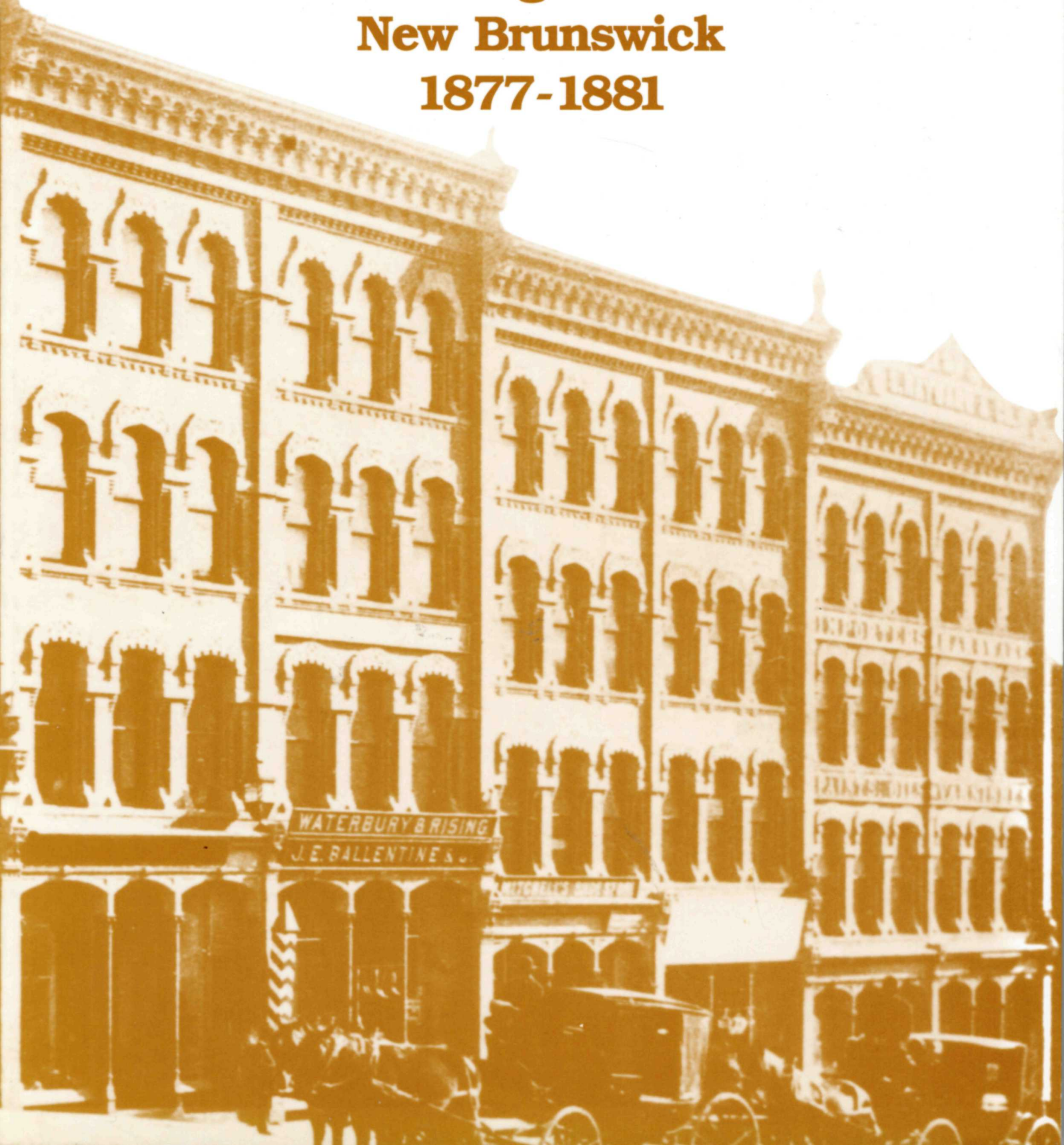


C. Anne Hale

**The Rebuilding of Saint John
New Brunswick
1877-1881**



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New Brunswick

1877 - 1881

by

C. Anne Hale

Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada

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Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum

To

W. Ernest Hale
1927 - 1986

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Foreword

The preliminary research for this study was carried out more than ten years ago and was originally intended to provide a catalogue listing of the buildings constructed following the Great Fire. It soon became evident, however, that both the quantity and the quality of information uncovered were sufficient to produce a detailed manuscript treating this episode in the architectural development of the city. The author, then an historian with the Architectural History Branch of Parks Canada, was invited to develop and refine the work, and to enhance the product with such illustrations as were available and appropriate. The results of this effort were sufficiently impressive that Parks Canada offered the manuscript to the then New Brunswick Historical Resources Administration for publication.

This monograph is to date the only comprehensive survey of the dramatic changes in the city's architecture as a result of the fire. A miscellany of structures — representing a century's growth in technology and design — was swept away. The post-fire buildings incorporated the benefits of the current construction materials and workmanship, and the varied decorative elements of the late Victorian style. The city's wholly transfigured appearance was unlike that of any contemporary urban setting in British North America.

Based largely upon information gleaned from newspaper reports, this study conveys not only an intimate view of the process of rebuilding, but also the responses and opinions of the citizenry. The accompanying photographs present a most rich and varied selection for this examination. The reader will enjoy this work for both the commentary and the illustrations of Saint John and its people over one hundred years ago.

No attempt has been made to regularize the spelling inconsistencies of nineteenth century writers, nor to correct the abbreviation "St. John", used frequently in referring to the city. The editorial pages of the day flowed with good humoured argument and angry outcry, colourfully evocative of the range

and intensity of emotions stirred by the disaster and the decisions which ensued.

The tragedy of the Great Fire touched the entire populace to a greater or lesser degree. W. Franklin Bunting, clerk of assessment for the city, managed to save most of the records of his office. His personal belongings, however, were entirely lost. In early July he wrote his brother, "Since the fire, I have been working on the Public Relief Committee and assisting as far as I could to provide for the hundreds of miserable devils without food, employment, or shelter; the many scenes I have witnessed have been soul-agonizing."¹ The diary of eighteen-year-old Ida Harding provides this brief but telling account:

June 20

Fine....A fire commenced in town about two o'clock this afternoon. Before it stopped it took from York Point to the Barracks Wharf. The whole of St. John. In fact one might say all, for all the business part is gone.... The fire was dreadful. Uncle James Harding was burned out and also Aunt Hammond, Mrs. Caldwell, Dr. Ring. Ma's three aunts at the Lower Cove...were burned to death.

June 21

Lovely day. Fire still burning.²

For most people, however, the impact of the fire was not to fade as quickly as it appears to have done for the young Miss Harding. The losses of life and livelihood, of homes and personal belongings, and of public buildings and official records would long remain a sad and fearful memory.

Many individuals have offered both interest and support in the final production of this book. Warmest appreciation is extended to all who have contributed.

—Editor

¹P.A.N.B., MC 1103, W. Franklin Bunting to Stephen Bunting, 8 July 1877, transcript, p.4.

²Transcribed in Elizabeth W. McGahan, ed., *Whispers from the Past: Selections from the Writings of New Brunswick Women* (Fredericton: Fiddlehead Poetry Books & Goose Lane Editions Ltd., 1986), p.45.

Acknowledgements

Much of the research for this report was conducted at the New Brunswick Museum, the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick and the Harriet Irving Library at the University of New Brunswick. The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the staffs of these institutions.

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Abbreviations

NBM	New Brunswick Museum
PANB	Provincial Archives of New Brunswick
PANS	Public Archives of Nova Scotia
MT	<i>Monetary Times and Trade Review</i>
SJDT	<i>Saint John Daily Telegraph</i>

Introduction

The Great Fire of 1877 in Saint John, New Brunswick was the most devastating conflagration in the history of the city and ranked as one of the most destructive urban fires in 19th century North America.¹ Saint John was one of the most prosperous cities on the continent in the mid-nineteenth century. The staple industries of the community had traditionally been shipping, shipbuilding and lumbering. By the 1870s, however, the conversion from wooden vessels to iron steamers and iron ships for the transportation of goods around the world had led to the collapse of the trade in wooden ships.

The decline of shipbuilding had a serious effect on the lumber business. "Either of the two troubles was enough to destroy anything but a strong commercial centre and a sturdy people", observed one contemporary writer, "but they came not upon St. John singly, nor unaccompanied with other calamities."² On 20 June 1877 two-thirds of the central portion of the city was destroyed by fire. Along with most of the central business district, many grand public buildings and private dwellings were lost. Documents relating to family histories, church and business records, and photographs were consumed in the disaster. Such was the magnitude of destruction that a number of insurance companies went bankrupt.

As a result of the great number and importance of buildings destroyed, the need for their replacement was urgent. By June 1881, the city had been rebuilt; in fact, the buildings erected during the four and one-half years of large scale reconstruction outnumbered those standing before the fire. It was an unprecedented and since unrepeatable period of building in the city. Several factors combined to determine the process of rebuilding. Elaborate building regulations were passed at an emergency session of the provincial legislature which opened on 29 August 1877. At the same time a system of building inspection was established for the rigid enforcement of the new building code. Architects and workers crowded the city during the building boom and competition was fierce. A greater quantity and variety of construction materials were available at this time than during any other period in the city's history. The outcome, at the end of four years, was a dramatically new architectural view of Saint John. Many of the buildings of this period today dominate the older architectural landscape of the central part of the city.

The present study, based chiefly on an examination of the *St. John Daily Telegraph*, describes this significant juncture in the city's architectural history and the

elements which produced it. In the absence of any standard interpretation of the city's reconstruction, newspapers were regarded as an important source. No modern study of the post-fire architecture has yet been compiled which relies extensively on contemporary newspapers and photographs. Because the photographic and written record of the poorer class of home is extremely limited, this study concentrates on the central part of the city, where the more expensive buildings were located.

Four major daily newspapers were published in Saint John during this period: the *Daily News*, the *Globe*, the *Daily Sun* and the *St. John Daily Telegraph*. The *Daily News* began in 1839 as the *Morning News*. Its founder was an advocate of Liberalism and responsible government. By 1863 it was the largest morning paper in Saint John.³ The *Globe* was started in 1858. Between 1867 and 1913 it was under the editorship of the outspoken John V. Ellis, who supported the Liberal party until Confederation, and thereafter the anti-confederation section of the party.⁴ The *Daily Sun* did not appear until 1878, and upheld the interests of the Liberal-Conservative party. In 1910 it was sold to the *Telegraph*.⁵

Politically a Liberal newspaper with an ironically large circulation among Conservative supporters, the *Telegraph* was founded in 1862 as a weekly and tri-weekly by John Livingston, editor and owner. Livingston "began a new era in journalism in Saint John by giving much attention to local news, thus increasing ... circulation very rapidly".⁶ With control of both the *Telegraph* and the *Presbyterian Advocate*, Livingston and his successor as publisher, William Elder, had a circulation of about twenty thousand each week, "the largest output for advertising medium east of Montreal in Canada".⁷

Until his death in 1888, William Elder published the *Telegraph*, with noted New Brunswick historian James Hannay as associate editor. The *Telegraph*, with its emphasis on local matters in reporting as well as editorial comment, as opposed to world or national politics, was chosen as the best single source of information on the city's reconstruction. The *Telegraph* supplied the public with contemporary building information in the form of detailed descriptions of various public, private and industrial buildings under construction. General articles on building progress and lists of new buildings appeared in the paper, both throughout the reconstruction years and in lengthy annual reports on building progress for the four-year period examined.

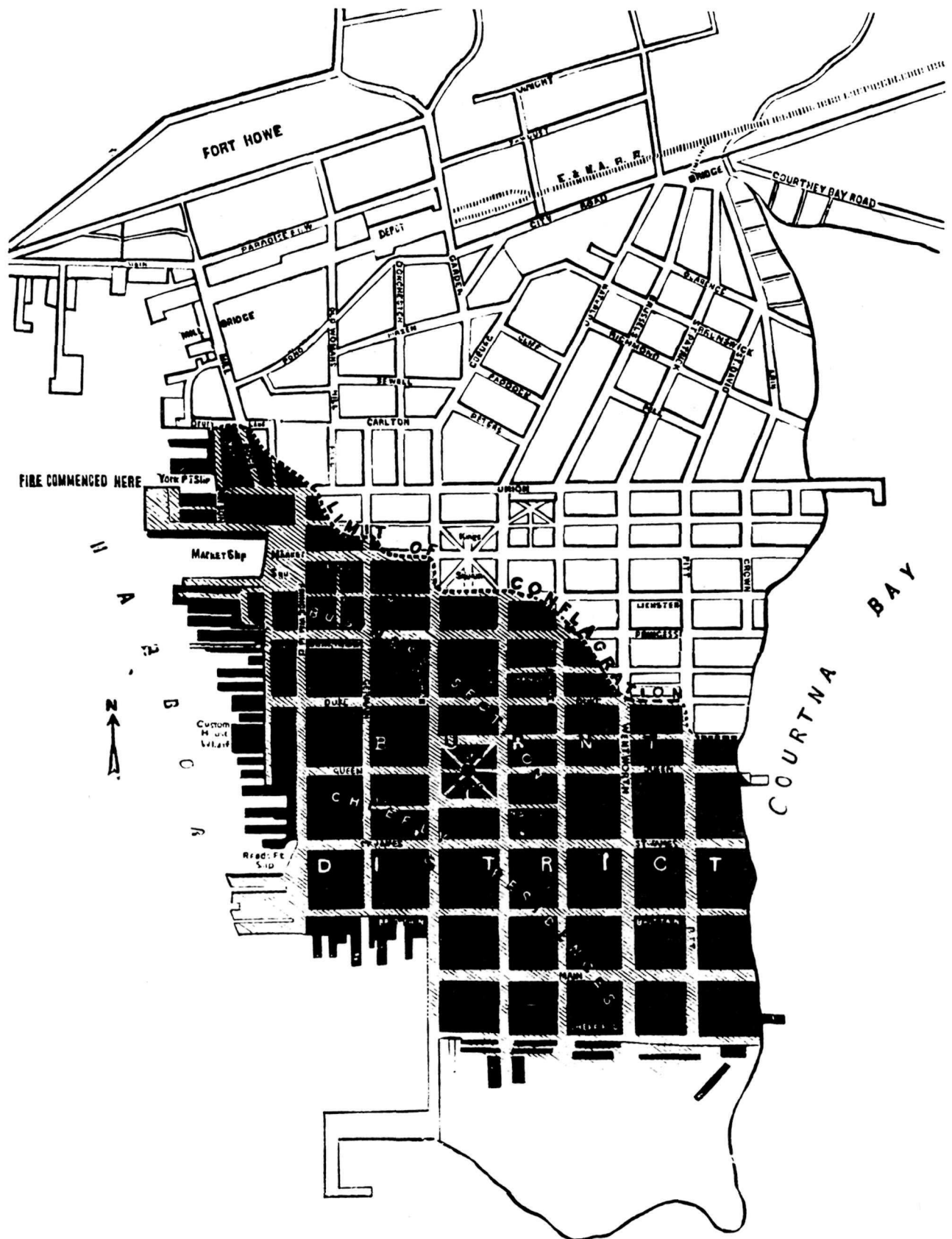
The *Telegraph* also served as an advertiser for architects, builders, labourers, artisans and materials. Since Saint John itself could not supply sufficient numbers of architects and labourers for the initial stages of such a large scale reconstruction program, articles on these visitors' origins, arrivals and departures were numerous. Information relating to architects and builders included announcements of their partnerships and their previous professional experience. Building renditions and floor plans of some of the major new buildings were reproduced in the *Telegraph*. As a reflection of public attitudes, a vehicle of public information, a record of daily changes, and a participant in public debate, the newspaper's role is particularly significant. Its editor strongly supported the new building law, giving detailed reports of both the infractions and the penalties imposed.

Although the *Telegraph* (20 June 1877 to the end of 1881) represents the major source of information for this study, other documentation was consulted in order to broaden the perspective. A less thorough reading of its competitors was made, particularly for supplementary editorial comment in annual reviews of building progress. The *Monetary Times and Trade*

Review, a weekly insurance journal published in Toronto, provided information on the insurance companies and related matters. George Stewart's *The Story of the Great Fire in St. John, N.B., June 20, 1877*, published shortly after the event, contains a detailed and illustrated summary of the immediate effects of the fire. R.H. Conwell's *History of the Great Fire in Saint John*, another early although less detailed account of the fire, was also examined. The new building regulations as well as the earlier regulations (1872) were described in the *New Brunswick Acts*. The "Report of Edward Willis, on the Manufacturing Industries of Certain Sections of the Maritime Provinces", published in the federal *Sessional Papers* of 1885, offered illumination on the economic development of Saint John from 1860 to 1885, with emphasis on the late seventies and early eighties. The Willis report combines tables, interviews with Saint John businessmen, and a lengthy analysis. Various photographic collections including those of the New Brunswick Museum, the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick, several American institutions, and the Architectural History Division, Parks Canada were consulted. A representative sample is included.

Notes

- 1 John C. Weaver and Peter De Lottinville, "The Conflagration and the City: Disaster and Progress in British North America During the Nineteenth Century," paper presented to the Canadian Historical Association, 1977, p. 1. The authors refer to the two Quebec fires of 1845, which left 20,000 homeless; the fire in St. John's, Newfoundland, in 1846, which burnt out over half the populace of 20,000; and a fire in Montreal in 1852, which rendered 10,000 homeless. "The Greatest Disaster in the City of Saint John," *Globe* (Saint John), 31 December 1911, p. 1. Although the cities of Chicago and Boston both suffered serious conflagrations in the early 1870s, Saint John's losses were particularly heavy, in that the fire struck both business and residential districts.
- 2 Canada. Parliament, "Report of Edward Willis, on the Manufacturing Industries of Certain Sections of the Maritime Provinces" in *Sessional Papers, 1885* (Ottawa: McLean, Roger & Co., 1885), Vol. 18, No. 37, p. 42.
- 3 J. Russell Harper, *Historical Directory of New Brunswick Newspapers and Periodicals* (Fredericton: University of New Brunswick, 1961), p. 78.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 62.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 92.
- 7 *Ibid.*



1. Area burned in the Great Fire of 1877

Frank Leslie's Illustrated News, Supplement (New York: 7 July 1877)

The Extent of the Fire

The fire king claimed tribute from the people of the rock-bound districts of the mouth of the St. John River, and two-thirds of St. John City, acknowledging his demand, were on the 20th June, 1877, laid in ashes at his feet.¹

Fires were a major factor in the architectural evolution of most North American urban centres in the 19th century; their susceptibility was determined in large part by the predominance of wood as a building material. Saint John, a typical example, has an early history liberally punctuated with frequent fires. In January of 1837 the city's main business district, then centered chiefly about Market Square, Prince William and Water streets and the wharves, burned. One hundred and fifteen buildings, including nearly all of the mercantile houses, situated near the harbour front, were destroyed and losses totalled a half-million dollars. Fire again swept through the business district in 1840, and a blaze in the same year claimed 60 houses in Portland, a community just outside the city limits. A year later, another fire in the business section caused the loss of four lives and 40 buildings. During the 70-year period prior to 1877, the block at York Point, situated at the west end of Union Street, on the northern line of the city (fig. 1), had burned six times.² It was at York Point that the Great Fire appropriately began.

In the afternoon of Wednesday, 20 June, a spark ignited in a bundle of hay in Mr. Fairweather's storehouse on the south side of York Point Slip, next to McLauchlan's boiler shop. Fanned by a strong north-east wind, the fire skipped easily through the York Point district, consuming the buildings on Hare's Wharf and sweeping up Smythe Street, along Drury Lane, Mill and Dock streets. The area was densely inhabited by poorer families, and contained a large number of warehouses. Built closely together, the buildings consisted of two or three storeys, with numerous stoops and outhouses.³ Here, where the lanes and alleys were narrow and all of the buildings constructed of wood, thoroughly dry from the heat of the previous weeks, the fire found "highly agreeable food."⁴ Resisting the fire fighting effort, the flames spread from Chipman Hill down to the harbour (fig. 2). According to one report:

Nothing seemed to materially check their progress. Brick buildings had wooden cornices, wooden sashes, unprotected by iron shutters, or wooden outbuildings attached, affording an easy entrance to the fire, and when once within the flames were sucked up the flue-like spaces between the bricks and plaster, made openings for themselves at the top, then roared madly as they fed on lath and beam.⁵

The neighbouring town of Portland sent its fire engine and firemen, and an engine was brought from Carleton by ferry boat. The fire fighting effort was widely criticized. The *Daily News*, for example, described the firemen as having been "too ambitious" in concentrating on saving individual buildings, or in attempting to put a fire out on one side of the street at a time, instead of preventing it from spreading. They seemed to have "little or no idea of putting out fires or rendering them harmless by tearing down the burning structure." The fire fighters spent hours on flammable attachments rather than the main buildings, "on a wooden shed that might be torn down and drenched in the gutter in ten minutes."⁶

At its peak, the light of the fire could be seen from as far away as Moncton and Fredericton. As the destruction progressed, so did the confusion and desperation among the people, resulting in scores of incongruous episodes. A fire department official was charged with taking two engines from their proper place in the fight and moving them to his own house, "vainly attempting to save it although risking the loss of a hundred houses by doing so."⁷ One merchant boasted that he had saved the key to his office; the building in which his office had been located, however, was razed.⁸ As more and more of the city succumbed to the advancing flames, the Bank of New Brunswick threw open its vaults to all for the storage of their currency and bonds, and when the building went, a large number of people were financially ruined. One witness reported that the safes dropped into the cellar, and the following day when they were opened, the overheated contents exploded. The amount lost, described in the *Telegraph* as "hot cash," was never known.⁹ In the aftermath, the dilapidated Marine Hospital (fig. 3) at the corner of Wentworth and St. James streets attracted much attention; it was "... an oasis of wood in this desert of ashes."¹⁰ According to one source, the structure was mistakenly saved by a crew that had been dispatched to preserve a newly built residence.¹¹ For some time, the hospital had been slated for demolition; now, all that was left of St. James Street was ironically "... the meanest public edifice in the city, a mere wreck of decaying wood."¹²

Many of the homeless escaped on rafts into Courtenay Bay, taking with them their household effects (fig. 4). The International Company's steamer, *New York*, the Carleton ferry boat, several tugs, and the *Empress* carried hundreds of refugees to Partridge Island and to Carleton, while others were fed and sheltered aboard the ships, boats and steamers overnight.¹³

After about forty hours, the fire abated. The scene, as viewed from elevated points in the area, was one of “unrelieved desolation” (fig. 5). According to a contemporary account, there was:

. . . nothing but ruin - brick, stone, mortar, charred wood - On three sides of this desolation there is water, and on the other rises the remainder of the town. Heaps of coal and other material tenacious of fire still flame up in many places, and smoke rises from almost every heap of debris, making lurid and ghastly effects by night and day. A pile of broken mortar-marked bricks, a jagged section of brick wall, a stone basement with a heap of ashes within, or a chimney standing like a sentinel in the desert, is all that remains of thousands of homes in which men, women and children lived, of factories in which hundreds earned their daily bread, of churches in which the people worshipped, of shops in which trade was carried on.... More houses are in ruins than were built in the first half century of the city's existence.¹⁴

It was estimated that the fire had swept 290 acres, 83 of which were in Queen's, 73 in Duke's, 95 in Sydney and 39 in King's wards.¹⁵ Streets and squares which were partially or totally destroyed numbered thirty-nine¹⁶ (App. A; see for example, Germain Street before and after the fire, figs. 6 & 7). Of these, 21 were razed, “. . . not one house being left throughout their whole extent”.¹⁷

The remainder, other than King and Pitt streets, had no more than a block left, and in most cases only about two or three homes survived. The total length of streets destroyed was about ten miles.¹⁸

The number of families that had been burnt out was calculated in July 1877 by the *Telegraph* to have been 2,780, and the dwellings consumed, approximately 2,000.¹⁹ Nothing was left of Queen Square, one of the wealthier residential districts (figs. 8 & 9). With few exceptions, the manufacturing establishments, situated on the outskirts of the city, escaped destruction, but losses fell heavily upon the mercantile interests. Vast stores of provisions had been entirely consumed in the early hours of the fire, and merchants in all branches of business were destroyed. The principal

dry goods dealers, major grocers, ship brokers, commission merchants and those trading in wholesale liquors, flours, provisions, coal, salt, lumber, tea, and West India goods lost both their inventories and their premises.²⁰

