

HERITAGE PROPERTY RESEARCH AND EVALUATION REPORT



GILLETT BUILDING
276 KING STREET WEST, TORONTO

Prepared by:

Heritage Preservation Services
City Planning Division
City of Toronto

July 2010

1. DESCRIPTION



Principal (south) facade on King Street West of the Gillett Building (1901)

276 King Street West: Gillett Building	
ADDRESS	276 King Street West (northwest corner of Ed Mirvish Way)
WARD	Ward 20 (Trinity-Spadina)
LEGAL DESCRIPTION	Plan 216E, Part Block A
NEIGHBOURHOOD/COMMUNITY	King-Spadina
HISTORICAL NAME	Gillett Building
CONSTRUCTION DATE	1901 (east building)
ORIGINAL OWNER	Thomas B. Greening
ORIGINAL USE	Commercial/Industrial (warehouse)
CURRENT USE*	Commercial (offices) * This does not refer to permitted use(s) as defined by the Zoning By-law
ARCHITECT/BUILDER/DESIGNER	A. Frank Wickson, architect
DESIGN/CONSTRUCTION/MATERIALS	Brick and stone cladding; brick, stone & wood trim
ARCHITECTURAL STYLE	Edwardian Classicism
ADDITIONS/ALTERATIONS	1942: west warehouse, Murray Brown, architect; 1972 ff., alterations for restaurants
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 276 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
1901 Oct	Thomas B. Greening, manager of the Pure Gold Manufacturing Company of Toronto, receives a building permit for a four-storey warehouse at the northwest corner of King Street West and Ed Mirvish Way (formerly Duncan Street), identifying A. Frank Wickson as the architect
1902 Aug	The Pure Gold Manufacturing Company is the owner and occupant of the completed building according to the tax assessment rolls
1904 Apr	The <u>Toronto Daily Star</u> reports that the EW Gillett Company has acquired the Pure Gold Manufacturing Company's King Street West property
1904 Oct	The EW Gillett Company purchases the property according to land records
1905 Aug	The EW Gillett Company occupies the building when the tax assessment rolls are compiled
1907 May	The EW Gillett Company receives a building permit for a four-storey warehouse, with Wickson & Gregg listed as the architects
1910 Oct	Representatives of the University of Toronto sell additional land on King Street West to the EW Gillett Company ¹
1912 June	The EW Gillett Company sells the complex to William R. Brock
1912	The building is first illustrated on Goad's Atlas of 1910, updated to 1912
1942 Jan	A permit is issued for the excavation of the foundations for the west addition, according to specifications drawn up by architect Murray Brown
1984	The property at 276 King Street West is listed on the City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties

ii. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

King-Spadina Neighbourhood

The property at 276 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 18th 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

¹ The lands were originally developed for 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

neighbourhood.² Founded in 1829, two years later Upper Canada College opened an expansive 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 in 1891, 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 20th century when 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 19th and early 20th 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.³ The revitalization of King Street, west of Simcoe began in the 1960s when Toronto entrepreneur Edwin "Honest Ed" Mirvish (1914-2007) 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 20th century, Roy Thomson Hall (1982) and the Princess of Wales Theatre (1993) opened on this section of King Street West, which was named Toronto's Entertainment District.

E.W. Gillett Company

The property at 276 King Street West contains a pair of structures that are together historically known as the Gillett Building. The original four-storey warehouse on the northwest corner of King Street West and Ed Mirvish Way (formerly Duncan Street) was constructed for the Pure Gold Manufacturing Company following the issuance of a building permit in October 1901 that identified A. Frank Wickson as the architect. Three years later, following the Great Fire of 1904, the Toronto Daily Star reported that "The

E. W. Gillett Company, who were burned out in the big fire, have purchased the fine substantial factory and warehouse of the Pure Gold Manufacturing Company, built a few years ago on the northwest corner of King and Duncan streets, which was formerly a portion of the old Upper Canada College grounds...The Gillett Company are to take possession of the building in a few months...."⁴ A subsequent building permit for the site was issued in 1907, naming Wickson and Gregg as the architects.

