

**HERITAGE PROPERTY RESEARCH AND EVALUATION REPORT**



**JAMES WEIR BUILDINGS**  
846-848A 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 James Weir Buildings (identified by the **arrow**); cover: east elevations of the properties of 846-848A Yonge Street (Heritage Preservation Services, 2014)

<b>846-848A Yonge Street: James Weir Buildings</b>	
ADDRESS	846-848A Yonge Street (west side, south of Yorkville Avenue)
WARD	Ward 27 (Toronto Centre-Rosedale)
LEGAL DESCRIPTION	Concession 2 FB, Part Lot 21
NEIGHBOURHOOD/COMMUNITY	Yorkville
HISTORICAL NAME	James Weir Buildings
CONSTRUCTION DATE	1892
ORIGINAL OWNER	James Weir, merchant
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 found <sup>1</sup>
DESIGN/CONSTRUCTION	Brick cladding with brick, stone, wood & metal detailing
ARCHITECTURAL STYLE	See Section 3
ADDITIONS/ALTERATIONS	See Section 3
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

<sup>1</sup> The building permit does not identify an architect, and no reference to the properties was found in the Globe's tender calls

## 2. BACKGROUND

This research and evaluation report describes the history, architecture and context of the properties at 846-848A Yonge Street, and applies evaluation criteria to determine whether they merit 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
1847	Harrison Routledge acquires land on the west side of Yonge Street between present-day Cumberland Street and Yorkville Avenue
1851	Routledge is recorded on Lot 21 in York Township in Rowsell's Directory
1853	The Village of Yorkville is incorporated
1856	The next surviving city directory after 1851 records a "general dealer" and a "comb manufacturer" as the occupants on Routledge's properties
1860	An archival photograph shows the original buildings on the subject properties
1861	Brown's Directory identifies George Scott and George Dunn as the operators of side-by-side stores on Routledge's properties, a status that is confirmed by the first surviving tax assessment roll for Yorkville in 1862 <sup>2</sup>
1874	Routledge conveys the subject properties to R. G. Barrett <sup>3</sup>
1876	A bird's eye view of Toronto illustrates the low-rise commercial buildings on-site
1878 Nov	James Weir purchases the subject properties
1883	The City of Toronto annexes Yorkville
1883 Sept	In the first tax assessment roll for St. Paul's Ward (incorporating Yorkville), James Weir is identified as the owner of a pair of 1½-storey stores
1884	The first Goad's Atlas to include Yorkville shows Weir's stores, which are the only ones in the block not illustrated as solid brick
1892 June	Building Permit #873 is issued to James Weir for "three attached two-storey-and-attic brick stores"
1892 Sept	The assessment roll compiled for 1893 taxes lists "unfinished stores" on Weir's properties
1893 Sept	A year later, Weir's stores are completed and valued at \$1700 a piece
1894	Goad's Atlas is not updated to show Weir's new brick buildings
1912	Goad's Atlas for 1910 updated to 1912 shows the brick buildings at present-day 846-848A Yonge
1927	Following James Weir's death, his executors convey the 846 Yonge to his son, Robert Weir who, in turn, sells the property to James Campagne
1930	The centre unit at 848 Yonge is retained by Jane Weir's estate
1974 Mar	The properties at 846-848A are listed on the City of Toronto Inventory of Heritage Properties

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

<sup>3</sup> Barrett was one of the executors of the Parker Estate, which owned the land where the neighbouring properties at present-day 836 and 838-844 Yonge were subsequently developed in 1874 and 1876, respectively

## ii. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### Yorkville

The properties at 846-848A Yonge Street are located in Yorkville, which originated as an independent community 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).<sup>4</sup> 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 access. Yorkville boasted 5000 residents in 1881, two years prior to its annexation by the neighbouring City of Toronto.<sup>5</sup>

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 necessitated the removal of the residential and commercial buildings along the route and their replacement by large scale developments occupied by insurance companies and medical practitioners. This activity drew small-scale proprietors 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

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<sup>4</sup> As shown on historical maps and atlases, Yorkville's boundaries encompassed parts of today's South Rosedale and the East Annex

<sup>5</sup> With Yorkville's annexation as St. Paul's Ward, two streets required new names, with Sydenham becoming Cumberland Street and William renamed Yorkville Avenue. The streets anchor the block where the subject property is found and remain primary commercial routes in the Yorkville neighbourhood

decade witnessed the community's transformation into a high-end shopping destination, supported by the conversion of remaining residential buildings into shops or their 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 No. 10 (1889) that incorporates elements from Village of Yorkville buildings, as well as the James Weir Buildings, which date to the era following the community's annexation by the City of Toronto.

