

HERITAGE PROPERTY RESEARCH AND EVALUATION REPORT



**JOHN ORAM BUILDING
836 YONGE STREET, TORONTO**

Prepared by:

Heritage Preservation Services
City Planning Division
City of Toronto

November 2014

1. DESCRIPTION



Above: view of the west side of Yonge Street, south of Yorkville Avenue (right) and showing the location of the John Oram Building in the block (identified by the **arrow**); cover: east elevation, 836 Yonge Street (Heritage Preservation Services, 2014)

836 Yonge Street: John Oram Building	
ADDRESS	836 Yonge Street (west side, north of Cumberland Street)
WARD	Ward 27 (Toronto Centre-Rosedale)
LEGAL DESCRIPTION	Plan 355, Lot 2
NEIGHBOURHOOD/COMMUNITY	Yorkville
HISTORICAL NAME	John Oram Building
CONSTRUCTION DATE	1874
ORIGINAL OWNER	John W. Oram, tinsmith
ORIGINAL USE	Commercial
CURRENT USE*	Commercial * This does not refer to permitted use(s) as defined by the Zoning By-law
ARCHITECT/BUILDER/DESIGNER	None identified ¹
DESIGN/CONSTRUCTION	Brick cladding with brick, stone, wood and metal detailing
ARCHITECTURAL STYLE	See Section 2.ii
ADDITIONS/ALTERATIONS	See Section 2.iii
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	November 2014

¹ No architect or builder is identified at the time of the writing of this report. Building permits do not survive for this era and no reference to the site was found in the Globe's tender calls

2. BACKGROUND

This research and evaluation report describes the history, architecture and context of the property at 836 Yonge Street, 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
1852	Robert A. Parker acquires a large parcel of land on the west side of Yonge Street between present-day Cumberland Street and Yorkville Avenue
1853	The Village of Yorkville is incorporated
1856	Parker is a resident on Yonge Street, north of Sydenham (Cumberland) when Brown's directory is compiled
1862	The first surviving tax assessment roll for Yorkville records Parker's widow on the subject property ²
1873	Mrs. Parker still resides on Yonge Street when Yorkville's assessment roll is compiled in 1873 for 1874 taxes
1874 Jan	Plan 355 is registered by the Parker Estate, subdividing the lands on the west side of Yonge Street in the block south of William Street (Yorkville Avenue)
1874	When the assessment roll is recorded (for 1875 taxes), a store owned and occupied by tinsmith John Oram is identified at 39 Yonge (present-day 836 Yonge)
1876	A bird's eye view of Toronto shows the existing buildings on the west side of Yonge Street in Yorkville
1883 Feb	The City of Toronto annexes Yorkville
1883 Sept	In the first tax assessment roll for St. Paul's Ward (incorporating Yorkville), John Oram continues to own and occupy the renumbered "736 Yonge" where he operates a hardware store
1884	The first Goad's Atlas to include Yorkville shows John Oram's store
1889 Sept	The present street numbering system is in place, with Oram recorded at 836 Yonge Street
1904	Following John Oram's death, his widow, Jane inherits the property and rents it to a series of hardware merchants (including her son, George Oram) until its sale in 1919
1974 Mar	The property at 836 Yonge Street is listed on the City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties

² An incomplete series of tax assessment rolls for the period 1862-1877 survives for the Village of Yorkville

ii. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Yorkville

The property at 836 Yonge Street is located in Yorkville, which originated as a suburban village prior to becoming the first municipality annexed by the City of Toronto in 1883. Nearly a century earlier when Toronto was founded as the Town of York in 1793, the area between present-day Bloor Street and Eglinton Avenue was subdivided into 100-acre farm lots that were accessed along concession lines and side roads. Yonge Street was surveyed during the same period as the main route from York to the northern hinterland, although portions of the road remained impassible for many years. An inn (the future Red Lion) was established on Yonge, north of the first concession line (Bloor) in the early 19th century and later became a popular hostelry for travellers passing through a toll gate near the intersection. On the northwest corner of Yonge and Bloor, York's first non-denominational cemetery opened in 1826 as the York General Burying Ground (commonly known as Potter's Field, it was marked on Cane's map of 1842, which is attached as Image 2). However, by the 1830s the first brick yards and breweries were operating in the ravine and along the watercourse that crossed Yonge Street north of Bloor, resulting in the subdivision of the adjacent lands for housing, shops and services.

