



BIGG BLOCK

1887 - 1965

115 - 123 King St. West



DIRECTORY LISTINGS:

1890: F. Shaw & Co., dry goods (115*); T.W. Dennis, tea merchant (119*); Bradford Warehouse dry goods (123*); W.R. Bigg, insurance (2nd floor);
1895: The Fair, fancy goods (115*); James Veale, crockery (119*); Bradford Warehouse dry goods (123*);
1900: The Fair, fancy goods (115*); Joseph Lane, jewellery (119*); Bradford Warehouse dry goods (123*);
1910: M.J. Kehoe, merchant tailor (115); George Pulos, tobacco & billiards (119); A.G. Sykes, teas (123);
1913/1915: M.J. Kehoe, merchant tailor (115); George Pulos, tobacco & billiards (119); A.G. Sykes, china, teas (123);
1917/1919: M.J. Kehoe, tobacco & billiards (115); Joseph Lane, jeweller (119); Laws Cafe (123);
1921/1925: Ryan & Kehoe, tobacco & billiards (115); Joseph Lane, jeweller (119); Laws Cafe (123);
1929: J. M. Kehoe, tobacco & billiards (115); Stevens Confectionery (119); Laws Cafe (123);
1931: J. M. Kehoe, tobacco & billiards (115); Stevens Confectionery (119); Wongs Cafe (123);
1933: J. M. Kehoe, tobacco & billiards (115); Stevens Confectionery (119); vacant (123);
1935: J. M. Kehoe, tobacco & billiards (115); Palms Tea Room (119); D. Lagana, shoe repair (123);
1937/1941: The Smoke Shop (115); J.L. Scott, china (119); Bessie Logan Beauty Shop (121);
1943: The Smoke Shop (115); J.L. Scott, china (119); Bessie Logan Beauty Shop (121);
1946/1954: Nora's Beauty Shop (121); New Percival Furniture [left side];
1956: New Percival Apparel Shoppe (117); Adams Furniture [left side];
1961: Doyle's Clothing (117); Adams Furniture [left side];
1963 : Doyle's Mens Clothing (115); Singer Sewing Machine (119); Adams Furniture [left side] ?;
1965 : Doyle's Mens Clothing (115); Singer Sewing Machine (119); Adams Furniture [left side] ;

William R. Bigg had this built and was the original owner. In the Brockville directory published by J.F. Kimball in 1886-1887, his was the only name noted in this spot. As far back as 1871, W.R. Bigg was listed as the principal at Central School on King St. By the early 1880s, William was partnered with Ezra McDougall in a hardware business, **McDougall & Bigg**. Meanwhile, **E.A. Bigg & Co.** was founded in the 1870s by his father. "Notions" was the company type listed in directories. Further investigation suggests that term refers to providing space to businesses. By the time this structure was built, his son, William, had left his hardware business and was running E.A. Bigg & Co. William expanded into insurance, which he ran out of the upper floor when it was finished. He initially lived with his father upstairs in this building. William initially lived on King St. E., then moved to lived on Mill St., now the south side of John at what is now [15 John St.](#). When the Bigg Block was erected, both E.A. and William lived in the upper floors.

F. Shaw & Co. opened a dry goods store in the easternmost unit in 1887. By 1895 the business was replaced by William R. Bigg of E.A. Bigg & Co. and called **The Fair**, who offered fancy goods featuring notions (small objects attached to a finished product such as buttons, snaps, and collar stays.) William R. Bigg is listed as a manager in this establishment, although continuing his insurance business. The fancy goods store closed in the first decade after the millennium. Incidentally, Bigg also advertised it as a "departmental store" (ad below), a phrase way ahead of its time. In these days, this type of store was generally called a dry goods store. I would be after WWII that these stores were billed as department stores.

The **Bradford Warehouse** dry goods store was run by Heman Shepherd. Shepherd lived at what is now [20 Victoria Ave.](#) It was an original occupant opening in 1887 and closed in early 1900, shortly after New Years.

T.W. Dennis, tea merchant, in 1887, moved into this new building from the Kincaid Block in what is now 72 King St. W. Starting some time before 1883, this was their second of three locations. Specializing in imported tea, he also offered crockery, glassware and some groceries. By 1895, Dennis moved his business to the Merrill Block at what later would be 40 King St. W. It closed by 1900. Thomas W. Dennis originally boarded at (26*) Apple St. for several years, then moved to what is now [59 James St. E.](#)

James Veale's crockery shop had a short existence between c1892 to c1897. He lived in an upper floor in the building.