### 846-848A Yonge Street

The subject properties on Yonge Street, north of Bloor Street West in Yorkville are located on Lot 21 in Concession 2 from the Bay, which was granted to military veteran and politician, David William Smith in 1798. The acreage was immediately sold to John Elmsley, the Chief Justice of Upper Canada, whose widow began selling portions of the tract in the 1820s when Levi Fairbanks acquired a large parcel with frontage on Yonge Street. The subject sites underwent two changes in ownership prior to 1847 when Harrison Routledge purchased the land.<sup>6</sup>

Routledge evidently developed the sites immediately, as Brown's Directories for 1851 and (after a gap) 1856 recorded commercial businesses in this location, and an archival photograph dating to 1860 illustrated a pair of 1½-storey structures (Image 5). These buildings evidently remained in situ following the sale of the properties in 1874 and again in 1878 when James Weir acquired the sites, which were described as 1½-storey stores according to the 1884 assessment roll (the first compiled after the annexation of Yorkville).

James Weir (1841-1927) was an Irish immigrant and Yorkville merchant, who continued to operate a boots and shoes business on the opposite side of Yonge Street after acquiring the subject properties. In June 1891, Weir received a building permit for "three attached two-storey-and-attic brick stores" at 846-850 Yonge Street valued at \$5300 (Image 11).<sup>7</sup> The structures were described as "unfinished stores" in September 1892, but occupied a year later when the next assessment roll was compiled. In 1896, Weir sold the northernmost unit (848A Yonge) to Charles Frogley, owner of the neighbouring property at 850 Yonge Street (Image 12). Following James Weir's death in 1927, his family immediately sold the southernmost unit at 846 Yonge, while retaining the centre block at 848 Yonge. The James Weir Buildings are illustrated in the historical images found in Section 6 (including those numbered 12-17).

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<sup>6</sup> Rutledge, who acquired other land in Lot 21, sold part at the rear of the subject properties to R. A. Parker in the early 1850s

<sup>7</sup> Construction was not underway in September 1891 when the assessment roll was compiled. The next year, Weir's properties were numbered at 846-848½ Yonge, despite the reference to "850" on the building permit

### iii. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Current photographs of the properties at 846-848A Yonge Street are found on the cover and in Section 2 and 6 of this report. The James Weir Buildings are a row of three-storey commercial buildings with architectural detailing inspired by the Romanesque Revival style that was adopted for commercial buildings at the close of the Victorian era. The style was popularized in Toronto in the 1880s when the Ontario Legislature, (Old) Toronto City Hall, and the Confederation Life Building were either in the planning stages or under construction following international design competitions.<sup>8</sup> Romanesque Revival detailing, particularly the oversized round-arch motif was adopted for institutional, residential, industrial and commercial buildings throughout Toronto.

Although the James Weir Buildings were developed in 1892 after the other buildings in this block, they complement them with their scale, setback, materials and elaborate detailing. Clad with red brick with brick, stone, wood and metal trim, the principal (east) elevations of the row are cohesively designed around the Romanesque round-arched motif and feature a single-bay centre building at 848 Yonge flanked by the structures to the south (846 Yonge) and north (484A Yonge) that are organized as two bays. The three buildings are separated by brick pilasters with stone trim that rise to the rooflines where parapets with decorative basketweave brickwork and metal cornices unify the trio. Above the first (ground) floor storefronts, which have been altered over time, the south building at 846 Yonge and the building at 848A Yonge are identical in their two-bay design with pairs of flat-headed openings with continuous stone lintels and sills in the second storey and pairs of round-arched openings with brick hood moulds and stone sills in the fourth floor (the windows have been replaced). The centre bay has an oversized flat-headed opening in the second floor and a monumental round-arched opening above with detailing similar to that introduced in the flanking units. Stone and brick band courses extend across the three structures. The side walls are shared by the neighbouring buildings to the north and south. The rear (west) extensions are not identified as heritage elements.

### i. CONTEXT

The location of the properties at 846-848A Yonge Street is shown on the property data map attached as Image 1. The James Weir Buildings are situated on the west side of Yonge Street near the north end 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 19<sup>th</sup> century commercial buildings, with the James Weir Buildings replacing an early pair

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<sup>8</sup> The style was often dubbed "Richardsonian Romanesque" for American architect H. H. Richardson (1838-86), who adopted the round-arched motif and heavy masonry from late 10<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> century European precedents in his designs for institutional and commercial architecture. While Romanesque designs were not new to Toronto – the most prominent early example being University College (1856, and reconstructed after a 1890 fire) – the style's popularity surged at the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Richardson's commissions were widely publicized in architectural periodicals

of shops on this site. With its neighbours, the James Weir Buildings 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 James Weir Buildings 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup>

### 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 and Early Example of a Style and Type with a High Degree of Craftsmanship** – The properties at 846-848A Yonge Street have cultural heritage value for the designs of the commercial buildings as representative examples of their type and style when they were designed and constructed as part of an intact block on Yonge Street in Yorkville. The James Weir Buildings appeared after the adjoining commercial buildings at 836, 838-842 and 850 Yonge Street, yet complemented the earlier structures with their high degree of craftsmanship and the original decorative detailing drawn from the popular architectural styles of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<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>N/A</b>
ii. yields, or has the potential to yield, information that contributes to an understanding of a community or culture	<b>X</b>

