# TOMPKINS BLOCK
## 1880's - 1987

# 139 - 143 King St. West
# 2 Storefronts

POST 1911 FIRE

The first picture is in the 1800's, as there was a small two story building to the left. The botton picture is from after 1900 with the new Hotel Strathcona to the left. Finally, as it looked around 1950.

**DIRECTORY LISTINGS:**:

**1886:**: R. Render, bakery (135*), M. Johnston, grocer (139*), Masonic Hall (u)
**1890:**: Moore & Mowet, merchant tailers (135*), M.J. Macnamara, dry goods / George Griffin, furrier (139*), Masonic Hall (u)
**1895/1900:**: Moore & Mowet, merchant tailers (135*), W.J. Bradley, dry goods (139*), Masonic Hall (u)
**1910:**: Hotel Strathcona (extension) (135), Mowet & Jackson, tailers (139), Masonic Hall (u)
**1913:**: vacant (135), vacant (139)
**1915:**: Jeremiah Curtin, pianos, etc. (135), James Alexander, Ltd., butter & cheese exporter (139)
**1917:**: W.R. Stitt, barber (135), James Alexander, Ltd., butter & cheese exporter (139)
**1919:**: Willis Piano Co. (135), vacant (139)
**1921:**: W.H. Jones, Optometrists (135), E. Reilly, & Co. furs (139)
**1923/1935:**: Haskett's Optometrists (135), E. Reilly, & Co. furs (139)
**1937:**: Haskett's Optometrists (135), Pratt's Home Furnishings (139)
**1941/1961:**: Haskett's Optometrists (135), O'Hara Supply Co. (139)
**1963:**: F.A. Woodbury, optom (135), O'Hara Supply Co. (139)
**1966:**: F.A. Woodbury, optom (135), Atkinson's Hi-Fi Centre (139)
**1969:**: Parker's Dry Cleaners & Shirt Launderers (135), Atkinson's Hi-Fi Centre (139)
**1971:**: La Belle Boutique (135), Atkinson's Hi-Fi Centre (139)
**1973:**: Wedgewood Boutique (135), Howard's Muntz Centre, record store (139)
**1976:**: Beltone Hearing Aid Service (135), Howard's Muntz Centre, record store (139)
**1978/1984:**: Beltone Hearing Aid Service (135), The Sound Studio, record store (139)
**1986:**: Beltone Hearing Aid Service (135), The Video Place (139)

When the Tompkins Block was built by contracted, Thomas Tompkins in the 1880s. It had two ground storefronts and originally had apartments in the upper floors. In 1901, Tompkins removed the small building to the left and built the new Hotel Strathcona. At this point, the upper floors of the Tompkins Block were redeveloped as an extension of the hotel with added rooms. The two commercial stores remained on the ground floor.

The **Masonic Hall** occupied the top third floor from the time the building was built until the devastating fire of 1911. The rebuild after the fire removed the top floor entirely. The Hall moved to 3 George St. as **Masonic Temple**, taking over the old George Street Methodist Church building after it closed. It was later called **Masonic Memorial Temple** and closed around 1987.

Contracter Thomas Tompkins, who owned the building lived upstairs after 1900.

**Moore & Mowet** moved here about 1888 after a partnership and name change (previously 'Moore & Kehoe'). The current partners were James Moore and William H. Mowet. Mowet lived upstairs in the 1890s, until it was being developed as the westerly part of the Hotel Strathcona. It became **Mowet & Jackson** after Moore left and was replaced with Samuel A. Jackson. This business had many name changes, ownership changes, address changes until it became 'Ker's Mens Wear' later in the 20th century. (See Fitzsimmons Block for a fuller history)

**M.J. Macnamara** opened a dry goods store at future #139 about 1888. **George Griffin** had a furrier business here at the same time. Around 1892, it became **W.J. Bradley** dry goods after being acquired by William J. Bradley. It specialized in clothing and gents furnishings. Bradley lived at what is now 100 Bethune St.

**James Alexander, Ltd.**, butter and cheese exporter, moved to this spot about 1914. However, Alexander had a long history previously. Originally from Aultsville, ON, he started his dairy business in Brockville in the 1880s, but relocated to Montreal in 1886. He had a partner, Donald A. McPherson, in the produce firm of **McPherson and Alexander**, which had a Brockville presence. A Montreal notice stated “McPherson & ALEXANDER, Farm, Dairy, Produce and Provision Merchants, and Wholesale Dealers in Grain, Flour, Pork, Butter, Cheese, &c., &c., cor King and William; Branch Offices Lancaster and Brockville, Ont.” (Note: nothing appears in the 1800s Brockville directories; his wife was from Lancaster). After the partnership ended **James Alexander, Ltd.** opened a branch location in the Castle Block #167 King St. W. c1907 to c1914. During this period, his Brockville managers were L. McVeigh, followed by C.E. Bissell. The branch closed about 1918. Alexander retired in 1921 and died in 1942.

