

**HERITAGE PROPERTY RESEARCH AND EVALUATION REPORT**



**NICHOLLS BUILDING**  
220 KING STREET WEST, TORONTO

Prepared by:

Heritage Preservation Services  
City Planning Division  
City of Toronto

July 2010

## 1. DESCRIPTION



South facade of the Nicholls Building

<b>220 King Street West: Nicholls Building</b>	
ADDRESS	220 King Street West (north side, west of Simcoe Street)
WARD	Ward 20 (Trinity-Spadina)
LEGAL DESCRIPTION	Plan 223E, Part Block D
NEIGHBOURHOOD/COMMUNITY	King-Spadina
HISTORICAL NAME	Nicholls Building
CONSTRUCTION DATE	1910
ORIGINAL OWNER	Factory Products Limited
ORIGINAL USE	Commercial (offices & warehouse)
CURRENT USE*	Commercial (restaurant & offices) * This does not refer to permitted use(s) as defined by the Zoning By-law
ARCHITECT/BUILDER/DESIGNER	Denison & Stephenson, architects
DESIGN/CONSTRUCTION/MATERIALS	Brick and stone cladding; brick, stone and trim
ARCHITECTURAL STYLE	Edwardian Classicism
ADDITIONS/ALTERATIONS	1945: tunnel to #214 King; 1981-82: alterations to south entrance, basement entry, & penthouse addition
CRITERIA	Design/Physical, Historical/Associative & Contextual
HERITAGE STATUS	Listed on City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties
RECORDER	Heritage Preservation Services: Kathryn Anderson
REPORT DATE	July 2010

## 2. BACKGROUND

This research and evaluation report describes the history, architecture and context of the property at 220 King Street West, and applies evaluation criteria to determine whether it merits designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act. The conclusions of the research and evaluation are found in Section 4 (Summary).

### i. HISTORICAL TIMELINE

Key Date	Historical Event
1902 Apr	The Canadian General Electric Company's acquisition of part of the former Upper Canada College campus at King Street West and Simcoe Street is announced in the April 29 <sup>th</sup> edition of <u>The Toronto Daily Star</u>
1902 May	In a transaction that remained unregistered until December 1903, Frederic Nicholls, General Manager of Canadian General Electric, purchases property on the north side of King Street West, west of Simcoe Street, from the Trustees of the University of Toronto <sup>1</sup>
1904 Aug	Nicholls is recorded in the City's tax assessment rolls as the owner of the vacant lot on the north side of King Street, west of Simcoe Street
1910 Mar	Nicholls sells the property to Factory Products Limited, a subsidiary of CGE
1910 Apr	Nicholls receives building permit #19584 for a five-storey brick warehouse, with Denison & Stephenson listed as the architects
1910 Sept	An "unfinished building" on the subject property is recorded in the tax assessment rolls
1910	The Toronto City Directory for 1911, reflecting information compiled by the end of 1910, records the "Nicholls Building" in place at 220 King Street West
1912	The Nicholls Building is first illustrated on Goad's Atlas for 1910 updated to 1912
1984	The property at 220 King Street West is listed on the City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties

### ii. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

#### King-Spadina Neighbourhood

The property at 220 King Street West is part of the King-Spadina Neighbourhood, the area that developed north of Front Street West between Simcoe Street and Bathurst Street, with King Street West and Spadina Avenue as its major commercial arteries. The origins of the district date to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century after the founding of the Town of York and the extension of that community westward as New Town. In the early 1800s, the relocation of the Provincial Legislature (Third Parliament Buildings, 1829-32) to Simcoe Place on Front Street West was accompanied by high-end residential development that drew community leaders to the neighbourhood.<sup>2</sup> Founded in 1829, two years later Upper Canada College opened an expansive

<sup>1</sup> The lands were the original location of Upper Canada College, which was founded as a private boys' school in 1829 and, eight years later, placed under the control of King's College, the forerunner to the University of Toronto

<sup>2</sup> The prevalent institutional character of the area continued through the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Government House, the official residence of the Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario, was completed in 1870 on the southwest corner of King Street West and Simcoe Street, opposite Upper Canada College

campus on Russell Square, the tract on the north side of King Street West, west of Simcoe Street. After the private boys' school moved to its present site on Lonsdale Road, representatives of the University of Toronto (which formed the College's Board of Governors) organized the subdivision and sale of the original property.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century after the Great Fire of 1904 destroyed the existing manufacturing district along Front Street near Bay Street, Toronto's industrial sector was re-established in the King-Spadina neighbourhood. The area was chosen for its proximity to the city centre, the availability of streetcar service for workers, and the presence of the steam railways, which had arrived in Toronto in the mid-1800s and constructed tracks and shipping facilities. The evolution of King-Spadina in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries can be traced on the Goad's Atlases, extracts from which are included in Section 6 of this report.