<sup>9</sup> The 1889 fire hall incorporates the tower from the 1876 village fire hall, as well as the coat-of-arms from the Yorkville Town Hall, demolished in 1941. Further west on Yorkville Avenue, several 19<sup>th</sup> 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 for Mount Sinai Hospital

<sup>10</sup> [http://www1.toronto.ca/city\\_of\\_toronto/city\\_planning/urban\\_design/files/pdf/hcd\\_yorkville\\_proposal.pdf](http://www1.toronto.ca/city_of_toronto/city_planning/urban_design/files/pdf/hcd_yorkville_proposal.pdf)



iii. demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer or theorist who is significant to a community	N/A
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No associative values are identified for the properties at 846-848A Yonge Street at the time of the writing of this report. The building permit does not name an architect. Unlike the other buildings in the block between Cumberland Street and Yorkville Avenue, the James Weir Buildings post-dated the annexation of Yorkville, so they do not contribute to the understanding of development of that community as an independent municipality.

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 James Weir Buildings contribute to the character of Yonge Street, north of Bloor Street where they reflect the late 19<sup>th</sup> 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."

**Surroundings** – The James Weir Buildings are also historically, visually and physically linked to their surroundings on Yonge Street where they are integral parts of the intact group of contiguous late 19<sup>th</sup> 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 properties at 846-848A Yonge Street have design, associative and contextual values as fine representative examples of late 19<sup>th</sup> century commercial buildings with detailing associated with the Romanesque Revival style of the late Victorian era, which support the character and setting of the block on Yonge Street between Cumberland Street and Yorkville Avenue with the intact group of late 19<sup>th</sup> century structures that includes the James Weir Buildings.

#### 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,  
<https://chuckmantorontonostalgia.wordpress.com/2013/01/23/postcard-toronto-yonge-street-n-of-bloor-yorkville-town-hall-nice-version-early/>, and



<http://cookbookstoreblog.blogspot.ca/2014/02/history-of-our-building-at-850-yonge-st.html>

Assessment Rolls, Village of Yorkville, 1862-77

Assessment Rolls, City of Toronto, St. Paul's Ward, 1884-92 and Ward 3, Division 3, 1893 ff.

Browne, Map of the Township of York, 1851

Building Permit 873 (June 10, 1892), City of Toronto Archives

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, 1891-1921

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, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., revised by Stephen A. Otto, 1986

Blumenson, John, Ontario Architecture, 1990

Dendy, William, Lost Toronto, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1998

Hutcheson, Stephanie, Yorkville in Pictures 1853-1883, 1978

McHugh, Patricia, Toronto Architecture: a city guide, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1989

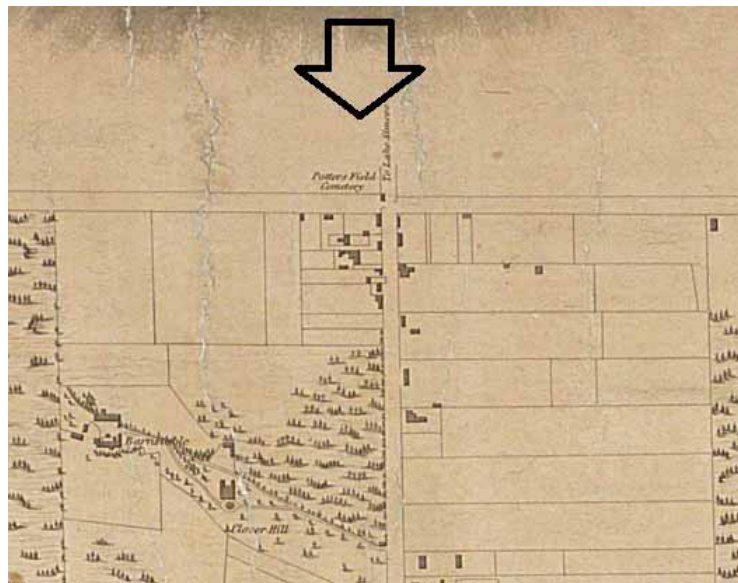
Mulvany, C. Pelham, Toronto: past and present, 1884

Weir Family Records, [www.ancestry.ca](http://www.ancestry.ca)

6. IMAGES<sup>11</sup> – the **arrows** mark the location of the subject properties



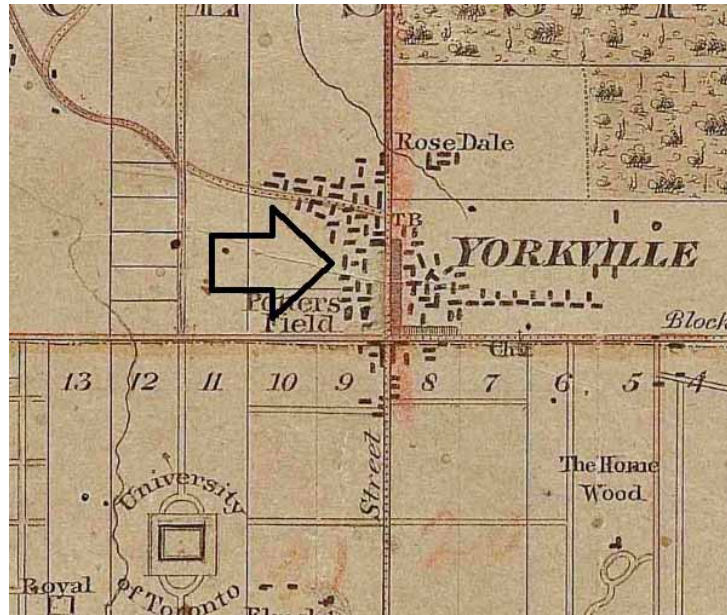
1. City of Toronto Property Data Map: showing the block on the west side of Yonge Street between Cumberland Street (south) and Yorkville Avenue (north) where the properties at 846-848A Yonge are located.