The destruction of other types of buildings was also high. Three theatres — the Academy of Music, Dramatic Lyceum, and the Dock Street Opera House — were levelled.²¹ Eleven major churches were reported to have been destroyed (see ruins of Germain Street Baptist Church, fig. 10).²² Most of the leading hotels were lost. Other buildings of a public character which burned were the customs house (figs. 11 & 12), the Savings Bank (fig. 13), the Maritime Bank and the Bank of Montreal (fig. 14), the post office (figs. 15 & 16), city hall, Wiggins Orphan Institution, Temperance Hall, Home for the Aged, Protestant Orphan Asylum, Deaf and Dumb Institution, St. Malachi's Hall, the Roman Catholic Temperance Hall and a large number of school buildings.²³

When to these losses are added private buildings together with personal possessions, libraries, art collections, documents, stocks held by merchants and the enormous quantity of goods kept in bonded warehouses, the immensity of spiritual and material privation can well be imagined:

Who shall gauge the destruction of homes and firesides, the sweeping away of old landmarks, the loss of portraits of friends, of family heirlooms and of gifts and mementoes of loved ones who have gone down to the grave? . . . Yet all these have to be taken into account when we speak of the losses by the St. John fire.²⁴

Campaigning for more financial aid from federal sources for rebuilding, A.L. Palmer, a local Member of Parliament, maintained that, “Although fires were, unfortunately, very common, the one of St. John was of such an extraordinary character, that it was not likely a similar one would occur in this Dominion for another 200 years. The country has never seen a fire so destructive as that. . . .”²⁵

Notes

- 1 Canada. Parliament, "Report of Edward Willis, on the Manufacturing Industries of Certain Sections of the Maritime Provinces" in *Sessional Papers*, 1885 (Ottawa: McLean, Roger & Co., 1885), Vol. 18, No. 37, p. 42.
- 2 "The Greatest Disaster in the History of Saint John," *Globe* (Saint John), 31 December 1911, p. 1.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 *Daily News* (Saint John), 7 July 1877, p. 1.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 "The Ruins of Saint John," *Daily News*, 6 July 1877, p. 2.
- 7 "Looking Out for No. One," *Daily News*, 6 July 1877, p. 2.
- 8 "The Ruins of Saint John," op. cit.
- 9 New Brunswick Museum (hereafter cited as NBM), Pkt. 30, Box 5, Shelf 108, Great Fire of Saint John, "I saw Saint John, N.B., burn down," by Annie J. Willet, as told to Byron M. Fisher, August 1956; magazine clipping.
- 10 "The Ruins of Saint John," op. cit.
- 11 NBM, Pkt. 30, Box 5, Shelf 108, Great Fire of Saint John, "Great Saint John Fire Swept City 78 Years Ago," *Telegraph-Journal* (Saint John); newspaper clipping, n.d. [c. 1955].
- 12 "The Ruins of Saint John," op. cit.
- 13 *Daily News*, 7 July 1877, p. 1.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 *Saint John Daily Telegraph* (hereafter cited as *SJDT*), 11 July 1877, p. 2.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 NBM, Pkt. 30, Box 5, Shelf 108, Great Fire of Saint John, *Canadian Illustrated News* (Toronto), p. 406; newspaper clipping, n.d. [21 June 1877].
- 21 *SJDT*, 11 July 1877, p. 2. The *Telegraph* uses the general term, "public buildings", to describe buildings that are used by the public, rather than buildings that are strictly publicly owned. This definition is employed in the present report.
- 22 Ibid., 5 October 1878, p. 2.
- 23 Ibid., 11 July 1877, p. 2.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Canada. Parliament. House of Commons, *House of Commons Debates* (Ottawa: McLean, Roger & Co., 1878), Vol. 2, 1878, pp. 1415-16.

The New Building Laws

Legislation

A new building act was passed on 5 September 1877, at an emergency session of the provincial legislature which was convened to deal with the Saint John crisis. For precedents, the city looked to its New England neighbour, Boston, which had sustained a serious fire four years earlier. This fire had consumed buildings on 110 acres of the city's most crowded business districts and was said to be "second only to that of Chicago in respect to the value of property destroyed".¹ The Boston building laws were recommended as a standard by various advocates of strict reform in building construction, including the *Telegraph*.² A month after the fire when the new building laws were being drafted, W.G. Preston, an architect then in Saint John, wrote to the editor of the *Telegraph* that, "although in some minor points imperfect, like all things human," the Boston legislation was, he thought, "the best and most complete code we have thus far, and might well serve as a basis or model law for your city. It has well stood the test of experience... and has been used by several other cities as an outline for their own use."³

Both the restrictions on building and the large powers given to the inspector in the Boston act were considered when Saint John prepared its proposal for the legislature. While the Saint John building laws were being drafted and debated, the local newspapers printed articles recommending precautions for fire-resistant building. Boston's laws, for example, recognized the potential danger of wooden structures; this applied not only to exterior walls, but to roofs, decoration or internal construction. Even brick and stone buildings could be hazardous if they contained, or were surrounded by, wood. The *Telegraph* warned that:

A lofty brick building, with a wooden roof, is the most dangerous of all structures when it catches fire for it becomes at once an enormous stove, and the light wood from the roof is sent into the air with awful force, in burning brands, to set fire to everything combustible in the neighbourhood.⁴

The new Saint John building act superseded the less detailed and more liberal "Law for the better prevention of Conflagrations in the City of Saint John" (1872).⁵ The proposed "New Fire Limits Law" was published in the *Telegraph* a few days before presentation in the legislature, in an effort to discourage any construction which would contravene the new regulations.⁶ In fact, in order to avoid the more expensive restrictions of the impending legislation, some property owners hurriedly rebuilt before the act was passed

on 5 September 1877. Architect W.G. Preston, a strong advocate of the use of brick or stone for rebuilding, as opposed to wood, wrote to the editor of the *Telegraph* concerning the problems these early buildings were creating:

For example, I noticed an eight-inch wall being run up on King Street. . . . Now, when you enact a building law, as surely you must, requiring such a wall to be 16 or 20 inches thick, this party's neighbours suffer from being forced to build more expensively (entailing a higher rental) than their thin walled friend, and at the same time suffer the penalties of increased danger, and insurance, from such proximity.⁷

The new act divided the city into three districts (fig. 17). The first district embraced the traditional business portion of the city; two-thirds of this area had been destroyed in the fire. The remaining one-third contained only a small number of wooden buildings.⁸ In this area, no wood construction or unprotected wood attachments were allowed.

In District 2 wooden dwellings and other structures were permitted, provided they did not exceed 25 feet in height, or 25 feet from a brick or stone basement not more than 5 feet above the street surface. These buildings could not be built more than two storeys above a basement, and their roofs were to be flat and covered with slate or some other non-combustible material.⁹

In District 3, buildings rising to 36 feet (from the highest level of any street on which the building fronted) were allowed. Wooden buildings under 36 feet high, from a brick or stone basement measuring no more than 4 feet above the street surface, could be built in this area. Warehouse sheds could be constructed of wood on or adjoining the wharves and piers of this district, providing that they measured no more than 12 feet above the surface of the wharf or pier and that their roofs were covered with gravel or metal roofing.¹⁰

The act followed the Boston building laws, which stipulated that within a defined district every building had to be constructed of a non-combustible fabric, whether this be brick, stone, iron or some other appropriate material. The sole exception was that wooden storage sheds, no higher than 27 feet, were allowed on the wharves. These structures, too, required non-combustible roofing.¹¹

A further amendment was passed in 1878, regarding construction on wharves. In view of the difficulty and expense of obtaining foundations of solid brick or stone for buildings or walls on the North Market

Wharf to the west of Nelson Street, and on South Market Wharf to the west of a line drawn one hundred feet to the east of the line of Ward Street, property owners in these portions of District 1 were permitted to construct brick-cased buildings without the 1877 restrictions. The structures were not to exceed 36 feet above the level of the street or wharf. Party walls or exterior side walls were to be not less than 8 inches thick, of brick, and built up 12 inches above the roof. To facilitate future fire fighting, the roofs had to be flat and covered with gravel, and have at least one scuttle in each roof between dividing walls fitted up with step ladders giving access to the roof.¹² Wharf construction was similarly exempt from the ban on wood in the Boston building regulations.

If these buildings had a greater superficial area than 3,200 square feet, they were to have walls of brick at least 8 inches thick dividing the woodwork throughout and bonded with exterior brick casing. The walls had to extend from the foundation to 12 inches above the roof, "and be capped with stone or metal, properly secured."¹³

Exact specifications regarding the size of studding, posts, beams, and joists were explained in the amendment. Sills, lintels, and caps were to be of stone, iron, or other non-combustible material, and again, all exterior woodwork, "excepting the usual margin of window frames and sashes," was to be covered with galvanized iron or other non-combustible material.¹⁴

The traditional wooden attachments and wall and roof coverings that characterized the city's pre-fire architecture were targeted in the new building regulations. These included cornices, window finishes, dormers, sky-lights, scuttles, cupolas, steeples, and roofs. According to the post-fire laws, these had now to be covered with a non-combustible material, such as iron, slate, metal, or gravel. Terra cotta became a popular substitute during the post-fire period. In contrast, the 1872 building law had allowed all of the steeples, cupolas and spires of public buildings to be covered with boards or shingles.¹⁵ Compare, for example, pre- and post-fire views of King Street, figures 76 and 79; Market Square, figures 88 and 33; and Trinity Church, figures 102 and 38.

Wooden shingles, which covered many roofs in Saint John, were considered to be the major cause of uncontrollable fires across North America as late as the 1920s.¹⁶ A week after the Saint John fire, the *Daily News* described this serious hazard:

On Wednesday the wind carried flakes of fire, burning fragments of shingles and laths, all over the south part of the city, and these wind-borne messengers of ruin ignited shingle roofs and pine cornices from Canterbury Street to the barracks. The least that can be done in the way of restriction is the prohibition of roofs that will take fire from sparks.¹⁷

"Even the most ardent advocate of wood", commented the *Daily News*, "will not, probably, object to a restriction of this kind".¹⁸

Representatives of the insurance companies exercised an important role in designing the new legislation. While the new law was being drafted, they stipulated that cornices be constructed of metal, stone, or brick. Wooden, boxed, or hollow cornices could provide shelter for rats and mice while, "in the case of fire in an adjoining building, they serve ... to conceal the creeping of flame to the roof timbers."¹⁹ The safer construction of skylights required by the new building code had been another post-fire recommendation by the insurance companies. They requested that skylights be iron-framed, with pounded glass at least one inch thick. The *Globe* described the dangerous character of skylights constructed in pre-fire days:

No more faulty construction exists than that of whole rows of brick buildings, each with a large skylight with wooden frame and thin glass immediately over a well-hole through the floors. . . . Buildings constructed in this manner have all the qualities of a furnace, their contents furnishing the fuel.²⁰

The new legislation demanded that fire walls be built within larger buildings, and within long ranges of buildings, so that fire might be more easily trapped, or its path checked. As a result, after 1877 no wooden building higher than 25 feet above the level of the street or basement, and which adjoined or was within three feet of another building, could be erected without the construction of an intervening brick wall eight inches thick and extending six inches above the roof. If both buildings were constructed of wood, the owners were expected to share the cost of the wall. If an owner put up a brick building more than 30 feet above street level, he would be entitled to the same contribution from the owner of adjacent wooden buildings.²¹

Wooden buildings rising more than 25 feet above the level of the street (or above the basement) could not be built in a range more than 40 feet long, without the intervention of one brick wall constructed (as above concerning sharing of costs) for every 40 feet in the length of the range, and extending six inches above the roof. If the building was for manufacturing purposes however, the inspector could allow the intervening brick walls to be erected at a distance not greater than 60 feet from each other or from the end of the building.²²

Once the act was passed, none of the buildings on the eastern side of the harbour could be roofed with shingles, but the façade of a mansard or French roof could be shingled, provided that the shingles were kept properly painted as required by the inspector of buildings.²³ No wooden buildings already standing within any of the three fire district limits could be raised, enlarged or heightened beyond the stated limits of that district.

Nor could these buildings be removed from one lot to another within any of the fire districts.

If the provisions of the act were violated, the offending building would be declared a "public nuisance."²⁴ The penalty for such a violation was a maximum fine of 20 dollars, and not less than ten dollars per day for each day during which the "nuisance" continued.²⁵ When it is considered that a labourer's daily wages then paid by the government in Saint John was \$1.40, an impressive amount for the time, it will be apparent that this was indeed a substantial fine.

In February, 1878, the common council had the acts and laws printed, together with additional pamphlets containing the "Fire Districts Law", the "Building Law", and by-laws. The pamphlets sold for ten cents each.²⁶ With the support of the newspapers, the insurance companies, and conscientious advocates for a fire-proof city, Saint John acquired a strict building code which eliminated many of the hazards of the city's earlier architecture. When the *Globe* had published suggestions from insurance agents concerning "Fires, Their Causes, Prevention and Extinction," in August of 1877, it was pointed out that one of the hazards in an older or fast-growing city was the necessary adaptation of buildings for purposes other than originally intended. In an expanding city such as Saint John had been, the character of certain streets had often changed dramatically to accommodate commercial growth. It was not uncommon to convert existing dwellings into warehouses for the storage of heavy goods. Floors overloaded with "barrels of high wines, liquors, saltmeats, and other heavy merchandize, being frequently tiered up to the ceiling," were likely to collapse. "If such a floor should give way, a stove being nearly always in the room, a fire would inevitably result," warned the *Globe*.²⁷ In the Great Fire, buildings erected since the early settlement of the city, subject to few regulations and restrictions, had been swept away, and their replacement was about to commence on the basis of a set of solid fire laws.

Regulation

To accompany the 1877 building law, an act for the inspection of buildings was also passed on 5 September 1877. Entitled "The Saint John Building Act, 1877", its purpose was to regulate the construction of buildings in Saint John, to provide for their inspection, and to penalize uncooperative builders.²⁸

Insofar as penalties were concerned, the difference between the post-fire regulations and the related section in the building act of 1872 was minimal, except that the amendment of 1877 incorporated the appointment of a building inspector. Although penalties and charges for "public nuisances" were handled similarly in the provisions of both the 1872 act and the 1877 amendment, a formal system for the inspection of

buildings was not established until 1877. In 1872, a public nuisance could be declared through traditional legal channels, but only "on information or complaint of any rate-payer in the said City."²⁹ By 1877, the need for a more efficient method of control over building was recognized. This was evident both in the degree of detail written into the amendment and in the provision for a building inspector.

M.W. Maher was appointed to the newly established post on 10 September 1877.³⁰ As alderman for Kings Ward prior to this appointment, Maher had been a strong supporter of a strict building act. In recording the events at a meeting of the common council where the new laws were being drafted, the *Telegraph* reported:

Ald. Maher argued for a stringent fire law, and gave as his opinion that it was better for the poor man in the end to build of non-combustible material. He even thought a more severe one than had been made up should be prepared, and hoped the good sense of the citizens would see it in the same light.³¹

The inspector selected by Common Council was to be "an able and experienced Master builder" and during his tenure, he was not to be employed or engaged in any other vocation, "or be interested in any contract or contracts for building or for furnishing materials."³²

For the first three years of his appointment, the inspector's salary was set at \$1200, paid from the city's general revenue fund. Three years after the passage of the bill, the salary was reduced to \$1,000 per year.³³ The reduction in the building inspector's salary presumably anticipated the decrease in the volume of building and consequently the inspector's responsibilities once the burnt district of the city had been reconstructed. This estimate proved accurate. In fact, by 1879 building activity in the city had decreased significantly, although this may also have been evidence of a cooling enthusiasm for the enforcement of the regulations, as the memory of the fire faded.

The inspector was responsible for signing all certificates and notices issued under the new building act. In addition to the preparation of detailed annual reports of the transactions of his office³⁴, he was also required to submit reports to Common Council upon request.³⁵ No construction or alteration could be undertaken without first obtaining a permit from the inspector, who could also require that plans of the proposed erection, alterations or repairs be submitted for inspection before issuing the permit.³⁶

If a building under construction was cited as unsafe or dangerous, the supreme court or any justice was authorized to issue an injunction restraining further work until the case had been investigated and a course of action decided upon. If the inspector found that a

building was especially dangerous to members of the fire department or citizens in case of fire, because of "insufficient stairways or insufficient thickness of walls, overloaded floors, defective construction, or other causes," he could have an injunction served.³⁷

The duties of the inspector included the examination of all of the dwelling houses in the city which were occupied by two or more families on any of the floors above the second from street level. He also had to inspect any building used for a hotel, boarding house, factory, mill, apartment house, or for offices or workshops, in which persons were employed in any of the storeys above the second.³⁸ Public gathering places such as churches, theatres, halls, or other structures used permanently or even temporarily for public purposes (e.g., school houses) also required proper fire exits. Penalties for continued neglect ranged from ten to fifty dollars.³⁹

The inspection of buildings symbolized a marked change in the public attitude to fire prevention and safety. Prior to 1877 there does not appear to have been a formal system of inspection with which to enforce building regulations.⁴⁰ In 1877, however, the scale of rebuilding, the keen detail of the new act, the vested interests of the insurance companies, the concern of each building owner that neighbouring houses not be a fire hazard, as well as the initiative and experience of Maher, gave the inspector's office considerable power.

The *Telegraph* followed closely all aspects of construction activity and transmitted this information in detail to the public. On one occasion the gas company and the trustees of the Centenary Church, one of the largest churches in the city, had violated the building code by not applying for permits and submitting plans to the inspector. They were reported in police court, whereupon they promised to alter their buildings according to the requirements of the law.⁴¹ The *Telegraph* article emphasized the cooperation between the police and the building inspector: "the magistrate wishes it to be known that he will aid Mr. Maher, to the

fullest extent of his power, to carry out the law, and will impose the highest penalty the law allows, on those who are convicted of a violation of the law."⁴²

The inspector's position was not without its personal hazards, as Mr. Maher discovered in October 1877, a month after he assumed his duties. Upon informing the contractor of a building on Brittain Street that one of the walls was not put up properly, Maher was promptly assaulted by two men working on the project.⁴³ It took some effort for those rebuilding in Saint John to adapt to the new laws: by 1 December 1877, 95 builders had been reported at the police office for failing to procure even the necessary street permits.⁴⁴

Two other cases which came before the court in 1877 involved construction on Princess Street. In one of these, a wooden building was found to be higher than the building law allowed, which was "no greater than twenty-four feet and flat roof."⁴⁵ On 18 August 1877, the *Telegraph* recorded "The First Complaint for Violating the Building Law Since the Fire."⁴⁶ The structure was owned by John E. Ganong, who was charged with building a house 40 feet high, of combustible material, within the fire district. Although he argued that brick-cased buildings (wood-supported and encased with brick) such as his own had been erected in the area since the 1872 act, Ganong was found guilty and fined 20 dollars. Another article on the Ganong case records the subsequent attempts of the city authorities to secure an injunction on Ganong's house from the equity court, on the strength of affidavits from the city engineer and the chief engineer of the fire department.⁴⁷ The judgement of the court was later published in full by the *Telegraph* for the public's information and education.⁴⁸

Because the new laws were enforced with the threat of heavy fines and possible jail sentences (although no instance of the latter was recorded), the buildings of this period considerably out-classed their predecessors in terms of fire safety. Much of this is attributable to the fire scare which encouraged the observation of strong regulations in building construction.

Notes

- 1 "The Boston Building Laws," *SJDT*, 14 July 1877, p. 2.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid., 19 July 1877, p. 4.
- 4 "The Boston Building Laws," op. cit.
- 5 New Brunswick. Legislative Assembly. "An Act for the better prevention of Conflagrations in the City of Saint John," *Acts* (Fredericton: G.E. Fenety, 1872), 1872 (hereafter cited as *Building Act, 1872*), p. 108.
- 6 *SJDT*, 13 Aug. 1877, p. 2.
- 7 *SJDT*, 19 July 1877, p. 4.
- 8 *SJDT*, 13 Aug. 1877, p. 2.
- 9 New Brunswick. Legislative Assembly, "An Act to regulate the construction of Buildings in the City of Saint John, and to provide for the due inspection thereof," *Acts* (Fredericton: G.E. Fenety, 1877), 1877 (hereafter cited as the *Building Act Amendment, 1877*), p. 17.
- 10 Ibid., p. 18.
- 11 "The Boston Building Laws," op. cit.
- 12 New Brunswick. Legislative Assembly, "An Act in further amendment of the Law for the better prevention of Conflagrations in the City of Saint John," *Acts* (Fredericton: G.E. Fenety, 1878), p. 251.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 *Building Act, 1872*, p. 109.
- 16 *Conflagrations in America Since 1900* (Boston: N.F.P.A., 1951), p. 13, as cited in John C. Weaver and Peter De Lottinville, op. cit., p. 4.
- 17 "Rebuilding with Wood," *Daily News*, 29 June 1877, p. 1.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 "Standard Buildings for Insurance," *Globe*, 3 Aug. 1877, p. 1.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 *Building Act Amendment, 1877*, pp. 18-19.
- 22 Ibid., p. 19.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid., p. 20.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 New Brunswick. Provincial Archives (hereafter cited as PANB), RS427, Saint John Common Council Minutes, 20 Feb. 1878, p. 679.
- 27 "Fires, Their Causes, Prevention and Extinction," *Globe*, 3 Aug. 1877, p. 1.
- 28 *Building Act Amendment, 1877*, p. 21.
- 29 *Building Act, 1872*, p. 100.
- 30 PANB, RS427, 10 September 1877, p. 490.
- 31 *SJDT*, 11 August 1877, p. 3.
- 32 *Building Act Amendment, 1877*, pp. 21-22.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 From an examination of the "Reports of the Inspector of Buildings" in the *Reports of the City of Saint John*, for the years 1877-1881; the annual reports on buildings recorded in the *Telegraph* contain this information in full.

35 *Building Act Amendment, 1877*, p. 23.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

37 *Ibid.*

38 *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 27

40 *Building Act, 1872*.

41 *SJDT*, 24 Dec. 1877, p. 1.

42 *Ibid.*

43 *Ibid.*, 3 Oct. 1877, p. 3.

44 *Ibid.*, 1 Dec. 1877, p. 3.

45 *Ibid.*, 16 Aug. 1877, p. i.

46 *Ibid.*, 18 Aug. 1877, p. 1.

47 *Ibid.*, 27 Aug. 1877, p. 1.

48 *Ibid.*, 19 Sept. 1877, p. 3.



2. Artist's depiction of King Street, looking toward the harbour
Frank Leslie's Illustrated News, Supplement (New York: 7 July 1877)



3. Sketch of the Marine Hospital, the sole building left on St. James Street
Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum

"... an oasis of wood in this desert of ashes the meanest public edifice in the city, a mere wreck of decaying wood."

Daily News, 6 July 1877

“Oh the terrors and suffering of weak women and tender children during the night succeeding that never to be forgotten day. It made my blood curdle to witness some of their sufferings. Hundreds stood in the open air without food or shelter during that awful night, and even as I write, numbers are huddled together in the houses of friends, in tents and in such other places of shelter as they have been able to secure.”