Despite the upheavals of the Great Depression of the 1930s followed by World War II, King-Spadina remained an active industrial area until the 1950s when the combination of large tracts of land, lower taxes and new highways for truck transport drew manufacturers to Toronto's suburbs. Although the clothing industry continued its dominance in the neighbourhood (which was later dubbed the "Fashion District") many of the former warehouses stood vacant as the area's industrial zoning restricted other uses.<sup>3</sup> The revitalization of King Street, west of Simcoe began in the 1960s when Toronto entrepreneur Edwin "Honest Ed" Mirvish restored the Royal Alexandra Theatre and converted many of the adjoining warehouses into eating establishments that served the theatre's patrons. By the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Roy Thomson Hall (1982) and the Princess of Wales Theatre (1993) opened in this section of King Street West, which was named Toronto's Entertainment District.

### Nicholls Building

In 1902, Frederic Nicholls, general manager of the Canadian General Electric Company, purchased land on the north side of King Street West, west of Simcoe Street, from the trustees of the University of Toronto. While Nicholls sold the site to Factory Products Limited (a CGE affiliate) in March 1910, he received the building permit for the five-storey warehouse the next month. The City's tax assessment rolls indicate that the building was under construction in September 1910, with Factory Products Limited listed as the owners and occupants of the "Nicholls Building" beginning in 1911. During this period, publisher Hugh C. Maclean and the offices of the architectural periodical, The Canadian Contract Record were among the tenants in the Nicholls Building. A subsidiary of Canadian General Electric that manufactured electrical supplies, Factory Products Limited retained and occupied the site until 1920 when the property was transferred to the parent company.

### Denison and Stephenson, Architects

The Toronto architectural firm of Denison and Stephenson prepared the plans for the Nicholls Building. Arthur R. Denison (1857-1923) was a member of one of Toronto's founding families and, in that capacity, was educated at Upper Canada College's King Street West campus. After

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<sup>3</sup> In 1996, the former City of Toronto adopted the King-Spadina Part II Plan, which relaxed land-use controls in the neighbourhood

apprenticing with Toronto architects Stewart and Strickland (who specialized in factories and schools), Denison embarked on a solo career, apart from a brief association with architect George W. King in the early 1890s. While Denison accepted a range of projects, among the first warehouses he designed in 1898 was for the W. R. Brock & Company at Wellington Street West and Bay Street, a firm that later relocated to King Street West, west of the Nicholls Building. In 1906, Denison began a partnership with George E. Stephenson that endured until the end of his career.

### iii. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The Nicholls Building is designed with features of Edwardian Classicism applied to an early 20<sup>th</sup> century warehouse. Its appearance is the result of the developments of the previous century, when new technologies, specifically steel frame construction and elevators, allowed buildings to grow increasingly taller. These advancements were coupled with the influence of the Chicago's World Columbian Exposition of 1893, which featured the "White City" of Beaux-Arts inspired and classically-detailed buildings. By the close of the 1800s, office buildings and warehouses hid their structural components and, in the case of manufacturers, production facilities behind facades that were embellished with classical elements. Edwardian Classicism emerged as the prevalent style in Canada, when it was particularly favoured for commercial and public buildings in the period leading up to World War I.<sup>4</sup> In Toronto, this turning away from the architectural excesses of the Victorian era in favour of the dignified elegance and order of Edwardian Classicism coincided with the Great Fire of 1904, which provided an opportunity for architects to apply the style in the new manufacturing district. Edwardian Classicism is exhibited in the design of the Union Building, where the principal facade follows a tripartite with a base, shaft and cornice inspired by the classical column. The contemporary elements of the building are found in the ample fenestration (a characteristic of both the style and the era),<sup>5</sup> which includes the unusual four-storey oriel window on the east elevations that is positioned to overlook King Street West.