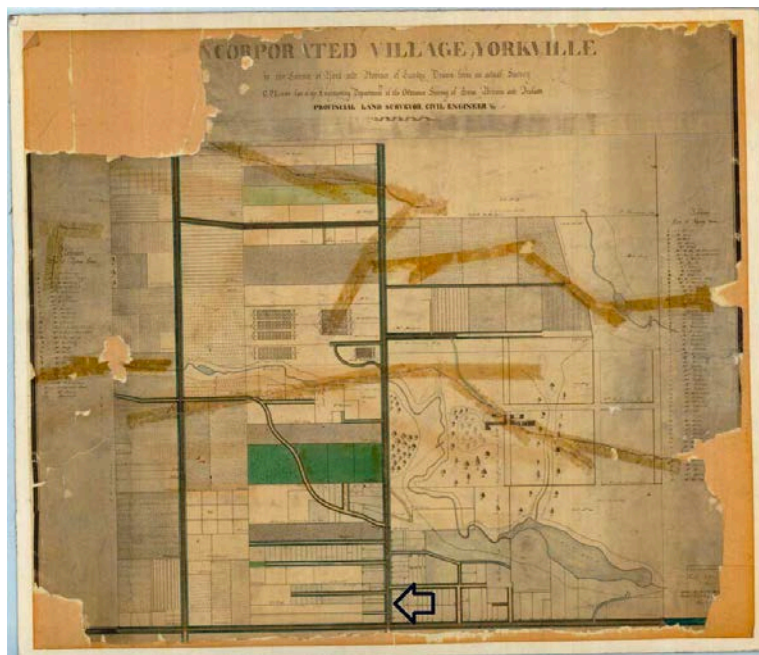
2. Cane's Topographical Map of the City of Toronto, 1842: showing the area where Yorkville developed adjoining Potter's Field and north of the City of Toronto boundary at the first concession road (future Bloor Street)

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<sup>11</sup> Additional maps and atlases tracing the development of Yorkville (but not reproduced here) are available, including those via <http://oldtorontomaps.blogspot.ca/>



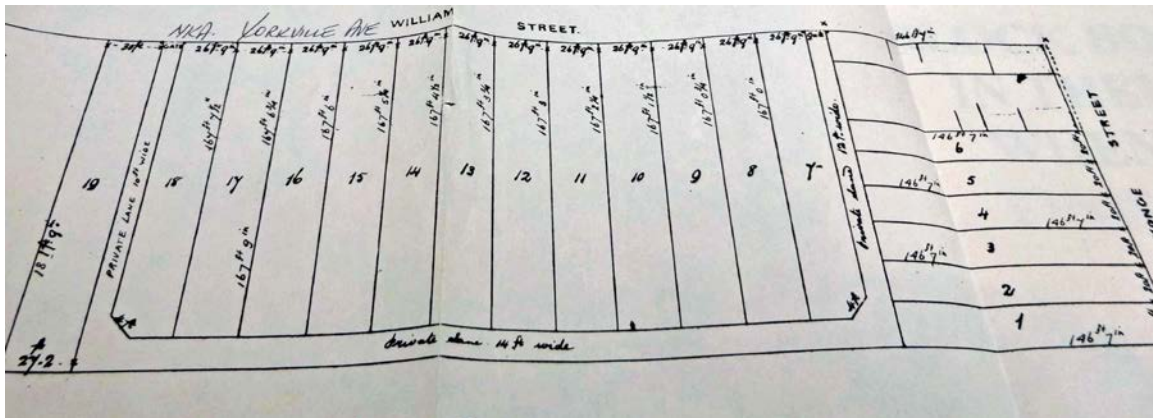
3. Browne's Plan of the City of Toronto, 1851: showing the development of the community at the south end of Township Lot 21, two years prior to the incorporation of the Village of Yorkville (other archival resources indicate a mixture of residential, commercial and small-scale industrial buildings along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



4. Liddy's Plan of the Incorporated Village of Yorkville, 1852: showing the subdivision of the lands on the eve of Yorkville's incorporation, including those along the west side of Yonge Street where the subject properties were 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** and the original low-rise stores on the subject properties are in place (right of the picket fence) (Toronto Public Library, Item 1985)

