

The Mechanics Institute

229-31, Dundas Street

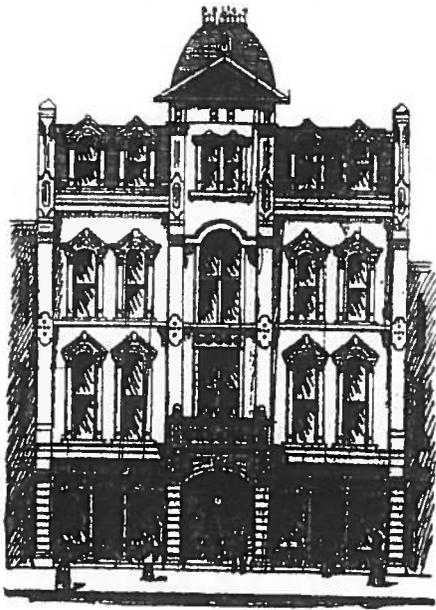
London's Mechanics' Institute was first organized in 1835 and was the third such institute to be established in Canada. The idea, which had originated in Britain around 12 years earlier, was to provide the working man with an inexpensive means of furthering his education. In 1843, an impressive Greek revival-style frame library and museum was opened as the Mechanics' Institute on the Courthouse Square. This building was later moved to Talbot Street, at the end of Queens Avenue. By 1877, with a library of over 1,000 volumes, the Institute had outgrown its original building. London architect Thomas Tracy was hired to design the new Mechanics' Institute at 229-31 Dundas Street. The new building, built in the Second Empire style, contained the necessary classrooms and offices, a library, museum, gymnasium and a well-equipped theatre on the upper floor. The studios of the Western Ontario School of Art and Design, established about 1878, were also located in the Mechanics' Institute building.

The opening of London's first free public library in 1895 doomed the Mechanics' Institute. Its books were moved to provide the base collection of the new public facility. Until about 1920 the building served as the premises for the Conservative Club of London. Its facilities were, as was the case with the Mechanics Institute, open and accessible to all classes of society. During the 1920s, the ground floors housed the then popular Eureka Shop or "wife-saving station," where domestic appliances started to be sold.

While under the ownership of the Conservative Club the theatre was very popular and accommodated in turn: the London Music Hall, the New Grand Opera House, Bennett's London Vaudeville Theatre and finally a movie house called the Majestic Theatre. The theatre became the scene of a real life murder on April 1, 1898.

Jim Tuttle, an impresario who had booked a professional company into the theatre, was finding it difficult to pay his actors. Tuttle owed lead actor W.D. Emerson and other cast members, including Emerson's pretty young wife, their salaries for the previous week's shows. During a Friday night performance, a fight broke out between Tuttle and Emerson. Unable to win by physical strength, Emerson pulled out a 32-calibre revolver from his pocket. When it discharged accidentally, the unfortunate Tuttle was shot in the face. At first the crowd milling outside the curtain thought the frantic call for a doctor was just part of the play's action or an April Fool's prank. Unfortunately it was neither. Tuttle was quite dead and Emerson was arrested for the crime. Londoners collected donations for Emerson's defence and when the verdict of "not guilty" was announced, local residents celebrated with the happy actor, his actress-wife and their young daughter.

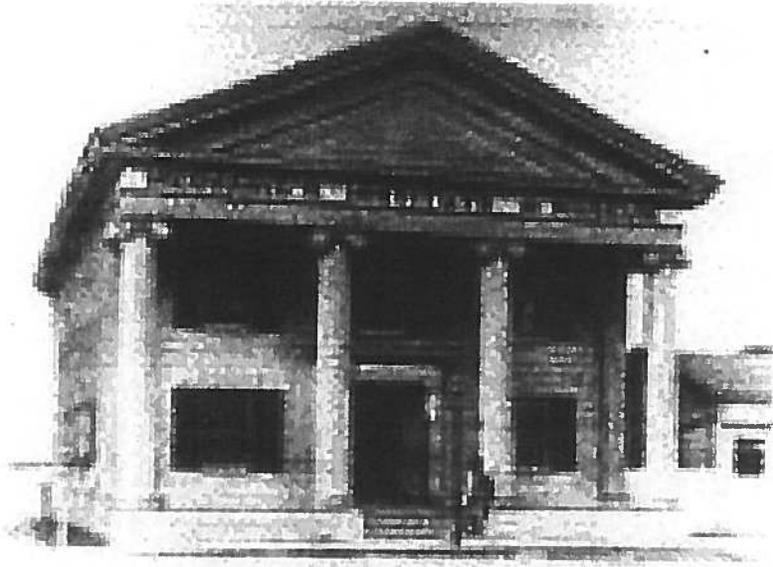
From *The London Free Press*, November 2, 1895.



