

LUXURY HOTEL WHERE ONCE WAS A WILDERNESS

Difficulties Overcome in Building Castle Harbour

ANOTHER CHAPTER IN THE FURNESS STORY

By BETTY SMITH

(Sunday Royal Gazette Reporter)

THE luxurious Castle Harbour Hotel was constructed during the second decade of the operations of Furness, Withy and Co., Ltd., in Bermuda. With its 18-hole golf course and lavishly landscaped grounds, it was planned as one of the great luxury hotels in the world. It was way ahead of its time in design and appointments.

The construction of the hotel in 1930-31 was a big undertaking, with almost inconceivable difficulties arising out of the nature of the terrain, transportation of equipment, and assembling of a labour force including artisans from England. Eventually, out of a wilderness there arose a building located high on a hill on a narrow strip of land that separates Castle Harbour and Harrington Sound, with an unforgettable view of sea, islands and gardens.

The land on which the hotel and golf course were constructed was heavily wooded. Thick vines climbed through the trees. Myrtle grew 20 feet high. No ground was visible; one walked on a mass of undergrowth in an almost impenetrable wilderness.

Six hundred Portuguese were brought here to work on the property. They signed their contracts on the tenders that brought them ashore and their return passage was deducted from their wages, returnable when they left the Colony provided they had good records here. The men were put up in bunk houses on the land and went to work with machetes to cut through the heavy undergrowth. It was hard work.

Lanes were cut through first so that surveyors could get to work and determine the contour of the land. Poison ivy abounded. Many of the workmen ended in hospital, eyes closed and hands and faces badly swollen from the poisonous plant.

First Private Car?

Some of the first pieces of big equipment seen in Bermuda were brought here from England and the United States, mostly by lighter. There was a steam shovel, tractors, dump trucks, and one of the first passenger cars ever brought here. This was used on the grounds by the construction superintendent.

A small freighter, named the "Longbird" transported equipment from the English boats anchored at Grassy Bay. Barges were towed out to the ships by tugs and loaded with freight. A dock was built and roads constructed.

In the early days the Bermuda Development Company's office

frightening horses on the highway. As the tractors and shovels passed an elderly woman's home she came flying out of her house and yelled to the drivers: "Stop! Stop! You are making so much noise I can't sleep."

Part of the hotel's garden was made from a natural sunken garden, a cave known as Coffee Cave because of the coffee trees which abounded there. The place was terraced and planted in tropical flowering shrubs and trees and today is known as Coffee Chine—a beautiful shaded glen.

Luxury Ships

Castle Harbour was operated on a year-round basis and visitors were brought here on the Monarch of Bermuda and the Queen of Bermuda. The Monarch was commissioned in 1931 and was the first passenger ship to provide a bath with every room. Two years later the Queen joined the Monarch and Bermuda was provided with two of the most modern and luxurious vessels afloat.

During the 1930's a great deal of promotional work was done by Furness, Withy to popularise the Colony and bring more and more visitors here during all seasons of the year. One cruise was named the Sidney Lenz Contract Bridge cruise and the Monarch of Bermuda brought down a load of bridge fans who listened to lectures aboard by Mr. Lenz, a world-famous player, and watched demonstrations of bidding and playing, engaged in bridge tournaments, and kibitzed to their heart's content.

Golf tournaments brought down groups of players. Alumni cruises were designed to attract groups of graduates from various