W.F. Bunting to Stephen Bunting 8 July 1877



4. Refugees at the water's edge

Frank Leslie's Illustrated News, Supplement (New York: 7 July 1877)



5. Burnt district, showing gas house chimney and smoking ruins, taken from Lower Cove

G.F. Simonson photo, courtesy of PANB, P7/105



6. Germain Street and Victoria Hotel, looking toward Saint John Stone Church, c. 1875
J. McClure & Co. photo, courtesy of National Archives of Canada, PA 103127



7. Germain Street ruins
J. McClure & Co. photo, courtesy of the National Archives of Canada, PA 103135



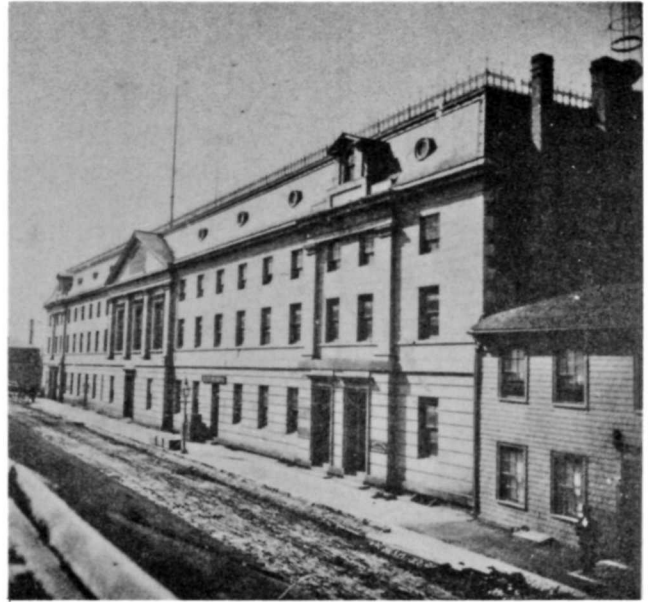
8. Queen Square as it appeared before the fire
Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum



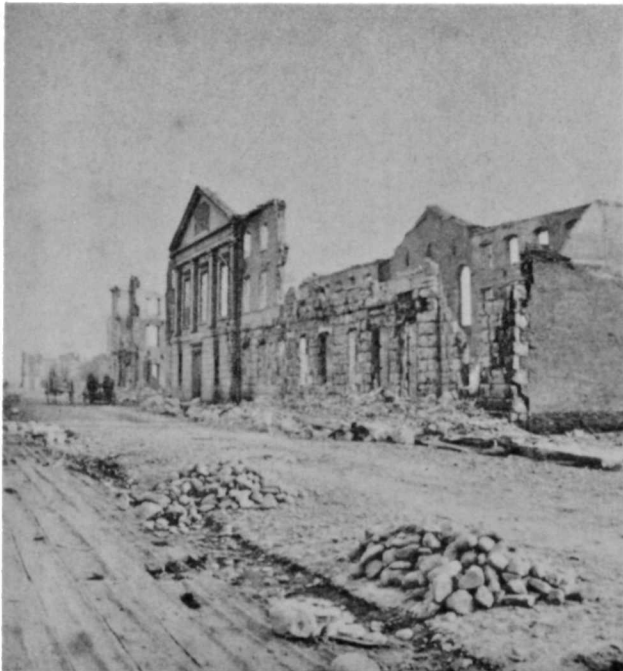
9. Queen Square in ruins
Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum



10. Ruins of Germain Street Baptist Church
From a sketch by artist John C. Miles, courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum



11. Pre-fire view of the old customs house, built in 1842
Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum



12. Customs house ruins
Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum

"The Custom House is a sorry spectacle, a sad commentary on the public faith in brick and stone and slate. The walls, to the height of about one storey, are standing, and the terrible penetrative and disintegrative power of the fierce heat generated by the combustion of the oils, liquors and naval stores within, is shown by the splintered and crumbling granite walls. They look like rotten wood."

Daily News, 6 July 1877



13. Inside the Savings Bank after the fire
G.F. Simonson photo, courtesy of PANB, P7/106



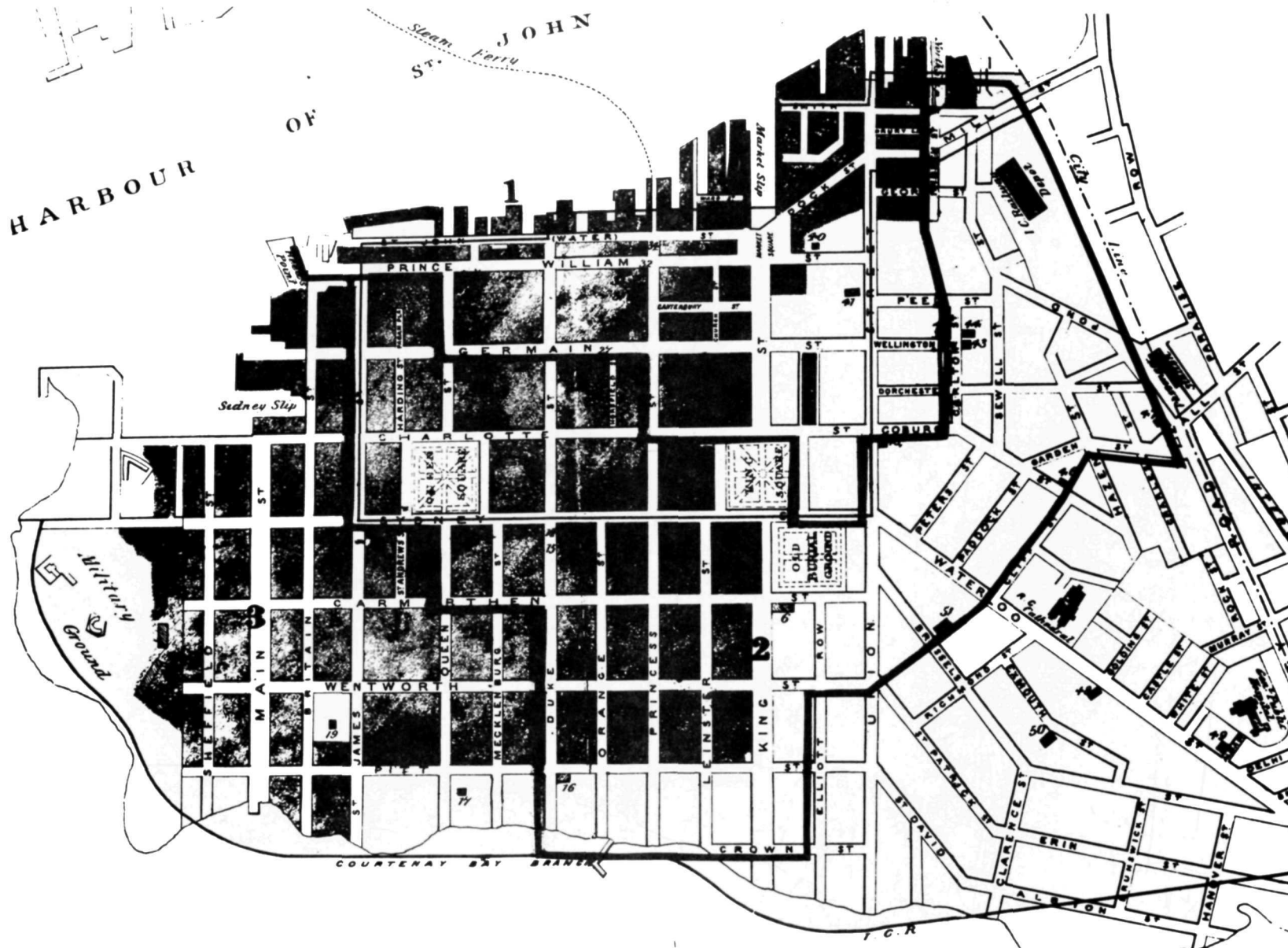
14. Pre-fire view of Prince William Street, showing the Bank of Montreal (on left) and the Maritime Bank
Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum



15. Post office, built in 1876, with Bank of New Brunswick on left
Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum



16. The post office in ruins
Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum



17. Map showing the razed section of the City and the building districts established after the fire (boundaries superimposed by author). George Stewart, *The Great Fire in St. John, N.B.* (Toronto: Belford Bros., 1877, reprinted in 1980 by Non-Entity Press, Woodstock, N.B.)



18. Provisioning the refugees in Barrack Square

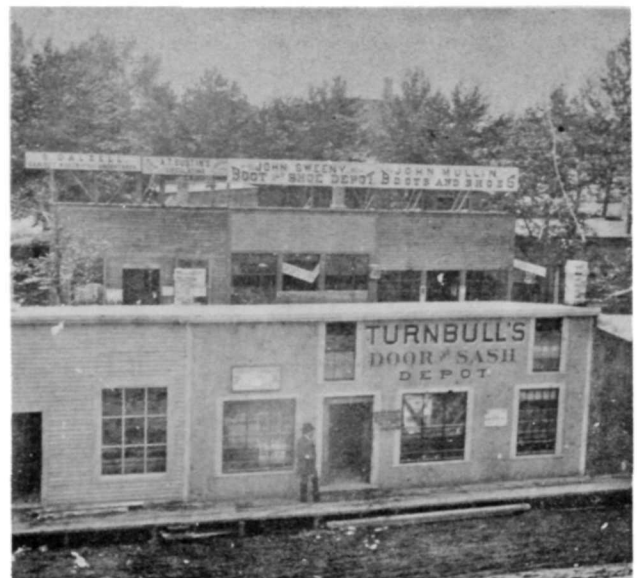
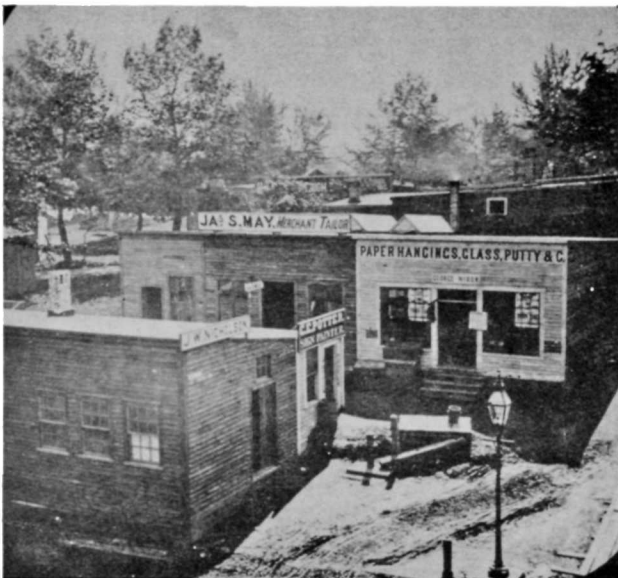
Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum



19. Encampment of the 97th Regiment in King Square after the fire
Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum

“With commendable enterprise, many of the merchants who were burned out, and could not secure premises in which to carry on their business, by permission of the authorities, erected shanties on King and Market Squares, which they promise to pull down before the first of May, 1878. The city now looks quite primitive. Turn where you will, shanties of various sizes and styles meet the eye.”

George Stewart,
The Story of the Great Fire ...



21 & 22. Temporary business accommodations in Shanty Town, King Square
Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum

Rebuilding the City

Progress of Reconstruction, 1877-1881

Immediately after the fire, large numbers of shanties were erected in the public squares, forming small communities. At the Barrack grounds and at the east end of Main Street, shelters were hastily constructed out of boards and old fences found in the vicinity and picked from the ruins. Cooking stoves marked the entrances of the shanties.¹ Private homes, tents, and even an old horse car also provided temporary accommodation for the homeless (figs. 18 & 19). Merchants carried on their businesses in makeshift huts in King Square (figs. 20-22). By September 1877, 120 families were living in the shanties erected by the Relief Association in Barrack Square.² The community was named "Murphy Town," after the superintendent of the work, N. Murphy.³ About 200 people were still living at Queen Square in August 1877.⁴ However, by mid-1878, as homes and business houses were rebuilt, most of the shanties had been auctioned and removed.

After the experience of the Great Fire, the value of unencumbered open spaces such as the squares and wider streets was more fully appreciated. As a precaution against the spread of future fires, many of the formerly narrow, congested streets were widened and straightened, as in the case of Dock, Union and Canterbury streets. Squares and better streets facilitated fire-fighting by providing a "break" or "pause" in the path of fires, and the squares had served as temporary shelter to inhabitants fleeing with their goods from their burning homes.

In May of 1878, as the shanties were disappearing from the public squares, the *Telegraph* described the importance of maintaining these open spaces both from a sanitary point of view and as an enhancement to the physical beauty of the city. Some years previous, many citizens had suggested King Square as an ideal location for a large city hall (see sketch of King Square, ca. 1851, fig. 23). Others preferred running King Street through the square and cutting up the remaining land into building lots, "which would bring large sums of money."⁵ Both King (fig. 24) and Queen squares have nevertheless been retained as recreational spaces. The Great Fire might be said to have saved them from enterprising commercial interests by creating a situation in which a large portion of the overcrowded city had to be replanned and rebuilt all at once. As well, with the more sophisticated construction techniques and innovative designs of the 1870s, it was possible to increase accommodation on pre-fire lots through vertical rather than lateral expansion.

The reconstruction of the city took less time than many had expected. Most of the properties were rebuilt with Saint John money. Besides putting a large part of the \$6,800,000 obtained from the insurance companies "into brick and mortar," private individuals are reported to have borrowed \$1,752,744 on mortgages for building purposes. Except for \$246,000, all of the latter amount was obtained from within the province.⁷

Only three months after the Great Fire, about 700 buildings were already under construction in the burnt area. About three hundred (counting each store as one building) of these were brick and about four hundred were constructed of wood.⁸ A third of the wooden buildings were merely ells or small buildings occupying the rear of lots. The other wooden buildings were described generally as being two or three storeys high with flat gravel roofs, in accordance with the new building regulations, and "better than those which were burnt."⁹ At this time extensive rebuilding activity was also concentrated in the central business district. Nearly the whole west side of Dock Street was already built up; construction on the South Market Wharf had begun; and Water, Prince William and King streets and the North Wharf had "imposing ranges of brick buildings" under construction.¹⁰

Within one year, approximately eight hundred and forty-two permanent buildings had been built or were in the course of construction.¹¹ About three hundred and thirty-eight of these—fewer than half—were constructed of brick (including stone or brick-cased buildings).¹² Over four million dollars had been spent on buildings in the burnt district by the first anniversary of the fire.¹³

Construction activity was most pronounced (with more than forty buildings under construction) along Queen, St. James, Brittain, Prince William, Germain, Charlotte, Carmarthen, Duke and Princess streets. In compliance with the new building regulations, brick predominated in this area. Of the forty-four buildings going up on Prince William Street, about thirty-nine were constructed of brick, for a total cost of \$600,000, the maximum spent on buildings on any street in the city at the time.¹⁷

The new Prince William streetscape included major banks, for example, the Bank of Nova Scotia, which was completed in this year. Also located there were large business establishments, insurance company offices, and later, the post office, city hall, and — the epitome of local architectural flamboyance — the cus-

toms house. On King Street, the main street in the city and referred to as the “Broadway” of Saint John, thirty-one brick buildings, mostly retail stores and offices, worth \$450,000 were going up; only four buildings of wood had been constructed along this street in the first year following the fire.¹⁵ On Dock Street, nineteen brick buildings valued at \$218,000 were under construction by June 1878. Close to the wharves and warehouses, the street had no wooden buildings at all.¹⁶

By the second anniversary of the fire, an additional 91 brick buildings had been erected, bringing the two-year total to 429. Similarly, wooden buildings had increased by 141, making a total of 646 (see Table 3).¹⁷ Only two years after the fire, observers were expressing fears of “overbuilding”. For example, only six hundred shops were estimated to have burned, as compared with the 724 shops that had been built to replace them by June 1879.¹⁸ The *Telegraph* commented that “certainly if but 600 were burned down, as had generally been stated, those that now exist much more than replace them.” The newspaper reported that already many believed “that the work of erecting business establishments [had] been rather overdone.”¹⁹

The same was true of residential construction. After only two years, there was nearly as much accommodation in the burnt district as there had been before the fire. As many as 1491 residences, located in 1075 buildings, had been built in the burnt district by June 1878. Other residences had been built elsewhere in the city and in Portland. An estimated 1600 or more buildings had been destroyed, but this figure included many public as well as private buildings. Many of the latter were described as “extremely inferior” to those which replaced them.²⁰

The second year of rebuilding marked the completion and occupancy of the Bank of New Brunswick on Prince William Street, as well as Mr. Domville’s brick building in which the Bank of Montreal and the Maritime Bank were housed. The Savings Bank was also completed in 1878.²¹ Most of the churches had been rebuilt, or were nearing completion. The Reformed Presbyterian Church, St. David’s and St. Andrew’s churches, the Germain Street Baptist Church and the Leinster Street Baptist Church had all been completed. Construction on St. James’ Church, Queen Square Methodist Church and the Reformed Episcopal Church was also completed by the second anniversary of the fire. The Centenary Church was still in progress, and the Trinity Church congregation had just laid the foundations of their large church.²² All of the churches completed or under construction by October 1878 were estimated to cost not less than \$400,000, “an immense sum considering the large private losses which the people who have to erect these churches met with in consequence of the fire.”²³ Other

public buildings constructed by this time included the Victoria and Madras schools, St. Malachy’s Hall, St. Joseph’s School, the police office, the new city hall, the ferry building, Wiggin’s Orphan Institution, and the home for the aged.

By 1881, most of the buildings had been completed (see Tables 4 & 5). By 1880, the city’s shops and dwellings had practically been rebuilt, and by June 1881 the same was true of its public buildings. The customs house and the post office, both begun by the start of 1878, were completed and occupied by June 1881. All of the churches destroyed by the fire had also been rebuilt, on a much larger and grander scale than those they replaced, except the Centenary which was still under construction, and which promised to be a considerable improvement on its predecessor.²⁴

The tapering off of construction activity is clearly demonstrated in a comparison of building statistics reported by the *Telegraph* for the years 1878, 1879, 1880 and 1881 (Tables 2-5). For example, by June 1878, exactly one year after the fire, of the 842 buildings which had been completed, 338 were constructed of brick and 504 of wood.²⁵ The second anniversary of the fire marked the completion of only 133 buildings containing 91 shops or dwellings of brick and 142 of wood. Between June of 1879 and 1881, only 56 additional buildings had been erected; these comprised 23 shops or dwellings of brick and 33 of wood.²⁶ In all, the *Telegraph* estimated that over the four years of reconstruction 1131 buildings had been erected in the burnt area.²⁷ Of these, 452 were brick buildings which contained 359 dwellings and 475 stores. The wooden buildings numbered 679 and contained a total of 1193 dwellings and 240 stores. The total expenditure was estimated at \$6,500,000, of which \$5,400,000 was attributed to the construction of private buildings, dwellings and stores, and \$1,100,000 to public buildings, banks and churches,²⁸ — a large sum for the city to spend on buildings in four years!

The Buildings

In August 1872 the *Telegraph* reprinted a description of Saint John, as seen through the eyes of the editor of the Boston *Gazette*, who had recently visited the city:

Neither the public nor private buildings, with the exception of the Victoria Hotel, claim much merit for architecture, but their arrangement and convenience illustrate the character of the people, dignified without pretension and substantial without pride or show.²⁹

The Victoria Hotel (figs. 25 & 26), built in approximately 1872 at the corner of Germain and Duke streets, was a square brick modestly Italianate building covered with mastic. Measuring five storeys high above the basement, it accommodated three hundred guests. Another American writer, Bayard Taylor of

the *New York Tribune*, described the city's architecture in 1876 as follows:

St. John has a thoroughly English stamp; even its smell is not that of an American town. The dark buildings of smoky brick, the plainness of the architecture, the unobtrusive character of the signs, and the sober aspect of the shop windows, and the deliberate movement of the people in the streets, proclaim another nationality, before you notice the English colors on the flag-staffs.¹⁰

In contrast, most of the buildings of the reconstruction period, particularly those of a commercial or public nature, were described as substantial, massive, solid, elegant and economical. The *Globe* depicted the altered appearance of the city just one year after the fire:

The new private edifices are superior as a whole to those they have replaced; the stores are much better; there are better business offices, more rooms for purposes of societies and organizations; the bank buildings, and similar edifices, will far outstrip those that they replace, while the churches will show a vast degree of improvement, and will be well calculated to secure the comfort while they stimulate the religious fervour of the worshippers.¹¹

In addition to the increased scale and variety of styles, the detail and trim of the new buildings was exceptionally diverse. New materials and techniques just then coming in to use, such as plate glass, gas lights, hydraulic elevators, telephones and central heating also contributed to a new architectural image. Commercial and business buildings especially gain their distinctively post-fire character from these factors.

Commercial and Public Buildings

For the purposes of this study, the term "commercial buildings" generally refers to office structures, banks, or retail shops. Buildings erected under the direction of the federal, provincial or city governments are referred to as "public buildings." Schools, opera houses and other similar institutions are not considered in any detail, except insofar as they might form part of a streetscape.

The new commercial and public buildings were far more commodious and had more elegant interiors than those they replaced. One important effect of the improvements in the interior layout of the new buildings was "to enable the whole ordinary business of the city to be done in less space than heretofore. That is, a given space of ground affords more offices, and even more stores than formerly; and there results from this a check upon the rebuilding on lots that before the fire seemed to be very choice ones."¹²

According to the *Globe*, although the city had changed in terms of the general solidity in the outward appearance of the business buildings, it was the interior of most of them that showed marked improve-

ment. The *Globe* described these innovations as follows:

...the interior of most of them shows far more improvement than the exterior. In the laying out of rooms much extra space has been gained, steam heating has been adopted in places in which it was never thought of before, elevators and other trade fittings and conveniences have been introduced, and in every way the foundations have been laid for placing the business of St. John upon a better basis than they were ever upon before.¹³

A comparison of photographs of streetscapes, taken before and after the fire, gives a general impression of the dramatic change in the architecture of the public and commercial buildings. The evolution of both King and Germain streets well illustrate this transition. Pre-fire views of King Street (figs. 27 & 28) show an unevenness among the buildings, many of them with highly flammable clapboard exteriors, shingled roofs and skylights. Compared with the post-fire appearance of the street (figs. 29 & 30), they demonstrate the result of the gradual accumulation of structures over nearly a century, with various additions and somewhat incongruous attachments. The post-fire views show larger, more substantial and certainly more sophisticated and fireproof structures. A more homogeneous and less "sprawling" effect was achieved by building in co-operative blocks, and the new buildings were considerably taller and more efficient. A pre-fire view of Gordon House, on King Street (fig. 31), with the Colonial Bookstore next to it (later replaced by a brick building before the fire, in the 1860s, fig. 32) aptly demonstrates the aesthetic and practical problem of pushing the familiar, traditional Maritime Georgian theme to its limits. Outgrown, the building appears bulky and ungraceful. The same is true of the Colonial Bookstore. The pre-fire replacement of the bookstore is an improvement, and although it is less streamlined than the buildings of the reconstruction period, its style suggests that of the later buildings.

In a similar manner, a pre-fire view of Germain Street (figs. 6 & 33) suggests a lack of long-range planning, and a similarity among the plain, symmetrical and blocky buildings that borders on dullness. Post-fire views (e.g., fig. 34), however, appear to have scheme, order, rhythm, regularity and uniformity of composition. The same contrast is observable in pre- and post-fire views of Prince William Street (compare figs. 15, 35 with fig. 36).

Large-scale Italianate buildings such as the Victoria Hotel and T.H. Hall's Bookstore were being built in Saint John during the decade before 1877. They were certainly larger than the neo-classical buildings they replaced, but their restrained decoration and relatively flat, plain outer walls link both stylistic types. The commercial buildings erected after the Great Fire were designed in a variety of styles then popular in other parts of Canada, the United States and Britain.

They included the Romanesque, Italianate, Renaissance, with classical elements, and Second Empire, which was the architectural hallmark of the 1870s in both Canadian and American urban centres. One of the practical assets of the Second Empire style was the mansard roof which allowed owners to make use of the top storey, well lighted with dormer windows. The flat, as opposed to the gable roof common in the pre-fire era, also provided a full upper storey. Commercial, public and other structures of the rebuilding period show more dynamically detailed façades than the general pre-fire architecture of the city. New rhythms in architectural line and texture, varied wall treatment, and generally that sculptural interplay of light and shadow—not only within the single building but shared by homogenous blocks—created a brand new image.