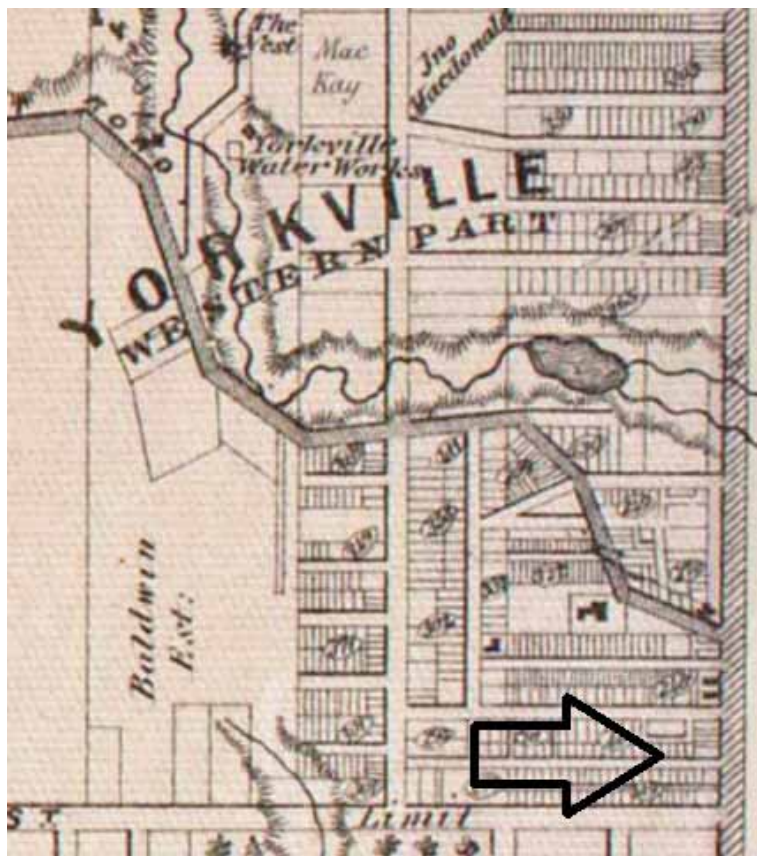


6. Plan 355, Yorkville, 1874: showing the subdivision of part of Township Lot 21, apart from the unnumbered parcel north of Lot 6 on Yonge Street where the subject properties were subsequently developed (Toronto Land Registry Office)