Michael J. Kehoe was a long time merchant tailor on King St. for many decades, listed as one as far back as 1871. He may not have had his own business that far back. He started out in the partnership of **Moore & Kehoe**, in the Central Block, before 1883. Around 1888, Moore left the business, and it became simply **M.J. Kehoe**. Some time in the first decade of the 1900s, the business moved across the street to this building, #115. Several family members also worked here. Kehoe originally lived on Holiday St., then moved to the Central Block above his store, then moved to the building above his store here. The store closed about 1920, with Kehoe in the tailoring business for half a century.

Occidental Cafe opened in about 1916. It was replaced by **Laws Cafe**, with Law Shue as proprietor, around 1920. They advertised "We serve an excellent dinner and supper for parties". A third acquisition, c1930, made it **Wongs Cafe**. It closed around 1932, the worst year of the Great Depression, after about 17 years and three brands.

Joseph Lane first opened his jewellery store in this block around 1897, but then moved to 12 King St. E. sometime in the first decade after the millennium. He then moved back here to the same spot, #119, from c1916 to c1927, when he closed after about 30 years in business. In the early years, Lane lived upstairs in this building, but later moved to [15 John St.](#)

Sandwiched in between when Lane left and came back, **George Pulos** opened his tobacco, cigars, billiards & shoe shine store, c1905 to c1916. He then moved to 138 King St. W., the York Building, staying there until about 1927, when it closed after about a quarter-century in business. Pulos lived upstairs in this building until he moved, and then moved his residence to [32 Andrew St.](#) This George Pulos is not to be confused with another George Pulos who was a partner in a confectionery business.

Ryan & Kehoe, tobacco & billiards, were opened by James E. Ryan and John M. Kehoe about 1920. It was in the same spot as another Kehoe business, a merchant tailor, probably his father. John had worked as a clerk in the previous tailor shop since the 1890s. He lived upstairs in the building, while James lived at [326 Church St.](#) He had worked as a clerk for many years for O.E. Quirnbach furniture & undertaker. Both had changed course in their careers, opening this. Around 1927, Ryan left the partnership, and it became **J.M. Kehoe**, tobacco & billiards. The business closed around 1936.

The **Smoke Shop** was opened by J. Frank Kehoe around 1936. He was obviously a relative of Michael J. and John M. Kehoe, continuing family ownership in yet another business here. Kehoe stated at the time "Billiards and Snooker, Tobaccoists, Etc. Shooting Gallery In Connection." This did not last long, as by 1940, it was acquired by S.H. Wilson, but managed by John Lillie. The establishment closed about 1944. It did not have any other location after it was here. A decade later, another business called The Smoke Shop (later Gardiner's Smoke Shop and Brockville Smoke Shop) opened around 1955 at 88 King St. W. It had no connection to this store, other than the name, and still operates today.

Stevens Confectionery, owned by Nicholas Stevens, existed from c1927 to c1934.

Bessie Logan Beauty Shop was in the block from around 1936. She lived upstairs in the building. **Nora's Beauty Shop**, run by Nora Slack, replaced it about 1945, but closed around 1955.

Theodore Caras opened **Palms Tea Room** about 1934. He lived with his wife Florence at [40 Broad St.](#), which no longer stands. The business was unsuccessful during the depression, as it was gone by 1936.

John I. Scott set up his china shop around 1936. He resided with his wife Edith in the [Devonshire Apts](#) on Church St. It lasted until about 1944.

