arriving in Baden via the Grand Trunk Railway and needing a place to stay. The Hotel’s location on Snyders Road provides another contextual reason for designation as Snyders Road was one of the pioneer settlement roads in Wilmot Township initially called Schneider’s Road and originally known as the Middle Road. This road served as Wilmot Township’s link to Berlin, now known as Kitchener.

The Baden Hotel also is of historical significance. In addition to the fact that it was built by a pioneer innkeeper, Christopher Kraus, the hotel has served as a meeting place for local residents, service groups, business people and travelers.

The Ceiling Paintings

The 27 paintings on the men's beverage room ceiling were done by an itinerant artist who John Stiefelmeyer¹ met at the Walper Hotel where he was doing some work for Mr. Zuber². He invited this man to come to Baden some time if he was out of work. Shortly thereafter he painted the ceiling tiles and today the paintings are still there in good condition. There has not been any mention of the person's name.

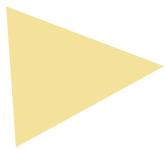
...Most of the paintings on the ceiling remain there, although some have been moved. A beam above the bar was installed in the 1980s causing the removal of a group of three paintings – one was subsequently damaged and the remaining two are now hung on the wall of the bar.

This hotel is a very good example of an early hotel that despite some changes and additions retains its original integrity. It is a symbol of how important the hotel was to the community at large and the connection it had to the Railway and community.

Endnotes

¹ John Stiefelmeyer was the owner of the Baden Hotel from 1920-46.

² Joseph Zuber was the owner of the Walper Hotel.



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Photos by Kim Clarke. Design: WALNUT