² The institutional character of the area was continued through the 19th 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

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

⁴ Toronto Daily Star (April 30, 1904), 2

In 1912, the Gillett Company sold the property to William R. Brock, who rented the premises to the Russell Motor Car Company in the World War I era and afterwards to the federal government as the location of the Custom House. During World War II, when the site was occupied by the James Morrison Brass Manufacturing Company, architect Murray Brown designed the adjoining (west) warehouse. The property was later acquired by Ed Mirvish Enterprises, which purchased and refurbished the Royal Alexander Theatre at 260 King Street West. The Gillett Building, along with other warehouses in the block between Simcoe Street and John Street subsequently housed restaurants that catered to theatre patrons.

Arthur Frank Wickson, Architect

The original Gillett Building was designed for the Pure Gold Manufacturing Company by Toronto architect A. Frank Wickson, whose successor firm of Wickson and Gregg was issued a building permit for the same site. Arthur Frank Wickson (1861-1936) worked with Toronto architects Darling and Curry prior to 1890 when he formed a partnership with Norman B. Dick. Following Dick's untimely death in 1895, Wickson worked alone for a decade before joining Alfred H. Gregg in a practice that exceeded 30 years. In 1904, Wickson prepared the plans for the Pure Gold Manufacturing Company's new facility on College Street⁵ and, in the same year, received the commission for the Featherbone Novelty Manufacturing Company's warehouse at 266 King Street West.

Murray Brown, Architect

The west addition to the Gillett Building was constructed according to specifications drawn up by architect Murray Brown and dating to the early 1940s. Born in Scotland and trained at the Royal Academy in London, Brown spent two years working with architect Charles S. Cobb after his arrival in Toronto in 1914. During this period, Cobb's office won the sought-after commission to design the City's Registry Office, a local landmark that stood on the site of present-day Toronto City Hall. With this auspicious beginning to his career in Toronto, Brown opened a solo practice and produced notable government buildings, movie theatres and commercial buildings with Modern styling.

iii. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The Gillett Building is comprised of two warehouses that were constructed 30 years apart and, as a result, are products of their particular architectural periods.

1901 warehouse (northwest corner of King Street West and Ed Mirvish Way)

The Gillett Warehouse dating to 1901 is an early 20th century warehouse with features Edwardian Classicism. Its appearance is the result of the developments of the previous century, when new technologies, specifically steel frame construction and elevators, allowed buildings to

⁵ Building Permit 772 (June 28, 1904)

grow increasingly taller. These advancements were coupled with the influence of the Chicago's World Columbian Exposition of 1893, which exhibited 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.⁶ 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 Gillett Building (1901), 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),⁷ which includes the distinctive windows incorporating tracery.

The Gillett Building (1901) rises four stories above an exposed base with window openings. Featuring a long rectangular plan under a flat roof, the structure is clad with brick (now painted) and trimmed with brick, stone and wood. The building displays the classical organization with a base, shaft and attic, with cornices along the roof and beneath the attic storey. The south facade is divided into three bays with a projecting centre section. In the lower storey, piers support a cornice that extends above the central entry and the flanking window openings. The main entrance, which is raised and recessed in a segmental-arched door surround with double doors and a transom, is protected by a classically-detailed Tuscan portico with stone columns and an arched pediment. The flat-headed window openings in the second and third floors are arranged in pairs in the centre bay. In the attic level, round-arched surrounds incorporate pairs of round-arched window openings and circular tracery. The outer bays display single segmental-arched windows in the lower floors, with round-arched openings in the attic storey. On the long east elevation facing Ed Mirvish Way, the fenestration is symmetrically placed, combining flat-headed, segmental-arched and round-arched openings.

⁶ Maitland, 121

⁷ Blumenson, 166

1942 warehouse (north side of King Street West, west of Ed Mirvish Way)

The 1942 addition to the Gillett Building reflects the Commercial Style introduced at the close of the 19th century, which was applied to large-scale warehouses well into the 20th, “whose flat roofs and orderly, sleekly framed, and many-windowed facades frankly represented their commercial purposes as well as skeletal construction.”⁸ The style was developed in Chicago, and its influence spread to the warehouses of the King-Spadina neighbourhood. It represented a counterpoint to earlier commercial architecture, with its minimal detailing and the oversized window openings that emphasize void over solid.