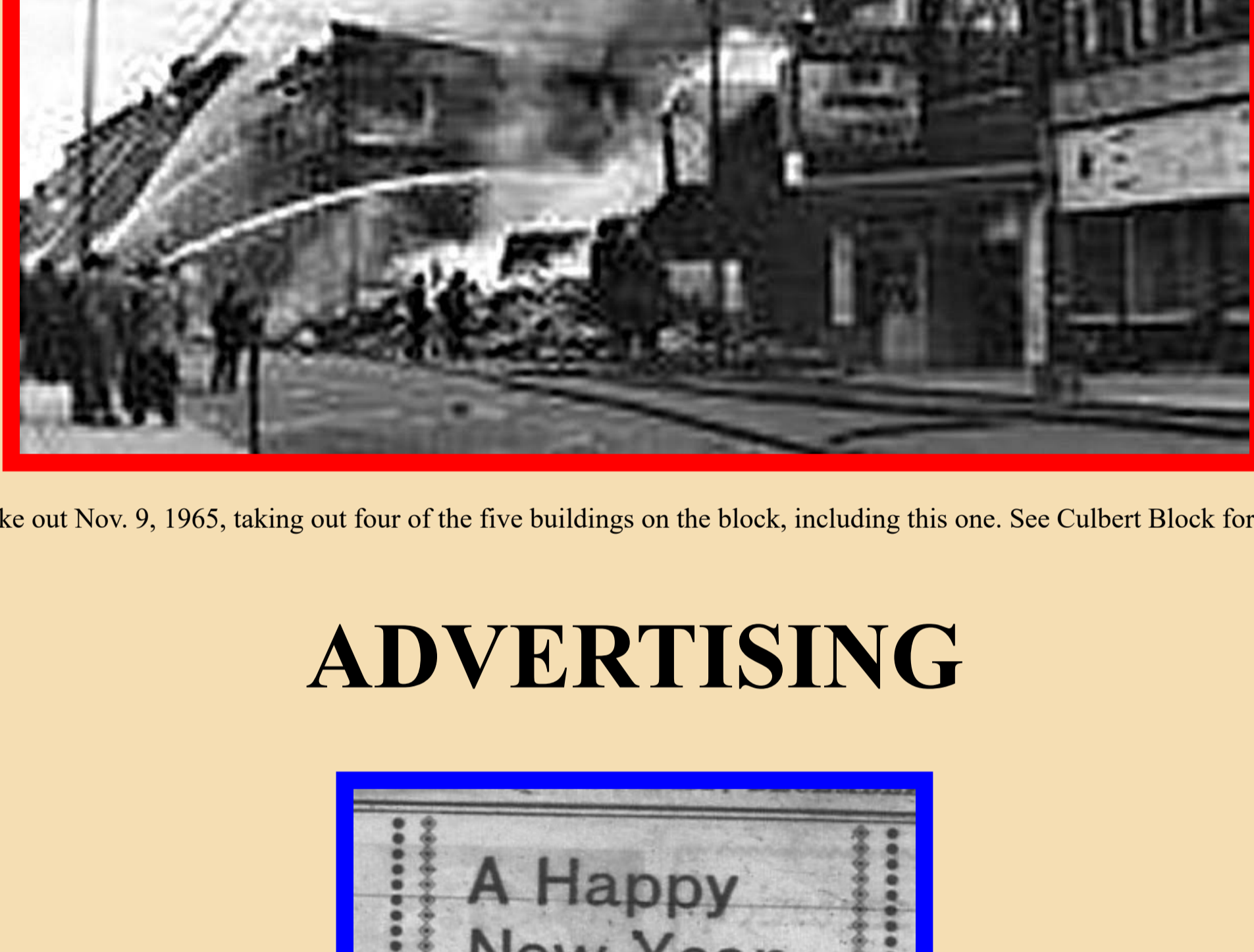
Doyle's Clothing Store opened here at #117 by John F. Doyle around 1958. It was renumbered to #115 around 1962 when Adams retracted to a smaller store. He lived with his wife Sopia in Prescott. After this building burned down in 1965, the business moved to the Central Block at 156 King St. W. Around 1970, it became **Doyle's Men's Wear and Ski Shop**. It closed around 1983.

The **New Percival Furniture** opened in the Culbert Block next door around 1936, with its eastern expansion in this building around 1945. By around 1953, the business was reduced to an **Apparel Shoppe**, only in this building. It disappeared altogether from Brockville by around 1962.

Adams Furniture opened in the Culbert Block next door with its eastern expansion in this building. They occupied space here from about 1955 until the building burned down in 1965.