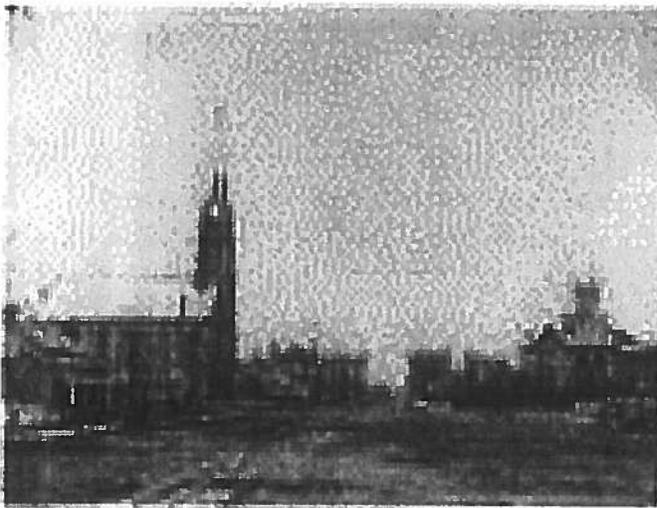
The Eureka Shop



From *The London Free Press*, June 28, 1924.



c. 1860 – 1877. A view of the front of London's Mechanics' Institute and Museum with its impressive two storey Corinthian columns and large shuttered windows.



c. 1875 - 1880 The *Mechanics Institute* at 449 Talbot Street.

Duffield Block

213- 215 Dundas Street
London, ON
Canada

The Duffield Block, originally known as Spettigue Hall, was built in 1871 by Joseph J. Spettigue, a native of Cornwall, England. He came to the Canadas in the 1840s and, in 1855, opened a general store on the corner of Dundas and Clarence streets in London (ON).

Spettigue Hall, on the southwest corner of Dundas and Clarence streets, was designed in the Second Empire Style. The structure was 197 feet long, 63 feet high and cost \$12,000 to construct. It contained an elegant 663-seat concert hall on the second floor.



Spettigue Hall. c.1875
Courtesy: Museum London

On September 19, 1871, the London Philharmonic Society gave the first concert in the hall, a cantata entitled "The May Queen", featuring several vocalists and a lead singer from Detroit. For the performance the stage was decorated with a May tree, flags, Corinthian pillars, evergreens, and flowers. According to the *London Free Press*, the occasion "was a source of great gratification", and the hall was "crammed" for the concert.



Architect Samuel Peters. Courtesy: Museum London.

In the early 1880s the architecture firm Samuel Peters & Son occupied part of the building. Their firm can be credited with nearly 100 designs for commercial, residential, ecclesiastical and institutional buildings throughout London and southwestern Ontario. By 1878 the building had several occupants, one of whom was art teacher William Lees Judson. It is believed that artist Paul Peel received his first art lesson in a room on the building's first floor.

Throughout its early history, however, the hall was used more for political meetings than for performances, until it was converted into offices. James Duffield bought the building in 1891 and turned it into City Gas Company offices. He closed the theatre, dividing its space into a third storey, thereby altering the facade. Among the many tenants were J. Gammage and Sons, florists; Arthur Wismer, jeweller; Charles Wismer, druggist; and the Knights of Pythias. The building also housed the Women's Morning Music Club. Its president was Mrs. John Labatt (Sophia Amelia Browne) and its secretary, Mrs. T. H. Carling (Nina M. Innes). In the 1980s the Duffield Block became the Toronto Dominion Building, housing the Royal Trust, the National Bank of Canada and Dominion Securities Pitfield.

Works Cited: London Public Library, Historic Sites Committee



Spettigue Hall. Adjacent buildings on Clarence and Dundas can be seen.



Sculpture "Woman with Kitten" by Paul Peel. The sculpture stood in the 1895 London Public Library building on the southwest corner of Queens Avenue and Wellington Street. Courtesy: Image Gallery, London Public Library.

The Edge Block

This building at the southeast corner of Dundas and Richmond Streets is known as the Edge Block. Locals used to refer to this intersection as “the Four Corners.” William T. Edge, who upon his death in 1918 was one of the oldest druggists in Canada, built the Edge Block in 1875. A marker at the top corner of the building bore its name: “Edge Block.”