By the mid 19th century, the steady development of the hamlet on Toronto's northern border was facilitated by an omnibus running directly from the Red Lion to Toronto's St. Lawrence Market (Image 3). Incorporated as the Village of Yorkville in 1853, the community's official boundaries were set at present-day Bloor Street, Sherbourne Street, Walker Avenue and a line near Bedford Road (Image 4).³ Yorkville's population doubled between 1851 and 1861 and, during the latter year the introduction of the first horse-drawn street railway offered more reliable connections to the city. Yorkville boasted 5000 residents in 1881, two years prior to its annexation by the neighbouring City of Toronto.⁴

During the 20th century as a Toronto neighbourhood, Yorkville evolved from a stable residential community to a primary cultural and commercial destination in the city. The widening of Bloor Street east and west of Yonge Street by 1929 displaced many small-scale proprietors who were drawn into the Yorkville neighbourhood where much of the residential building stock was converted to commercial uses. The decline of the area after World War II made it an affordable enclave for artists. In the 1960s (when the construction of the subway line along Bloor Street resulted in further redevelopment), Yorkville was a beacon for Toronto's music scene and "hippie culture". The following decade witnessed the community's transformation into a high-end shopping destination, supported by the conversion of remaining residential buildings into shops or their

³ As shown on historical maps and atlases, Yorkville's boundaries encompassed parts of today's South Rosedale and the East Annex

⁴ With Yorkville's annexation as St. Paul's Ward, two streets required new names, with Sydenham becoming Cumberland Street and William renamed Yorkville Avenue. They anchor the block where the subject property is found and remain primary commercial streets in the Yorkville neighbourhood

replacement by low-scale mixed use developments that included York Square and Hazelton Lanes. In the 1990s, part of Yorkville was designated as one of Toronto's first heritage conservation districts. Additional properties were recognized on the City's heritage register, including Fire Hall #10 (incorporating the tower from the 1876 Yorkville Fire Hall and the coat-of-arms from the 1860 town hall), the original Olivet Congregational Church (now the Heliconian Club, 1876), and the John Oram Building at 836 Yonge Street, all of which were associated with the 19th century Village of Yorkville.

836 Yonge Street

The subject property on Yonge Street, north of Bloor Street West in Yorkville stands on land originally surveyed as Lot 21 in Concession 2 from the Bay, which was granted to military veteran and politician, David William Smith in 1798. The acreage was acquired by John Elmsley, the Chief Justice of Upper Canada, whose widow sold a large tract along Yonge Street to Levi Fairbanks in the 1820s.

In 1852, Robert A. Parker, a Yorkville merchant, purchased part of Fairbanks' land on Yonge Street, midway between present-day Cumberland Street and Yorkville Avenue.⁵ Parker commissioned a house on the site, which was in place by 1856 when he was first recorded at this location in the city directory. Parker's property is illustrated in an archival photograph dating to 1860 (Image 5).⁶ His widow and heir, Margaret Parker occupied the premises until 1873, and the next year his executors registered Plan 355 on the Parker Estate (the plan is attached as Image 6 and its development illustrated in Image 8).

John William Oram (1848-1904), an English-born tinsmith who immigrated to Canada in 1869, acquired Lot 2 under Plan 355 from Parker's executors in 1874. By the close of that year, the three-storey brick building at present-day 836 Yonge was in place and recorded in Yorkville's tax assessment rolls. Its completion coincided with Oram's marriage and, according to subsequent archival records he resided in the building with his family while operating a hardware store on the premises. Following Oram's retirement, his son, George continued the business in this location. John's widow, Jane Oram inherited the property, which was occupied by a hardware store until its sale to Charles Chapman in 1919.⁷ The John Oram Building is illustrated in the historical images found in Section 6 (Image 7-15).

⁵ Parker bought and sold additional land in Lot 21 where he also registered plans of subdivision prior to his death in 1858

⁶ The photo shows the commercial buildings immediately north (right) of the Parker residence, which were replaced in 1891 by the current structures at 846-848A Yonge, as well as the Bostwick House (c. 1855) at present-day 850 Yonge, which was updated in 1885 for Charles Frogley's bakery