During the rebuilding, property owners generally agreed to erect their buildings in uniform blocks, a trend applauded by the insurance companies. By 5 July 1877, less than three weeks after the fire, several meetings had been held by owners of property in the business district and the erection of such blocks discussed. The *Telegraph* reported that the new business blocks of Saint John would probably “combine elegance and solidity with economy, and, while we shall probably have no structure comparable to the Commercial Palace we shall have a much higher average of excellence than in the old city.”³⁴

King Street and Market Square

The owners of property on the north side of Market Square agreed to build a uniform block of buildings which would “be a credit and ornament to the city” (fig. 37).³⁵ The earlier block was plain and the resemblance among the pre-fire buildings was their modest simplicity (fig. 38). The new block had a frontage of 160 feet on Market Square. On each end was a pavilion building four storeys high. The front consisted of ornamental pressed brick in three colours: black, white and red. The centre building was flat-roofed, surmounted by a balustrade and cresting, and the buildings on either side had slate mansard roofs. The clock tower on the roof of the centre building, Sheffield House, emphasized the symmetry and height of the block. The cornices of the buildings were constructed of galvanized iron and brick, as required by the new building act. On the ground floor, the shop fronts were supported by iron columns with arches sprung between them to support the superstructure. The architects, Smith and Dunn, had designed the block “to be fireproof, as nearly as it can be made.”³⁶

London House, Daniel and Boyd’s new establishment, attached to Sheffield House, was described as one of the most substantial warehouses in the city. It was constructed of rough-hewn Caledonia freestone. Like many of its contemporaries, the building was

fitted with an hydraulic elevator. Of this building the *Telegraph* remarked:

We have been told by visitors from other places that this in its entirety is one of the most thorough in the Dominion and admirably adapted to a general wholesale business. It has been built with an eye to strength and durability and all done by day’s work.³⁷

Similarly, property owners on King Street replaced their pre-fire business houses with homogeneous blocks (figs. 29 & 30). The Commercial Block (figs. 29 & 94), completed early in the reconstruction period, was a collection of retail stores and offices with warehouse space above. Larger than most post-fire commercial structures in the city, the block was constructed of brick. Locals were intrigued by the versatility of non-traditional building materials as demonstrated in the façade by the window surrounds, string courses, and cornices of projecting brick or brick relief. In general, the new stores and principal commercial buildings were much taller than their predecessors. The *Telegraph* considered that none of them was “too high for convenience, while height gives them a certain style and character that a low building never exhibits.”³⁸ The interiors of the units in the Commercial Block were “fully equipped with all modern appliances, such as hydraulic hoists, fire-proof vaults, etc., etc., making it one of the finest and most desirable blocks in the city.”³⁹

Other commercial buildings erected on King Street included Logan and Lindsay’s grocery store, James Manson’s department store (“The Palace”) and Blanchard’s fancy goods store. Just before the fire, James Manson had built “The Palace” on King Street. He rebuilt on the same site, and his new establishment (fig. 39) was open for business by December 1877, six months after the fire.⁴⁰ Although the front of the new building was not as imposing as the one it replaced, the interior layout was an improvement. The main store measured 25 by 100 feet. The two front ground floor windows were each composed of a single plate of glass 16 feet high and 7 feet wide, “the largest plates now in the city.”⁴¹ W.E. Blanchard’s American jewellery, toys and fancy goods store was a three-storey structure of brick and stone with large street-level display windows of plate glass.

Logan and Lindsay had rebuilt their grocery by February 1878. “Except for the matter of the site there is nothing in common between the old store and the new one,” the *Telegraph* informed readers. The old store was too limited for the growing business of the firm; the *Telegraph* suggested that the new one was probably the handsomest grocery east of Montreal and was well designed to accommodate all aspects of the business. The new store consisted of four storeys and was divided into two sections, the lower west section measuring 100 by 20 feet, the upper east section 90 by 20 feet. The east section was devoted to the wholesale

business and was fitted up with suitable offices. An hydraulic elevator 5 feet square communicated with the upper storeys, and a single hoist served a like purpose for the retail store alone. On the second flat were a sample room for testing teas, rooms for the storage of tea, canned goods and miscellaneous groceries. The third floor was reserved for the storage of goods, while the fourth accommodated a bonded warehouse, rooms for roasting and grinding coffee and the elevator landing. The retail store contained 200 square feet of space.⁴²

Prince William Street

Traditionally referred to as the “Wall Street of St. John” in the nineteenth century, Prince William Street was lined with major banks, business houses, public buildings, newspaper offices, small shops and dry goods stores. In terms of people, goods and variety of commercial activity, it was the busiest street in the city. By the time of the Great Fire, the dry goods and other stores had begun gravitating to Germain Street. Financial institutions, office and public administration buildings took the place of these busy shops (fig. 36). The need for a full-scale reconstruction of the street after the fire resulted in an equally sudden fulfillment of this pre-fire “trend.” This transition occurred in an era when clothing was handmade, requiring voluminous quantities of cloth and trim, and it is not surprising that the local press expressed concern over this considerable loss of pedestrian traffic and trade in the area. The editor of the *Globe* feared that the logical result would be for publishers, brokers, insurance agents, bankers, lawyers and wholesale dealers to gain the monopoly of Prince William Street’s business.⁴³

Indeed this did happen. Although two popular businesses, Jardine and Co., grocers, and J. and A. McMillan, booksellers, stationers and printers re-established themselves on Prince William Street, it was speculated that these two firms would not be able to check the trend, and that they would be lucky to “hold their own.”⁴⁴ The post office (fig. 40, still standing) would be rebuilt on this street, but its method of operation had been modernized, and it was therefore unlikely to attract much of the general public to the area, as it had in the past. During this period, the services of the post office were being decentralized, and the main building was about to become less of a gathering place for the collection of stamps or mail. The pre-fire postal service, with its centralized operation on Prince William Street, had been a distinct advantage to adjacent businesses:

The Post Office must do something towards assisting them [J. & A. McMillan and Jardine & Co.]; but the tendency of the time is not to increase calls at the Post Office as rapidly as they increased before stamps could be purchased at almost any store in town, before there was a free delivery of letters, before letters could be posted at street corners.⁴⁵

Three major public buildings were built on Prince William Street. Besides the post office, these included the city hall and the magnificent customs house (which was destroyed in 1961). City Hall was built at the corner of Prince William and Princess streets; before the fire, the city offices had been located in a building on the same site, which had been erected by the Corporation of the Commercial Bank of New Brunswick for its banking house. It was later purchased and converted by the city. The new building (fig. 41) was three storeys high with mansard roof and constructed of brick and stone for \$40,000. The façade was 58 feet wide along Prince William Street and 46.5 feet deep along Princess Street. The front was constructed of freestone from the New Brunswick Freestone Company’s quarry in Albert County,⁴⁶ on low bases of granite. More commodious than its predecessor, the new building also provided for future expansion; in the interim, some spare rooms were rented to local organizations such as the Tilly Lodge.⁴⁷

The customs house (fig. 42) was also rebuilt on its old site at the south end of Prince William Street. A Second Empire structure constructed of freestone, it rose three storeys on the Prince William Street façade and five at the rear on Water Street. Both front and rear measured 200 feet wide, and the depth of the structure between the two streets measured 99 feet. The façade had three imposing entrances. Judged to be “a monument of elegance,”⁴⁸ the new building was not as large as the old customs house (fig. 11) but it certainly had a more elaborate exterior. The local press described it as “a free rendering of the classic style, its four fronts faced with freestone from the Caledonia Quarry,” and referred to “the striking harmony of its proportions and the suggestion of the French Renaissance style, conveyed by its central dome.”⁴⁹ The three richly panelled and carved main doors were described as “massive affairs” of East India teak. Pilasters with carved capitals adorned the second and third storey exterior as well as those of the first storey of the central pavilion. The caps of the pilasters in the central pavilion consisted of carved heads representing Europe, Africa, Asia and America. Above the central doorway the keystone carried a bust of Britannia. The *Telegraph* reported that the building gained in “massiveness and solidity” what it had lost in “carving and ornament,” and was “certainly very imposing in its aspect.”⁵⁰

Local supervising architects J.T.C. McKean and Ernest Fairweather effected major improvements in the design of the customs house as they prepared the working drawings. The federal Department of Public Works had originally intended that the Water Street portion of the building would be constructed of brick and that the front only would be of the more costly freestone. The architects made strong representations against this course, demonstrating that the Water Street front would be seen quite as much as the other

and that, viewed from the harbour, it was in fact the principal front of the building. It was finally decided that the full exterior of the building should be of freestone, giving the structure “harmony and unity of expression which it would not otherwise possess.”⁵¹ The local press boasted that “it was probably the finest Customs House in America and second to very few in the world.”⁵² Certainly it was one of the largest public buildings built in the Second Empire style in Canada.⁵³ To protect the building from fire, it was disconnected from all structures around it, with a greater space at the north end to provide a fire break, a lesson learned from the Great Fire.⁵⁴ Some views of the building under construction — rare for the period — were recently found in Department of Public Works files. Figures 43 and 44 document the progress of construction to 1879.

Most of the business houses constructed along Prince William Street during the post-fire reconstruction were designed in the Italianate or Second Empire styles, with Romanesque and classical elements. Three major banks were rebuilt on the street soon after the fire: the Bank of New Brunswick (fig. 45), situated on its pre-fire lot next to the post office; the Bank of Nova Scotia on the opposite side of the street, and the Savings Bank (fig. 46). Henry Starbuck, formerly of Boston, designed the new Bank of New Brunswick, based on its pre-fire appearance (see fig. 15). The degree of classicism in its design distinguished this building from its counterparts. The massive columned front with pediment featuring the coat of arms represented a simplification or consolidation, on a bolder scale, of the architectural features of the previous building, which was erected in the early 1820s. The Prince William Street façade of the post-fire building was constructed of the “best” native freestone, in the Corinthian classical style, with a projecting pediment supported by six stone columns. The windows of plate glass represented a late 19th century innovation.⁵⁵

The Bank of Nova Scotia (fig. 47) was also rebuilt on its former Prince William Street site, from building plans prepared by architects Dumaesq and Dewar in the style of the Second Empire. The building had a frontage of 38.5 feet with a depth of 50 feet. The lower storey was constructed of freestone, while the upper storey consisted of pressed brick, with carved free-stone trimmings. The two entrance porches had four massive columns of polished red granite; in between, three round-arched windows were separated by polished grey granite columns with elaborate capitals. The ground floor was occupied entirely by the bank, with a banking room 28 by 26 feet, a manager’s office, cloak room, and money and book vaults. The keeper occupied the whole of the attic.⁵⁶

The “Wall Street” character of Prince William Street was further enhanced by Robert Marshall’s Insurance Block (fig. 48), designed by McKean and Fairweather.

The impressive structure measured 40 feet along the Prince William Street front and extended back for 30 feet on Market Square. A typical example of this type of office building in the area, it was four storeys high with a flat roof, and a spacious, well lighted basement. The principal floor, which contained two suites of offices and the staircase leading to the upper storeys, was raised 18 inches above the street grade, in order to give additional height and light for the basement. The offices on the ground floor, a suite of which was to be occupied by the proprietor himself, were well lighted by large shop windows of plate glass. Those on the principal front were separated by ornamental (rather than structurally essential) cast iron columns which carried a series of brick arches, “springing from carved stone skew-backs, and these with their neatly molded outer rims will present an agreeable contrast to the horizontal shop cornices so generally in use.”⁵⁷

Another typical Prince William Street business location was the Bayard Block, built in 1877. The building had a frontage of 50 feet and a depth of 55 feet. It was arranged with a high basement and three suites of offices on the principal floor. Both the basement and the first floor had large plate glass fronts, like many of its contemporaries. The second and third storeys contained suites of offices, finished in hardwood. The front of the building was “richly, but not elaborately” decorated with iron, polished granite and cut free-stone. The cornices and other ironwork were brought out with stencil figures in rich colours. The building was heated by steam. A restaurant operated by one of the city’s leading caterers occupied the basement level.⁵⁸

Both Chubb’s Building and John McCoskery’s four-storey hotel were also built on Prince William Street during the post-fire rebuilding period. Chubb’s Building at Chubb’s Corner was described as “Classical in design, the detail being somewhat Greek in character”. Designed by McKean and Fairweather, architects, the building measured 25.5 feet on Prince William Street and 55 feet on Princess Street. It stood six storeys high on Princess Street and four on Prince William Street. The building contained stores and offices.⁵⁹

McCoskery’s hotel fronted on Prince William Street for 52 feet and extended back 90 feet, with a rear entrance on Queen Street. The lower storey contained offices, a barroom, and a ladies’ entrance in the northern end of the front. The hotel contained 68 rooms, including handsome dining rooms, spacious drawing rooms, sample rooms for commercial travellers, and bedroom suites.⁶⁰

Although businesses like J. and A. McMillan (fig. 49), stationers, Jardine and Co., grocers, and Emerson and Fisher (fig. 50), wholesale and retail dealers in stoves, furnaces and kitchen furnishings, tended to

rebuild in other parts of the city, these three built large new business houses on their pre-fire lots that complimented their neighbours. Given the qualms of the local press over the domination of the street by offices and financial institutions, it is ironic that many of the businesses for which the post-fire buildings were erected have since either moved or become defunct. But J. and A. McMillan, established in 1822 and still operating today was expected to be lucky if it could "hold its own!"

J. and A. McMillan rebuilt on their old site on Prince William Street. The four-storey building with a basement and surmounted by a hopper-shaped deck roof was erected "especially for the requirements of their book, stationery, binding and printing business". Each flat was 32.5 feet by 120 feet deep. The first flat was 15 feet high and contained their book and stationery department. The second, third and fourth flats were, respectively, 12, 11 and 10 feet high, and the basement was 8 feet high. A small parcel elevator connected each flat with the business office and salesroom. The building was also fitted with speaking tubes.⁶¹

Other Commercial Buildings

Before the fire, the *Telegraph* itself had for several years occupied a wooden building on Prince William Street owned by Walker and Son, opposite the Bank of New Brunswick on the site of a fine insurance building since erected by W.M. Jarvis. Like many typical pre-fire structures, the *Telegraph* building had not originally been intended for a newspaper office, but it had been adapted by means of repairs, alterations and additions. This entire establishment was destroyed in 1877. In the fall of 1877, a lot measuring 64 by 38 feet at the corner of Canterbury and Church streets was leased for a twenty-one-year term. In consultation with several department heads of the *Telegraph*, the local architectural firm, McKean and Fairweather, drew up the plans. The new building (fig. 51), five storeys high including a basement, completely covered the lot. The entire structure, with the exception of two shops, each 18 by 34 feet and two warerooms of the same size above them, was occupied by the *Daily Telegraph* newspaper and job printing establishments. Constructed of brick with granite and freestone trim it was described as "a most tasteful structure" which secured a large amount of accommodation out of the area at their disposal and was "constructed with the greatest economy."⁶²

The appearance of Germain Street (fig. 34), like the other chief thoroughfares of the city was improved by the erection of many handsome new buildings during this period. Dr. Ring's brick building at the corner of Germain and Church streets was completed at the end of 1877. Three storeys high on Germain Street and four on Church Street, the structure accommodated a

hall, six stores and offices. On the front of the building were three groups of plate glass windows, with three windows in each group. Between each group were projecting tiers. The window heads had segmented arch heads of stone, and springers and keystones of the same material. The front of the building was decorated with square and diagonal semi-courses. The entire building was finished with a brick cornice, and was separated with ornamental cast iron columns. On the Germain Street front of the first floor were three large stores. Each store had a uniform width of 13 feet, while the northern and central stores were respectively 65 and 37 feet deep. The basement contained three stores with an entrance from Church Street, five other offices and a storeroom.⁶³

Germain Street was one of the streets that particularly demonstrated the displacement in the traditional layout of businesses. Whole ranges of stores were built on this street where before there had been none (compare figs. 6 & 52). Before the fire, the retail trade in the smaller and fancier wares had tended to gravitate to Germain Street. After the fire this shift was emphatic. The attractions of Germain Street were described by the *Globe* as early as October 1878: "Its proximity to the centre of King Street, the fact that it is a level street, not requiring from ladies the fatigue of uphill walking, will make it very popular as a promenade, and we expect to see there a flourishing class of milliners, dry goods and other fancy stores."⁶⁴

Churches

Prior to the great fire St. John could not boast much of the architectural beauty of its churches, for with three or four exceptions they did little credit to the taste of those who erected them. Of the eleven places of worship destroyed on that memorable 20th June, but one was built of a more durable material than wood, and most of them were utterly without any architectural pretensions.⁶⁵

As for comfort, most of the churches, according to the *Telegraph*, "were far from being up to the mark, and strangers often wondered why the people of St. John, so enterprising in other respects, permitted themselves to fall so far behind with respect to the buildings which they had dedicated to the service of GOD."⁶⁶

Like the commercial structures, almost all of the new churches built in the four years following the fire were a functional improvement on their predecessors, being larger, grander, and more comfortable. Most of them were Gothic in design. The Germain Street Baptist Church (fig. 53), the first to be completed after the fire (September, 1878), was far superior to the old edifice. The old church, before the fire considered one of the most comfortable buildings in the city, was built of brick and measured 75 by 74 feet. The dimensions of the new Gothic church, constructed of brick with freestone trim, were 100 by 65 feet. Beneath the church were lecture rooms, classrooms, and other

offices connected with the church; the auditorium above, including the gallery, seated eight hundred people (fig. 54). The church cost \$40,000.⁶⁷

The Germain Street Methodist Church (fig. 55), located on the corner of Queen Square and Charlotte Street (and renamed Queen Square Methodist Church), was another handsome Gothic structure of red freestone with trim. The structure measured 60 by 124 feet deep. It replaced a wooden building (fig. 56) which measured only 42 feet by 80 feet. The new church seated 750 people and, when the Sunday school was added, one thousand people.⁶⁸

The first church to formally lay a foundation stone was St. David's Presbyterian (fig. 57) on Sydney Street. It replaced a wooden structure which measured 60 by 76 feet, with a school house in the rear. The new church, built of brick with stone dressing, measured 100 by 60 feet, with a large tower giving an additional frontage to the building of nearly 20 feet. In the lower storey was a lecture room and school room capable of seating seven hundred persons, and vestry and other rooms. The pews in the auditorium were semicircularly arranged with a gallery on three sides; it had a seating capacity of one thousand. A bell weighing 2,350 pounds was installed and an organ was built by a Saint John firm — the old church did not have one. The cost of this building was \$40,000.⁶⁹

The St. Andrews Presbyterian Church (fig. 58) was among the largest and most imposing of the church edifices erected. This emphasized the contrast between the new and old churches. The old church (fig. 59) was described as "a shaky, wooden structure," 50 by 80 feet, with a school room measuring 63 by 20 feet in the rear. In basic design, it closely resembled the early pre-fire Trinity Church (figs. 60 & 61). By contrast, the new church, built of brick with a stone front at a cost of \$65,000, was 150 by 82 feet wide across the front and 78 feet wide in the body of the building. The Sunday school room at the rear measured 72 by 55 feet and 30 feet high, and was capable of seating 650 people. Also in the rear of the church were the lecture room which measured 55 by 38 feet, the Young Men's Association room, 30 by 36 feet, a session room, vestry, and Sunday school library. The auditorium was 72 feet by 65 feet and 60 feet high; the pews were circular in form, and the gallery extended, as in St. David's Presbyterian Church, around the church on three sides. The auditorium seated one thousand people. The church had two towers; the lowest measured 88 feet to the summit, the other was surmounted by a spire, the top of which measured 179 feet from the ground. The building was heated by steam, with a radiator in every pew. The organ was built in Boston and cost \$3,500.⁷⁰

The first church to be commenced and the last to be completed was the Centenary Queen Square Church (fig. 62) which replaced a building measuring 62 by 90

feet. The new church, estimated to cost 80 thousand dollars, was built on a gigantic scale and accommodated fifteen hundred people (see fig. 63). A school house, forming the transept of the building, measured 90 by 40 feet. The church was built of limestone, with the window finish, tracery and trim of artificial stone made out of cement. The lower part of the school building was devoted to parlors and classrooms for church work, while the upper part contained a Sunday school room capable of seating five or six hundred people—this was used for public worship until the church was completed. Its style, like most of the other churches of this period, was Gothic.⁷¹

Two exceptions to the predominance of Gothic churches being built at this time were Trinity Church and the Leinster Street Baptist Church. The dimensions of the old wooden Leinster Street Baptist Church were 45 by 70 feet, whereas its replacement, at the corner of Leinster and Carmarthen streets, was T-shaped, with an extreme length of 114 feet and a width at the front of 60 feet and at the rear of 90 feet. The auditorium, including a gallery at the end, accommodated seven hundred people. Located at the rear of this brick and stone structure were the vestry, classrooms, pastor's room, library, baptistry, kitchen and several fine schoolrooms.⁷² The architects, John Stevens and Son of Boston, did not strictly follow any classical design of architecture for this church. They had aimed rather "to combine such forms as would be suited to the present age, and the habits, wants and tastes of the people."⁷³ The outline, that of a headless cross, and general features, however, were modelled from the Byzantine period. The building cost \$30,000.⁷⁴

After considering numerous plans, the vestry of Trinity Church accepted those of W.T. Thomas of Montreal. The old church, which had been more than once enlarged (figs. 60, 61 & 64), was built of wood, measured 110 by 56 feet, and had a handsome spire 100 feet high. The new church (figs. 65 & 66), built in the early English style, was 66 by 155 feet, with a handsome cut stone porch in front. The new spire rose 200 feet above the ground. The church had an open-timber room 52 feet high. Its seating capacity was 780 people, and it cost \$40,000. With its lavish appointments and greater space, the interior of the new church far surpassed that of its predecessor. A school house, measuring 80 by 52 feet, was also built on Charlotte Street, and cost an estimated \$16,000.⁷⁵

Private Buildings

Early documentation, and photographs in particular, are rare for any but the wealthier class of home, although obviously many modest structures were built during the period. Cheaper residences also tended to have a shorter life span. The new buildings erected by the wealthier classes were largely concentrated in the higher parts of the city. On Queen Square (figs. 67 &

68), Carmarthen, Germain (fig. 69), Sydney, Duke, Orange (fig. 70) and Mecklenburg (fig. 71) streets were many elegant mansions and palatial residences "of every variety of architecture."⁷⁶ Many, however, were variations on either Italianate or Second Empire styles. One house, located on Queen Square, was built of beautiful ornamented stone, with a mansard elevation cased with copper plates. The home of one of the merchant princes of the city, it was said to have cost "three times the sum of any residence erected in St. John."⁷⁷ Caverhill Hall (fig. 72), situated at 134 Sydney Street, the home of Simeon Jones, a brewer and mayor of Saint John, was also built in this period. Its design was taken from that of a house Jones and his wife had admired in Toronto. The plans were prepared by Mr. Brown, a Toronto architect, and the building was completed about 1881. This mansion represents one of the extremities of style indulged in by more wealthy citizens at this time.

A couple of 1860s buildings on Chipman Hill show the contrast between the houses of the wealthy before and after the fire. The Pratt House (fig. 73) and its neighbour at 13 Prince William Street (fig. 74) show the restrained exteriors of the pre-fire period. The only flamboyant aspect of the buildings — which is considerable — remains inside, in the form of cornice decorations (fig. 75), general plasterwork, carvings and wall and ceiling paintings. In contrast, the late-1870s buildings flaunt the wealth and prosperity of their owners in a profuse display of exterior decoration. A comparison of other types of private residences before and after the fire demonstrates a general movement from the austere to a more varied and externally decorative style of architecture.

By 1878, a mile of new frame buildings, erected for the poorer classes and roofed with asphalt and gravel, stretched from Orange Street to South Harbour.⁷⁸ While no detailed contemporary photographs of these buildings are available, they were probably similar to those constructed in the same period in the vicinity of present Main street (see fig. 76). Most of these have since been destroyed.

Early in the rebuilding period, the *Telegraph* described a new scheme for the construction of brick residences in blocks much like the commercial buildings or as duplexes, for people of moderate means. The mansard roof, a major feature of the Second Empire style, was preferred to the traditional pre-fire gable roof, because of the extra space it provided in the top storey. The article appeared in July 1877:

The scheme is based on the assumption, which seems to prevail everywhere but in St. John, that an entire lot of 40 feet front is not required for an ordinary house, but that two comfortable houses can be built on each lot of that frontage. The houses embraced in the proposed plan are what may be termed brick cottages, each with a frontage of 20 feet of suitable depth. They will have a basement story somewhat

elevated from the street, a first floor and a Mansard story making three flats available for rooms. The houses are intended to be set ten feet each from the street, and there will be a front entrance to the basement under the stoop. . . . [A] house with the same accommodation would cost nearly twice as much by the system of building isolated houses which is usually adopted.⁷⁹

There are a number of houses fitting this description in the residential part of the city today.