**Edward Reilly, & Co.** was a furrier, both in manufacturing and retail, opening in 1918. Reilly lived at 73 John St., a building that is no longer there. In 1934, he moved his furrier business off of King St. to 86 John St., a location where it stayed until the end of its life. In the early days, customers picked a skin and the coat was made to measure. Up to 4,500 coats would be stored in these days. Edward's son, Robert Lawrence, took over, followed by Robert Lawrence Junior, and finally Larry Reilly in 1982. Around 1994, the company added ready-to-wear coats brought in from Montreal, and it became 50% of the companies sales. The business closed in March 2019, with its clients taken over by two companies in Peterborough and Ottawa. It had been profitable to the end, but there was no one to take it over.

**W.H. Jones**, optometrist, opened at #135 around 1920. **K.R. Haskett**, optician and optometrist, took over around 1922. Haskett resided at 49 Wall St.. In later years, he lived at 122 Water St. E. After almost 40 years, it became **F.A. Woodbury**, optometrist. Frank A. Woodbury lived with his wife Marion at 14 Hardy Cr.. Around 1968, he moved the business off of King St. to 42 George St., ending just under a half century in the Tompkins Block. It closed about 1979.

**O'Hara Supply Co.** was opened around 1940 with Garrett E. O'Hara as proprietor. They specialized in automobile accessories, and also had tires, radios, sporting goods, bicycles, electrical appliances and musical merchandise. He lived with his wife, Eva, at 256 King St. E.. In later years, the store was managed by Leo G. Beavals. The business closed about 1965 after a quarter of a century.

**Atkinson's Hi-Fi Centre** opened around 1965 and was owned by Sidney Atkinson and T. Morgan. **Howard's Muntz Centre** was a record/tape store, part of a chain, owned by Dennis Howard and Gerry V. Johnston. It replaced Atkinson's around 1972. The store closed in 1977 as the entire chain went bankrupt. Muntz was replaced by **The Sound Studio** record store that lasted until c1985. It offered "Records & Tapes, Hi-Fi & Stereo's" and was managed by Gene D. Chymycx. Chymycz replaced the record store with **The Video Place**, a video rental store about 1985, but it didn't last long, closing around 1987.

# THE 1911 FIRE

It was the first many major downtown fires of the 20th Century and it occurred on December 27, 1911. The fire was first noticed by night clerk George McCullock and bellboy Robert Rusland of the Hotel Strathcona around 5 a.m. that morning. Much of the Tompkin's Block was part of this hotel, situated next door, for the past decade. The fire started near the grill of the hotel's bar. W.H. Brown, proprietor, and the two men got the 50 or so guests out and the fire station notified. Cheif Brady led the firefighters. Most of the two buildings were destroyed, but part of the Tompkin's Block survived with most of the front intact. The front portion left standing can be seen in the middle of the above photo.

The Brockville Loan and Savings Company owned the Tompkin's Block at the time of the 1911 fire (below). After the fire, it was rebuilt, the third floor with it's fancy top (and Masonic Hall) removed. What was left survived another 70+ years.

# STOREFRONTS

Haddad

OHARA'S
SEEDLING
TREES

ATKINSON'S

*(Last two cut-out's from a Doug Grant photo)*

# ADVERTISING

MAIN STREET JOBBING SHOP.

