

Black Watch Building: 34, 36, 38 Mill Street, Almonte Ontario

The “Black Watch” building is an interesting study of the ever changing and evolving history of commercial spaces in Almonte. Many aspects of the building’s history such as the history of the land, previous owners, and fire damage all contribute to the story that this building has to tell. The belief is that the current building was built in 1910 or 1911 after the big fire of September 1909. The building used to be three stories and was rebuilt as two. It is possible that some of the outer brick walls were salvaged after the fire and used to rebuild the building.

This property and building appears on the Shipman survey, lots 8 and 9.

Architectural Features:

Dates: This building was built in late 1909 or early 1910.

Style: This building is built in a classical revival, commercial style out of red brick.

Dimensions: 110’ x 67’6” (each storefront is 22’ wide)

Architect: Unknown

Current Owners: 34: Mississippi Masonic Hall Inc; 36: Canica Design; 38: Evelyn Wheeler Professional Corporation.

Construction:

The building is two stories divided into three equal sized commercial spaces each with their own storefront. The bricks on both sides of the building are laid out in common bond with headers every 7th course. There are quoins visible (where two types of brick meet, though these are not intended to be decorative in this case) on the North West corner of the building, which may indicate the integration of that older part of the wall with the more modern wall.

The bottom of the wall on 38 Mill (east side) has been replaced more recently. The bricks at the front are stretcher bond suggesting that they are either a later addition or a veneer over a hollow wall. The top of the front has some interesting brickwork in a frieze across the front that fits in with the brickwork of some other buildings on Mill Street (58, 60 and 73 Mill Street are good examples). The fact that the decorative brickwork is at the top of the building indicates that the façade was built specifically for the two story building, not for the older three story building as is often believed..

The façade is divided into three by the use of brick pilasters. The entablature over the doors has a decorative scalloped cornice with medallions on each pilaster. (four in total) There is an addition at the back of 38 Mill Street that appears to be a part of the original structure as well since it uses the same bricks.

Openings:

The windows are (or were) double hung and were likely all 4 panes segmental (2-over-2) with stone lintels and sills. There are nine windows across the front of the building, three in each bay. All have been replaced with more modern windows. An original window is visible at the back of the building. The windows at the sides and back

of the building also have stone sills. Some have brickwork over the windows (flat arch) instead of stone lintels. The roof is shed style and slopes towards the rear of the building.

Notable Features:

The most notable feature is the windowless West wall with the words **Black Watch Chewing Tobacco "A Man's Chew"** painted in black on the side. Underneath these words can be seen the words Shamrock Woolens. Above these words there used to be lettering at the top corner of the building reading **J F Patterson Chemist and Druggist**. (see photo below) These bricks have been replaced with more modern brick. This wall acts as a billboard and is a very recognizable part of the downtown streetscape. Very little information exists on the Black Watch Chewing tobacco company. A photo of Prince George BC from 1929 shows a small store on George Street called Black Watch Chewing Tobacco (see photo below). This suggests that the Black Watch lettering was painted on the side of the building in Almonte after the fire of 1909 and the rebuilding of the buildings. The Shamrock woolens would have been painted on before Black Watch but also after the fire. This dating is also probable because prior to 1909, the wall was shared or at least entirely obscured by the hotel next door.

Each storefront has its own stoop and entranceway. 34 Mill Street is perhaps the most intact, with its plate glass windows forming an entrance bay. Beautiful tin ceilings are visible on the lower floor ceilings of each of the three stores.

Overall the building conforms to the rest of the street very well with its cornice being at the same height and with a similar roof height as well. In this way the building contributes to an overall look for Mill Street.

History

The property was originally owned by Daniel Shipman (and wife), the first settler in Almonte (after Shepherd's failed attempt to settle here). Shipman arrived in 1821. Shipman sold the property in 1852 to John Murphy who presumably erected the North American Hotel on the property. It was known as Murphy's hotel in 1863 (Walling Map). Murphy sold the building to John Hanover in 1865 who immediately sold the property to Henry Stafford. At this time the hotel came to be known as Stafford's Hotel.

In addition to the hotel, Stafford also operated a drug store in the building. Stafford's buildings caught fire in 1877 and were destroyed. He sold the property to Thomas R. White, William Thoburn, and Manasseh Patterson in February of 1878.

White, Thoburn and Manasseh erected three three-story buildings on the property, much like what is there today. Thoburn operated a grocery, White had a tinsmith shop, and Patterson opened a drug store. Tenants resided above the stores. The third floor was used as the local Masonic Lodge. At this time the West wall was shared with the building to the West (Cole's Hotel).

