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SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF ARCHITECTURE IN CANADA

# BULLETIN

SOCIÉTÉ POUR L'ÉTUDE DE L'ARCHITECTURE AU CANADA

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## BARRINGTON STREET:

In June 1749, Col. the Hon. Edward Cornwallis and a fleet of thirteen transports carrying almost 3000 settlers sailed into Chebucto Harbour to establish Halifax as an English presence between Fortress Louisburg and the New England Colonies.

As an English Fortress, Halifax was laid out by the expeditions engineer John Bruce and surveyor Charles Morris on the harbour slope of Citadel Hill. The plan conceived in London was ambitious. The Gentleman's Magazine declared: "that the city is at first to consist of 2000 houses, disposed into fifty streets of different magnitudes." The result was much more modest consisting of blocks of 120 by 320 feet with less than a dozen streets. Each block contained sixteen house lots 60 feet deep with a frontage of 40 feet. The streets were to be 55 feet wide.

The streets were named in honour of the patrons of the expedition and leading British Statesmen of the day. The middle street along the wooded slope was called Barrington but no one seems to know the reason why. It has been suggested that it was after William Wildman, Viscount Barrington of Ardglass. He later became a Secretary of War, but in 1749 he was an unknown. Some say the street was meant to be named after the Earl of Harrington who was the Secretary of State and that some wag's pen slipped and the H became a B. Thus Barrington came to be.

At first, Barrington Street was just a trail leading to the cemetery just outside the town walls, but as the Grand Parade was cleared and St. Paul's was built, Barrington Street became the centre of the activities of the new town. It became the fashionable promenade each evening and Sundays where strollers guarded by red coated soldiers would take their exercise and display their airs along Barrington Street and through the woods to Point Pleasant.

In 1766 the eastern or lower sidewalk from the Grand Parade to the Kissing Bridge at Freshwater (the base of Inglis Street) was planked and became known as the Mall. This lasted until 1820 when it fell into disrepair and the town fathers had no funds to replace it.

The Rev. Jacob Bailey arriving in Halifax in 1799 as a Loyalist refugee describes Barrington Street as the most elegant street in town, containing St. Paul's, the Assembly House and several of the best houses.

Within five years, the government had invested over £700,000 in founding Halifax, a considerable sum over 200 years ago. The site chosen is now largely occupied by the Central Business District, the street layout having changed very little in the last two centuries. The original town stretched from Buckingham Street in the north to Salter Street in the south end.

Thomas Aikens writes that before the first winter set in, a number of frames and other materials were brought from New England and a number of comfortable dwellings had been erected. But for the most part, the first growth dwellings were generally single storey or storey and a half, covered in clapboards, many with gambrel roofs. These old houses were still in existence in 1850, windows and doors being altered.

For reasons of lot size, from the beginning of the 19th century, the side hall plan, two and one-half or three and one-half stories with a gable roof became the vernacular of Halifax. At the same time, the small peaked dormers were replaced by the three bayed or Scottish dormer and then used to exhaustion until the nineties, evolved from a sparsely trimmed version into a highly be-tassled Victorian. Many were built as shops with living quarters above.

However, with few exceptions, they were built in wood. Isabelle Lucy Bishop writes of her visit to Halifax in the 1850s, "the Capital of Nova Scotia looks like a town of cord, nearly all the buildings being of wood. There are wooden houses, wooden churches, wooden wharfs, wooden slates, and if there are sidewalks, they are of wood also."

In 1857, the editor of the Acadian "Recorder" cried out at "it's long rows of old, dirty, dingy, shaky, wooden houses, all built originally in the tea chest order of architecture" and its "reputation of being the meanest looking city in the civilized world, in proportion to its wealth and other advantages."

The waterfront was the centre of business and trade while the upper streets were residential. In the early 1800s, Barrington Street from Buckingham to Salter was predominantly middle class residential with wood frame houses and garden lots and a few mansions for well-to-do officials, such as Blower House at the southwest corner of Blower Street, Robie House, site of the City Club, and the Forman Mansion across the street.

After the American Revolution, the most fashionable and well-to-do had moved up the hill to Argyle, and the character of Barrington Street slowly moved from single family to higher density with the appearance of boarding houses, and the garden lots slowly disappeared. As Hollis and Granville became the commercial centre, Barrington became a mixed use residential/commercial area with street level shops. The financial prosperity resulting from the Napoleonic wars and the war of 1812 greatly increased building. The total number of houses was doubled in a relatively short time.