Rising six stories, the structure features a long rectangular plan. The building combines textured and smooth stone on the raised two-storey base, with red brick cladding on the upper floors, and brick and stone detailing. The flat roofline is marked by a cornice that has been altered. The base is divided into three bays by stone columns, with the main entrance inset beneath a cornice in the left (west) bay. The door and window openings are segmental-arched. On the three-storey shaft above, red brick piers organize the fenestration and spandrels. The flat-headed window openings in the second and third floors have stone sills, and distinctive bay windows are recessed in the west bay. The fourth storey has segmental-arched window openings with hood moulds and keystones. A cornice separates the attic level, where round-arched window openings with stone voussoirs are placed between panelled and decorated pilasters. The distinctive four-storey oriel window with a decorated base that projects at the south end of the east elevation is a highlight of the design.

### iv. CONTEXT

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<sup>4</sup> Maitland, 121

<sup>5</sup> Blumenson, 166

The property at 220 King Street West is located on the north side of King Street West in the block between Simcoe Street (east) and Ed Mirvish Way (the south end of Duncan Street, west). The Nicholls Building is adjoined on the east by two early 20<sup>th</sup> century warehouses, while a vacant lot separates it from the Royal Alexandra Theatre to the west.<sup>6</sup> To the south, the Nicholls Building overlooks the open space at the east end of Metro Hall.

### 3. EVALUATION CHECKLIST

The following evaluation applies Ontario Regulation 9/06 made under the Ontario Heritage Act: Criteria for Determining Cultural Heritage Value or Interest. While the criteria are prescribed for municipal designation under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act, the City of Toronto uses it when assessing properties for inclusion on the City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties. The evaluation table is marked “N/A” if the criterion is “not applicable” to the property or X if it is applicable, with explanatory text below.

<b>Design or Physical Value</b>	
i. rare, unique, representative or early example of a style, type, expression, material or construction method	<b>X</b>
ii. displays high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit	<b>X</b>
iii. demonstrates high degree of scientific or technical achievement	<b>N/A</b>

#### **Representative Example of a Style and Type with a High Degree of Craftsmanship –**

The Nicholls Building is a highly-detailed example of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century commercial warehouse with Edwardian Classical styling that is distinguished by its distinctive fenestration. As the narrowest of the group of warehouses constructed on the north side of King Street West between Simcoe Street and John street, the recessed bay windows above the main entrance and the multi-storey oriel window that projects from the east side elevation are unique features that set the building apart from its neighbours.

<b>Historical or Associative Value</b>	
i. direct associations with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization or institution that is significant to a community	<b>X</b>
ii. yields, or has the potential to yield, information that contributes to an understanding of a community or culture	<b>N/A</b>
iii. demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer or theorist who is significant to a community	<b>X</b>

**Person -** The property at 220 King Street was developed by Frederic Nicholls, a person of national significance in Canada. As a publisher, businessman, and politician, Nicholls assumed many roles, the most visible being his position as general manager of the Canadian General Electric Company, which was founded in the 1890s to manufacture and generate electrical

<sup>6</sup> The vacant property at 224 King Street has never been developed. The land formed part of the tract that Frederic Nicholls purchased from the trustees of the University of Toronto in 1902, which he sold to George F. McGuire three years later. McGuire retained the land until 1944 when his executors sold it to 224 King Street West Limited, which remained the owner when the City’s tax assessment rolls were compiled in 2009.

equipment. At the same time, Nicholls joined railway promoter William Mackenzie and entrepreneur and visionary (Sir) Henry Pellatt to form a private syndicate to provide Toronto businesses and citizens with electrical power generated at Niagara Falls. While the formation of the publicly-owned Hydro-Electric Power Commission of Ontario ultimately ended the syndicate's role in power supply, Nicholls continued to develop his business interests prior to his appointment to the Canadian Senate in 1917. Frederic Nicholls commissioned the self-named warehouse as the location of Factory Products Limited, a subsidiary of CGE that produced electrical supplies.