Most of the residential buildings erected in this period were larger than their predecessors. Whether constructed of brick or wood, they tended to be either flat or mansard-roofed. Like other contemporary structures, they were taller, better lighted, more comfortable, and like the public and commercial buildings, they generally offered more accommodation per building than was the case before the fire.

The End of the Reconstruction: The Local Press Reacts

As a result of the full-scale reconstruction, the press observed certain shifts in population densities in and around the city. Besides the shift of business from Prince William to Germain streets, another effect of the fire had been to cause rapid development in the districts beyond the fire limits, where building regulations were less rigid and where poorer people could erect buildings more cheaply. This was somewhat evident in Carleton, but in Portland, in the vicinity of the Marsh Bridge along the Dorchester Street extension, it was particularly apparent. Gaps in many streets were closed up and building operations, "not indeed of a superior class of structures," were being carried on energetically. The *Globe*, observing this trend as early as June 1878, commented that "all that part of the populated section has been much benefited, not, let us hope, at the permanent expense of the portion that suffered by the fire of a year ago."⁸⁰

The Saint John *Globe* commented prophetically 12 months after the fire that:

. . . It would seem as if there were enough buildings, even though a large portion of Prince William street, Canterbury street, Water street, and Germain street is untouched. But as time goes on, when the Custom House, the Post Office, the Bank of New Brunswick, the City Buildings are finished, business will find its way back to its old quarters in those streets, and no doubt without any serious or permanent injury to the present activity in the northern and north-eastern section of the city.⁸¹

A common aspect of the majority of the post-fire buildings was their grander scale. When it is considered that the population was not rapidly increasing, and that the number of buildings erected after the fire outnumbered those destroyed, it is reasonable to speculate that the city might have overestimated its build-

ing requirements. In 1879 the *Telegraph* had promoted the "wise and patriotic course" to rebuild without delay.⁸² A year later, however, the paper expressed quite a different view, and described the situation as a "choice of difficulties":

If men build too rapidly or too expensively they may be open to the charge of rashness and extravagance, if they build mean edifices they may be accused of thinking of the needs of the present and taking no thought of the future....To presume a due proportion between parsimony and extravagance is difficult and to judge accurately of the precise effect which the burning down and rebuilding of a city will have on the drift of its business is more difficult still. If then some mistakes have been made in the rebuilding of St. John they are such as naturally arise out of the circumstances in which our people found themselves.⁸³

The relocation of businesses during the reconstruction period resulted in more homogeneous streetscapes, such as Prince William "Wall" Street, with its chains of insurance, bank and public administrative buildings. The movement of some of the residential population to the outlying districts was perhaps a strengthening of the trend to develop residential areas in the suburbs, although during the period large numbers of residences for both the wealthy and professional classes were rebuilt on their previous sites in the city core. Not only was the physical appearance of the buildings changed, but also their distribution. Over the short span of four years, the central portion of the city had essentially been replaced.

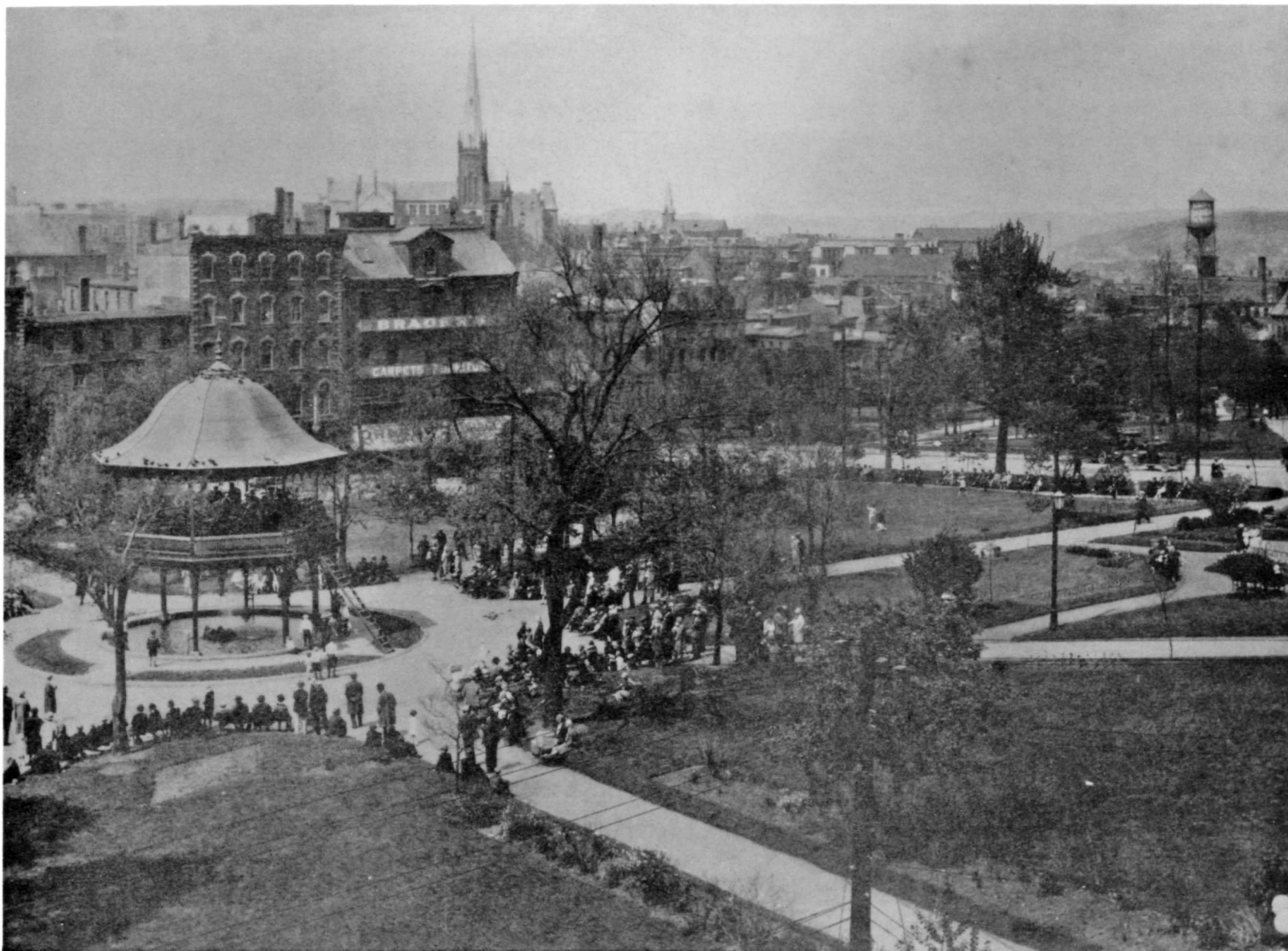
Notes

- 1 *Globe*, 25 June 1877, p. 2.
- 2 *SJDT*, 16 September 1878, p. 3.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 17 September 1877, p. 3.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 18 August 1877, p. 1.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 31 May 1878, p. 2.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 19 June 1880, p. 2.
- 7 *MT*, 25 June 1880, p. 1529. *SJDT*, 19 June 1880, p. 2. At this time the *Telegraph* also published a detailed article on the financing of the rebuilding. It was estimated that the new buildings could be valued at a minimum of \$6,250,000, excluding the lots. Of this amount, the Dominion government had appropriated \$420,000 for public buildings. This group of buildings was appraised at \$115,000. About \$70,000 had been expended by the two banks which had built "on their own account since the fire." Other buildings of a public nature, such as schools and churches, were estimated to have cost \$425,000, while private buildings were valued at \$5,220,000. Mortgages placed on property in the burnt district since the fire numbered 768, with a value of \$1,752,744. Of the estimated total expenditure, the newspaper reported that only \$258,000, or about four per cent, had been obtained abroad. Mortgages on the post-fire buildings approximated less than one third of their actual value.
- 8 *SJDT*, 27 September 1877, p. 1.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 *Ibid.*, 26 September 1877, p. 1.
- 11 *SJDT*, 20 June 1879, p. 2. Table 1, referred to in text, is from the *Globe*, 19 June 1878, p. 2; these statistics differ slightly from those of the *Telegraph*, but they include building progress outside the boundaries of the burnt district, and provide a more general impression of widespread building activity in the city.
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 *Globe*, 19 June 1878, p. 2.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 *Ibid.*
- 17 *SJDT*, 20 June 1879, p. 2.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 *Ibid.*
- 22 *Ibid.*
- 23 *Ibid.*, 5 October 1878, p. 2.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 20 June 1881, p. 2.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 20 June 1879, p. 2.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 20 June 1881, p. 2.
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 *SJDT*, 1 August 1872, p. 1.
- 30 "Alongshore," *SJDT*, 14 August 1875; see also *SJDT*, 9 September 1876, p. 1.
- 31 *Globe*, 19 June 1878, p. 1.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 *Ibid.*
- 34 *SJDT*, 5 July 1877, p. 2.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 20 July 1877, p. 1.
- 36 *Ibid.*
- 37 *Ibid.*, 8 June 1878, p. 3.
- 38 *Globe*, 19 June 1878, p. 1.
- 39 *SJDT*, 20 August 1877, p. 3.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 10 December 1877, p. 3.
- 41 *Ibid.*

- 42 Ibid., 23 February 1878, p. 3.
- 43 *Globe*, 25 October 1878, p. 2.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 *SJDT*, 30 May 1878, p. 1; 18 April 1878, p. 3.
- 47 Ibid., 3 February 1880, p. 3.
- 48 *Globe*, 19 June 1878, p. 4.
- 49 *SJDT*, 26 April 1881, p. 1.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Christina Cameron and Janet Wright, *Second Empire Style in Canadian Architecture* (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1980), p. 48. Canadian Historic Sites No. 24.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 *Globe*, 19 June 1878, p. 4.
- 55 *SJDT*, 29 December 1877, p. 3.
- 56 Ibid., 28 August 1877, p. 1.
- 57 Ibid., 6 July 1877, p. 2.
- 58 Ibid., 28 August 1877, p. 1.
- 59 Ibid., 2 November 1878, p. 3.
- 60 Ibid., 10 June 1878, p. 3.
- 61 Ibid., 19 June 1878, p. 3.
- 62 Ibid., 29 October 1879, p. 2.
- 63 Ibid., 23 November 1877, p. 3.
- 64 Ibid., 5 October 1878, p. 2.
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Ibid.
- 70 Ibid.
- 71 Ibid., 22 July 1878, p. 1.
- 72 Ibid., 5 October 1878, p. 2.
- 73 Ibid., 22 July 1878, p. 1.
- 74 Ibid.
- 75 Ibid.
- 76 *Daily Sun* (Saint John), 18 November 1878, p. 1.
- 77 Ibid., p. 2.
- 78 Ibid., p. 1.
- 79 *SJDT*, 14 July 1877, p. 2.
- 80 *Globe*, 19 June 1878, p. 1.
- 81 Ibid.
- 82 *SJDT*, 16 May 1879, p. 2.
- 83 Ibid., 19 June 1880, p. 2.



23. King Square, c. 1851. *Drawing by J.W. Hill, lithographed by Saxony of New York, courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum*



24. King Square, c. 1900. *Toronto Transit Commission photo, courtesy of the National Archives of Canada, PA 55043*



25. Sketch of Victoria Hotel, pre-fire
Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum



“Neither the public nor private buildings, with the exception of the Victoria Hotel, claim much merit for architecture, but their arrangements and convenience illustrate the character of the people, dignified without pretension and substantial without pride or show.”

Telegraph, 1 August 1872

26. 1870s view of the Victoria Hotel
W. & J. Notman photo
Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum



27. King Street, looking toward the harbour, c. 1867. *Courtesy of the National Archives of Canada, C 1649*

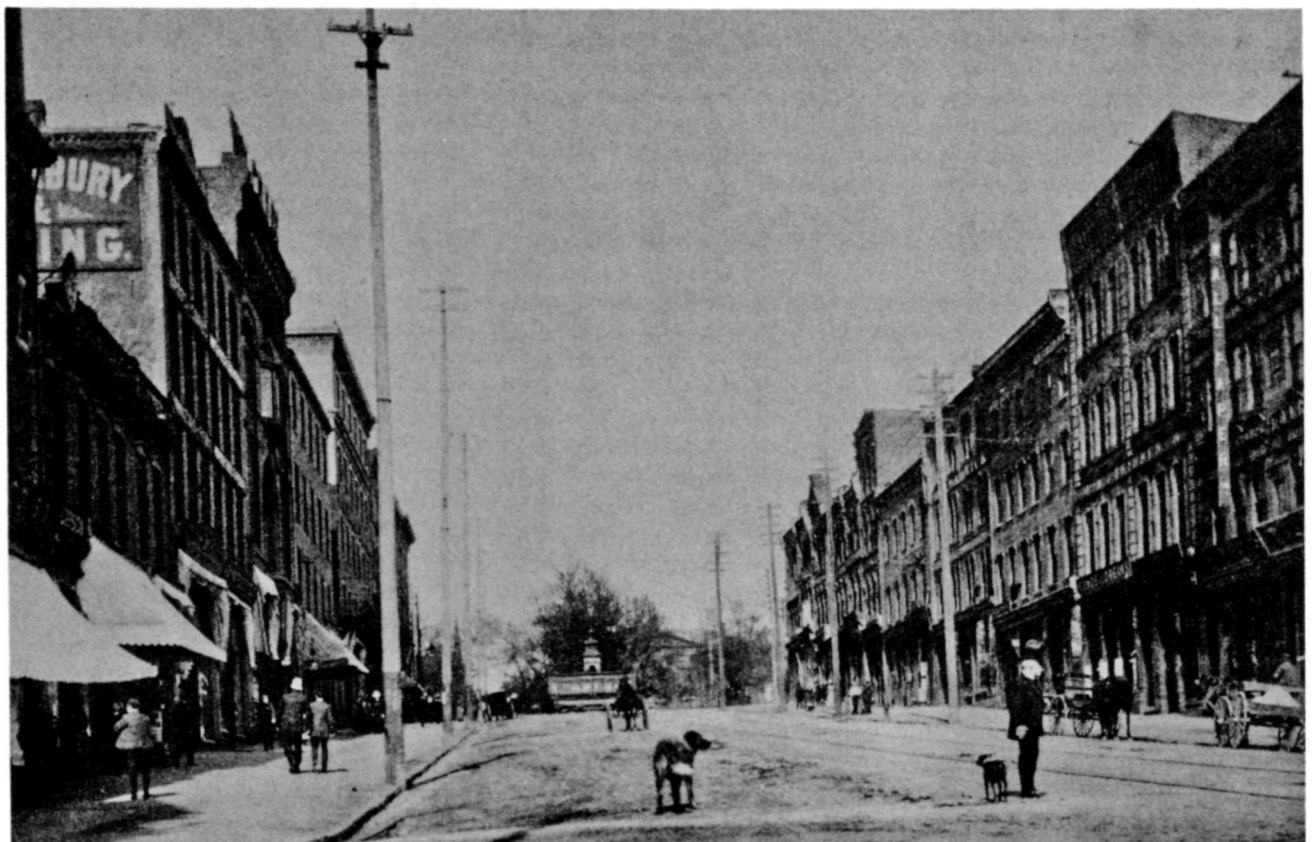


28. King Street, looking toward King Square, 1875

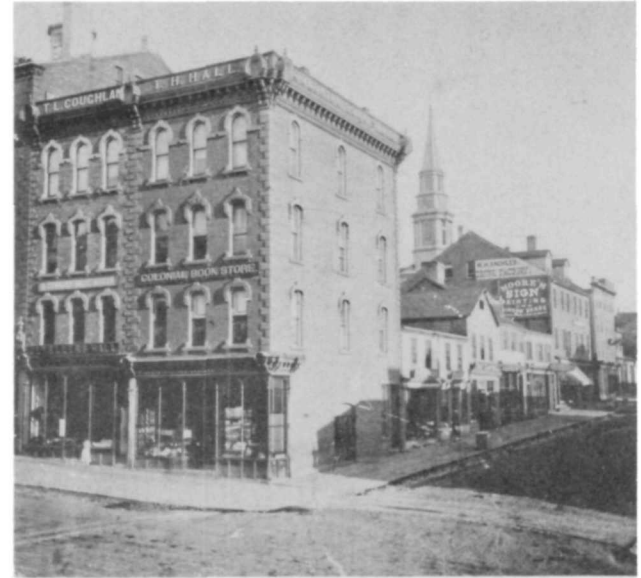
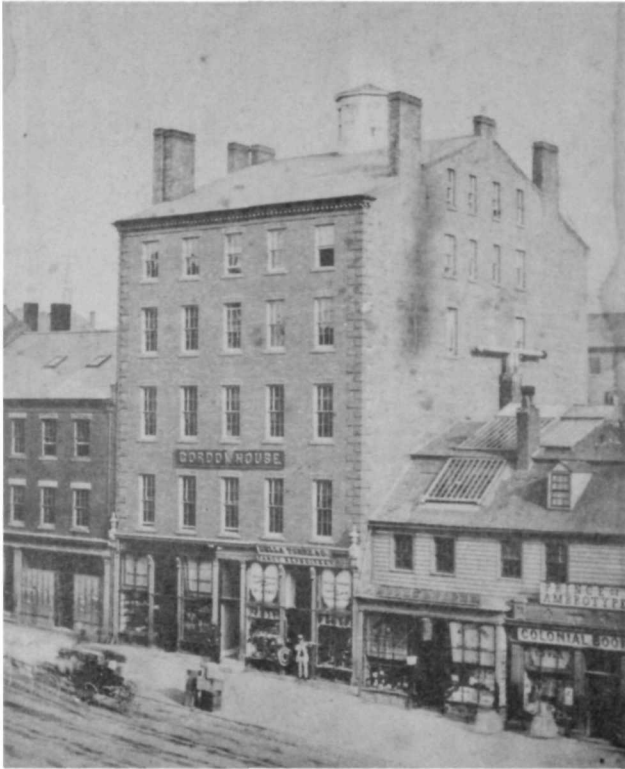
J.R. Woodburn photo, courtesy of the National Archives of Canada, PA 103122



29. King Street, with Commercial Block at left, 1899
Carre, Art Work on the City of Saint John



30. King Street, east from Germain, 1899
Carre, Art Work on the City of Saint John



32. Colonial Bookstore, King Street, as rebuilt in 1860s
Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum

31. Gordon House and Colonial Bookstore, King Street, c. 1860
Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum



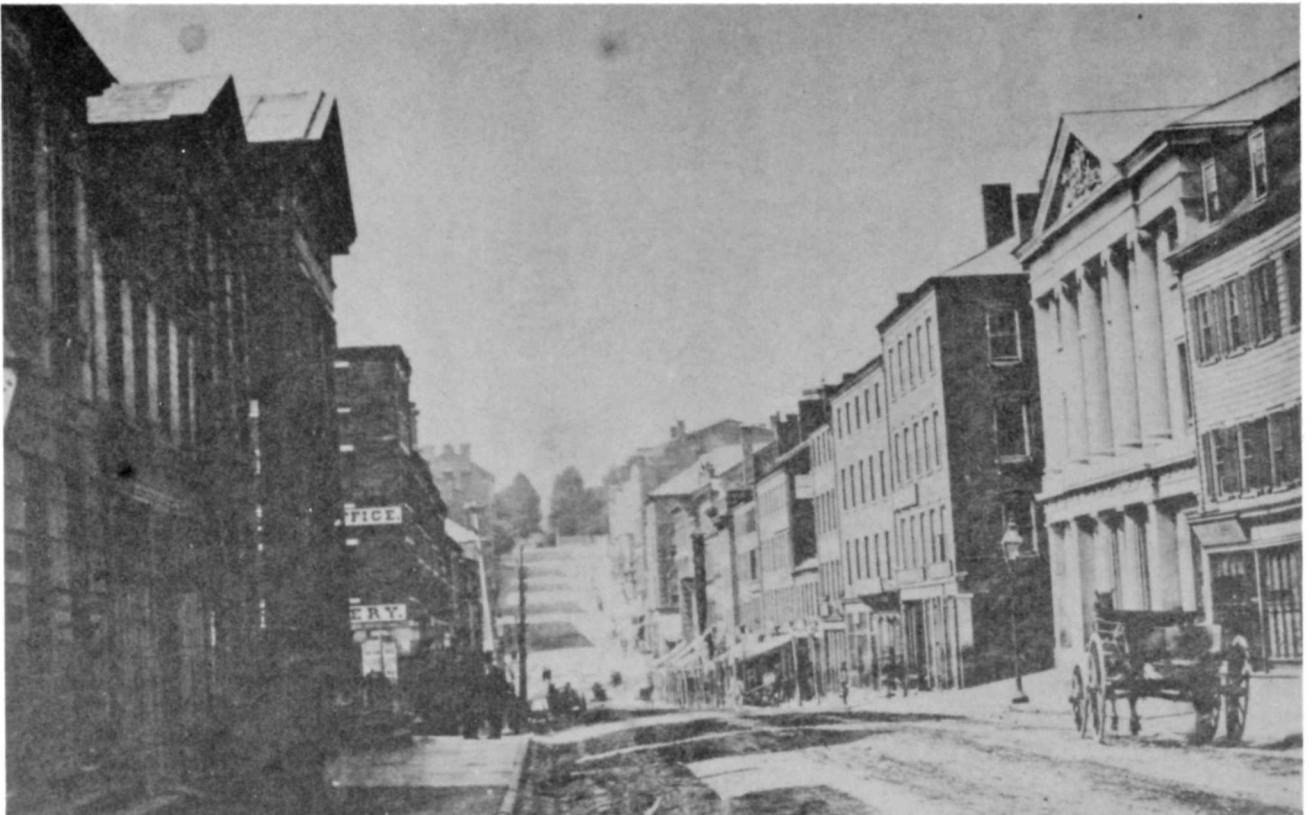
Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum

33. Germain Street in the early 1870s



34. Germain Street business section, 1899

Carre, Art Work on the City of Saint John



35. Pre-fire view of Prince William Street, with the Commercial Bank on the right and the Bank of New Brunswick opposite
Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum



36. Prince William Street, 1899

Carre, Art Work on the City of Saint John



37. North side of Market Square

Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum



38. Pre-fire business houses on Market Square

Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum



39. Manson's department store, the second "Palace," adjacent to the Domville Building on King Street at Market Square
Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum

The Role of Insurance Companies

The insurance companies exerted a powerful influence on the method of rebuilding the city. Their chief concerns after the fire were the formulation and the enforcement of new regulations governing the construction of buildings.