On the 17th of September 1821, a fire destroyed nearly all of the buildings on the eastern side of Barrington between Blower and Sackville Street. Over 24 wood frame houses were consumed. The result was legislation in 1822 and 1831 to create a "brick district" encompassing the central area of Halifax in which no new buildings could legally be erected.

Much of the block remained unbuilt upon for a number of years, for shortly after the completion of Province House, the boom years gave way to a long depression which lasted from 1822 to 1839.

There were several reasons for the changing economy. The withdrawal of military and naval forces after the Napoleonic war had an adverse effect; there were marked changes for the worse in trade with the United States; with a surplus of shipping, there was little ship building; a reduction of activity in the naval dockyard further decreased employment. Families began to emigrate, many buildings became unoccupied, business was rapidly contracting.

However, in 1839, Samuel Cunard, a citizen of Halifax, signed a contract with the British government to run a regular steamship line for mail service. This venture proved most successful, and in two years time the service was doubled. It marked the beginning of the climb from depression.

In 1845, there were two events of importance. A railway line to Windsor was begun. The United States signed a treaty of reciprocity with the British North American colonies which reduced customs barriers and trade was much increased. With the rebirth of activity, there followed a substantial increase in population and new building, which caused further expansion of the City.

The terrible fire of 1859 which destroyed most of the block from Duke to Buckingham was rebuilt under the Act of 1857 which limited the erection of wooden buildings within the City of Halifax. The beauty of C.P. Thomas' Granville Street reconstruction was the major result of this fire.

In 1858, according to Richard Nugent's Business Directory of Halifax, Barrington Street did not contain one drygoods store. There were at that date about fifty wholesale and retail stores engaged in the drygoods trade, but they were all located either on Granville or Water Streets. The development of the street into a trade center did not commence until the eighties of the last century. It was only after the extension in 1871 of the street to Campbell road that it became a popular thoroughfare, since it now was the main link from north to south in Halifax.

A new departure was made on this old residential street in 1876. The first marked feature was the building of the Academy of Music in the above year. From this date onward, the street gradually became transformed and the old wooden buildings began to disappear, to be replaced by brick and stone commercial structures in the rich variety of Victorian architecture.

Between 1885 and 1910, there was a rash of new construction resulting in Barrington Street as we know it today. At one end of the street, old Dalhousie College gave way to a new City Hall, while at the southern portion of the street between Spring Garden and Sackville, the new Masonic Hall, the YMCA building (Pacific Building), Saint Mary's Temperance Building (N.F.B.), a new Glebe house for Saint Mary's, the Church of England Institute, and the City Club building its new home where Judge Robie once lived, formed the new institutional centre for Halifax.

In between rose the Keith Building, the Roy Building, Wright Building, St. Paul's Building, G. M. Smith Building, and other office and stores, a series of Victorian commercial architecture at its best.

Barrington Street became the retail centre, the advent of the street car and horseless carriage allowed it to dominate the Halifax market until the 1960s.

But even as the street was still growing, the seeds of its future downfall were being sown. In the early 1920s, Simpsons chose not Barrington Street for its new store but rather built out in the rustic village of Armdale. The growth of Halifax in the late 50s and early 60s with its resulting development of the suburbs with their shopping malls stole the major retail outlets from the central core. This was emphasized by the movement of Eaton's to the new Halifax Shopping Centre in 1962. With the resulting loss of the major stores, Barrington Street's position as a first class location quickly deteriorated and instability and investor nonconfidence set in.

The growth of the major malls and office towers at the two extremes of Barrington at Duke Street and at the base of Spring Garden Road did nothing to halt this deterioration as the professionals moved into new high rise office towers, leaving an empty void in the upper floors of Barrington Street stores, and only a few number one major retail tenants are left on the street.

It is hoped that programs like the Province's mainstreet program coupled with the re-introduction of housing back in the downtown core, that this deterioration will be turned around and investor confidence will be restored in the area, making it again a viable commercial area.

The street has undergone many changes since 1749, from the old one and half storey gambrel roof New England residences to the main commercial street of Halifax. By determining where various buildings stood, what they looked like, when they underwent change and what these changes were produced elevations of each block of buildings. Each block was drawn to show the state of development of the street at three different dates, 1880, 1920 and 1980.