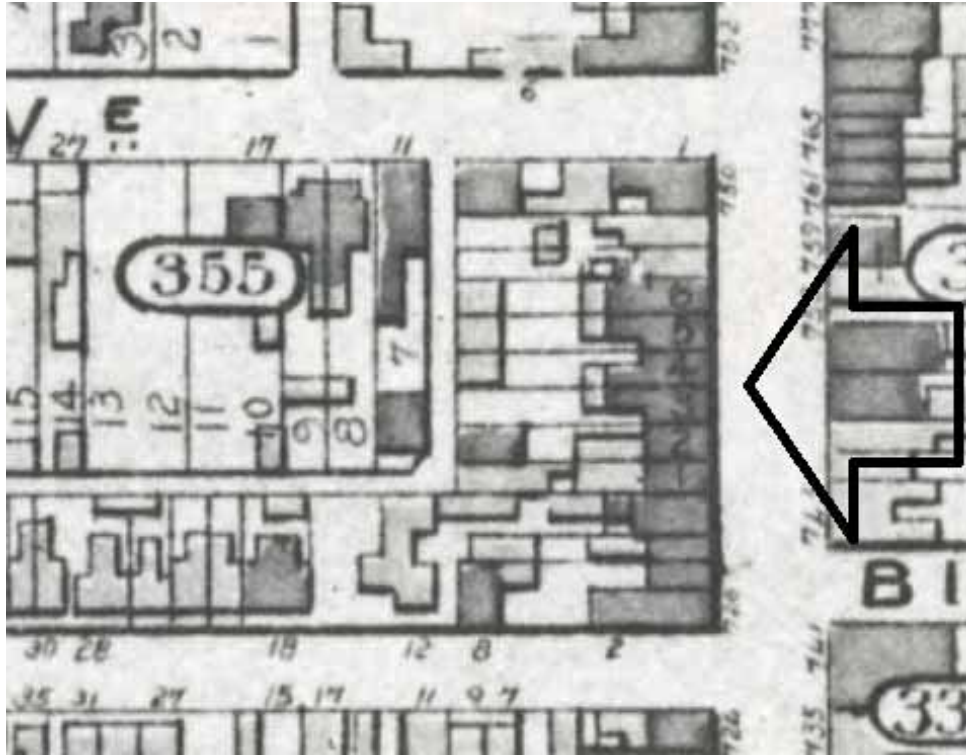




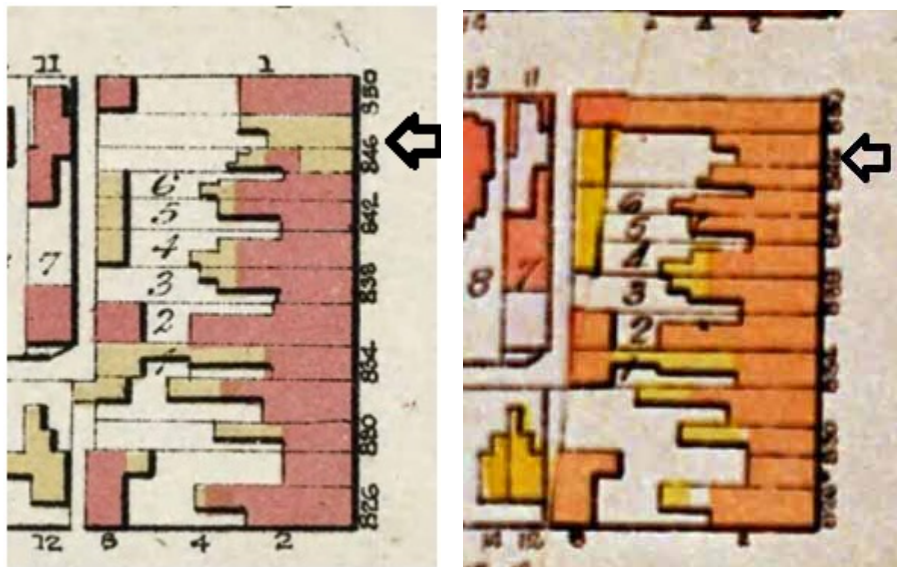
7. Gross's Bird's Eye View of Toronto, 1876: showing the west side of Yonge where the original low-rise buildings were in place on the subject properties



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)

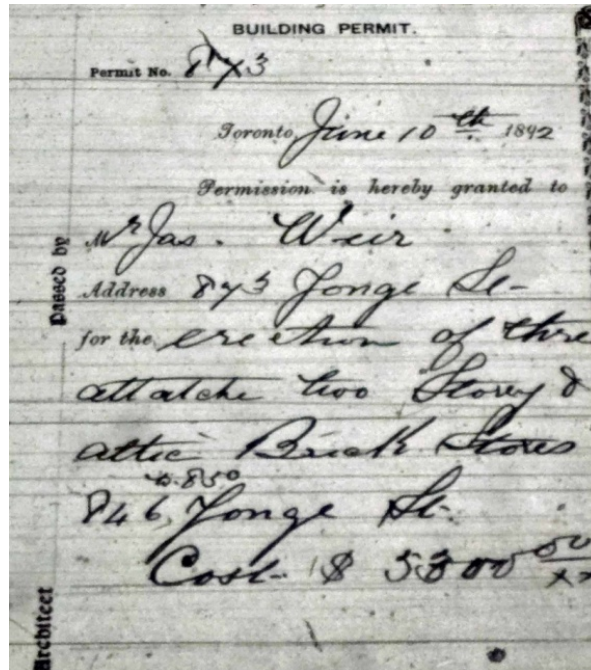


9. Goad's Atlas, 1884: showing Yorkville following annexation when the subject properties at present-day 846-848A Yonge (north of Lot 6) contained the earlier buildings on the site (which are lighter in colour than the surrounding structures)

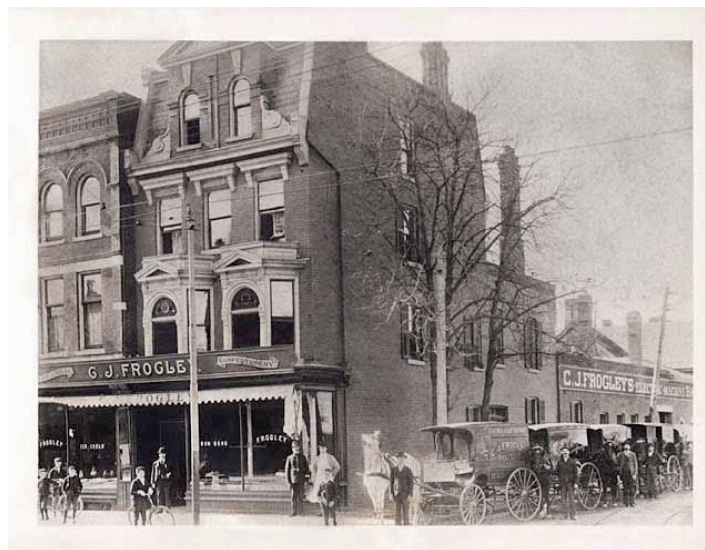


10. Goad's Atlases, 1890 (left) and 1910 revised to 1912 (right): showing the original stores on the left, which were replaced by the James Weir Buildings (1892) on the right





11. Building Permit #873 (June 10, 1892): issued to James Weir for the trio of stores now identified as 846-848A Yonge Street (City of Toronto Archives)