The west warehouse (1942) extends four stories above a raised base with window openings. Covered by a flat roof and displaying a long rectangular plan, the structure is clad and trimmed with brick (now painted). The principal (south) façade projects slightly south of the 1901 warehouse to the east, and features a grid-like organization of large-scale flat-headed window openings that are reduced in height from the first to the fourth stories. The east elevation, where only the southernmost bay is exposed, incorporates an entry in the basement level.

iv. CONTEXT

The Gillett Building is located on the northwest corner of King Street West and Ed Mirvish Way (formerly the south end of Duncan Street). It anchors the east end of the block extending west to John Street that contains a group of surviving early 20th century warehouses, as well as the Princess of Wales Theatre. To the east, it faces the complementary Reid Building at the northeast corner of King Street West and Ed Mirvish Way, and overlooks Metro Hall to the south.

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.

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

Representative Example of a Style and Type with a High Degree of Craftsmanship – While the Gillett Building (1901) is a representative example of an early 20th century warehouse, it is

⁸ McHugh, 20

distinguished architecturally by its Edwardian Classicism styling, particularly the classical treatment of the first floor and the entrance portico. In the attic storey, the round-arched window openings incorporating tracery are distinctive architectural features. The west warehouse stands out on King Street with its unabashedly modern design, where the architect applied a grid pattern to incorporate the large-scale industrial windows. While the parts of the complex were designed in different periods, they complement one another with their shared scale.

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

Organization - The Gillett Building is significant as the first of the commercial warehouses completed on King Street West between Simcoe Street and John Street. Commissioned by the Pure Gold Manufacturing Company, producers of baking powder and other food products, the site was acquired in 1904 by the E. W. Gillett Company, which also made baking ingredients and whose previous premises had been destroyed in the Great Fire of the same year. By World War I, the Russell Motor Car Company occupied the site and, following the conflict, the Dominion Government’s Custom House was located in the building. The complex was extended with the completion of the west addition (1942-43) for the James Morrison Brass Manufacturing Building.

Person - The property at 276 King Street West is associated with Toronto businessman Edwin “Honest Ed” Mirvish, who revitalized King Street West with his restoration of the Royal Alexandra Theatre in the early 1960s. Over the following decades, Ed Mirvish Enterprises acquired many of the warehouses along the street, including the Gillett Building, converting most to restaurants. Following the revitalization of the Royal Alexandra and the conversion of the adjacent buildings, Roy Thomson Hall (1982) opened on the south side of King Street, and Ed Mirvish Enterprises commissioned the Princess of Wales Theatre (1992) at 300 King Street West. Duncan Street between King Street West and Pearl Street was renamed Ed Mirvish Way in recognition of the entrepreneur’s contribution to the cultural life of the neighbourhood.

Architect - The original Gillett Building (1901) was designed by Toronto architect A. Frank Wickson, during the decade he practiced alone before entering a partnership with A. H. Gregg. Prior to accepting the commission for this site, Wickson had gained experience in industrial design with his former partner, Norman B. Dick, when the pair prepared the plans for the series of warehouse for the Rawlinson Company on St. Joseph Street, west of Yonge Street. As Wickson and Gregg, the successor firm received a second project for the E. W. Gillett Company in 1907, a time when Wickson was completing one of his best known works, the former Toronto Reference Library on College Street and St. George Street (in association with architect Alfred Chapman).

The west warehouse dating to the early 1940s was executed by Scottish-born architect, Murray Brown, who was reputed for his modern designs for bank branches, movie theatres and municipal buildings, including Postal Station K in North Toronto, which is a recognized heritage site.

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

Character – Contextually, the Gillett Building contributes to the historical character of the King-Spadina neighbourhood, which emerged as the city’s new manufacturing centre after the Great Fire of 1904. The Gillett Building was the first of the series of early 20th century warehouses built on Russell Square, the former campus of the Upper Canada College, as the area evolved from an institutional precinct to the industrial sector. Following the departure of manufacturing interests from King-Spadina in the decades after World War II, the Gillett Building was one of the warehouses converted to commercial uses as King Street, west of Simcoe, emerged as the heart of the city’s Entertainment District.