⁷ Coincidentally, from 1919-21, another John W. Oram conducted a steam fitting business at 836 Yonge as Chapman's tenant

iii. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Current photographs of the property at 836 Yonge Street are found on the cover and in Sections 2 and 6 of this report. The John Oram Building is a three-storey commercial building with architectural detailing inspired by the Italianate and Renaissance Revival styles popular for commercial buildings during the Victorian era. With its scale, setback, cladding and decorative detailing, the John Oram Building complements the neighbouring structures in the block that share its late 19th century vintage. The building is clad with brick and trimmed with brick and stone (now painted), and the ends (north and south) of the roof extend as fire walls. The principal (east) elevation is organized into two bays, with brick quoins marking the outer edges of the wall. Along the roofline, the brick parapet with corbels is embellished by the metal and wood cornice with wood brackets. The storefronts in the first (ground) floor have been altered and the window openings in the second storey enlarged. In the upper (third) floor, the pair of segmental-arched openings has hood moulds with keystones and contains wood windows. The side walls are shared by the neighbouring buildings to the north and south. The rear (west) extensions are not identified as heritage elements.

iv. CONTEXT

The location of the property at 836 Yonge Street is shown on the property data map attached as Image 1. The John Oram Building is found on the west side of Yonge Street near the centre of the block between Cumberland Street (south) and Yorkville Avenue (north). This section of Yonge Street was initially developed prior to the annexation of Yorkville by the City of Toronto and contains an intact group of late 19th century commercial buildings. The John Oram Building and its neighbours face east where the Albert Britnell Bookstore (1928) at 765 Yonge, between Bloor Street East and Asquith Avenue is also a recognized heritage property. The block with the John Oram Building ends at Yorkville Avenue on the north, where the Yorkville Branch of the Toronto Public Library (1907) at 22 Yorkville and Fire Hall #10 (1889) at 34 Yorkville are proximate to the subject property and recognized on the City's heritage register.⁸ Further west, between Bay Street and Avenue Road, parts of the former Village of Yorkville were designated as the Yorkville-Hazelton Heritage Conservation District in 2002.⁹

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

⁸ The fire hall incorporates the tower from the earlier village fire hall, as well as the coat-of-arms from the Yorkville Town Hall, demolished in 1941. Further west on Yorkville Avenue, several 19th century house form buildings are recognized on the City's heritage register (with some also designated under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act), including the property at 100 Yorkville that was converted into a private hospital and became the first location of Mount Sinai Hospital

⁹ http://www1.toronto.ca/city_of_toronto/city_planning/urban_design/files/pdf/hcd_yorkville_proposal.pdf

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	N/A
iii. demonstrates high degree of scientific or technical achievement	N/A

Representative and Early Example of a Style and Type - The John Oram Building has cultural heritage value for its design as a representative example of a commercial building with original decorative detailing drawn from the popular architectural styles of the late 19th century. The building was designed and constructed as part of an intact block on Yonge Street in the former Village of Yorkville.

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

Community - The property at 836 Yonge Street is also valued for its historical association with the Village of Yorkville (1853-1883), which was an incorporated municipality prior to its annexation by the City of Toronto. When the John Oram Building was constructed, it was part of the commercial district along Yonge Street serving the brick yards, breweries and related industries that formed the basis of the community.

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 John Oram Building contributes to the character of Yonge Street, north of Bloor Street where it reflects the late 19th century development of the area at the time it evolved from an independent village to a city neighbourhood along the important corridor known as Toronto's "main street."

Setting - The John Oram Building is also historically, visually and physically linked to its surroundings on Yonge Street where it is integral part of the intact group of contiguous late 19th century commercial buildings that extends along the entire block on

the west side of the street from Cumberland Street to Yorkville Avenue and marks the east entry into the commercial heart of the former Village of Yorkville.

4. SUMMARY

Following research and evaluation according to Regulation 9/06, it has been determined that the property at 836 Yonge Street has design, associative and contextual values as an important commercial building with period detailing that is historically associated with the former Village of Yorkville and supports the character and setting of the block on Yonge Street between Cumberland Street and Yorkville Avenue with the intact group of late 19th century structures that includes the John Oram Building.