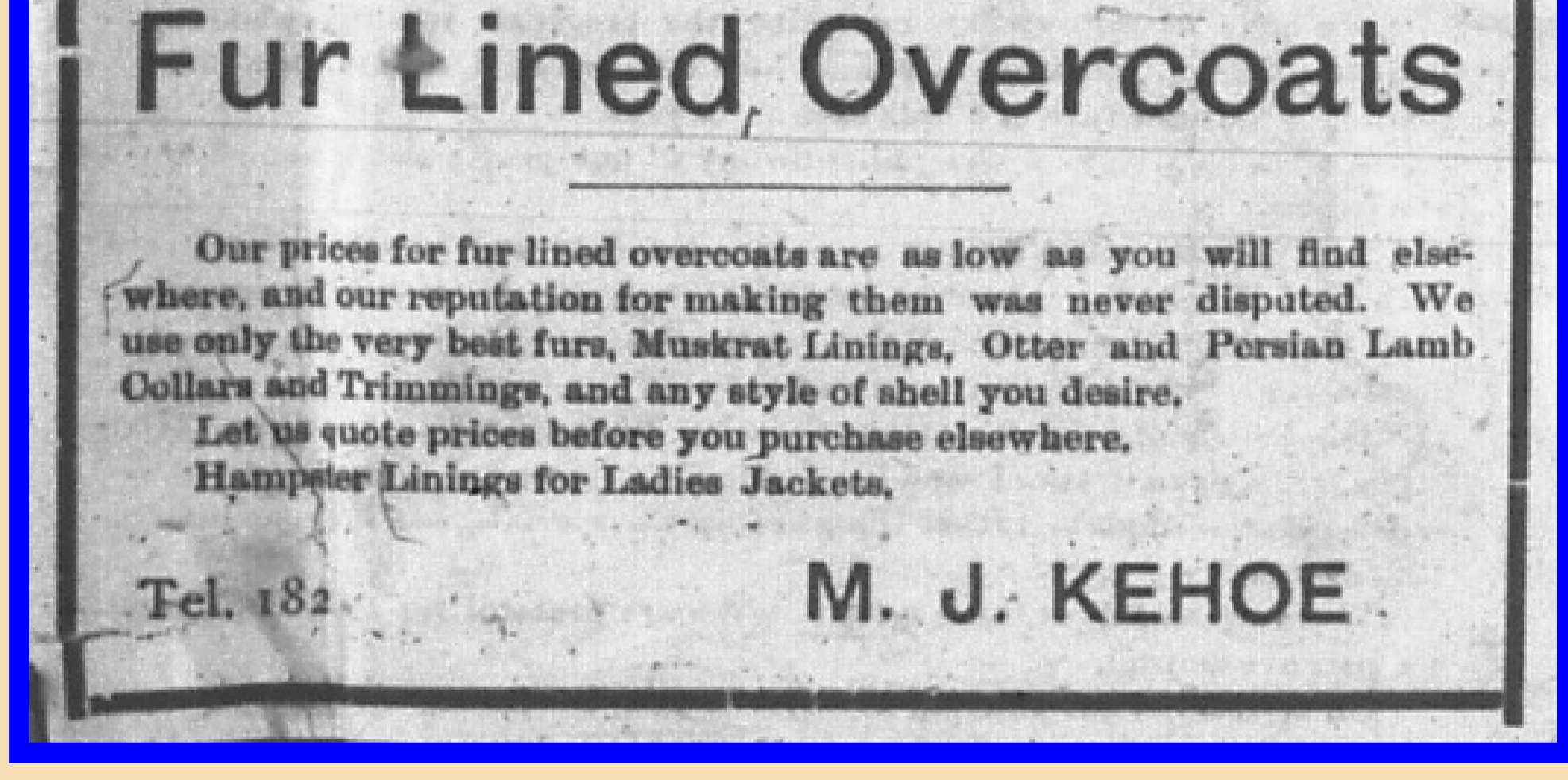
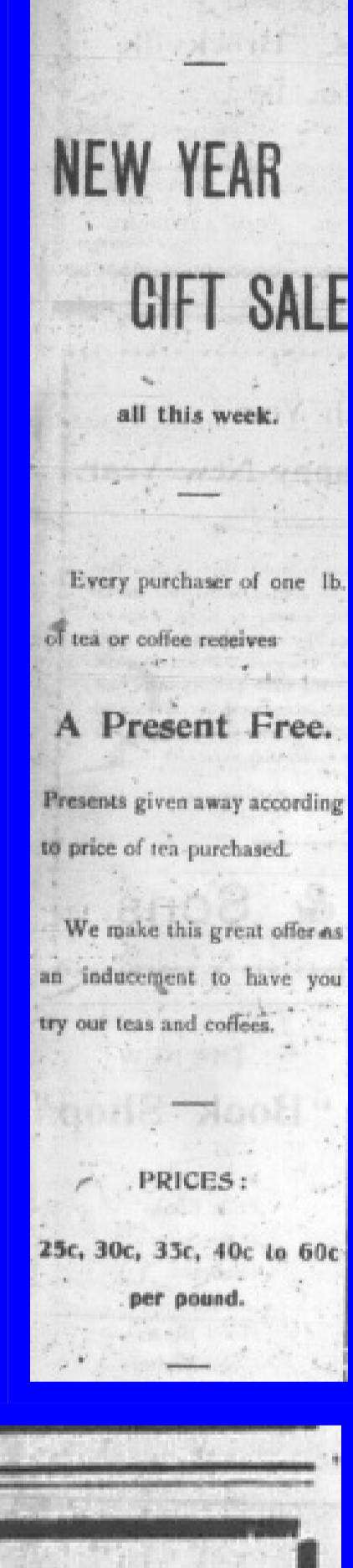
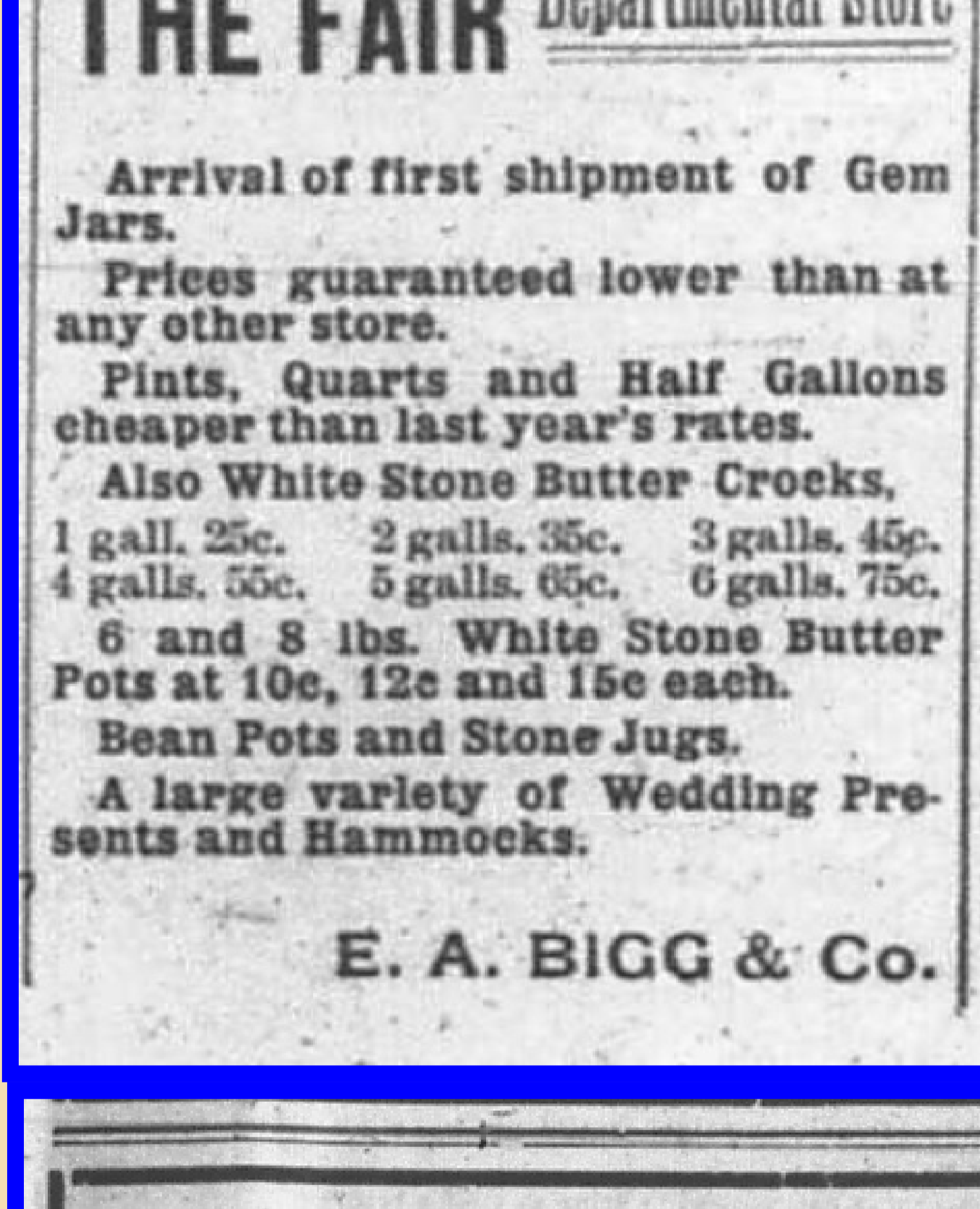
Singer Sewing Machine moved here in 1962, after its previous location in the Grand Central Hotel directly across the street, was destroyed by fire. In Singer's long history in Brockville, well over a century, this was its 6th of 7 known locations in the city. The store was managed by Allen Leeder during this period. Leeder lived with his wife Ruth at [26 James St. W.](#) The old phrase "lightning doesn't strike twice in the same place" doesn't apply here. Only three years later, 1965, the Singer store was destroyed by another fire. It would move from here north to the Brockville Shopping Centre. Perhaps, two fires in three years chased them out of the downtown area.