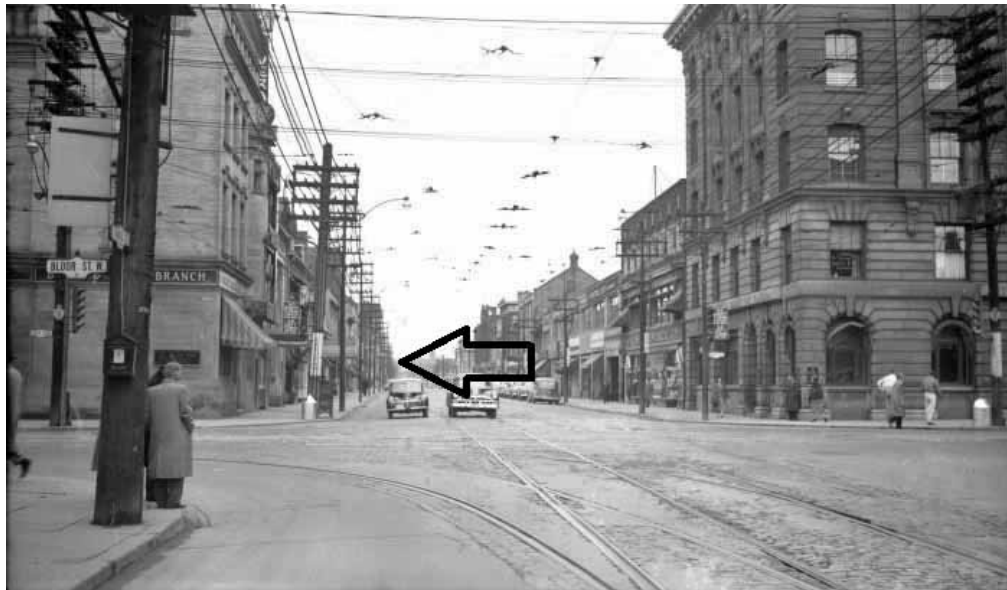


12. Archival Photograph, Southwest Yonge Street and Yorkville Avenue, undated: showing part of the James Weir Buildings (1892) at present-day 848A Yonge on the extreme left, beside the Charles Frogley Building at 850 Yonge (with extensions along Yorkville). The photograph post-dates 1896 when Weir conveyed the northernmost unit to Frogley, who extended his company's signage and awning across the east elevation (<http://cookbookstoreblog.blogspot.ca/2014/02/history-of-our-building-at-850-yonge-st.html>)