**Architect** - Toronto architectural firm of Denison and Stephenson designed the Nicholls Building. The firm was headed by Arthur R. Denison, the son of one of the city's founding families, who apprenticed with the Toronto architectural firm of Strickland and Symons before opening a solo practice. While Denison was well-versed in the design of all building types, beginning in the 1890s he was noted for commissions showcasing commercial warehouses. Denison prepared the plans for the Nicholls Building during his partnership with George E. Stephenson near the close of his career.

<b>Contextual Value</b>	
i. important in defining, maintaining or supporting the character of an area	<b>X</b>
ii. physically, functionally, visually or historically linked to its surroundings	<b>X</b>
iii. landmark	<b>N/A</b>

**Character** – Contextually, the Nicholls Building contributes to the character of the King-Spadina neighbourhood, which developed as the city's manufacturing centre following the destruction of the former industrial core in the Great Fire of 1904. The construction of the Nicholls Building on the south end of Russell Square, the original campus of Upper Canada College, continued the transition of the area from an institutional enclave to an industrial district. With the gradual departure of manufacturing interests from King-Spadina in the decades after World War II, the Nicholls Building was one of the warehouses converted to commercial uses as King Street, west of Simcoe Street, emerged as the heart of the city's Entertainment District.

**Surroundings** – The Nicholls Building is historically, physically, visually and functionally linked to its setting on King Street West, where it contributes to the collection of early 20<sup>th</sup> century warehouses, including the adjoining properties at #212 and #214 King that were also associated with the Canadian General Electric Company. With their complementary vintage, heights and early 20<sup>th</sup> century styling, primarily with Edwardian Classical features, the Nicholls Building and its neighbours form an important group of heritage warehouses, and also bookend the Royal Alexandra Theatre, the National Historic Site at 260 King Street West.

#### 4. SUMMARY

Following research and evaluation according to Regulation 9/06, it has been determined that the property at 220 King Street West has cultural heritage value. Located on the north side of King Street West, west of Simcoe Street, the Nicholls Building is a well-crafted example of Edwardian Classical design applied to an early 20<sup>th</sup> century warehouse according to the plans of architects Denison and Stephenson, which is particularly distinguished by its fenestration, with the ornate

riel window on the east elevation. While it contributes to the historical context of the King-Spadina neighbourhood where it is linked to its setting as part of an important collection of heritage warehouses on King Street West, the Nicholls Building is historically associated with the Canadian General Electric Company and its general manager, Frederic Nicholls, who was a pioneer in the development of Ontario's energy sector.

## 5. SOURCES

### Archival Sources

Abstract Indices of Deeds, Plan 223E, Part Block D  
Assessment Rolls, City of Toronto, 1900 ff.  
Building Permit #19584, April 4, 1910, City of Toronto Archives  
Building Records, Toronto and East York, 220 King Street West, 1945-82  
City of Toronto Directories, 1900 ff.  
Goad's Atlases, 1884-1923  
Photograph, City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1231, Item 2165  
Photograph, Library and Archives of Canada, Item 25592

### Secondary Sources

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"To Build in King Street," Toronto Daily Star (April 29, 1902)



## 6. IMAGES



Principal (south) façade of the Nicholls Building



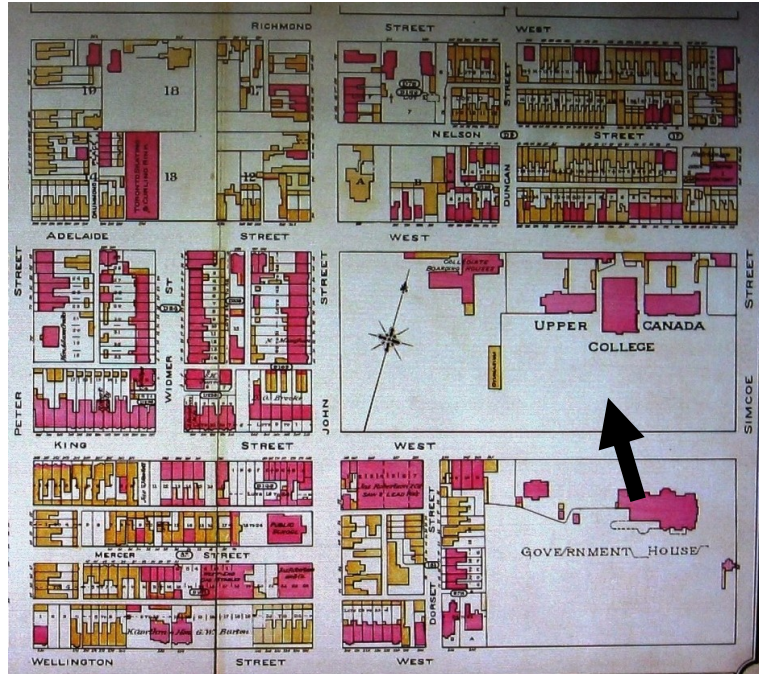
Historical photograph of Upper Canada College, showing the main campus (with the buildings facing south toward King Street West), where the Nicholls Building was constructed in 1910 (Source: Toronto Reference Library, Item B12-34b)