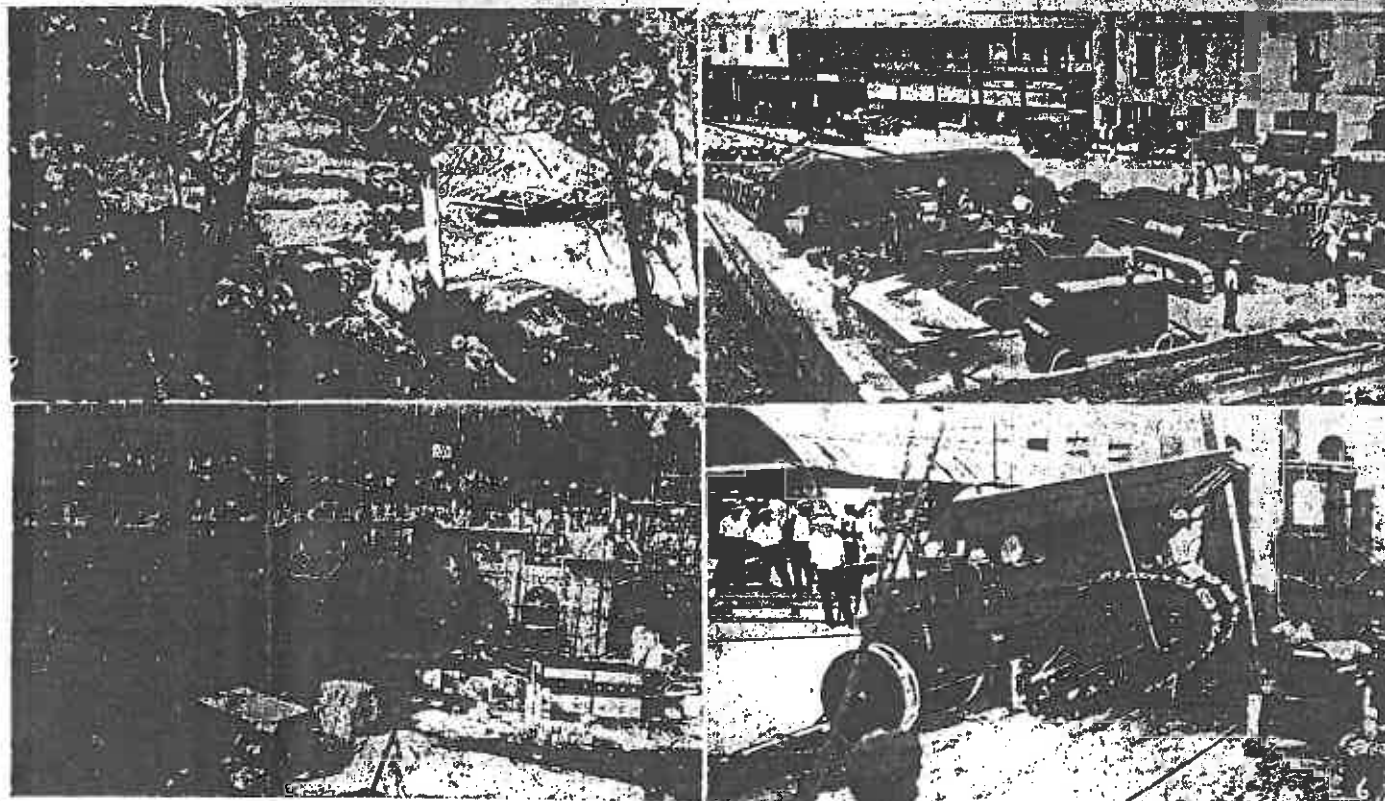
First Film

The first carrier and resort film was made by Furness—settings were used at the Bermudiana and St. George Hotels. The value of window displays was realised and posters were used to advantage in the company's uptown passenger office on Fifth Avenue, the first steamship office to be opened on the ground floor of a Fifth Avenue building. The window displays were designed to promote Bermuda rather than the Furness ships.

Present-day publicity on the Colony is remarkably similar to the original ideas of Furness in the early days of large-scale promotion.

War came. In September, 1939, the Castle Harbour Hotel was closed and the Mid-Ocean Club was put on a quasi-operational basis. The Queen of Bermuda entered war service. In 1941 the Castle Harbour Hotel was occupied by the military. The tourist trade was over for the time.

In next week's issue of The Sunday Royal Gazette post-war events in the Furness story will be described including the arrival of a new ship, the Ocean Monarch, and the return of the Queen to the run.



Construction of the Castle Harbour Hotel. Top left: The site after preliminary clearing. Top right: Heavy pieces of equipment on the dock in Hamilton, awaiting transport to Tucker's Town. Bottom left: The hotel in the eighteenth week of construction on January 8, 1931. Note the tremendous amount of steel framework. Bottom right: A crowd gathers to watch the unloading of the first shipment of mechanical equipment for the job. Scene is on the dock in Hamilton in November 27, 1929. The equipment came on the s.s. Fort Victoria.

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In the early days the Bermuda Development Company's office staff made up the payrolls for the hundreds of workmen, who got paid every two weeks. When the English firm building the hotel took over the office work they were amazed to find that several thousands of pounds were in a room with open windows and with no guard on duty with a gun to protect the money!

Lost Monocle

An amusing incident happened one day. One of the English foremen, who invariably wore a monocle, dropped it in a truck that was being loaded with sand. The workmen were made to sift the whole truck-load and the monocle was recovered.

Probably the first complaint in Bermuda's history about "motorisation" arose unexpectedly one night. A train of equipment was being hauled by road from Tucker's Town to Hamilton to be shipped away. It was decided to do the job late at night to avoid

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Golf tournaments brought down groups of players. Alumni cruises were designed to attract groups of graduates from various universities. During one period the word got around that only women came to Bermuda in the summertime. A promotional campaign was started to bring men here at that time and trips were arranged for groups of college students. This was the forerunner of the present day "College Week." Conventions had never been promoted up to this time. Advertising was started to get these large groups to come here. The first convention to take an ocean-going cruise was the American Society of Interior Decorators. Others followed.

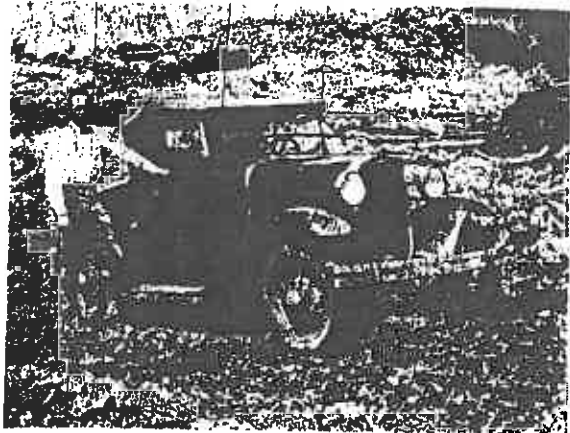
In 1934 Furness, Withy's advertising agents began going after business in the Southern United States and in the Middle West. Heretofore most of the visitors had come from the East. Package tours were arranged with railroads to bring visitors to New York and then on to Bermuda by ship. Thousands of people who visited the World's Fair came on to Bermuda.

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One of the first passenger cars in Bermuda, which was used on the Castle Harbour grounds by the construction superintendent. This photograph was taken on April 2, 1930.