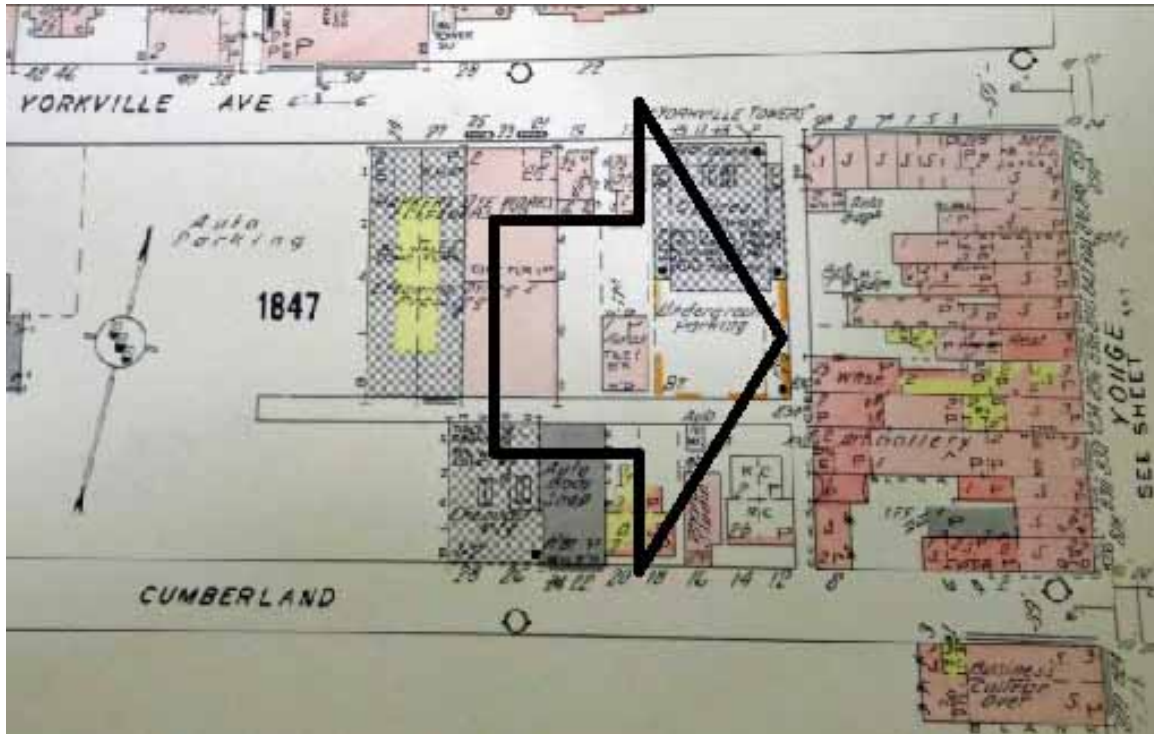




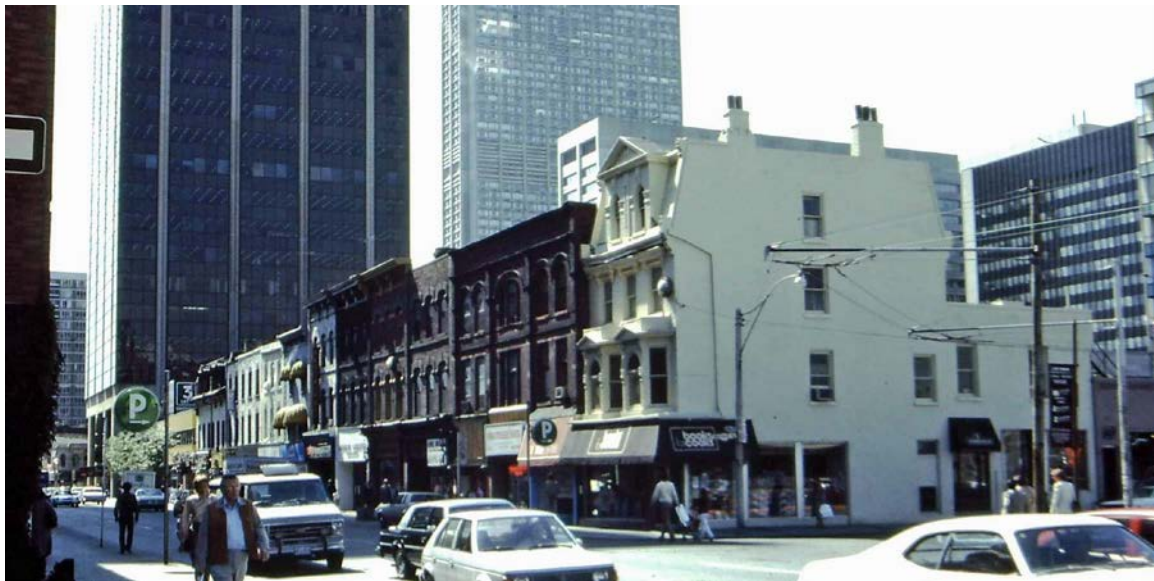
13. Postcard of Yonge Street, north of Bloor Street, c. 1907: showing the James Weir Buildings near the north end of the block and their proximity to Yorkville's town hall with its landmark clock tower (destroyed by fire in 1941) (<https://chuckmantorontonostalgia.wordpress.com/2013/01/23/postcard-toronto-yonge-street-n-of-bloor-yorkville-town-hall-nice-version-early/>)



14. 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 properties at 846-848A Yonge Street are located (Toronto Reference Library, Item #1966)



15. Atlas, Underwriters' Survey Bureau, 1965: showing the status of the properties at 846-484A Yonge Street in the block on the west side of Yonge Street

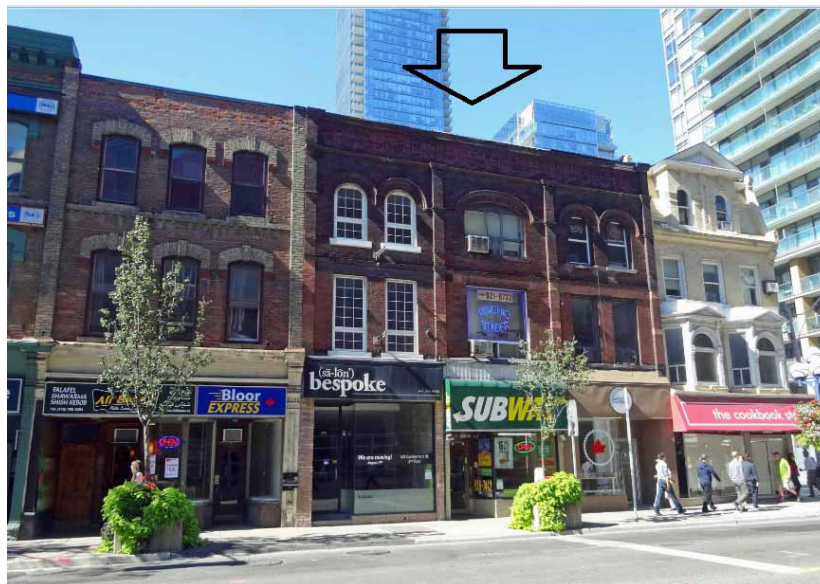


16. Archival Photograph, 1982: showing the west side of Yonge Street, south of Yorkville Avenue (right) where the properties at 846-848A are found near the north end of the block (Toronto Historical Board)





17. Archival Photograph, 1974: showing the southernmost unit of the James Weir Buildings at present-day 846 Yonge Street on the extreme right (Toronto Historical Board)



18. Current Photograph, 846-848A Yonge Street, 2014: showing the James Weir Buildings in context with the adjoining properties at 844 Yonge (left) and 850 Yonge (right) (Heritage Preservation Services)