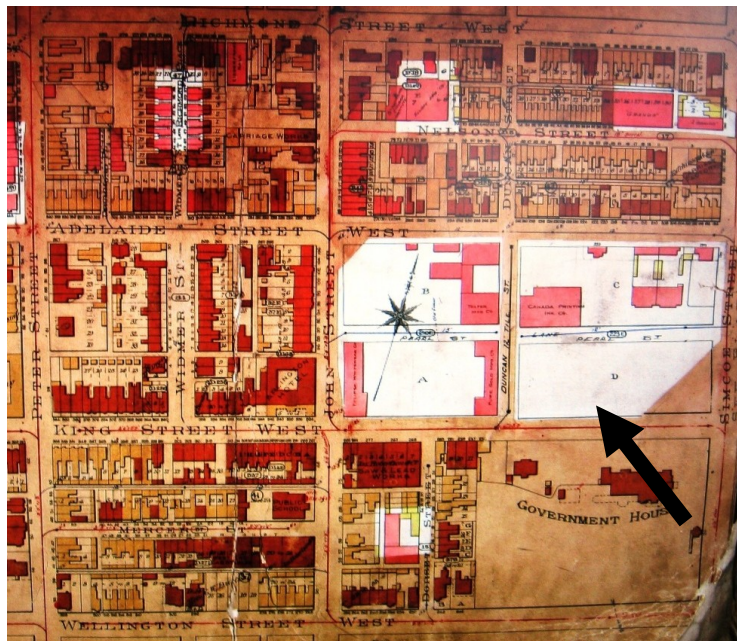
View of the Nicholls Building (left) on the north side of King Street West, opposite Government House (which fills the centre of the photograph), in 1912 (Source: Library and Archives Canada, Item 25592)



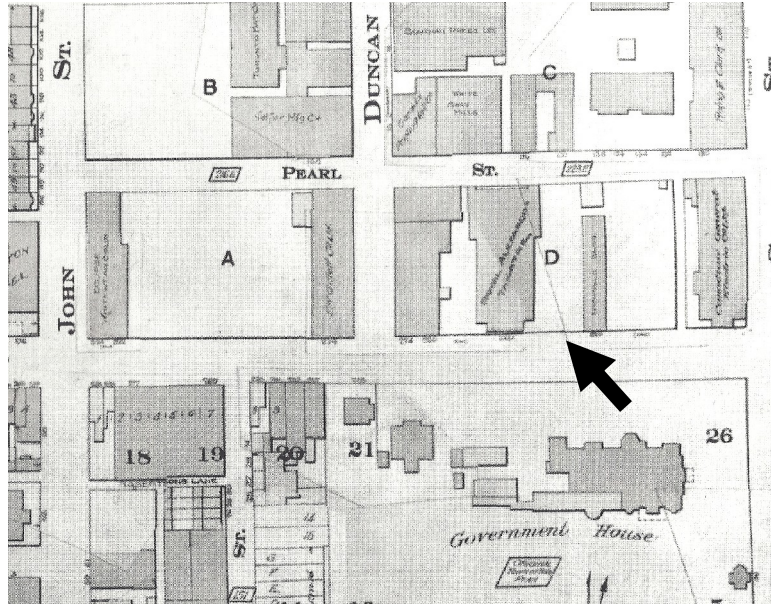
View of King Street West, looking west from Simcoe Street, and showing the Nicholls Building mid-block in July 1927 (Source: City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1231, Item 2165)