The original Barrington Street stretched from Buckingham Street in the north to Salter Street in the south end. Of the area under study the east block elevation between Prince and George Streets opposite the Grand Parade has produced a typical example of the street in transition from residential to elegant commercial to its present state.

EAST BLOCK OF BARRINGTON STREET  
FROM PRINCE TO GEORGE STREET



1701-1703 Barrington Street

(Formerly 106)

NEIMA BUILDING

Construction Date: 1860s

Architect/Builder: Unknown

Dimensions: H 31'4"  
W 21'9"  
D 60'0"

Occupancy: At the present time, the building contains a fast food outlet which succeeded Leon Neima Jewellers who had been at this address for over 20 years from the 1950s to 1970s.

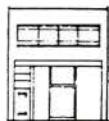
In the period from 1910 to 1950, there were a variety of clothing stores on the ground floor level while the upper floors were occupied by a succession of photo studios.

From the 1870s to 1910, the main floor was the home to various grocery stores and the upper levels still contained photo studios; S. Millman in 1875 and Moss Photo around the turn of the century.

Hopkins Atlas of 1878 shows the existing 3 storey brick structure on the site while the earliest known photo of Halifax in 1853, a daguerreotype by Daniel J. Smith, shows a 3 1/2 storey wood frame building on the corner which suggests that the present building was constructed in the 1860s.

Description: The building is a plain 3 storey flat roofed mid-Victorian brick commercial structure. The bracketed heavy cornice on the Barrington and Prince Street elevation is its principal feature along with the arched windows. Over the years, the only changes have occurred in the storefront at street level

2



1705-1709 Barrington Street

(Formerly #473, #109/107)

Construction Date: Early 1900s

Architect/Builder: Unknown

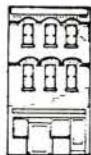
Dimensions: H 23'6"  
W 22'3"  
D 60'0"

Occupancy: Presently it is a clothing store. In the years from 1910 to 1960, the building was occupied by a series of different commercial uses.

From 1893 to 1910, the City Directories list the building as a double house with a clothing store on the main level. In the late 1880s, the ground floor was occupied by J. Roy and Co. Sewing Machines, while, in 1879, a dressmaker and pattern maker were at this location. 1875 saw the building listed as a boarding house with a toy store and milliners on the premises.

Description: The building is a 2 storey wood frame structure. The present facade was constructed in the early 1950s and was a renovation of a previous structure. Goad's Fire Insurance Map of 1914 and photos of the time show a 2 1/2 storey wood frame building with 2 dormers. The 1853 daguerreotype shows the same 2 1/2 storey wood frame building with the 2 dormers was in existence at that time.

3



1711 Barrington Street

(Formerly #475, #111-113)

Nelson's Eye Antiques

Construction Date: The brick suggests early 1870s.

Architect/Builder: Unknown

Dimensions: H 33'5"  
W 18'7"  
D 60'0"

Occupancy: Nelson's Eye Antiques, the occupant since the 1960s, has just closed and the main floor is presently vacant. In the 1940s and 1950s, it housed the MacAskill Studio; the well-known Marine photographer. The building contained a jewellery store in the 1930s.

In 1917, the tenant was the American Boot and Shoe Store and in the period from 1875 to 1917, it was a boarding house with a men's clothing store at the street level.

Hopkins Atlas of 1878 shows the existing 3 storey brick building.

Description: Mid-Victorian, 3 storey brick, commercial building with a flat roof. The elegant brick detailing at the cornice and at the window head are the main highlights of this building.

#111/113 Barrington Street

Dates: 1853

Description: Photo shows a 2 1/2 storey wood frame building with dormers.

4



1713 Barrington Street

(Formerly #479, #117)

Construction Date: Mid-1950s

Architect/Builder: Unknown

Dimensions: H 17'6"  
W 20'0"  
D 60'0"

Occupancy: In November 1980, Sam the Record Man went out of business and the building is presently vacant.