Surroundings – The Gillett Building is historically, functionally, physically and visually linked to its setting on the northwest corner of King Street and Ed Mirvish Way, where it is part of the group of surviving early 20th century warehouses in the extended block that share a complementary scale and appearance, many with Edwardian Classical styling. With the neighbouring warehouses, the Gillett Building provides a bookend to 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 276 King Street West has cultural heritage value. Located on the northwest corner of King Street West and Ed Mirvish Way (formerly Duncan Street), the Gillett Building is significant as the oldest of the warehouses along King Street, west of Simcoe Street. The Gillett Building contributes contextually to the historical character of the King-Spadina neighbourhood as it evolved from an institutional enclave to an industrial precinct and, more recently, the city’s Entertainment District. The warehouses are linked to their surroundings as integral members of the group of early 20th century commercial buildings on King Street. Historically, the Gillett Building is associated with the architects that designed the pair of warehouses, and with businessman Ed Mirvish, who refurbished them as part of the revitalization of King Street West.

5. SOURCES

Archival Sources

Abstract Indices of Deeds, Plan 216E, Part Block A
Assessment Rolls, City of Toronto, 1900 ff.
Building Permits #287 (October 3, 1901), #772 (June 28, 1904), and #7597 (May 16, 1907), City of Toronto Archives
Building Records, Toronto and East York, 276 King Street West, 1941-98
City of Toronto Directories, 1900 ff.
Goad's Atlases, 1884-1923
Photograph, City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1231, Item 2165
Photograph, Library and Archives Canada, Item 25593
Photograph, Toronto Reference Library, Item B12-34b