THE 1965 FIRE



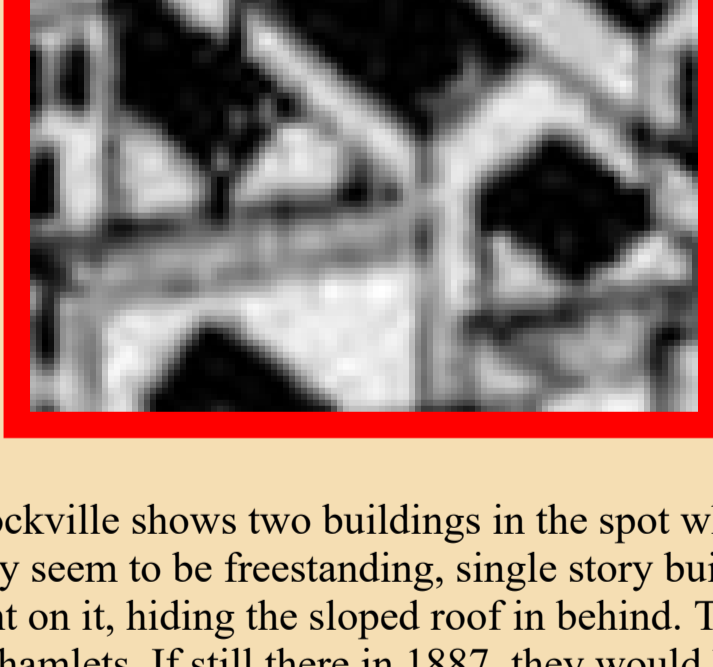
Fire broke out Nov. 9, 1965, taking out four of the five buildings on the block, including this one. See Culbert Block for more info.