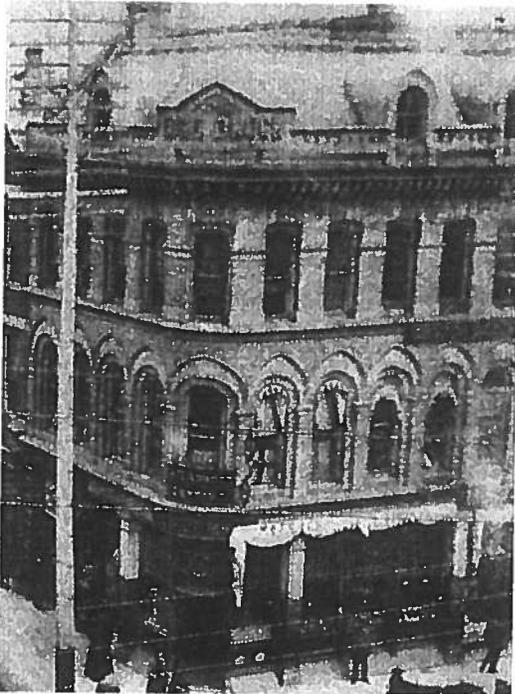
The Edge Block, c. 1880. Courtesy: Image Gallery, London Public Library.

The architectural style of the building is High Victorian, a fittingly elegant style for offices, lodge and club rooms and the variety of fraternal organizations for which the Edge Block provided space on its second and third floors. In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries the ground floor served as a hub for railway offices, including the Grand Trunk and the CNR.

From the 1930s until the 1990s the corner shop on the ground floor was the popular “United Cigar Store,” a meeting place for locals. From the 1950s until the 1990s the shop next door to the cigar store (on Dundas Street) was the equally well-patronized “Laura Secord Candy Shop.”



CNR Ticket Office. From *The London Free Press*, August 15th, 1926.



The Edge Block c. 1890. The marker at the top of the building reading "Edge Block" can be clearly seen. Courtesy: Museum London.



Dundas Street, looking east from Richmond Street, London ON-1941. The Edge Block is on the right. Courtesy: Image Gallery, London Public Library.



Richmond Street, looking south from Dundas, London ON - 1941. The Edge Block is on the left. Courtesy: Image Gallery, London.

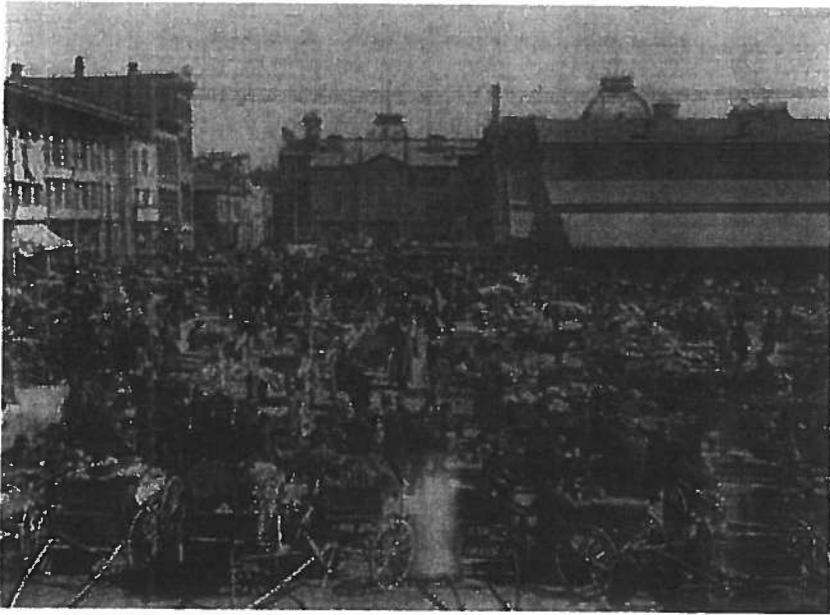
Sources: Historic Sites Committee, London Public Library.

Burridge Block

103-05 King Street is one of the market's earliest commercial structures. It is often referred to as the Wallace Building, but originally it was known as the Burridge Block. The architectural style of the building is High Victorian, but much of the ornamental detail, once found along the top, has been lost. It was in 1881 that John Burridge built this structure. His last name and the date 1881 are still displayed at the top corner of the building. Burridge had established the London Boot & Manufacturing Co. on this site in 1870.