Humanitarian considerations aside, their severe losses in the Great Fire gave the insurance companies a vested interest in determining how the city would be rebuilt. The three local insurers, for example, had fared poorly. The St. John Mutual “busted”, and of the \$75,000 due to policy holders, never paid a cent.¹ The St. John Maritime Mutual, which had started a few years earlier, “went up in smoke”. Premium notes, assessments and stock books burned in the safe, and nothing remained of the company but the policies in the hands of the insured. The Central, a Fredericton firm, had to borrow money to settle its claims.² The Stadacona, a national company, gave up business. Of the three American agencies in Saint John, only one was reported to have withdrawn from the city — the Phoenix, of Brooklyn, which paid \$60,000.³ One source estimated that the English insurance companies suffered a net loss of about \$4,824,500; the Canadian companies, \$1,351,500; and the American companies, \$448,500.⁴ The gross loss of all twenty-four companies operating in the city was quoted at \$6,933,674.87, and the net loss, at \$6,624,672.22 (see Table 1).⁵

In the months before the new building legislation was passed, the *Telegraph* reported that some companies were threatening to withdraw from Saint John altogether if their demands for strict laws, combined with a program for their aggressive enforcement, were not satisfied. They expressed the hope that the new Fire Limits Act, and the acts relating to construction and providing for an inspector of building, would “strengthen the hands of the agents opposing the withdrawal of their respective companies from St. John and enable them to offer more moderate rates than they should otherwise be able to do so.”⁶ Underlining the important role of the insurance companies’ agents, the *Telegraph* stated editorially that they could do much “to promote the erection of buildings which will, to a reasonable extent, be fire resisting and not directly combustible, and if they remain firm in promoting their object, they will do well for the city and themselves.”⁷ The collapse of the smaller insurance companies had given the larger firms more power in their campaign for building reform. For example, this notice concerning the “reservations” of the large companies appeared in the *Telegraph* before the enactment of the new building laws:

The strong and reliable companies, which have saved the city from commercial ruin, by themselves assuming enormous financial burdens, are naturally not anxious to repeat the experiment. They therefore give notice that they will only insure buildings of a certain class, and no one need wonder at it.⁸

Two weeks later, a major English company, the Liverpool and London and Globe, advertised that they would, at least until the new laws were passed, insure (“to limited amounts”) wooden and brick buildings in the northern part of the city, Portland and vicinity, except that:

In accordance with the action of the other offices no Insurance can be granted on any building of wood or otherwise of inferior construction erected since June last, or the contents of any such building.⁹

The New Brunswick Board of Underwriters, which had been established in Saint John in 1865, also pressed for the immediate passage of new building regulations, before rebuilding could commence based on the liberal laws of 1872.¹⁰ Serious fires in the towns of St. Stephen and Woodstock during the summer of the Great Fire had placed additional drains on the financial resources of the insurance companies. After the Saint John catastrophe, underwriters began to identify the principal risks in the cities and towns throughout the province, including Saint John and the neighbouring communities of Carleton and Portland. They also examined the factories, most of which were located in Portland (outside the burnt district), and made practical recommendations for greater precautions against fire which would bring insurance costs to the lowest possible levels.¹¹

Aside from their general insistence that any future construction in the city be regulated by stringent rules of fire safety, the insurance companies played an educational role, offering suggestions as to types of buildings that might be economical as well as fire-proof. The city’s earlier fire limit law of 1872 had been “practically a dead letter for some time,”¹² and the *Daily News* remarked that it looked as though “the work of ensuring the rebuilding of a safer class of structures than those which burned must be done by the agents of the Insurance Companies”.¹³ For example, because it was easier to extinguish fires which occurred in long, narrow buildings, they recommended building in blocks, preferably with a maximum area of 4000 square feet.¹⁴ While the suggestion was not actually incorporated into the provincial building act, this type of structure became a common feature of post-fire Saint John. The new act did stipulate that wooden buildings erected in a range of more than 40 feet be

separated at 40 foot intervals by brick walls.¹⁵ Such uniform ranges of buildings began to appear in areas beyond the central commercial district, where wooden structures were still permitted.

Agents supplied information on acceptable, standard types of fire-proof buildings which could be insured at reasonable rates. Because of the wood used in and around the buildings in Saint John before the fire, the rate of insurance on even the best brick buildings had never dropped below one-half of one per cent. One newspaper report offered the following comparison of insurance rates in other cities:

. . . in England, where less wood was used, the rate was as low as one-third; and in Italy the rate was one-twentieth, so low that it did not pay for collection. There was absolutely no risk at all there of more than the partial loss of a building or its contents. It was simply a question of the reduction of hazard to a minimum.¹⁶

For Saint John property owners, the result of the fire and its effect on the insurance companies was a great increase in rates. The insurance on first-class brick buildings rose from 0.8 and 0.5 per cent to 1 and 1.25 per cent, while the rate on wooden buildings increased from 1 per cent to 2 and 3 per cent.¹⁷

Before the new building laws were passed, a controversy developed over the city council's suggestion, which was supported by the insurance companies, that only brick buildings be allowed on wharves. Anxious letters to the editor described the difficulty and expense of obtaining proper foundations for brick structures on the wharves.¹⁸ Several owners of property on South Wharf and Ward Street asked that the proposed building law be amended to allow them to put up

brick-cased buildings of three stories. Otherwise, the lots would be valueless, because construction costs were prohibitive. In March 1878, the insurance companies again urged government to reinforce the rule against placing brick-cased buildings anywhere in Fire District 1 except on certain parts of the South and North wharves.¹⁹ Notwithstanding this pressure, the "Act to amend the Law for the better prevention of Conflagrations in the City of Saint John" was again revised in April, 1878, and extended the boundaries within which brick-cased buildings were allowed in District 1. This appears to have been the only major concession forced upon the insurance companies.

The attitude of the insurance companies, as expressed by their influence on the form of the new laws and by educating the public, forced upon the property owners, architects and builders alike an increased awareness of fire safety and the need to support and maintain better construction standards. Obviously, owners of first-rate brick structures objected to having wooden buildings erected in close proximity, which would force them to pay higher insurance rates. "It is only on well built brick or stone houses that we can expect to be able to raise a fair amount of money on mortgage, or get insured at a moderate premium," wrote the editor of the *Telegraph*.²⁰

The successful implementation of the new building laws also depended upon a system of supervision and strict enforcement. This led to the appointment of a building inspector, whose responsibilities and powers were considerable. The stand taken by the insurance companies served to strengthen the authority of the building inspector, the insurance companies' inspectors, and the local police.

Notes

- 1 *Globe*, 19 June 1878, p. 4.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid., 8 September 1878, p. 2.
- 7 Ibid., 3 July 1877, p. 2. A month later, the *Globe* (3 August 1877, p. 1) published a front-page article entitled, "Standard Buildings for Insurance," which summarized an acknowledged authority, *Fires, their Causes, Prevention and Extinction* (see "The New Building Laws").
- 8 *SJDT*, 14 July 1877, p. 1.
- 9 Ibid., 31 July 1877, p. 1.
- 10 *Monetary Times & Trade Review* (Toronto), 30 December 1881, p. 798.
- 11 Ibid. Four months after the Saint John disaster, neighbouring, Portland suffered a "Great Fire" which turned about 3,000 people out into the street. The *Daily News* of 23 October 1877 reported that property worth more than \$200,000 (and insured for less than \$70,000) was lost. The incident emphasized the importance of having strict fire laws, regardless of the initial expense of building with non-flammable materials. Portland, situated on the boundary of Saint John, was described as a tinderbox and contained many working class homes of wood construction. The bulk of the mills, foundries, bakeries and factories in the Saint John area, as well as large wooden storage sheds stocked with combustible materials, were also located here. Until its amalgamation with Saint John in 1889, Portland continued to be a haven for those who wished to build cheaply.
- 12 "Rebuilding with Wood," *Daily News*, 29 June 1877, p. 1.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 *SJDT*, 17 July 1877, p. 5.
- 15 New Brunswick. Legislative Assembly, "An Act to amend the Law for the better prevention of Conflagrations in the City of Saint John," *Acts* (Fredericton: G.E. Fenety, 1877), p. 17.
- 16 "Rebuilding with Wood," op. cit.
- 17 *Globe*, 19 June 1878, p. 4.
- 18 *SJDT*, 17 August 1877, pp. 2-3; 23 March 1878, p. 3; 25 March 1878, p. 3.
- 19 Ibid., 23 March 1878, p. 3.
- 20 Ibid., 3 July 1877, p. 2.

Materials

Early in the reconstruction period, especially before the passage of the new laws, a controversy developed over the use of brick versus wood. Brick was even preferred over stone, which had a tendency to crack or explode when subjected to extreme heat (see, for example, the old customs house, fig. 12, and old post office, fig. 16). But in Saint John the preference for wood was based on tradition, aesthetics and cost. In a city where the economy had traditionally been based on the lumber and shipping industries, and where wood was therefore cheap and readily available (more so with the demise of the wooden ship), the transition from wood to brick was neither smooth nor uncontested. The *Daily News* described one of the problems with brick as being “its want of capacity to take on fog hues readily.”¹ People loved their old homes and they wanted new ones to resemble them as much as possible, fog tints not excepted:

While wood, no matter how much disguised by paint, quickly makes a friend of the misty messenger from the bay, and takes on the delightfully cool and neutral tints which saucy visitors from Boston, whose uneducated eyes have not learned to appreciate them, call “dingy,” brick stoutly resists the vapory influence and stares impudently red from year to year. If brick would take more kindly to the fog we are sure it would be better liked in St. John.²

The objection to brick was based on more than its extra expense. Many people in Saint John had an affection for wood and “a hearty prejudice against brick.”³ The former material was described as warmer, more easily worked, “more susceptible of cheap ornamentation,” and “more pleasing to the sight.”⁴

At a public debate held a week after the fire, a local man, D.S. Kerr, expressed the opinion that brick was more dangerous than wood in the case of fire. “The burning of brick buildings created heat, rarefaction of the air, atmospheric currents, ten times as great as are caused by the burning of wood. He had seen it and knew it.”⁵ Supporters of this view, in the opinion of architect W.G. Preston, were welcome to take in a load of bricks for their winter’s fuel, freeze to death and vex the public ear no more.⁶ One writer conjectured that if D.S. Kerr were forced to live in a brick building he would undoubtedly go to the extra expense of having it encased with wood as a protection from spontaneous combustion by moonlight!⁷ The editor of the *Telegraph* commented:

Yet sensible men, champions of the “poor man” will tell us, in substance, that the risk of fire in a case of brick buildings is not much less than wooden buildings! It is surprising that no rival insurance agent ever discovered the fact and made a fortune of it.⁸

As for the argument championing the economy of wood over the expense of brick or stone, there were many in Saint John at the time,

...who don’t think it would have “cost too much” had they put five hundred dollars worth more of brick work into their walls, so that they and other helpers would have dared to remain in their stores long enough on the afternoon of the twentieth of June to have removed five thousand dollars worth of their silks, their silver plate, or their clothing.⁹

The availability of loans provided one incentive to build; an increase in the supply of building materials created another. In 1877 materials such as brick, wood and lime were cheaper than they had been for many years, a reflection of the depression of the time and a lifting of import tariffs. The *Monetary Times* recorded on 27 July 1877 that competition in providing building materials had reduced the price of “the much needed article of brick” to “lower prices than have been known before.” The same journal estimated that in 1877 buildings could be erected at a cost of ten or fifteen per cent less than had been possible during the previous decade.¹⁰

As early as the end of June 1877, the *Telegraph* was advocating brick and stone for building. The editor explained that before the fire, brick had cost from one quarter to a third more than wood,¹¹ creating a problem for people of small means. This burden was somewhat lightened when the duty was taken off imported bricks. It was a golden opportunity for the brick manufacturing business. By 30 October 1877, the *Telegraph* reported that 16 million bricks had been imported from the United States since the fire and, “but for such importation, the progress now visible in the rebuilding of Saint John could not have been made.”¹² Most of these shipments came by sea from Boston.

Some bricks were also obtained from Nova Scotia; the supply, however, was insufficient for Saint John’s needs. Nova Scotian brick makers complained that the removal of duty on bricks imported from the United States was prejudicial to their production and trade. The *Telegraph* explained plainly that,

...all the brick now in Nova Scotia, nay all the fuel in Nova Scotia for the making of brick, is very limited, and if we had to wait until Nova Scotia could meet our requirements, we would wait long; the importation of other dutiable materials, as well as of goods to sell in the new stores, would be greatly diminished, and a state of commercial depression produced.¹³

Also, noted the *Telegraph*, many of the bricks being imported were not of the type produced in Nova Scotia. The fact was that bricks carried from the brick-yards of Nova Scotia directly to Saint John cost nearly as much as those brought by freight from Boston.¹⁴

After the new building laws were passed, the use of wood was severely restricted, resulting in a predominance of brick and stone architecture. The materials required for the large-scale reconstruction of the city came from a wide variety of sources. All of the major public buildings built in the five years following the fire were constructed of fire-proof materials, prompting the *Globe* to offer the following comment on the results of a year's building activity:

The general characteristics of the new city, insofar as they present themselves outwardly, are greater uniformity of building, greater height, and as a whole, a greater amount of ornamentation. It is true, in regard to uniformity, that it is often apt to run into a dull sameness, and that there is not a great deal of beauty in red brick, nor can a very high style of architecture be obtained by any combination of these brick. But a few relief rows of coloured brick, the judicious use of curved lines, the addition here and there of freestone, even in small quantities, have done something to give a graceful character to many of the buildings - so that uniformity has not run wholly into dullness.¹⁵

Indeed, the façade of the Globe building itself (fig. 77) is an excellent illustration of the versatility of brick.

Freestone from New Brunswick Freestone Company's quarries in Albert County was used to build the new city hall (fig. 41) on Prince William Street.¹⁶ The basement of the Domville building (fig. 78), also on Prince William Street, was constructed with Ohio granite, and the superstructure with stone from the Caledonia Quarries in Rockland, New Brunswick.¹⁷ An advertisement for this company in 1877 (fig. 79) referred to its stone as "the finest Olive freestone in the Dominion; chosen above all others for the front of the new Post Office [fig. 40], for its colour and texture." It had received the highest prize at the Philadelphia Exposition and had been used "in many of the leading public and private buildings in Boston, New York and Philadelphia."¹⁸ Most of the granite for the foundation of the new customs house (fig. 42), also on Prince William Street, was obtained from Walton's quarry at Spoon Island, New Brunswick.¹⁹

Pugsley's office building, situated at the corner of Prince William and Princess streets, was constructed of brownstone, with Ohio stone trimmings.²⁰ The Bank of New Brunswick (fig. 45) was built of stone from Port Philip, in Nova Scotia.²¹ Marshall's insurance building (fig. 48), located at the corner of Prince William Street and Market Square and designed by McKean and Fairweather, was constructed mainly of brick, ornamented with moldings of galvanized iron and pressed zinc, and relieved by patterns and bands of coloured bricks. The front of the Bayard Block, an

office building on Prince William Street next to the Barnes Hotel, was "richly, but not elaborately, decorated with iron, polished granite and cut freestone;" the body of the front was of the "best American pressed brick."²²

Of the eleven major churches lost in the fire, only one had been built of a more durable material than wood.²³ Most of the new churches were constructed of stone or brick with freestone trim or dressings, such as the Germain Street Baptist Church (fig. 53), the first to be completed after the fire (September 1877), and St. David's Presbyterian (fig. 57) on Sydney Street.²⁴ The walls of the Leinster Street Baptist Church were faced with brick from Haverhill, Massachusetts, and trimmed with Bay of Fundy freestone. The roofs of the church, including the spire, were covered with Canada slate.²⁵

Two of the three Methodist churches under construction in 1878 were built of stone, instead of brick.²⁶ One of the most elaborate churches from this period, the Centenary Queen Square Church (fig. 62), rebuilt on its old site at the corner of Wentworth and Princess streets, was constructed of limestone, with window finish, tracery and trim of artificial stone made out of sand and cement.²⁷ The Germain Street Methodist Church (fig. 55), located at the corner of Queen Square and Charlotte Street, was constructed of red freestone with trim and window caps, of artificial stone. The windows were from the same molds as those of the Centenary Queen Square Church.²⁸ The Lower Cove Methodist Church, at the corner of Carmarthen and St. James streets, and the Reformed Episcopal Church on Charlotte Street were the only wooden church edifices under construction in 1878. Trinity Church (fig. 65), was constructed of rough ashlar, with rubbed stone trimmings; inside were granite pillars.²⁹

Other contemporary materials such as plate glass and metal products contributed to the change in the style of the new buildings. Daniel and Boyd, for example, built a two-storey warehouse with a wooden frame covered with corrugated iron. Claimed by the *Daily News* to be the first of its kind to be built in New Brunswick, it was a cheap and substantial building measuring 45 by 55 feet and 20 feet high, and took only ten days to erect.³⁰

Less information is available concerning the origins of materials used in the construction of private homes, although those not of wood were usually of brick or brick and stone, with flat or mansard roofs and some freestone trim. Three views of Queen Square, one of which dates from before the fire (fig. 8), and the others afterward (figs. 67 & 68), show that before 1877 most of the houses on this square were built of wood. The post-fire views present a radically different landscape of predominantly brick and stone buildings (see

also Germain Street, fig. 69; Orange Street, fig. 70; and Mecklenburg Street, fig. 71).

In general, the use of fire-proof materials combined with new building techniques resulted in larger buildings after 1877. This is evident in the churches, business buildings and the homes of the well-to-do, such as those on Queen Square. In addition, new materials allowed for greater large-scale external ornamentation than previously. The wooden carving and gingerbread decorations of the buildings of the pre-fire era gave way to stone carvings, heavy stone columns, pre-stamped, pre-pressed, and mass-produced ornamentation, for example, terra cotta molds and iron cornices and crestings. The potential monotony of brick façades was relieved by patterns produced by the varied placement, colour and texture of the bricks. The *Daily News* wrote in October of 1877:

The chief necessity of the law, as a provision against fire, really seems to be cheap brick. Not until St. John and its popular suburbs are built up solidly of brick can great fires [be prevented] however efficient our

Fire Department and however abundant our water supply may meanwhile be made.³¹

Because of the immediate and heavy demand, materials had to be imported from a wide variety of places; they were suddenly in generous supply and therefore liberally used. The city's architecture was subject to broader, more contemporary, international influences than before, when local wood was the principal building article. As a result, the imagination and wealth of owners and architects was more readily expressed in the exteriors of the new structures. Whereas in the past flamboyant ornamentation had been reserved for the interiors of the buildings (partly due to the delicacy of materials such as plaster and wood), it was now able to make its way to the exteriors. With the availability of mass-produced materials and new building techniques, the reconstruction was able to go forward with greater speed than would have been possible in the earlier period, and in a short time the traditional, reserved English character of the city's architecture was eclipsed.

Notes

- 1 “Rebuilding with Wood,” *Daily News*, 29 June 1877, p. 1.
- 2 *Daily News*, 6 July 1877, p. 1.
- 3 “Rebuilding with Wood,” op. cit.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 *SJDT*, 19 July 1877, p. 4.
- 7 *Daily News*, 6 July 1877, p. 1.
- 8 *SJDT*, 30 June 1877, p. 4.
- 9 Ibid., 19 July 1877, p. 4.
- 10 *MT*, 27 July 1877, p. 129.
- 11 *SJDT*, 30 June 1877, p. 2.
- 12 Ibid., 3 October 1877, p. 1.
- 13 Ibid., 10 October 1877, p. 1.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid., 8 September 1877, p. 2.
- 16 Ibid., 18 April 1879, p. 3.
- 17 Ibid., 10 June 1878, p. 3.
- 18 Ibid., 13 July 1877, p. 2.
- 19 Ibid., 26 April 1871, p. 1.
- 20 Ibid., 15 August 1879, p. 3.,
- 21 Ibid., 17 May 1878, p. 3.
- 22 Ibid., 28 August 1877, p. 1.
- 23 Ibid., 5 October 1878, p. 2.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 *Daily News*, 7 July 1877, p. 3. No illustration of this building was available.
- 31 *Daily News*, 23 October 1877, p.1.

Labour

Not only were materials plentiful and cheap, but the presence of large numbers of contractors, labourers, mechanics, masons and stone cutters in the city provided an additional incentive to build. The range of skills and experience among the craftsmen from both Canada and the United States complimented that of the architects. Only a building operation as extensive as that in post-fire Saint John could place such large numbers of labourers at the service of property owners and architects. In 1878, 1151 people were employed as builders in Saint John. This figure included carpenters, masons, painters, plumbers, marble workers, sash, door and blind makers, stone cutters, and tinsmiths, all employed in building operations, "to say nothing of the crowd of workmen of one kind or another directly engaged in building construction, and the number indirectly employed to supply the needs of the building class."¹ By 1884, this number had dwindled to 461.² In response to the demands of the large transient population, both the construction and service industries prospered during the building boom as they had never done before. Money was circulating freely.

In 1878, it was the building industry which provided employment for the largest number and paid the highest wages in the city. Five hundred and ninety-two carpenters and masons alone were employed, and their combined weekly wages were over 6,000 dollars.³ During the post-fire reconstruction, the government paid \$1.40 a day for labour in Saint John compared with \$1 in the city of Ottawa at the same time.⁴

As soon as rebuilding had begun, hundreds of workers flooded the city seeking employment. Many of the labourers came from towns within the province, for example, Fredericton, Moncton, Chatham, and Saint John.⁵ Some also left their homes in Nova Scotia, and a large proportion migrated from Boston, Bangor and other cities in New England where, the *Daily News* informed prospective builders, labour was cheap, and "building operations have been very dull for many years."⁶ Wages at first were low, but soon "skilled labour was at a premium" and commanded a good price.⁷ The decline of the lumber industry in the Maritime Provinces during the 1870s had forced many woodsmen to seek other employment. Some became directly involved in the extensive building operations in Saint John, and thus gained employment and training in the quarries that supplied stone for rebuilding the city.

The supply of carpenters in Saint John exceeded local requirements by November 1877.⁸ Bricklayers, how-

ever, were in high demand. Skilled bricklayers were earning between \$3.50 and \$4.00 per day, while regular bricklayers earned as much as \$2.50. Unlike the carpenters, the great majority of bricklayers were Americans. Good stone masons readily commanded at least three dollars per day, while less highly skilled workmen in this line could be hired at lower rates.⁹ Yet by the early part of 1878 a notice which appeared in the *Telegraph* suggests that there was already an overabundance of stone cutters:

U.S. STONE CUTTERS - Mr. Jos. McColgan writes to us in reference to a paragraph stating that a placard had been placed in his door announcing a sale of American stone cutters. Mr. McColgan states that he did not put up the placard and that as soon as he saw it, he tore it down.¹⁰

Labourers from outside Saint John usually left at the end of the building season, to return in the spring. For the inside winter work, the home labour market was able to supply all the workmen necessary in 1877.¹¹

The origins of the various contractors were as diverse as those of the architects whose plans they executed. Hopkins and Wiley, architects from Montreal, prepared the plans for the Domville building.¹² The contractors, Messrs. Wand, were also from Montreal. The hydraulic elevator was supplied by Miller Brothers and Mitchell, of Montreal, and the hot water heating was provided by Charles McGrath and Company, also of Montreal. McGrath's had supplied the heating system in the previous Maritime Bank building.¹³ The woodwork of the Domville building was done by Beatty and Watters, of Carleton (Saint John), and the iron work by another local firm, George Fleming and Sons.¹⁴

The contractors for both the McMillan and Walker buildings on Prince William Street, were J. William and C. Speers, from New York.¹⁵ For 25 years, William Speers had been a builder in New York where he and his brother had constructed several large buildings, including the Third Avenue Depot and the county court house.¹⁶ Since the architects for both buildings were also from New York, it is possible that the firms had collaborated before.

St. Andrews Church was designed by the Toronto firm, Langley, Langley and Burke. The superintendent for the building was E.I. Brass of Saint John. Wall painting was executed by John Johnston, and the iron work was done by Armstrong Brothers; both were Saint John firms.¹⁷ Mitchell, Vance and Co., from New York, supplied the gas fixtures for the church,

while the heating came from the Walworth Manufacturing Company in Boston, through their local agents, Wisdom and Fish.¹⁸ The church bell was made by McShane and Company of Baltimore.¹⁹

The plans for the Leinster Baptist Church were drawn by John Stevens and Son, architects from Boston, Massachusetts.²⁰ The building was heated by Clogston's patent steam apparatus, furnished by Ingalls and Kendricken, also of Boston.²¹ Alfred E. Edwards, of Saint John (formerly of Lewiston, Maine) was contractor for the mason work and George Willetts and Samuel Waters, also formerly of Maine, for the carpenter work.²²

The counters in James Manson's "Palace" on King Street were of French walnut "with a dead gloss finish", the work of T.S. Prescott, a practical polisher from Chicago.²³ Down the center of the shop was a "row of bronze triple-light gas fixtures of chaste design", imported from New York.²⁴

Creditors were occasionally left behind to mourn the disappearance of contractors. The transient class that obtained employment in Saint John after the fire remained one and a half years and then departed, "leaving, in many instances no trace behind save the legacies of unpaid bills for material, labor, &c."²⁵ In December 1877, for example, the American contracting firm of Cutter and Potter had the following expensive buildings under construction: Stewart's Block, corner of Charlotte and Duke streets; Lawton's Block, Germain Street; A. Chipman Smith's house, corner of Princess and Carmarthen streets; the police station and the Hook and Ladder Company building, both on King Street East; and Reed's building on St. James Street. These were collectively valued at 50,000 dollars. Cutter hailed from Massachusetts, and Potter from Portland, Maine.²⁶ On 18 December Charles E. Cutter was discovered to have suddenly left the city, carrying with him some four thousand dollars which he had received to pay employees' wages and other debts. Of that amount, \$2,394 had been drawn from the city chamberlain for the new police station on King Street East.²⁷

As soon as the news of Cutter's runaway was heard by the creditors of the firm, Potter was taken to jail. The firm had sub-contracted the mason work on one of the buildings to Smith and Carlyle. Smith, learning of Cutter's departure, started after him via the St. Andrews road, and arrived on the other side of the line ahead of Cutter. That morning, Cutter arrived at Calais, Maine, where Smith had him arrested and jailed.²⁸ Two days afterward, this notice appeared in the *Telegraph*:

A CARD - Inasmuch as existing circumstances have confounded me with Cutter, I beg leave to notify the public that I am in no way connected with his business, and that I have not the slightest intention of leaving St. John.