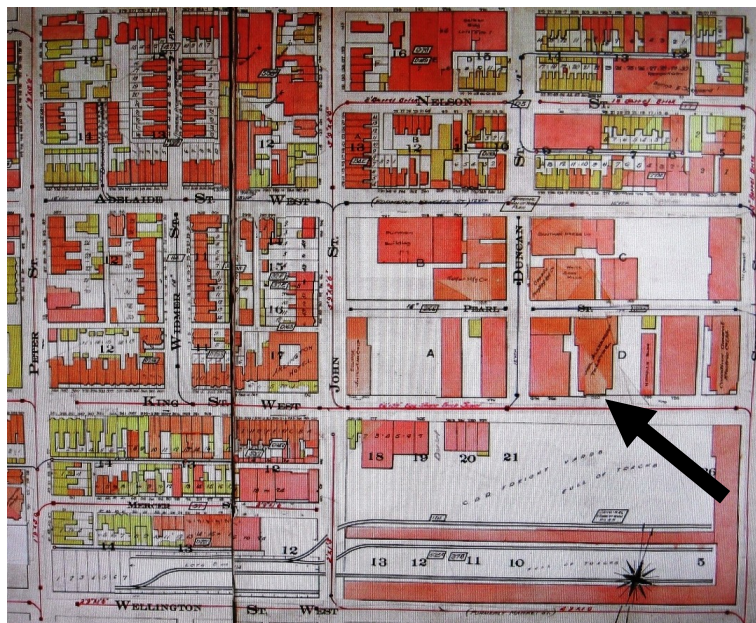
Excerpt, Goad's Atlas, 1884, showing King Street West before the relocation of Upper Canada College. The future site of #214 King is marked by the arrow (Source: City of Toronto Archives)



Excerpt, Goad's Atlas, 1903, showing the removal of most of the buildings associated with Upper Canada College, and the introduction of the first warehouses along King Street West. The future site of #212 King is marked by the arrow (Source: City of Toronto Archives)



Extract, Goad's Atlas, 1910 revised to 1912, showing the Nicholls Building in place at #220 King and the development of King Street West to date (Source: City of Toronto Archives)



Excerpt, Goad's Atlas, 1910 revised to 1923, showing the King Street West warehouses in place, including the Nicholls Building at #220 King. The two adjoining buildings to the east were also associated with Canadian General Electric

## BUILDING PERMIT

No. 9584

Plan No.	_____
Lot No.	_____

Toronto, APR 4 1910

Permit granted to

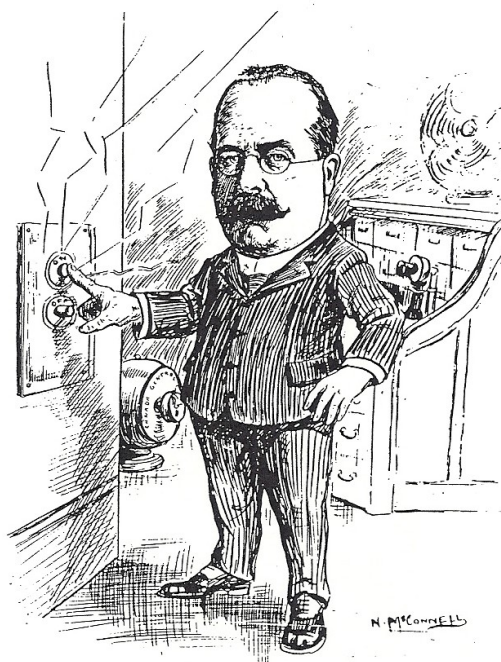
Mr. Frederic Nicholls 210 King Street  
 To erect a 5-story brick building Warehouse  
near Simcoe St.

on 218 King Street  
 Architect A. R. Dennis & Stephenson  
 Builder Davidson & Lunn  
 Cost of Building, \$ 34,000  
 Plans and Specifications approved by \_\_\_\_\_

No. of Block Plan \_\_\_\_\_ 713  
 Limit 0 Water, \$ \_\_\_\_\_

This Permit does not include any openings in sidewalks or encroachment past line of street

Building permit #9584 (April 4, 1910) for the property at 220 King Street West (Source: City of Toronto Archives)



Frederic Nicholls, illustration from "Torontonians As We See 'Em," 1905,

Illustration of Frederic Nicholls in 1905, reproduced in Bright Lights, Big City, 1991, 18