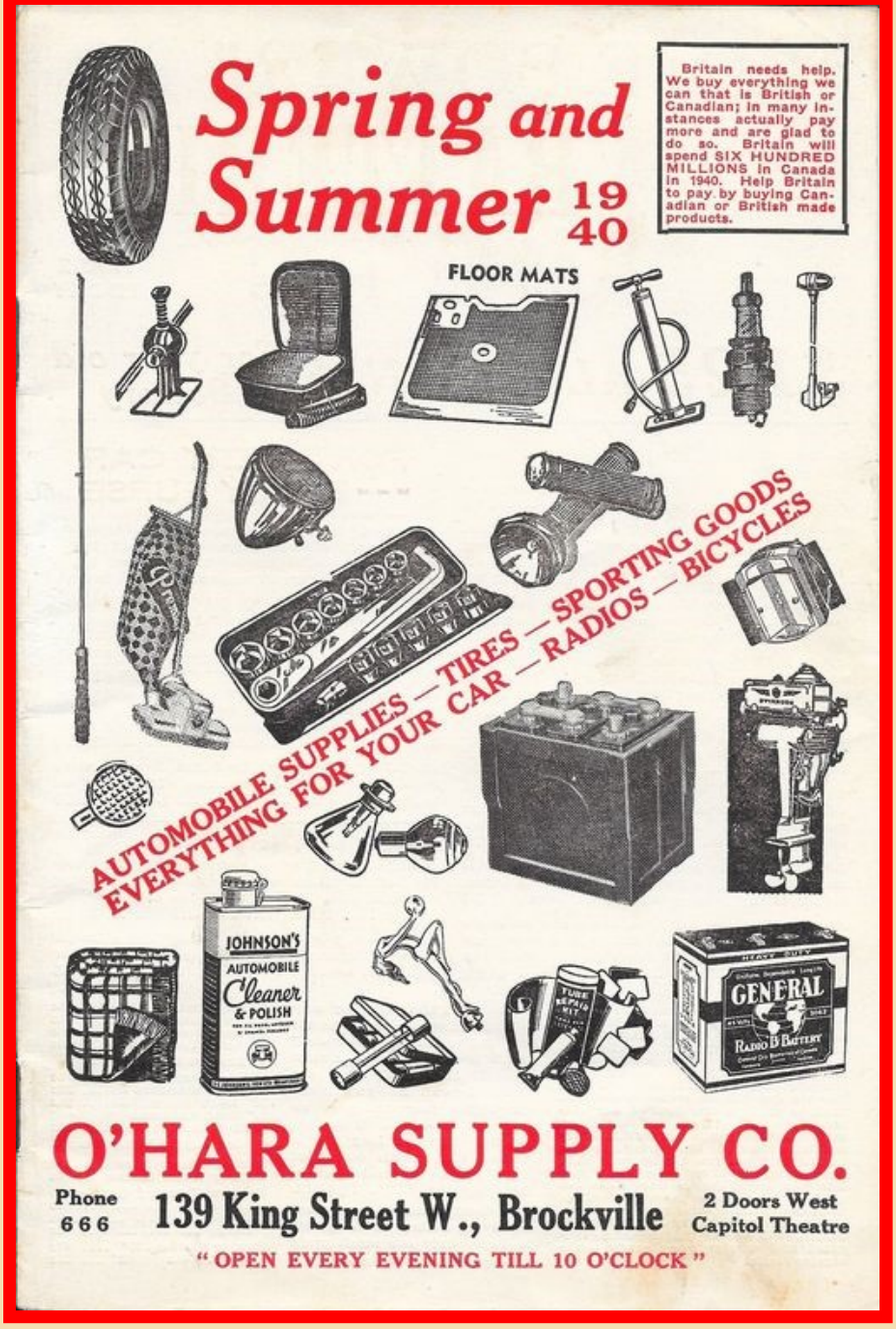
THOMAS E. IRVINE,

JOINER AND CABINET-MAKER.

*Church Furniture A Specialty. Designs always on View*

All orders promptly attended to and work executed in a workman-like manner. Particular attention paid to orders from out of town.

264 KING STREET WEST, BROCKVILLE.




Irvine Cabinet Maker, 1887; O'Hara Auto Supply, 1940;

# PREVIOUS BUILDING

Previous to the building of the Tompkins Block, the lot seemed to be occupied by the easterly portion of a larger building shown in a cut out from Herman Brosius 1874 Bird's Eye View Map of Brockville. The western part survives as the Wright Block next door. You are looking at the back of it.

# THE REPLACEMENT CANADA TRUST BLOCK

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The westerly half of the Canada Trust Block currently occupies the former Tompkin's Block spot from 1987 onward.

*Out of Town*
BACKGROUND

# MUNTZ CANADA

## Toronto, Ont.

### 358 km from Brockville

**Earl "Mad Man" Muntz / Toronto's Yonge St. flagship store**

Earl "Mad Man" Muntz was a flamboyant character, a businessman and engineer, promoting cars and consumer electronics. One of his many early ventures was a company building sports cars, the Muntz Jet. He generated publicly with his alter ego "Mad Man" personality in television commercials, with outrageous claims and stunts. Muntz introduced car stereos and developed the Muntz Stereo-Pak, a 4-track cartridge that played in them. Lear Industries fine-tuned this into the 8 track cartridge that became the rage of the 1970s. Everyone had a player installed under their car dash. Selling televisions since 1947, Muntz hit is stride installing the car stereos and then selling the 8 tracks that played in them.

David Hoffman saw the rise of Muntz in the U.S. and thought it could be duplicated here. His Canadian operation was a separate company that had no connection with the American operation except for providing the idea, purchasing product from the same Japanese suppliers, and securing the rights to the Muntz name in Canada. Getting those rights in 1965, he started operations in 1967. Hoffman opened his flagship store (above) in Toronto on the corner of Yonge and Dundas, competing directly with his two largest competitors, A&A and Sam The Record Man.

Muntz began publishing the Muntz Tape Guide in 1974 and given out free at the stores. Published quarterly, it was a comprehensive 8 track tape listing guide, of every tape available, that filled the need that record companies had been complaining about.

Every baby boomer has memories of their under dash car stereo beginning to wear out and start skipping. To remedy this, maintain tightness, and ensure proper play, you had to tuck a pack of matches underneath or to one side of the cartridge. If you did not see those matches, you knew they had a fairly new unit! After all, you had to blast your tunes while cruising down Main St. It was a rite of passage during this era.

The chain saw rapid expansion during the 1970s, with 158 stores in 1974 and hit 180 outlets by its end. The chain went bankrupt in June 1977. It was probably due to too much expansion, two quickly. More importantly, it also did not help that their emphasis was on 8 track tapes, which began going out of fashion by that time. A rapid rise and fall in a single decade.

*(Information from this piece gathered from several copies of Billboard Magazine and RPM Magazine)*

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