12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



151-155 149 146-147 137-143 139-35 129-131 125-27 119-123 117 111-15 107-09 106 1880



505-507 503 499-501 493-497 491 489 48 481-483 479 475 473 471 1920



1741 1739 1735-37 1731-33 1729 1725-27 1721-23 1715-19 1713 1711 1705-09 1701-03 1980

SSAC

ADDITIONS TO MEMBERSHIP

June, 1981

Becher, Tom  
P.O. Box 34182,  
Stn. D,  
Vancouver, B.C.  
V6J 4M4

Cavett, Mary Ellen  
26 Prairie View Road,  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R3J 1G9

Clark, H. Spencer  
191 Guildwood Parkway,  
Scarborough, Ontario  
M1E 1P5

Craig, Pamela  
20 Butternut Street,  
Toronto, Ontario  
M4K 1T7

deFort-Menares, Anne  
100 Quebec Avenue, #608,  
Toronto, Ontario  
M6P 4B8

Gilpin, John  
1402-9927-114 Street  
Edmonton, Alberta

Greer, William  
155 Hudson Drive,  
Toronto, Ontario  
M4T 2K4

Hurley, Kent  
Architecture T.U.N.S.  
P.O. Box 1000,  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
B3J 2X4

Kelman, Mary  
346 Fifth Avenue, #7,  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1S 2N8

Nell-Bar, Jennifer  
2-1860 Crescent Road,  
Victoria, B.C.  
V8S 2G8

Penney, David  
P.O. Box 1205, Stn. C,  
St. John's, Newfoundland  
A1C 5M9

Pratt, J. MacDougall  
922 William St. Tecumseh,  
Windsor, Ontario  
N8N 2A4

Rodgers, W. Richard  
211 Boulton Avenue,  
Toronto, Ontario  
M4M 2J8

Shouldice, Julie P.  
18 Harvard Avenue,  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1S 4Z3

White, R. 2364 Regent Avenue  
Montreal, Quebec

Woods-Marsden, Joanna  
Fine Arts Department,  
University of British Columbia,  
Vancouver, B.C.

SSAC  
ADDRESS CHANGES

Carruther, James  
9358 West Olympic Blvd.,  
Beverly Hill, CA 90212  
U.S.A.

Coopersmith, Penina  
City of Calgary Planning Dept.  
Library,  
P.O. Box 2100,  
Calgary, Alberta  
T2P 2M5

Ham, Clifford,  
P.O. Box 4886, Stn. E  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1S 5J1

Larisey, Peter  
220 W. 98th,  
Apt. 11A,  
New York, New York  
10025

Schneider, Dan  
Heritage Trust,  
7th Fl., 77 Bloor St. W.,  
Toronto, Ontario  
M7A 2R9

Upton, Dell  
Box 7357,  
Richmond, Virginia 23221  
U.S.A.



During the 1950s and 1960s it contained a jewelry store.

Description: 1 storey masonry building, the store underwent renovations during the 1950s. In the early 1950s it was a 2 storey building.

#117 Barrington Street

Dates: 1853 - 1914

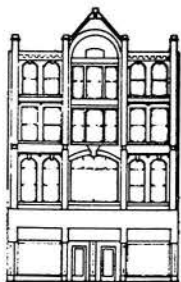
Architect/Builder: Unknown

Dimensions: W 20'0"  
D 45'1"

Occupancy: Around the turn of the century the building was occupied by a dentist and milliner shop. From 1879 to 1893, G.M. Smith & Co. grocers occupied the building. Previously it was a ladies' clothing store.

Description: The Goad Fire Insurance Map of 1914 shows a 3 1/2 storey wood frame building with a very large dormer which was very atypical to the street.

The 1853 picture shows a 2 1/2 storey wood frame building with 2 dormers.



5

1715-1719 Barrington Street

(Formerly #481-483, #119/123)

The "1893 Building"

Construction Date: 1893

Architect: J.C. Dumaesq and H. Mott

Builder:

Dimensions: H 57'0"  
W 39'0"  
D 60'0"

Occupancy: Since 1977, the building has been occupied by Fowler, Bauld and Mitchell, Architects, who renovated the building.

During the 1940s to 1970s it was a clothing store. A disastrous fire ripped through the building just before Christmas 1950 during supper rush hour.

Ten bodies had been taken from Kay's Limited, Barrington Street department store before firemen abandoned for the night their search for victims of a fire which, flashing from Christmas decorations in the window with explosive speed, blanketed exits and trapped shoppers and staff behind a wall of flame.

In 1893, G. M. Smith & Co., dry goods importers moved in 119-123 Barrington Street.

One of the last commercial buildings to be built of stone; most of the subsequent buildings on Barrington use brick.