5. SOURCES

Archival Sources

Abstract Index of Deeds, City of Toronto (Yorkville), Plan 355, Lots 3-6
Abstract Index of Deeds, York Township, Concession 2 from the Bay (West), Lot 21
Archival Photographs, Toronto Public Library, Toronto Historical Board, and
<https://chuckmantorontonostalgia.wordpress.com/2013/01/23/postcard-toronto-yonge-street-n-of-bloor-yorkville-town-hall-nice-version-early/> (individual citations in Section 6)
Assessment Rolls, Village of Yorkville, 1862-77
Assessment Rolls, City of Toronto, St. Paul's Ward, 1884-92 and Ward 3, Divisions 3, 7 and 8, 1893 ff.
Browne, Map of the Township of York, 1851
Building Records, City of Toronto, Toronto and East York, 1946 ff.
Cane, Topographical Plan of the City and Liberties of Toronto, 1842
City of Toronto Directories, 1851 ff.
Decennial Censuses of Canada, 1871-1891
Goad's Atlases, 1884-1923
Gross, Bird's Eye View of Toronto, 1876
Liddy, Plan of the Incorporated Village of Yorkville, 1882
Miles and Company, Illustrated Historical Atlas of the County of York, 1878
Underwriters' Insurance Bureau Atlas, Vol. 1, 1965

Secondary Sources

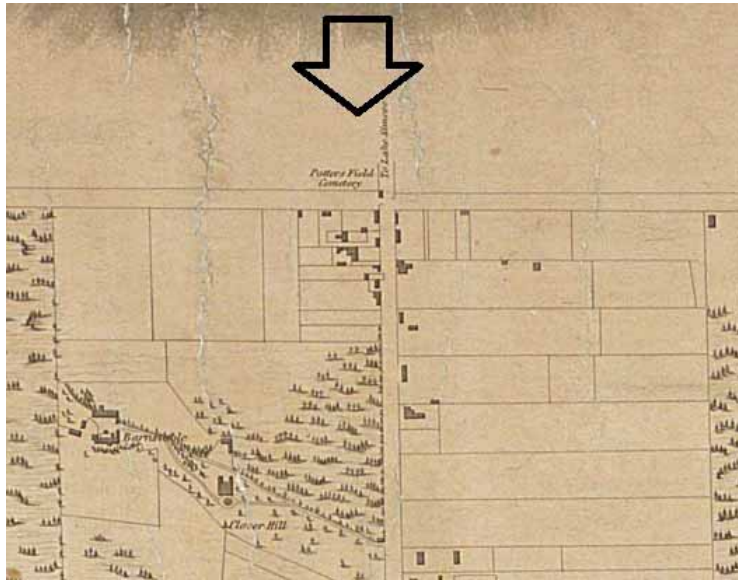
Arthur, Eric, Toronto: no mean city, 3rd ed., revised by Stephen A. Otto, 1986
Blumenson, John, Ontario Architecture, 1990
Dendy, William, Lost Toronto, 2nd ed., 1998
Hutcheson, Stephanie, Yorkville in Pictures 1853-1883, 1978
McHugh, Patricia, Toronto Architecture: a city guide, 2nd ed., 1989
Mulvany, C. Pelham, Toronto: past and present, 1884
Oram Family Records, www.ancestry.ca

6. IMAGES¹⁰ – the **arrows** mark the location of the subject property

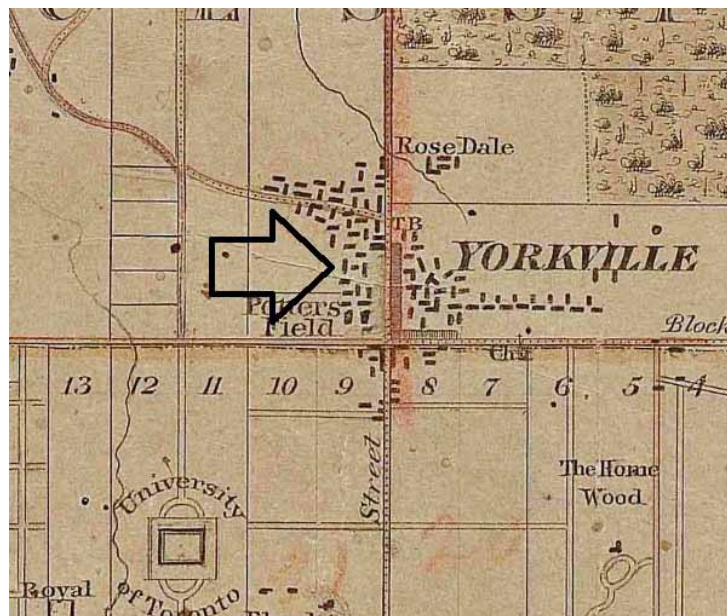


1. City of Toronto Property Data Map: showing the block on the west side of Yonge Street between Cumberland Street (south) and Yorkville Avenue (north) where the property at 836 Yonge Street is located.