John Burridge was one of 23 individuals to lose his life in a fatal accident that took place on election night, January 3, 1898, when the northeast corner of the second floor of the old City Hall (situated on the west side of Richmond, between Dundas and King) gave way. Not since the Victoria Day Disaster of May 24, 1881, had such a calamity befallen London. Incidentally, Burridge and his first wife Prudence had been among the more than 400 passengers who survived the tragic 1881 foundering of the steamboat "Victoria." He had also avoided another disaster to hit London at this time. He had been living on the north side of Becher Street near the forks of the Thames in 1881, but was living in the "Burridge Block" by 1884 and thus avoided the July 11, 1883 inundation of the Thames, when the north branch of the river crested and some 18 lives were lost in West London. The Burridge family—John's second wife Louisa and then two of his children, Edna L. Burridge and Roy S. Burridge—still resided in the upper floors of the block until 1919.

The Burridge Block, like many of the shops that faced Market Square, also dealt in goods that were primarily of interest to the farmers selling produce at the market. Many harness makers, implement dealers, cabinet makers and seed and hardware merchants were to be found in the vicinity of the market. Among the long-term tenants of the Burridge Block ground floor corner-shop was James Dunn, a harness maker. Dunn had occupied an earlier structure on the same southwest corner of King and Talbot since 1870 and he remained in the corner store of the Burridge building until 1913. Dunn's son, G. Frank Dunn, carried on the harness business at the site until 1922 and in nearby locations until 1932. The Burridge Block had also housed grocers, carriage dealers and butchers. Many a Londoner remembers the Market Butcher at 103 King Street, which ran its business from about 1950 until the mid-1990s. Londoners recall the awe instilled in them as children by the sight of the array of cow carcasses, pigs, trotters and sheep's heads hanging from the ceiling, still a common sight in mid-twentieth-century butcher-shops.



Market Square. c.1885. Courtesy:
Image Gallery, LPL



Burrige Block. Circa 1885. Courtesy Peter Vickers



City workmen paving Talbot Street, north of Burrigge Block. c. 1905.

Sources:

Baker, Michael, ed. *Downtown London: Layers of Time*. London (ON): LACH, 2000.

Brock, Dan. "Ceiling collapse kills more than 20 election night," *The London Free Press*, 14 Feb. 2005, C3

The "Whiskey Row"

A variety of hotels and inns appeared in the vicinity of the market soon after it was located on its present site in 1845. A notorious array of taverns and hotels of dubious repute, known by the turn of the 20th century as "Whiskey Row," appeared along King Street, across from the Market. The "Whiskey Row" was the scene of innumerable fights, brawls and, occasionally, even murders. Respectable late Victorian and Edwardian ladies would never walk alone in this area. As the story goes, election day seems to have been an especially hazardous time. Paid men stood at the doors of inns and taverns and bought drinks for all who entered. Once the patrons became drunk, they would be carted off to the voting posts in order to fix the ballot in favour of the appropriate candidate.

The taverns on "Whiskey Row" sprouted following the arrival in London and the first meeting in Canada of the Salvation Army. This event took place in May 1882 and the meeting was held on market square. The newly-formed Salvation Army band famously performed on Market Square on Saturday nights, when it seemed like all of London turned out to the Market in order to buy at bargain prices until ten o'clock at night. Over 1,000 wagons used to cram the square while crowds exclaimed over John Law's electric shock machine and women searched up and down "Whiskey Row" for their husbands.

The Bank Hotel, all that remains of the "Whiskey Row," located at the south-east corner of Talbot and King, was probably built in the 1860s or 1870s and was in use as a hotel until 1923. During this year it was enlarged and converted into offices and apartments with stores on the ground floor. This conversion was likely carried out by Ernest W. Moore, a stock broker with an office on the second floor. For a long time this block was referred to as the Moore Building.

The Bank Hotel, along with five other hotels were named in a report in 1913 that called to the attention of Londoners that these places were dens of vice and iniquity. This situation, however, lasted only until the Ontario Temperance Act, introduced in 1916 as a wartime measure and retained by referendum in 1919. This legislation spelled death to many hotels, barrooms, taverns and public houses. Of the 170 taverns and hotels that existed in London in the 1870s, only 17 were left operating after the introduction of the Ontario Temperance Act which was repealed in 1923.

The old Town Hall on the north-west corner of Talbot and King Streets also became a similar hotel by the name of Balkwill's and later Clarendon. The fate of this building, along with its adjacent Victorian streetscape known as the Talbot Block, was sealed when, despite civilian protest, it was razed to the ground in 1991.