The office and switchboard of the first telephone service in Almonte were in Manasseh Patterson's Drug store in the late 1800s. Patterson was the local agent of the

Bell Telephone Company and managed the switchboard for the original 29 subscribers. The first operator was a man named Walter James. The first telephone call placed in Almonte would have originated in Patterson's store.

Manasseh died in 1907 and passed the business on to his son, James Frederick Patterson. James did not come to own the building until his mother died in 1943. He subsequently sold to members of the Masonic lodge in 1953.

On September 10, 1909 fire broke out behind White and Thoburn's stores and the entire building burned to the ground. It was believed at the time that the fire was started in the trash behind the stores by local troublemakers. The fire spread quickly in the wooden sheds adjoining and "soon had a strong grip on the brick buildings fronting on Mill Street." The following is an excerpt from an article entitled Under Fire Again the Almonte Gazette Sept 17, 1909, page four:

The commercial house...was the first to collapse. The solid brick buildings above soon followed. These were the building owned by the M. Patterson estate and tenanted by Mr. J. F. Patterson, druggist, who also lived in the building; Dr. T.R. Paterson, dentist, and the Masonic Hall; the solid brick building owned by Mr. T. R White and occupied by Mr. Wm Kaufman, hardware, and the solid brick building owned by Mr. Wm. Thoburn and occupied by Mr. W. West, merchant. Practically nothing was saved from these buildings which were burned to the ground with the exception of the walls of Mr. Thoburn's building, which are still standing although they will have to be torn down before the building can be replaced.

This article also tells the stock values of what was lost in the fire, most of which was fortunately insured.. The author estimates the damage at between \$55000 and \$70000. A bystander, Mr. A.S. Henshaw, Manager of the Bank of Montreal, was struck and killed by an electricity pole that fell when some of the building collapsed.

The fire was an important part of the history of Almonte. This was the third major fire to strike the downtown in as many years. The businesses that had been housed in these buildings had to scramble to keep their customers. In the Gazette on October 1, 1909 Kaufman offered "fire bargains". On October 15, J.F. Patterson announced that all his accounts must be settled at once.

The owners decided to erect a new building to replace the one that had been destroyed. The stores were rebuilt as a two story building. The new building was erected very quickly- within a few months. It was completed by January at the latest since on Friday January 14, 1910, D.J. Dick advertised in the Gazette that his new store would be in the New Thoburn Block after January 20.

On April 1, 1910, Patterson's Drug store was advertising once again. This suggests that a new commercial space was ready for the store by then. On April 8th the new hall for the Masons was announced as being on the second floor of the Patterson

building. This hall was "said to be one of the most complete and comfortable halls in the Ottawa Valley." Paterson (spelled with one "t") continued to work as a dentist in the building as well (until at least the 1920's).

After the fire, James Patterson moved to Toronto with his wife Minnie (Census of 1911) but the drug store continued to be operated under the name Patterson with James F. listed as the druggist (as of 1920).

With its prominent location on Mill Street, it is not surprising that this building has been connected with some of Almonte's important citizens. The following is background information on some of the people who have been associated with this property over the years.

William Thoburn

Thoburn owned the East section of the building. Mr. Thoburn was a prominent Almonte citizen who went on to own and operate a very successful mill on Little Bridge Street (Brown Mill). He eventually became the mayor of Almonte.

Manasseh (Also known as John) Patterson

Manasseh was born in Perth on February 17, 1848 to James and Bresaya (Pounder) Patterson. Married Mary Peddar on July 22, 1875. They had two children, James and Francis. Manasseh was a prominent citizen in Almonte. Before his marriage, Manasseh went to the front with the Perth company in 1866 and he was a member of the militia as a staff sergeant for the 42nd regiment for many years afterwards. He came to Almonte in 1871 and took a position with the druggist Mr. Shaw. He bought the business soon afterwards. He was a druggist who owned and operated Patterson's Drug store. He was also interested in modern science and inventions. He was the first agent of the Bell Telephone Company in Almonte (see above). He was a respected and important citizen of Almonte. When he died in Cobalt, Ontario in 1907 of Pneumonia at the age of 59, William Thoburn, JM Rosamond, JW and JB Wylie were among his pallbearers.

James Frederick Patterson

James was born in 1877 to Manasseh and Mary Patterson. James had charge of the drug store from around 1903/4. He married Minnie Mc Arthur in 1871. He had a brother called Francis, or Frank. Frank attended the Royal Military college in Kingston and then got his Bachelor of Science from McGill. He found work with the federal government's engineering department as an engineer in Ottawa.

Other Businesses:

This building has housed several other businesses over the years as well. McCormick's Ladies wear was in the East portion of the building for many decades. Lee Pro hardware (which I believe is now Lee Valley Tools) was in 36 Mill Street. More recently the building has housed a Radio Shack, an Auto Parts store, and the offices of Wheeler and Mackey (Wheeler is still there).