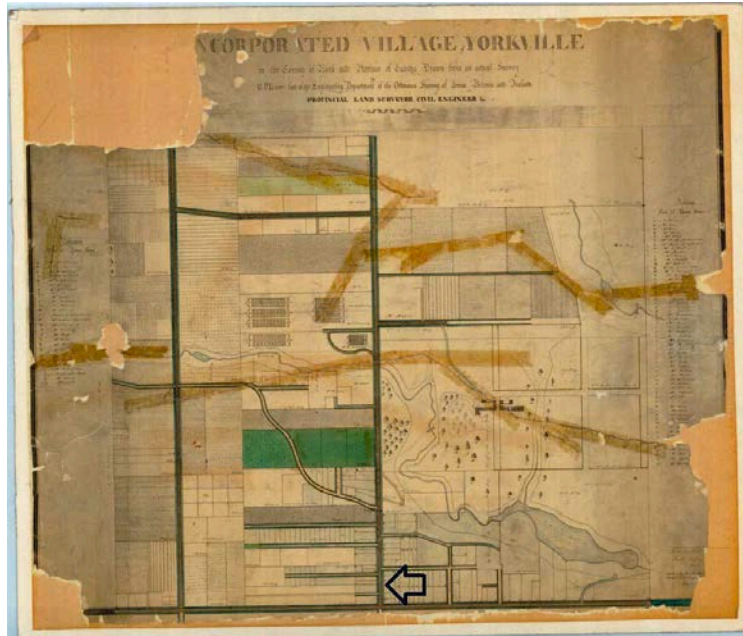
¹⁰ Additional maps and atlases tracing the development of Yorkville (but not reproduced here) are available, including those via <http://oldtorontomaps.blogspot.ca/>



2. Cane's Topographical Map of the City of Toronto, 1842: showing the area where Yorkville developed, adjoining Potter's Field and north of the City of Toronto boundary at the first concession line (Bloor Street)



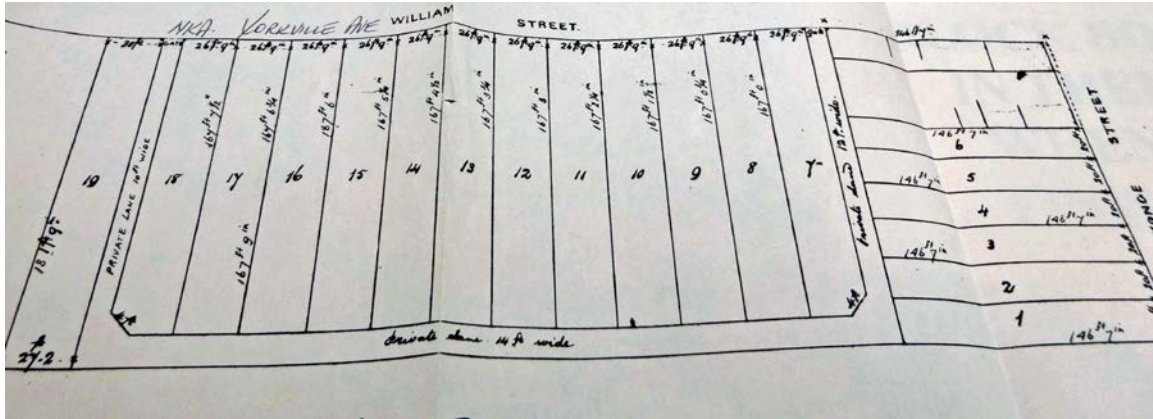
3. Browne's Plan of the City of Toronto, 1851: showing the development of the community at the south end of Township Lot 21, two years prior to the incorporation of the Village of Yorkville (other archival resources indicate a mixture of residential, commercial and small-scale industrial buildings along Yonge Street and Davenport Road)



4. Liddy's Plan of the Incorporated Village of Yorkville, 1852: showing the subdivision of lands on the eve of its incorporation as a village, including those along the west side of Yonge Street where the subject property was subsequently developed