Description: 1893 is on the building. Hopkins shows a small frame in 1878, insurance maps show a 4 storey store building in 1895. Store fronts altered.

This is an unusual stone building with a central gabled parapet with four square roof projections. The surface of the facade is both rock-faced and smooth stone. There is a large window-to-wall ratio and, in the central portion of the building, there are projecting bay windows with thin pilasters.

119/123 Barrington Street

Dates: 1853 - 1888

Architect/Builder: Unknown

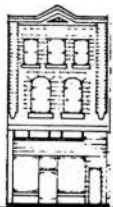
Dimensions: W 39'0"  
D 60'0"

Occupancy: In the 1870s and 1880s the building housed a sewing machine store.

Description: The Goad's Fire Insurance Map of 1888 shows a 3 storey wood frame building divided into two shops, #119 and #123.

The 1853 photo shows a 2 1/2 storey wood frame building with dormers.

6



1721-1723 Barrington Street

"Kaiser Building"

Construction Date: Built for Edmund P. Ennis, dentist, late 1880s.

Architect/Builder: Unknown

Dimensions: H 42'7"  
W 22'0"  
D 56'0"

Occupancy: In 1880, Scotia Stamp Co. occupy this building. From 1924 to 1940s Harry S. Tolson, of Bedford, a dentist, operated at this location. In 1921, last year of Ennis, it was known as the "Maritime Dental Parlour". Edmund P. Ennis, already mentioned as a dentist with a house on Cornwallis Street, one of only five dentists in town, takes over in his own name in 1888. In 1885, J. E. Mulloney & Co., dentist carried on business at this location. Ennis was 33 years at this location and dentists at this location for 55 years.

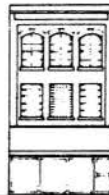
Description: Between 1895 and 1905, store front was altered. A small building of rusticated grey granite with yellow glazed brick and white granite accent trim. There is a central gable in the flat roofline. On either side of the building, there is an unusual turret-like projection. The granite is rock-faced and set in broken-course construction.

125/127 Barrington Street

Dates:

Description: 3 storey wood frame

7



#1725-1727 Barrington Street

(Formerly #489, #129-131)

Construction Date: 1890s

Dimensions: H 42'7"  
W 22'6"  
D 56'0"

Occupancy: In 1980, Eye Wear Ltd. occupies the building and from 1940s to the present day, the building's use has been commercial. In 1940, it contained Leeds Ladies Wear.

It was built for Wm. H. Cabot in the 1890s. During the 1860s, the Cabots were well known tailors and gent's furnishing merchants. Wm. H. Cabot was a son or relative of Richard Cabot, a drygoods merchant at 61 Argyle Street. In 1880, William is listed as clerk, boarding at Richard's house at 59 Argyle Street.

By 1885, William had his own dry goods store at 131 Barrington Street. The store continues, advertising "trimmed millinery" in 1917, until 1937, after which the Leeds Co. Ladies Wear takes over.

Wm. Cabot has, therefore, continued a retail tradition going back to the middle of the 19th century up to almost the Second World War, of which 52 years were at this location.

Description: This is a plain building of red, rock-faced, Cumberland sandstone with a large window-to-wall ratio. The windows on the second floor have flat heads with plain lintels and lugsills. The third storey windows have segmental heads with simple voussoirs and key-stones.

The only non-public building to use Wallace Stone for the whole facade, not only for detailing, as was the practice.

#129-131 Barrington Street

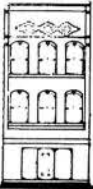
Dates: 1875 - 1880

Architect/Builder: Unknown

Dimensions: W 21'0"  
D 50'0"

Occupancy: G. Harris, a plumber by trade, carried on his business at this location in 1879 and in 1875, a Miss George ran a boarding house on the second and third floors while sewing machines were sold on the main level.

Description: The 1888 Fire Insurance map shows a 2 1/2 storey wood frame building and Hopkins Atlas of 1878 confirms the presence of this wood frame building.



8

1729 Barrington Street

(Formerly #491, #133-135)

Construction Date: Built in 1912 for Wm. Crowe, fancy goods, at the same time as all buildings to the north up to George Street were being rebuilt.

All buildings to the north of 1725-1727 Barrington Street were destroyed by fire in 1912.