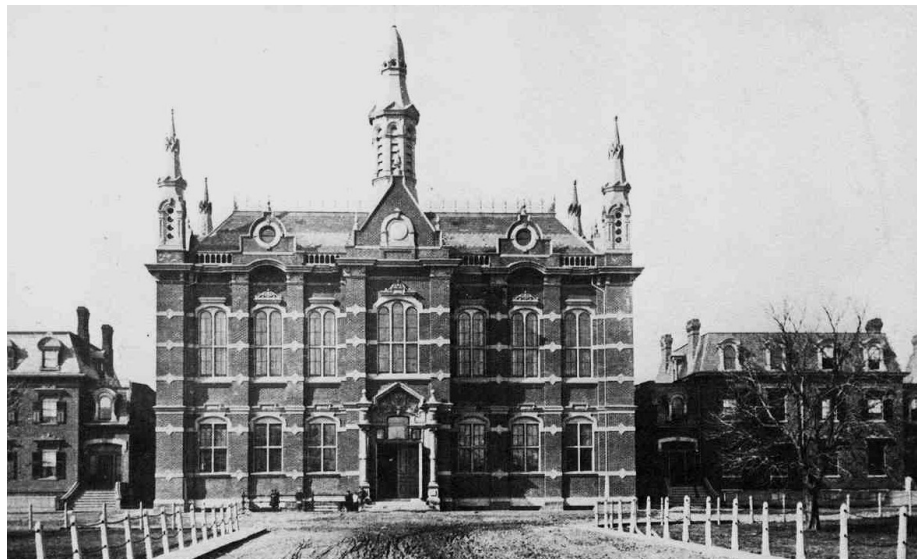
Secondary Sources

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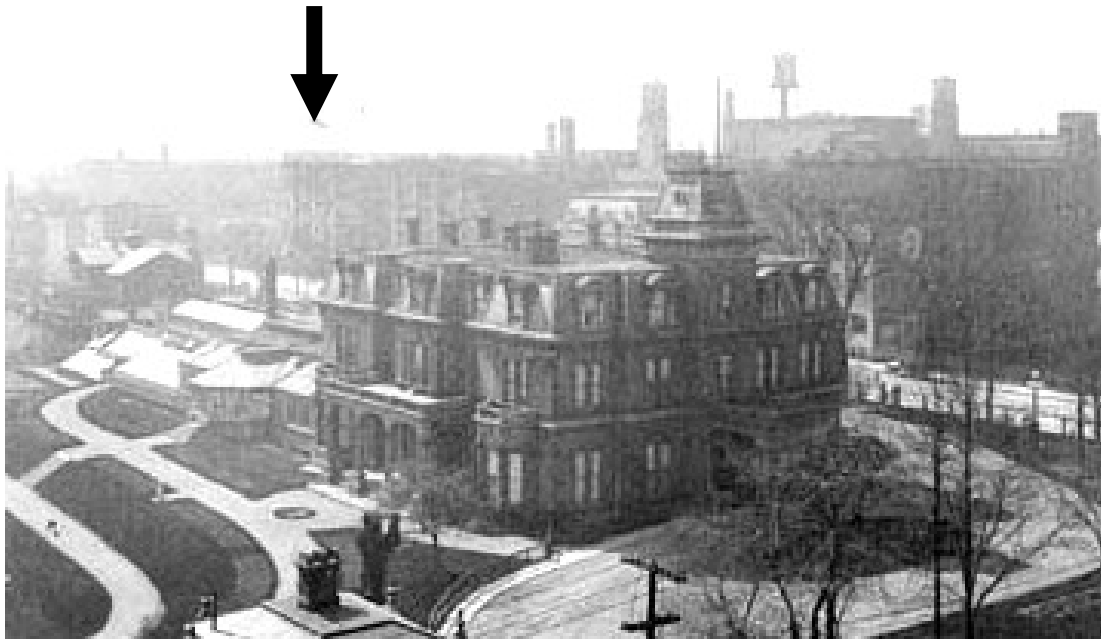
6. IMAGES



Photograph showing the south façade of the 1942 west addition to the Gillett Building



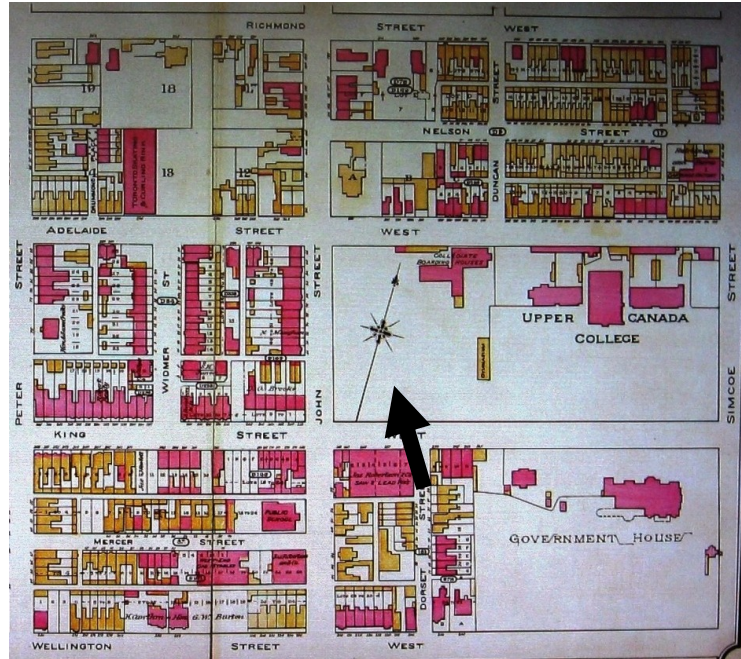
Historical photograph of Upper Canada College, showing the main campus (with the buildings facing south toward King Street) where the Gillett Building was constructed in 1901 (Source: Toronto Reference Library, Item B12-34b)