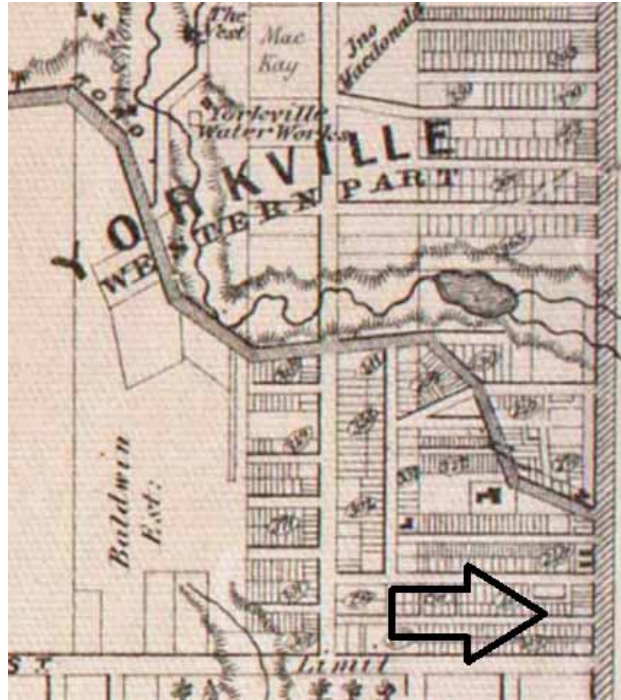
5. Archival Photograph, Yonge Street, Yorkville, 1860: showing the status of the block south of present-day Yorkville Avenue (where the entrance to the street is marked by the **arrow**) prior to the development of the John Oram Building on R. A. Parker's former estate (marked by the picket fence) (Toronto Public Library, Item 1985)



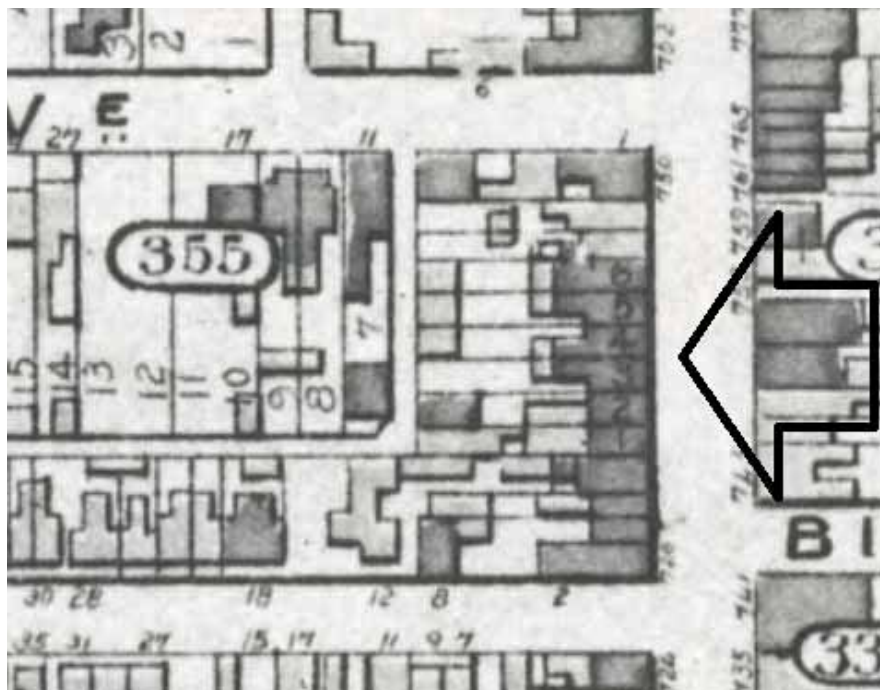
6. Plan 355, Yorkville, 1874: showing the subdivision of the Parker Estate where the John Oram Building at present-day 836 Yonge was constructed on Lot 2 (Toronto Land Registry Office)



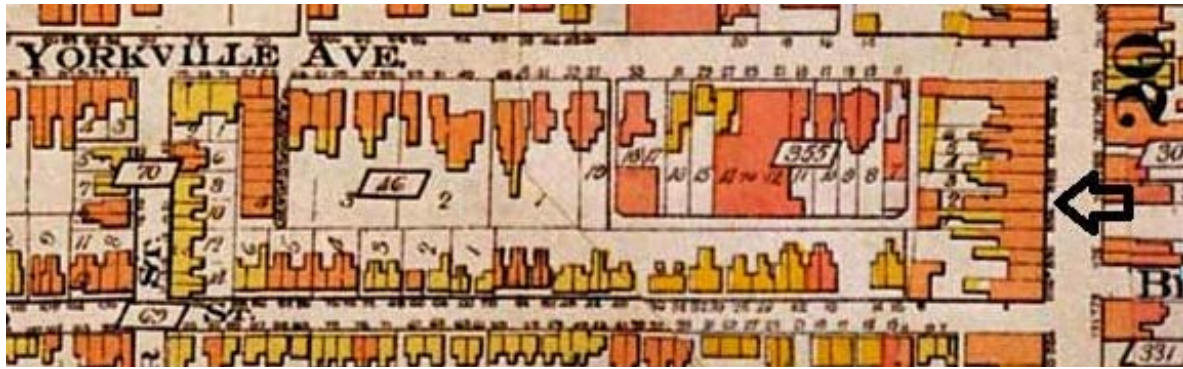
7. Gross's Bird's Eye View of Toronto, 1876: showing the west side of Yonge Street where parts of the block between present-day Cumberland Street and Yorkville Avenue were developed, including the John Oram Building at present-day 836 Yonge