Architect/Builder: Unknown

Dimensions: H 40'6"  
W 19'0"  
D 56'0"

Occupancy: Since its construction in 1912, the building has been strictly commercial, mostly in the clothing business. In 1912, the building was rebuilt, business carrying on above the Bon Marche to the south for a year. Business continued at this location under the name of Wm. Crowe, fancy goods until 1928, over 58 years at this location.

Description: Early 20th century 3 storey green glazed brick with white brick design. Granite is used as accent material for sequential arched windows keys, sills and string-course. Copper is used for fascia cornice and pilaster's heads with a wreath design. The only building in coloured glazed brick on Barrington Street.

1729 Barrington Street, Pre-1912

Dimensions: W 20'0"  
D 50'0"

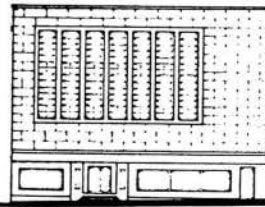
Dates: Pre-1868 - 1911

Architect/Builder: Unknown

Occupancy: The book, "Halifax and its Business, 1876" states that William Crowe started his business at this location in 1868.

Wm. Crowe advertises for the first time in 1870 as an agent of Raymond Sewing Machines and dealer in Berlin Wool, Mme. Desmores patterns and Indies' fancy goods. He states that he has experience of 10 years in sewing machines and advertises for agents for the four provinces; N.S., N.B., P.E.I., and Nfld. Crowe lived in the house, presumably upstairs.

Description: 3 storey wood frame.



9

1731-1733 Barrington Street

(Formerly #493-97, #137-143)

Birk's, also L. Claude Davidson Building

Construction Date: 1912, renovated in 1950s

Architect: William Critchlow Harris and W. T. Harrison

Dimensions: H 42'0"  
W 57'6"  
D 120'0"

Occupancy: Birk's since 1926, prior Davidson's Stationery Store.

Description: 3 storey with smooth sandstone and marble cladding which was applied during the 1950 renovation and modernization.

The original building was designed in 1912 by Harris and Harton as a 4 storey building but was actually constructed as a 3 storey building of rusticated stone with a very large glass store-front at street level. The original drawing of the facade is in the Provincial Archives of Nova Scotia.

#137-143 Barrington Street

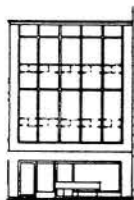
Architect/Builder: Unknown

Dates: 1827 - 1911

Occupancy: From 1870s to 1912, the use of buildings was commercial with stores on the main level, while previous to this it was basically residential.

The assessment records of Halifax for 1819 and 1822 show 2 vacant lots assessed for £200 belonging to Matthew Richardson while in 1834, the rolls list the assessment of Matthew Richardson's property for £1000.

Description: 3 1/2 storey stone building erected approximately 1827 after law forbidding wood frame construction due to Hollis Street fire of 1827. Erected by Matthew Richardson on the late Andrew Belcher's garden, a vacant lot.



**10**

1735-1737 Barrington Street

(Formerly #499-401, #145-147)

Construction Date: 1912

Architect/Builder: Unknown

Dimensions: H 40'9"  
W 28'0"  
D 58'0"

Occupancy: Presently commercial and office use. From 1917 to 1950s it was home of Kinley Ltd., Drugs and in the period of 1886 to 1917, it was Bramstead & Sutherland, dry goods.

Description: In the 1960s a new curtain wall facade was placed over the existing 3 storey building and in 1979, a brick store front facade was added.

#145-147 Barrington Street

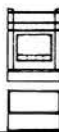
Dates: Unknown - 1912

Architect/Builder: Unknown

Dimensions: W 28'0"  
D 58'0"

Occupancy: 1875-1886 - Clothing store.

Description: Destroyed by fire in 1912 and rebuilt to present. Goad's Fire Insurance Maps of 1895 shows a 2 storey masonry building and the map of 1888 shows a 2 storey wood frame and, unfortunately, no further descriptions exist on either building.



**11**

1739 Barrington Street

(Formerly #503, #149)

Construction Date: 1912

Architect/Builder: Unknown

Dimensions: H 25'9"  
W 12'3"  
D 50'0"

Occupancy: Part of Atlantic Trust, their board room is on the second storey, while the first floor is commercial. From 1875 to the 1960s the building was occupied by Shaffer - Jeweller and Whiston - silversmith.