HENRY B. CUTTER,
Residence - Leinster Street,
near Water Works.²⁹

The police station had been almost finished when the Cutter and Potter scandal erupted, but construction faults came to light. Reported the *Telegraph*:

The new police building on King Street East has one serious defect, the acoustic properties of the courtroom being of the very worst kind. When one speaks in a loud tone in this room those downstairs can hear every word and *vice versa* all the noises from the cells are plainly heard in the room above.³⁰

Two years after the building was completed, another structural problem was located. From shrinkage or other cause, the floors had sunk from the walls more than an inch all around, and openings a quarter of an inch wide existed in the plastering at the corners of the walls.³¹

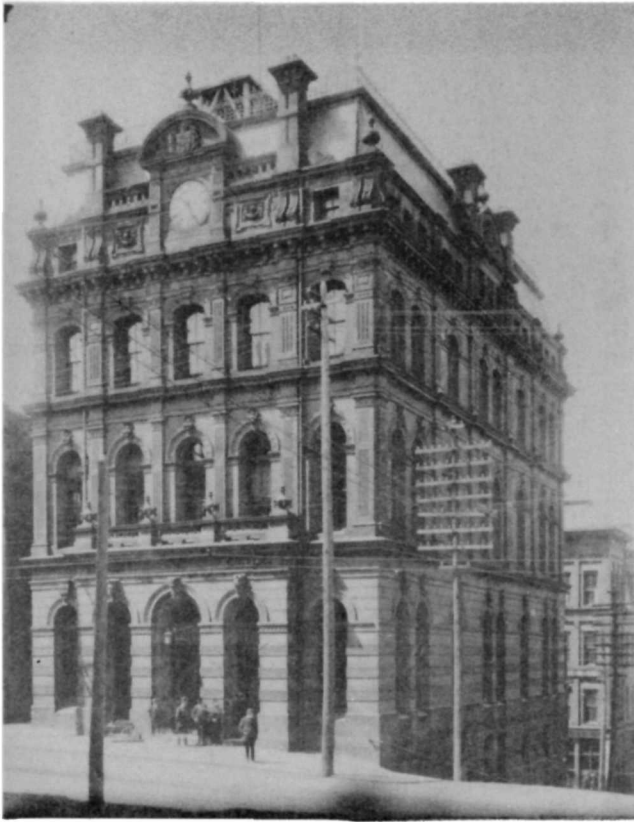
On another building, a Mr. "R." had employed a man named Mahoney to do some plastering, at a cost of 150 dollars. Mr. R. offered Mahoney one-half of the amount, but the latter excitedly called upon some of his men to assault Mr. R. unless he paid in full immediately. Mr. R. complained to the police and again offered 75 dollars. Mahoney was fined four dollars and advised to accept the partial payment.³²

The construction boom was beginning to subside about a year after the fire when the *Morning Freeman* wrote ". . .the present summer has not, so far, fulfilled the expectation of great building activity which was indulged in last fall."³³ On 3 June 1878, the *Telegraph* carried the following announcement: "Returned mechanics from St. John to Halifax report unfavourably of labor prospects in this city, and. . . in view of dearth of employment, crowds of carpenters and others had left for the States."³⁴ By the end of 1878 and throughout 1879, many of the workmen were leaving the city.

The competitive atmosphere induced by the magnitude of building operations and the accompanying high wages had brought a large number of craftsmen from both Canada and the United States. Local carpenters and stone masons now competed with skilled counterparts of varied backgrounds and experience. A port city, Saint John had attracted craftsmen and painters in the pre-fire era, but never in such numbers as during the rebuilding period.

Notes

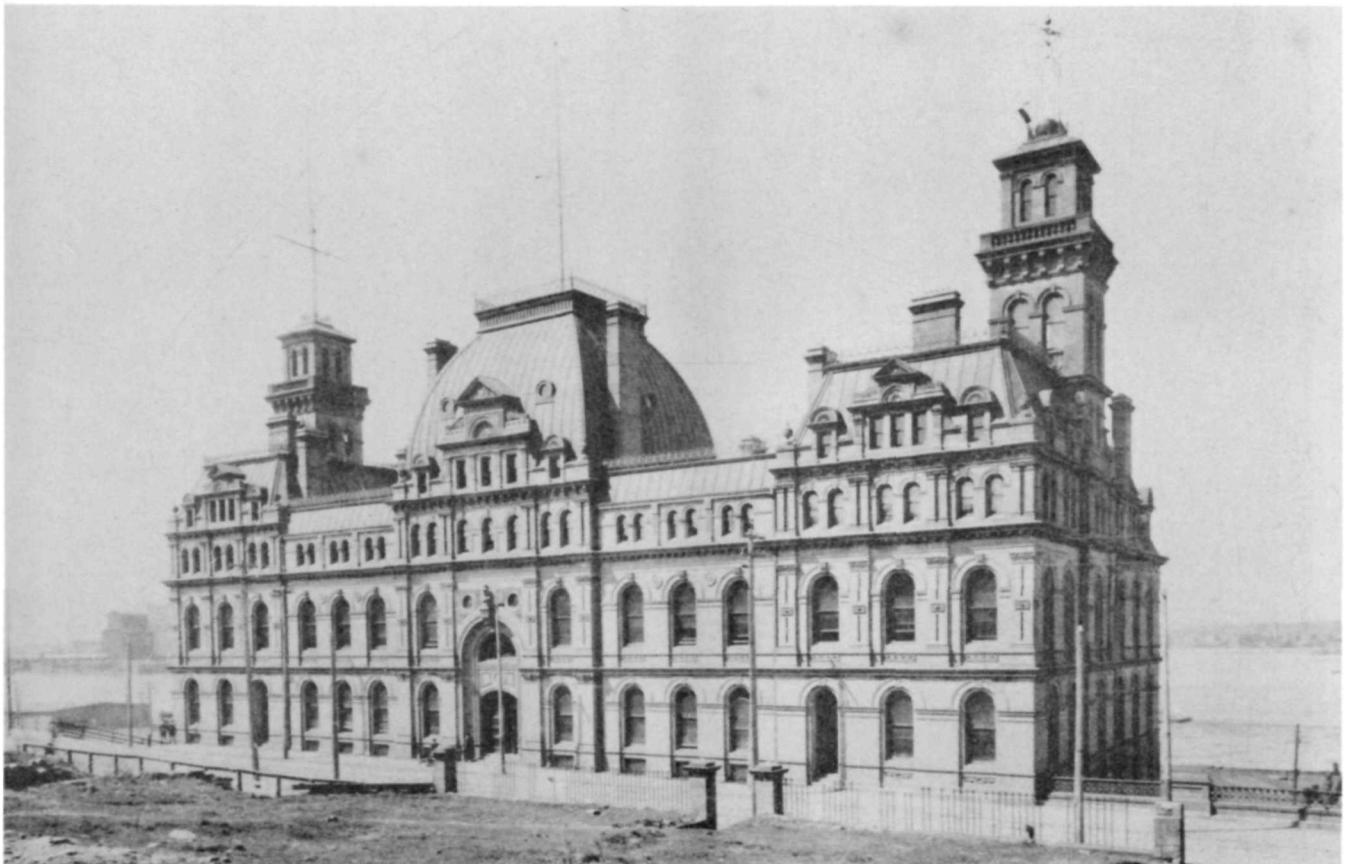
- 1 Canada. Parliament, "Report of Edward Willis, on the Manufacturing Industries of Certain Sections of the Maritime Provinces" in *Sessional Papers, 1885* (Ottawa: McLean, Roger & Co., 1885), Vol. 18, No. 37, p. 43.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid., p. 49.
- 4 Canada. House of Commons, *Duties Collected at St. John, N.B.* (Ottawa: McLean, Roger & Co., 1878), Vol. 2, p. 1415.
- 5 *SJDT*, 3 November 1877, p. 3.
- 6 *Daily News*, 6 July 1877, p. 1.
- 7 *SJDT*, 3 November 1877, p. 3.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid., 19 February 1878, p. 3.
- 11 Ibid., 3 November 1877, p. 3.
- 12 Ibid., 25 September 1877, p. 3.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid., 26 January 1878, p. 3.
- 16 Ibid., 27 November 1879, p. 1.
- 17 Ibid., 27 February 1879, p. 3.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid., 27 February 1879, p. 3.
- 20 Ibid., 22 July 1878, p. 1.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid., 10 December 1877, p. 3.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Willis Report, op. cit., p. 36.
- 26 Ibid., 18 December 1877, p. 1.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Ibid., 19 February 1878, p. 3.
- 30 Ibid., 15 July 1878, p. 1.
- 31 Ibid., 22 January 1879, p. 1.
- 32 Ibid., 22 December 1877, p. 3.
- 33 *Morning Freeman* (Saint John), 20 June 1878, p. 2.
- 34 *SJDT*, 3 June 1878, p. 3.



40. Post Office, Prince William Street, 1899
Carre, Art Work on the City of Saint John

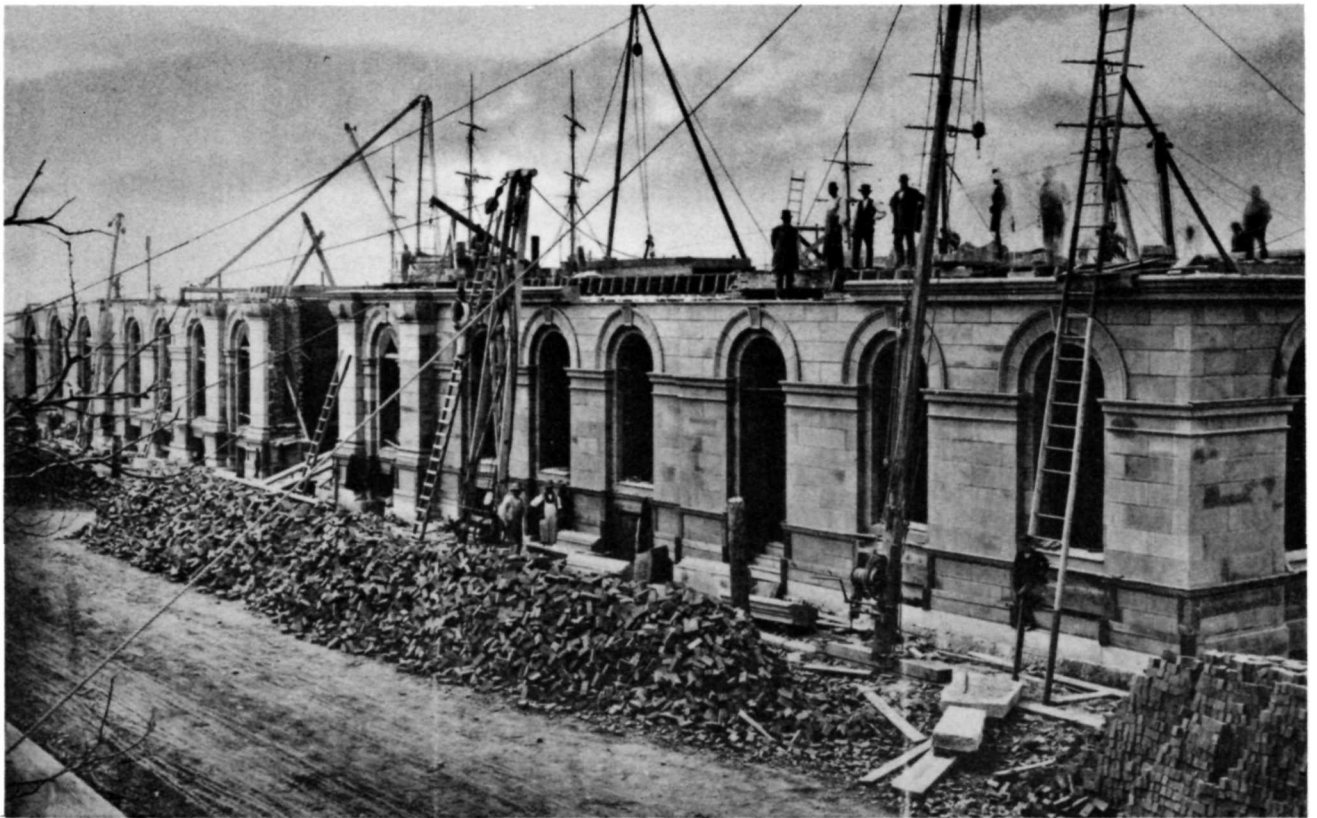


41. City Hall at Prince William and Princess streets, 1899
Carre, Art Work on the City of Saint John



42. Custom House, 1899

Carre, Art Work on the City of Saint John

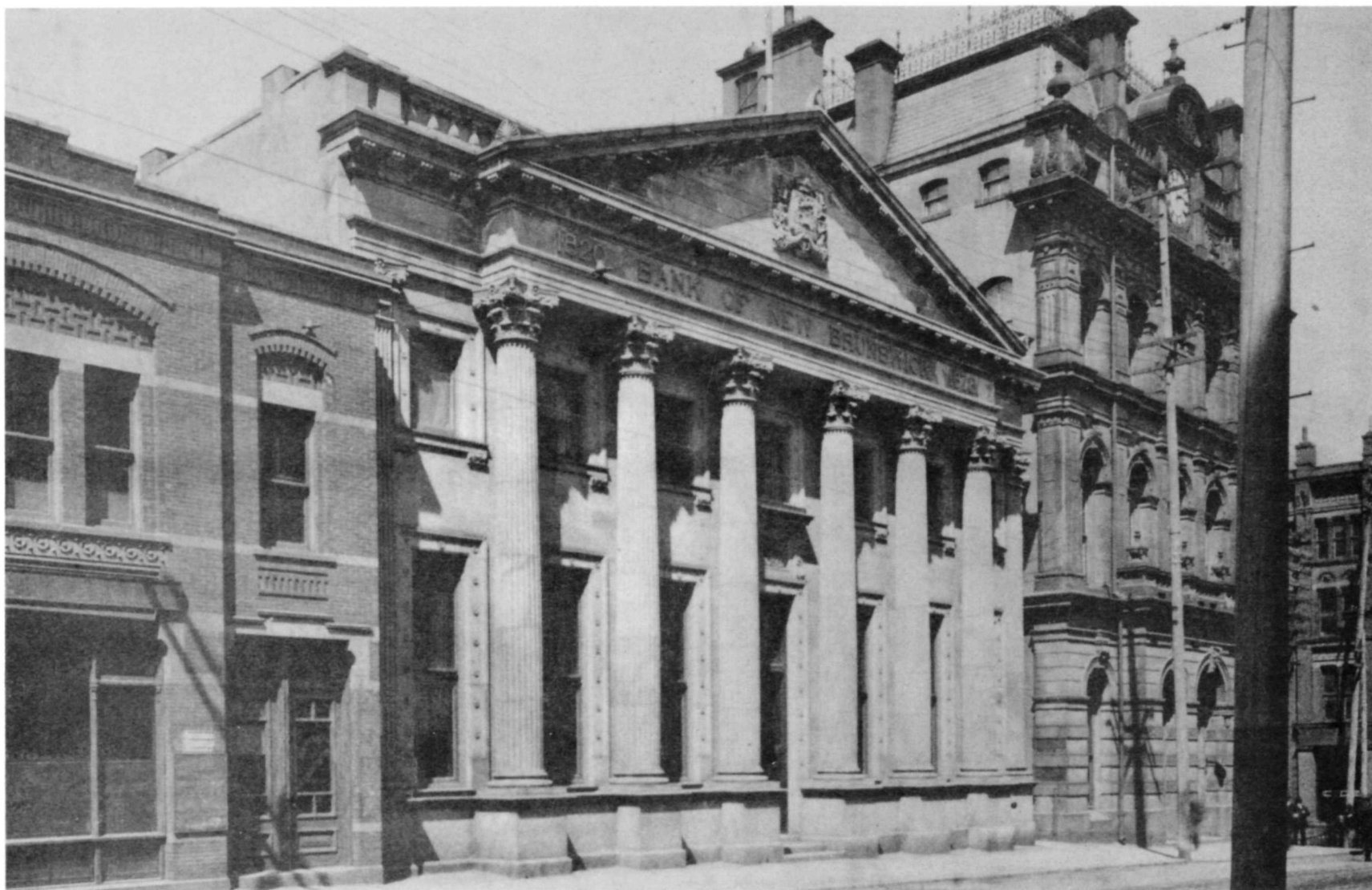


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43 & 44. Construction of Customs House, September 1879
W. & J. Notman photos, courtesy of the National Archives of Canada

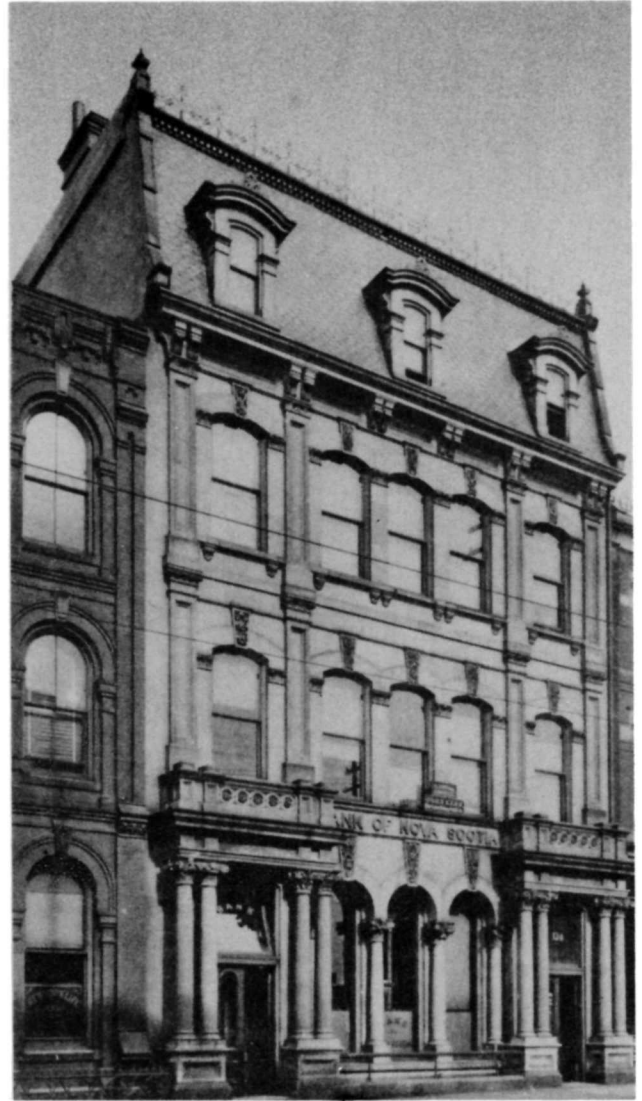


45. Bank of New Brunswick and Post Office on Prince William Street

Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum



46. Savings Bank, Prince William Street
Carre, Art Work on the City of Saint John



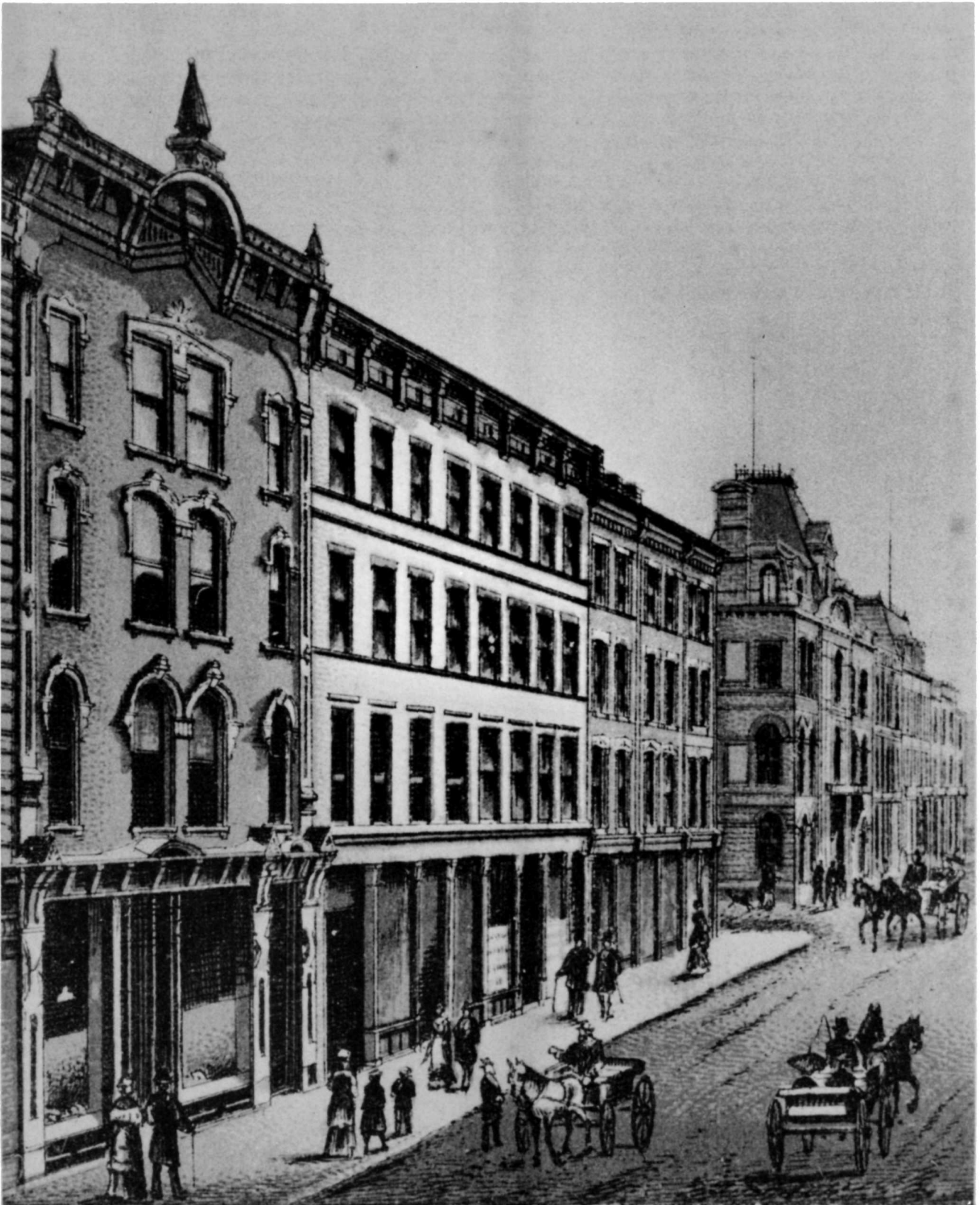
47. Bank of Nova Scotia, 1899
Carre, Art Work on the City of Saint John



48. Robert Marshall's insurance block
Saint John Daily Telegraph, 4 October 1877

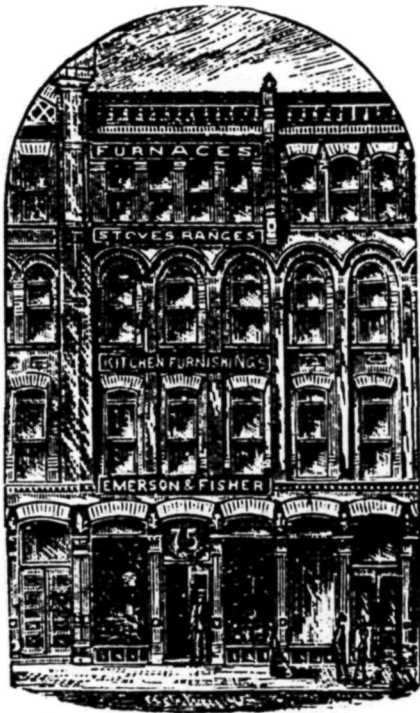
"... the interior of most of them shows far more improvement than the exterior. In the laying out of rooms much extra space has been gained, steam heating has been adopted in places in which it was never thought of before, elevators and other trade fittings and conveniences have been introduced, and in every way the foundations have been laid for placing the business of St. John upon a better basis than they were ever upon before."