8. Miles and Company's York County Atlas, 1878: showing the layout of Yorkville west of Yonge Street prior to its annexation by the City of Toronto (only major landmarks including the Yorkville Town Hall and St. Paul's Church on Yonge Street are marked on the map)



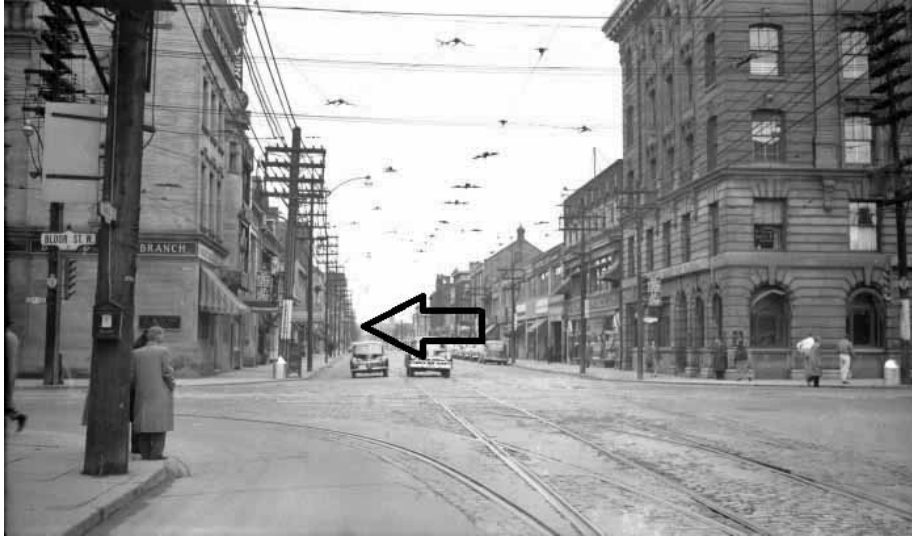
9. Goad's Atlas, 1884: showing Yorkville following annexation where the subject property is located on Lot 2



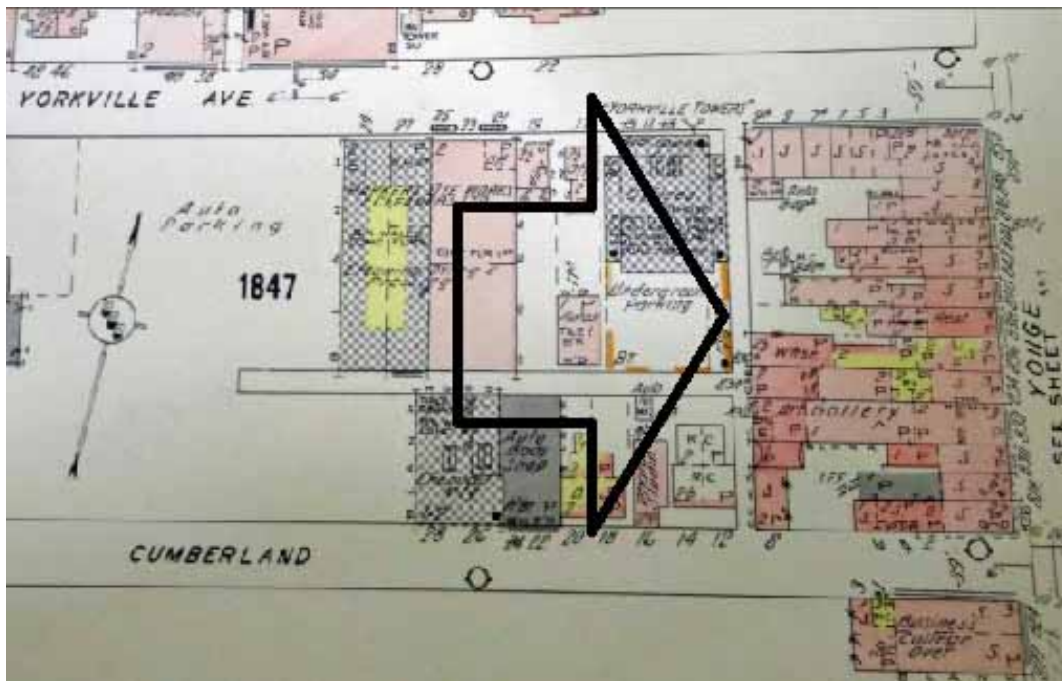
10. Goad's Atlas, 1910 revised to 1912: showing the development of the block containing 836 Yonge Street, particularly the rear (west) brick-clad wing added to the John Oram Building since the last update