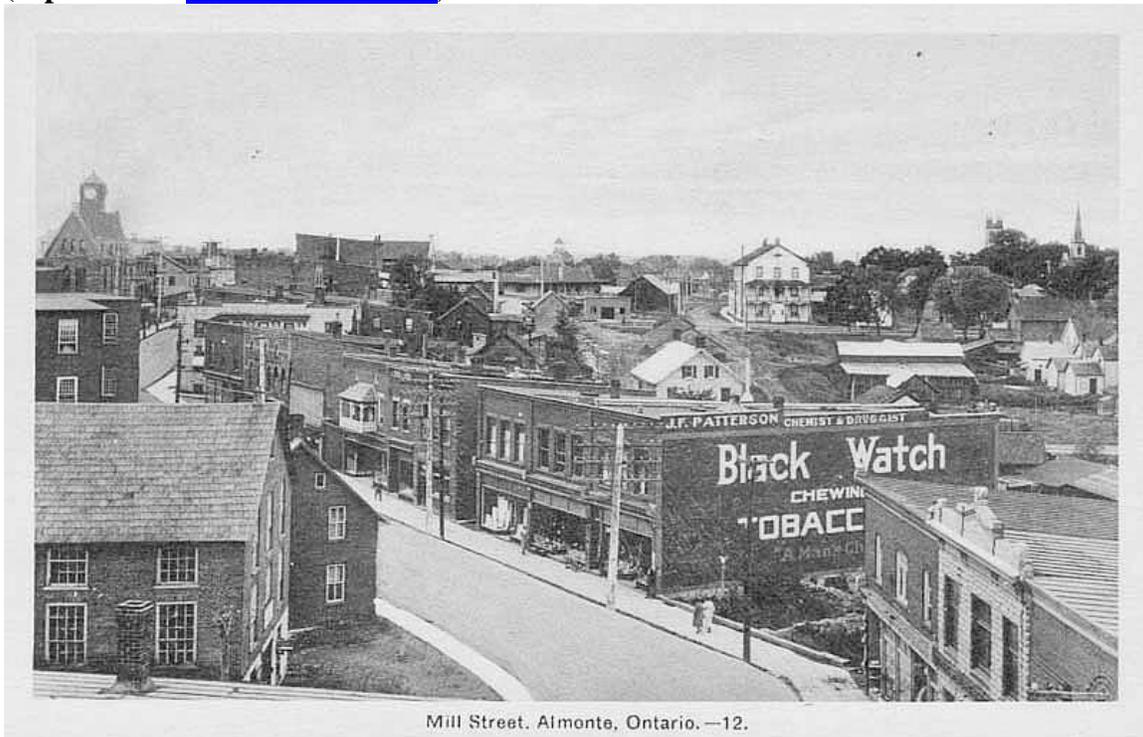
Current Building

Currently this building houses Almonte Natural Foods (34 Mill) with the Masonic Lodge above, Canica Design (36 Mill), and the law office of Evelyn Wheeler (38 Mill).

The building has undergone extensive changes and renovations. 34 Mill Street is perhaps the most authentic to the original building. The Canica building (36 Mill) was awarded a plaque for architectural conservation by Mississippi Mills's Heritage Committee which is affixed to the left of their doorway. However, this building has been modernized in various ways. The façade of 38 Mill Street is completely changed from its original appearance; the door has been brought flush with the building and the entranceway enclosed. Modern brickwork has been done around and above the door. The windows have all been modernized; each of the three stores has different windows above. All of these changes have altered the façade from its original, more unified look (see photo below).

Photos

(copied from www.almonte.com) :



Mill Street, Almonte, Ontario. —12.

copied from www.settlerseffects.ca note Black Watch store 4th from left.



Sources:

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- Directory of the Town of Almonte, township of Ramsey and Former Residents of the Town and Township. Compiled by C.K. Grigg, 1920.
- North Lanark Historical Society, The Development of the Woolen Industry in Lanark, Renfrew, and Carleton Counties: a project by the North Lanark Historical Society, 1978.
- Ramsey Reflections 1836-1862. Town Meeting Notes (binder in locked case)
- 1909 – 1911 Almonte Gazette microfilm files in Almonte Public Library
- Shipman survey accessed at Almonte Land Registry Office on June 4, 2007.
- Patterson family history found at: www3.simpatico.ca/djordan/Patterson.htm compiled by Linda S. Jordan. Accessed on June 7, 2007.
- Image of Prince George BC found on www.settlerseffects.ca Accessed on June 7, 2007.
- www.almonte.com accessed June 12, 2007.

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