ADVERTISING



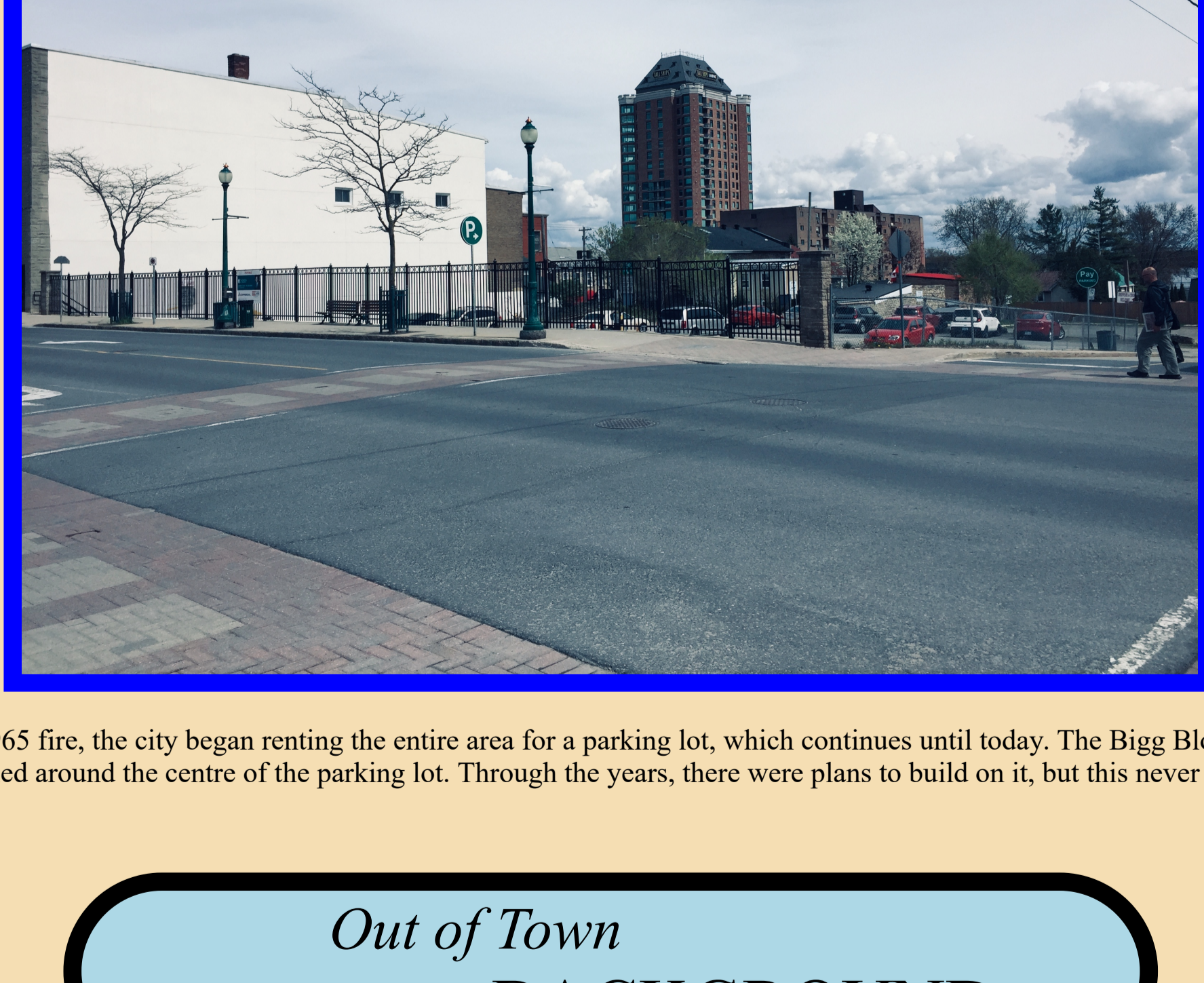
The Bradford Warehouse, dry goods, 1899; The Fair departmental store, 1899; Sykes Tea, 1903; Keyhoe merchant tailor, 1904; Percival Store, 1931; Adams Furniture, 1959;

PREVIOUS BUILDINGS



Here Heman Brosius's 1874 drawing of Brockville shows two buildings in the spot where the Bigg Block later occupied. They are seen from behind. From the drawing they seem to be freestanding, single story buildings, not attached to each other. The eastern structure has a 'fake' block style front on it, hiding the sloped roof in behind. These are often added on later, and are generally found more in smaller villages or hamlets. If still there in 1887, they would have been demolished.

REPLACEMENT



After the 1965 fire, the city began renting the entire area for a parking lot, which continues until today. The Bigg Block would have occupied around the centre of the parking lot. Through the years, there were plans to build on it, but this never materialized.

Out of Town BACKGROUND

NEW PERCIVAL FURNITURE Kingston, Ont. Only 85.3 km from Brockville



Joseph Abramsky immigrated to Kingston in 1890 and began selling linens and clothing. In 1903, he opened Abramsky's Department Store at 259 Princess St., selling mainly clothing and soft goods initially. They expanded to the second floor, selling furniture, eventually with the name **The Percival Store**. The furniture store opened in Brockville in the Central Block around 1930. Initial troubles led to this store closing, probably caused by the Great Depression. The second attempt, under the name **The New Percival Store** opened in the "Culbert" Block, later expanding next door into this building. The chain also opened stores in Belleville, Peterborough and Smith Falls. They sold furniture, stoves, radios, electric refrigerators and appliances, according to their ads. Later they added an Apparel Shoppe. Around 1955, Abramsky sold the furniture business to **Adams Furniture**, another Canadian chain. The apparel part did not go with it and continued to operate as the **New Percival Apparel Shoppes** until closing around 1958. The original Abramsky business in Kingston folded in 1977.