11. Postcard, Yonge Street north of Bloor Street, c. 1907: showing part of the block south of Yorkville Avenue (the subject property at 836 is just out of the range of the image on the left) and its proximity to the former Yorkville Town Hall with its landmark clock tower (destroyed by fire in 1941)
[\(https://chuckmantorontonostalgia.wordpress.com/2013/01/23/postcard-toronto-yonge-street-n-of-bloor-yorkville-town-hall-nice-version-early/\)](https://chuckmantorontonostalgia.wordpress.com/2013/01/23/postcard-toronto-yonge-street-n-of-bloor-yorkville-town-hall-nice-version-early/)



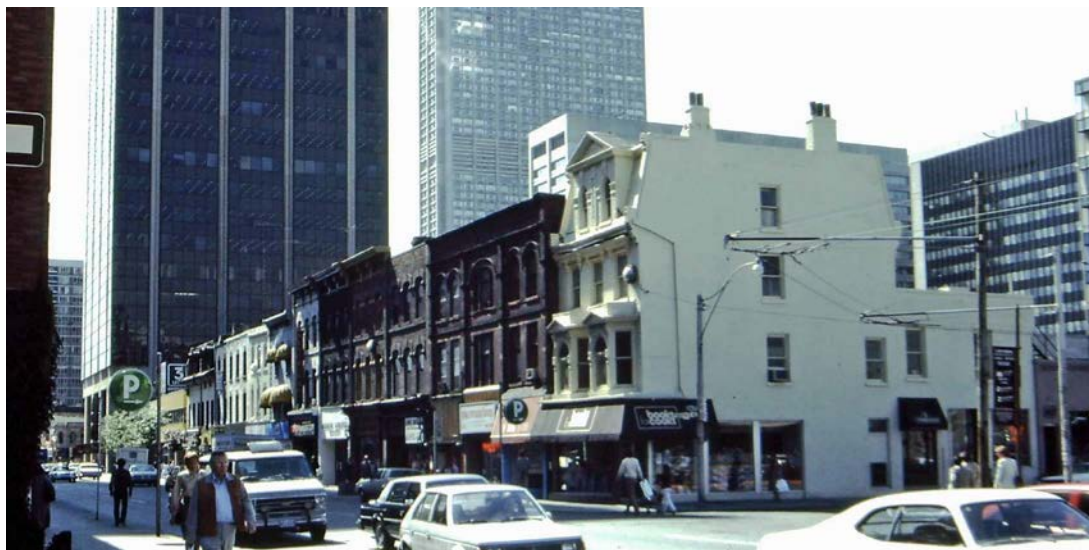
12. Archival Photograph, Yonge Street north of Bloor Street, 1953: showing the low-rise buildings along the street, including the block between present-day Cumberland Street and Yorkville Avenue (identified by the **arrow**) where the subject property at 836 Yonge is found (Toronto Reference Library, Item #1966)



13. Atlas, Underwriters' Survey Bureau, 1965: showing the status of the property at 836 Yonge Street in the block on the west side of Yonge Street



14. Archival Photograph, 1974: showing the John Oram Building at 836 Yonge Street on the far left side of the image (Toronto Historical Board)



15. Archival Photograph, 1982: showing the west side of Yonge Street, south of Yorkville Avenue (right) where the subject property at 836 Yonge is placed toward the south end of the block (Toronto Historical Board)



16. Current Photographs, 836 Yonge Street, 2014: showing the east elevation of the John Oram Building (above) and its location in the block north of Cumberland Street (below) (Heritage Preservation Services)