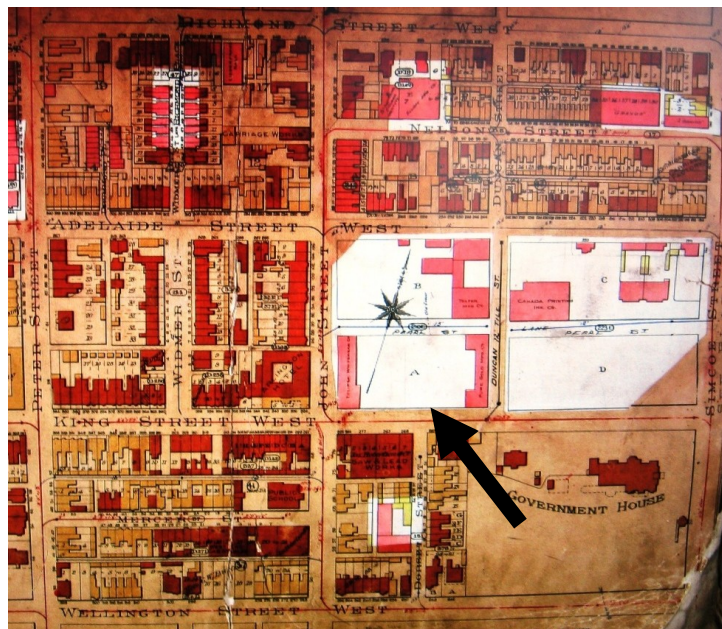
Photograph of Government House, showing the warehouses along King Street West in the background, with the Gillett Building toward the west end of the block, in 1908 (Source: Library and Archives Canada, Item 25593)



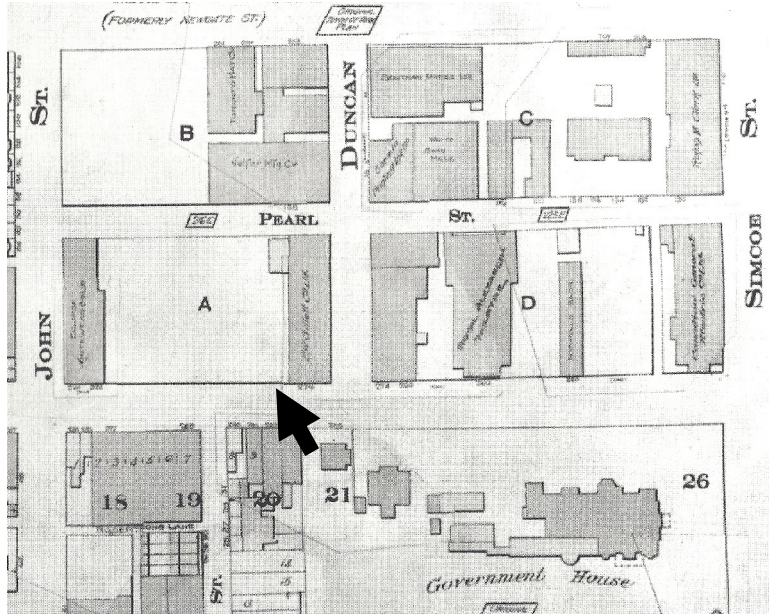
View of King Street West, looking west from Simcoe Street, and showing the Gillett Building at the west end of the block in July 1927 (Source: City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1231, Item 2165)



Excerpt, Goad's Atlas, 1884, showing King Street West before the relocation of Upper Canada College. The future site of #276 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, including the building at #276 King (Source: City of Toronto Archives)



Extract, Goad's Atlas, 1910 revised to 1910, showing the first Gillett Building in place (Source: City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties)



Excerpt, Goad's Atlas, 1910 revised to 1923, showing the King Street West warehouses in place, including the Gillett Building at the northwest corner of King and Duncan (now Ed Mirvish Way) (Source: City of Toronto Archives)

BUILDING PERMIT.

✓ No. **287**

TORONTO, OCT - 4 1901

Permit granted to

Mr. *Thos B. Greening*

To erect a *Four Story Brick*
Warehouse

near *John St*
on *E. King St*

Architect *A. Frank Wilson*

Builder *Holtby Bros.*

Cost of Building, \$ *20,000.00*

Building Permit #287 (October 3, 1901) for the first Gillett Building (Source: City of Toronto Archives)

BUILDING PERMIT

No. **7597**

Plan No. _____

Lot No. _____

Toronto, MAY 16 1907 190

Permit granted to

Mr. *E. W. Gillet Co.* *King + Queen corner*

To erect a *4 story brick warehouse.*

on *N.W. cor King + ~~Queen~~ ^{Spencer} Sts.*

Architect *Wickson & Gregg*

Builder *Page & Co.*

Cost of Building, \$ *12,000.00*

Plans and Specifications approved by _____

does not include any openings in sidewalk or encroachment past line of Street

Building Permit #7597 (May 16, 1907) for the Gillett Building (Source: City of Toronto Archives)