Globe, 19 June 1878



49. At left, J. & A. McMillan stationery, Prince William Street. On the corner is the "Exchange" with City Hall opposite.
Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum

STOVES, RANGES,



FURNACES,

IN ALL THE LATEST AND MOST DESIR-
able Patterns, making the best assorted stock
in the Lower Provinces, which we offer at the Low-
est Possible Prices to cash buyers.

ALSO—A full and complete assortment of House
Furnishing Hardware, Stamped and Japanned
Tinwares, etc., etc.

WHOLESALE AND RETAIL.
EMERSON & FISHER, 75 Prince Wm. St.

50. Advertisement from the *Saint John Daily Telegraph*,
23 October 1880



51. *Saint John Daily Telegraph* building, corner of Church and
Canterbury streets, 29 October 1879

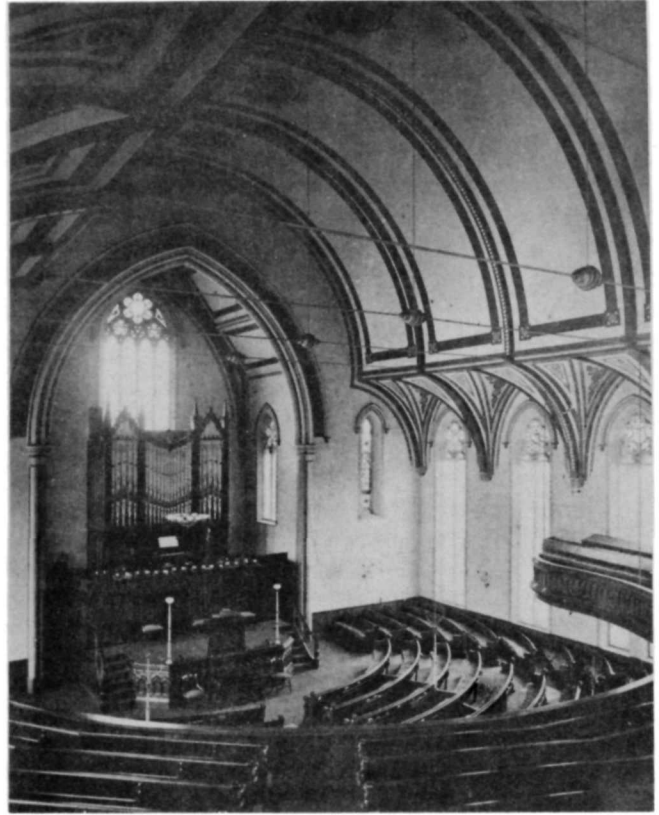


52. Post-fire view of Germain Street, with the Masonic Temple at the right

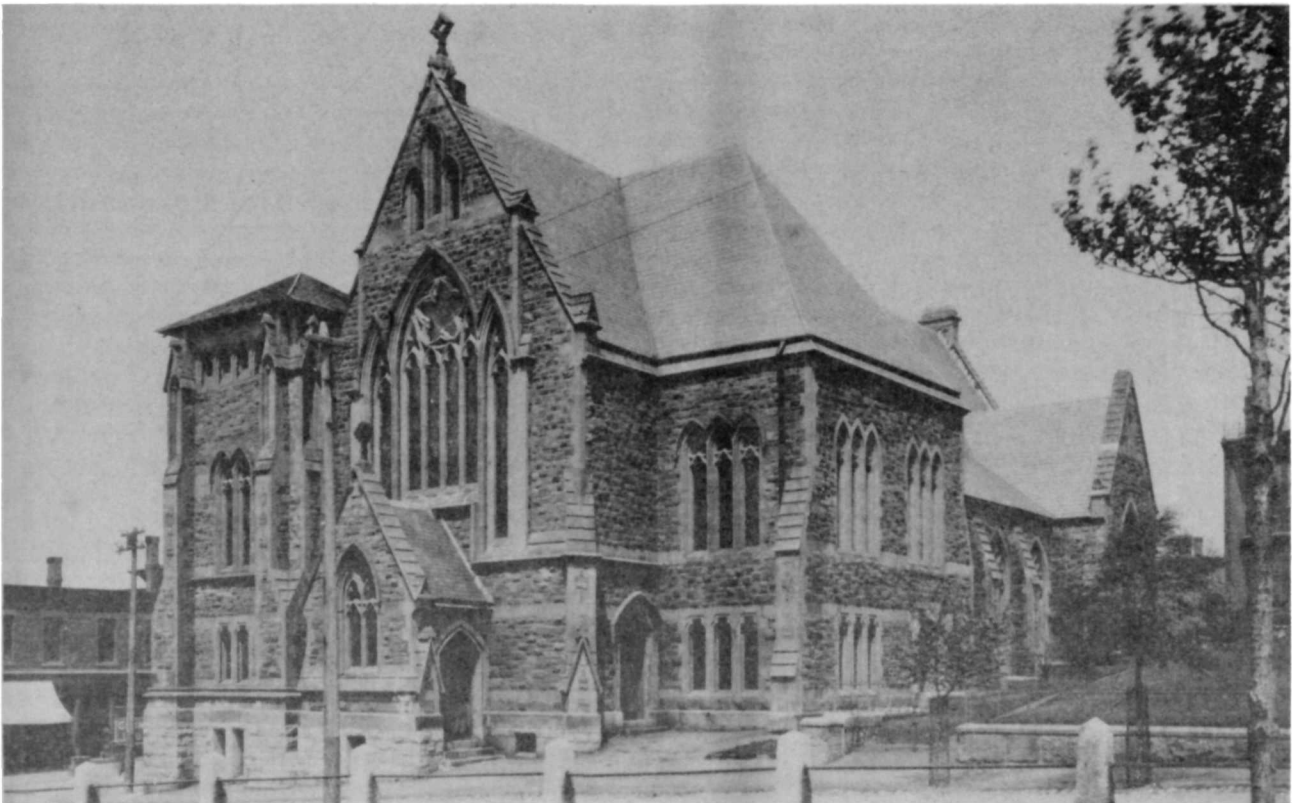
Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum



53. Germain Street Baptist Church
Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum



54. Interior of Germain Street Baptist Church
W.&J. Notman photo, courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum

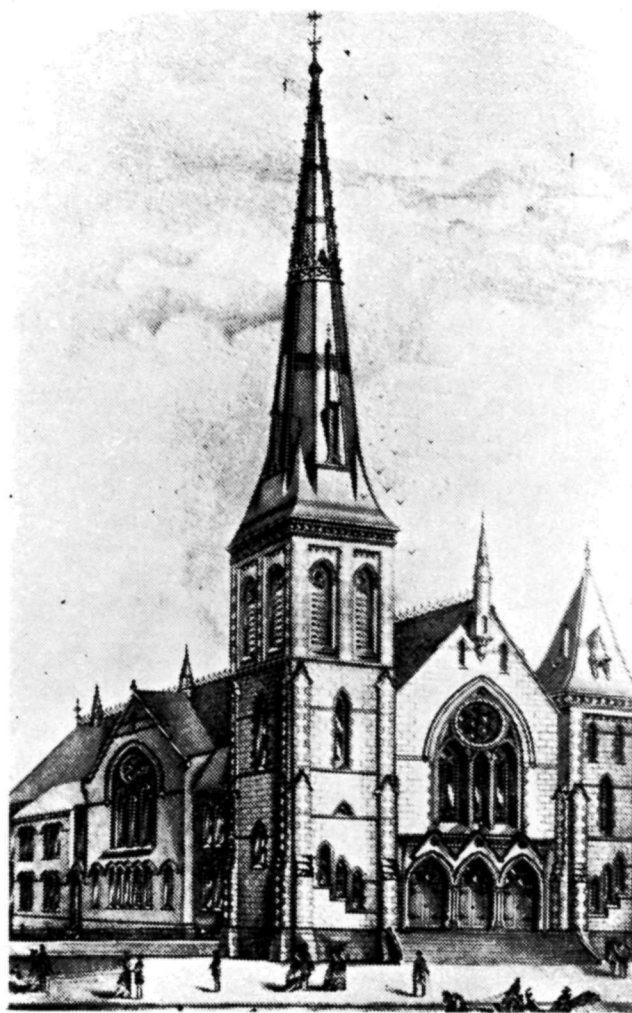


55. Queen Square Methodist Church, 1899

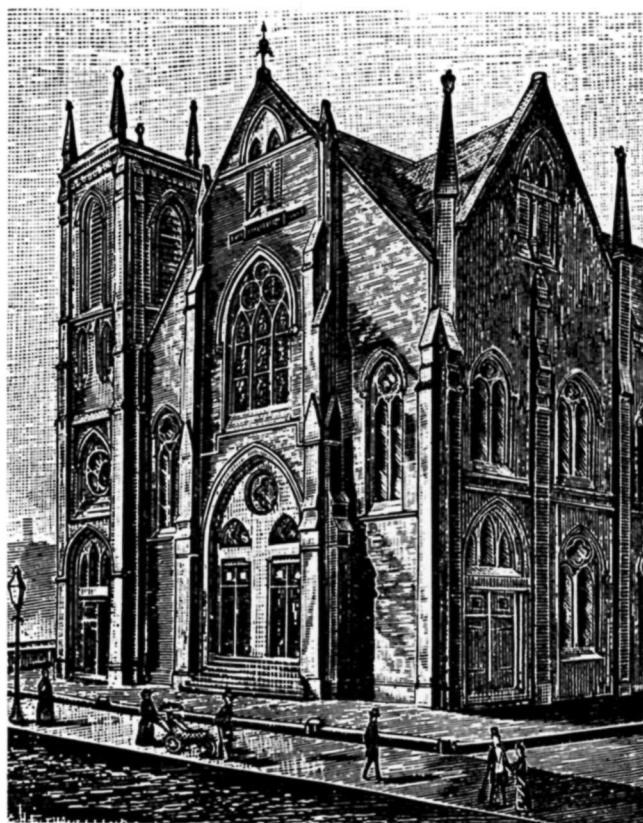
Carre, Art Work on the City of Saint John



56. Old Germain Street Methodist Church
Courtesy of PANB, P7/78



58. St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Germain Street
Courtesy of PANB, P7/140



57. St. David's Presbyterian Church, Sydney Street
Courtesy of PANB, P7/66



59. Old St. Andrew's Kirk
Courtesy of PANB, P7/92



60. Old Trinity Anglican Church, 1791
Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum



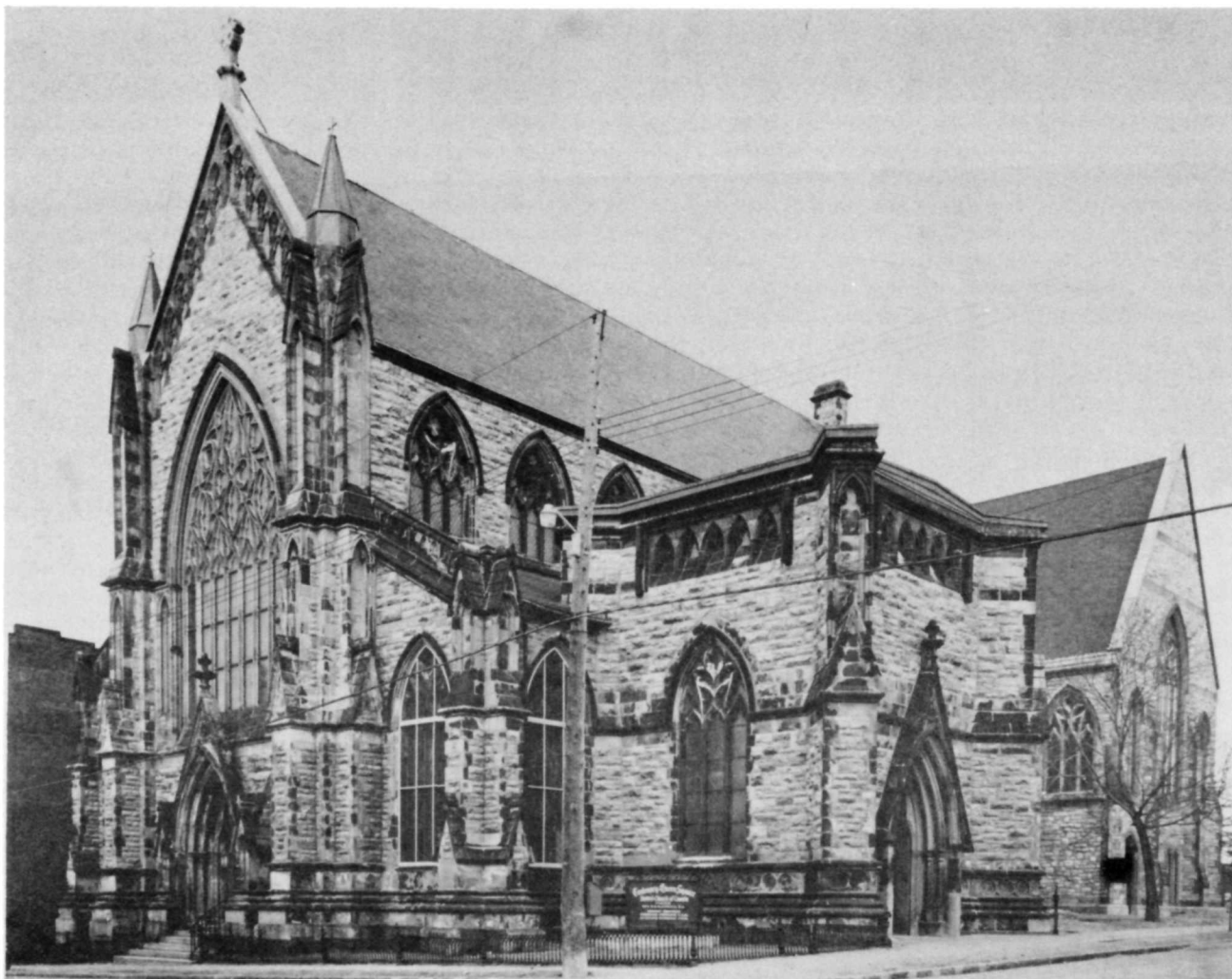
64. Interior of Old Trinity
Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum



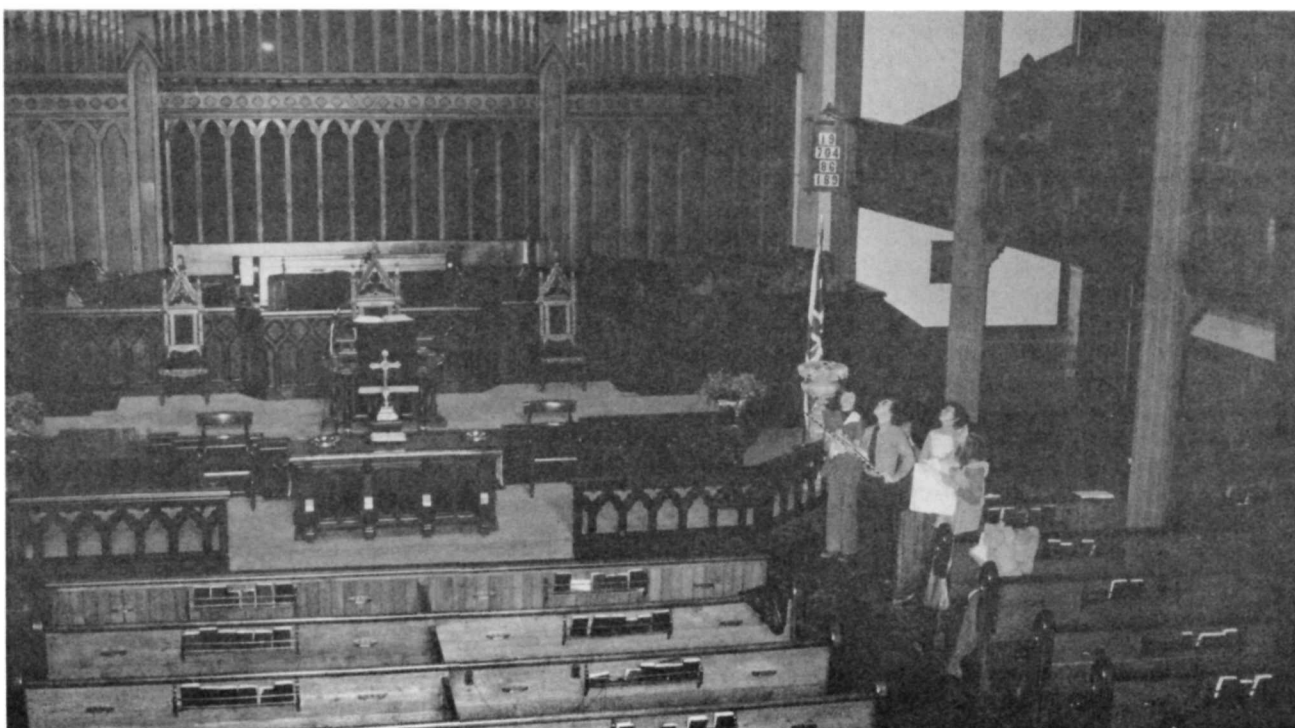
61. Old Trinity with additions
Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum

"Prior to the great fire St. John could not boast much of the architectural beauty of its churches, for with three or four exceptions they did little credit to the taste of those who erected them. Of the eleven places of worship destroyed on that memorable 20th June, but one was built of a more durable material than wood, and most of them were utterly without any architectural pretensions."

Telegraph, 5 October 1878



62. Centenary Queen Square Church, corner of Wentworth and Princess streets, 1899
Carre, Art Work on the City of Saint John



63. Centenary Queen Square interior, 1970s
Courtesy of Canadian Inventory of Historic Building



65. Trinity Anglican Church
Courtesy of PANB, P7/1



66A. Detail of altar relief
Courtesy of Canadian Inventory of Historic Building



66. Interior of Trinity Church, 1970s

Courtesy of Canadian Inventory of Historic Building

Architects and Builders

More than 400 architects and builders placed advertisements in the *Telegraph* in the course of the four years (see Appendix B). In addition to a handful of local firms (only seven architects were listed in McAlpine's Business Directory for Saint John in 1876-77), the others came from Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, New York, California and Boston. The professional milieu in which these architects worked during the building boom was indeed exciting and competitive:

... immediately after the great fire the place was temporarily invaded by a horde of architects. Many of these men were of professional experience; some had genius, but nearly all, yielding to the spirit of rivalry and the desire to establish a reputation, put forth their best efforts to produce original or at least striking designs.¹

G.B. Croff and F.T. Camp, architects from New York, first advertised their services in the *Telegraph* on 7 July 1877.² Already credited to this American firm were the designs for the post office and the Windsor Hotel, both in Saratoga; the Santa Barbara Grand Hotel, California; the New York Centennial State Building; the Farmers' Bank, an iron building at Hudson, New York, and many stately and beautiful houses in the United States. In 1878, they prepared the plans for the Eighth Provincial Exhibition Building in Fredericton. Croff had produced several popular books on architectural design and had studied extensively in Europe.³ J. and A. McMillan, local booksellers and stationers, advertised in September 1877 an "Extensive Collection of Original Studies for Dwellings, BANK, SCHOOL and OFFICE BUILDINGS" which would cost from one thousand to one hundred thousand dollars. The collection, drawn by G.B. Croff, was entitled "Progressive American Architecture."⁴

Croff and Camp designed many fine residences for the leading men in the city, including a handsome French cottage on Princess Street for A. Chipman Smith, which was described as "an ornament to the new St. John, being something quite unique and marked in design."⁵ They also supplied the plans for the J. and A. McMillan building on Prince William Street, which the *Telegraph* applauded as "a beautiful and imposing architectural monument to the street, and one of the very finest and best constructed in the city. . . at once a credit alike to the owners and Messrs. Croff and Camp, the architects."⁶

St. James Church on Main Street, Lower Cove, was built in the early English style⁷ and was of rubble olive stone, "peculiarly adapted for church purposes."⁸ F.T.

Camp, who drew the plans, dealt with the problem of "accommodating 500 persons in a stone building at a cost of \$10,000."⁹ Begun in March 1878,¹⁰ the church was opened for public service in January 1879.¹¹

By July 1877, the Montreal firm of architects, Hopkins and Wily, had established a business in Saint John.¹² They had an impressive range of clients in Montreal, including the Bank of Montreal, Merchants Bank of Canada, Consolidated Bank of Canada, the Telegraph Company (fig. 80), the Harbor Commissioners, North British and Mercantile Insurance Company, Royal Insurance Company, and Canada Life Assurance Company. They had also designed various churches, stores and private residences.¹³ The firm's major contract in Saint John was the Domville Building, located at the corner of Prince William and King streets. The ground floor of the building was laid out for the accommodation of both the Maritime Bank and the Bank of Montreal.¹⁴

Another Montreal architect was W.T. Thomas, formerly of the prestigious firm of Thomas and Sons, who in 1878 prepared the plans for the well known Trinity Church, and its school house.¹⁵ This is the only building Thomas is known to have designed in the city during this period. Since its construction was superintended by local architect R.C. John Dunn,¹⁶ it is probable that Thomas did not actually establish a business in the city.

The prominent Toronto architects Langley, Langley and Burke prepared plans for St. Andrews Presbyterian Church in September of 1877,¹⁷ and the church was completed in 1879.¹⁸ Like W.T. Thomas, this firm does not appear to have had an office in Saint John.

Several architects arrived from Boston, and prominent among these were J.G.F. Bryant and H.A. Black, who had established themselves in Saint John by late July 1877.¹⁹ "The gentlemen have come among our people with the highest testimonials of capacity and the largest experience in the designing of private and public buildings in many of the cities of the United States," announced the *Telegraph*.²⁰ Bryant had furnished the designs of 111 of the 550 stores erected in the burnt district of Boston following that city's great fire in 1872. He was also architect for the city halls of Boston (fig. 81) and Lynn, Massachusetts.²¹ Black was described as a "gentleman of quick perception in his profession," with a "large experience in every variety of building."²² Among his Saint John buildings were Stewart and White's brick business building on Charlotte Street,²³ and John McCoskery's large hotel,

Prince William Street.²⁴ The partnership was dissolved on 3 January 1878,²⁵ and Black continued to practise in Saint John on his own.²⁶

Also from Boston were John Stevens and Son, who first advertised in the *Telegraph* on 3 July 1877.²⁷ The Leinster Street Baptist Church, on the corner of Leinster and Carmarthen streets, was designed by this firm in 1878.²⁸

During the first six months after the fire, New York architects West and Anderson, established an office in Saint John as exclusive suppliers for various products, including Iden and Company's chandeliers and gas fixtures, W. Dale's Patent Illuminating Tiling (for vaults, floors, vestibules, skylights, etc.), Wilson and James' rolling steel and wood shutters, and Manhattan Pottery.²⁹

J.C. Dumaresq and Andrew Dewar (figs. 82 and 83) came to Saint John from Halifax in 1877. In their first advertisement in the *Telegraph* following the fire, dated 11 July 1877, they were described as "architects of all the principal buildings in Halifax, Nova Scotia."³⁰ One of these was the Deaf and Dumb Institute (fig. 84). Dumaresq had worked in Halifax for about forty years, and his name was well known throughout the Atlantic Provinces. During 1877, under the name of Dumaresq and Dewar, the firm designed the Germain Street Baptist Church,³¹ "The Palace," a department store for James Manson, on King Street,³² the Bank of Nova Scotia, on Prince William³³ Street, and many other buildings. Following the dissolution of their partnership in February of 1878, they worked independently.³⁴ Dumaresq was particularly successful in his subsequent career, which was highlighted by the commission to prepare plans for the Legislative Building (fig. 85) in Fredericton in 1880.³⁵

The presence of large numbers of out-of-town architects who possessed a wide spectrum of professional expertise put the resident architects upon their mettle. The local firm of J.T.C. McKean and G. Ernest Fairweather advertised in the *Telegraph* a week after the Great Fire.³⁶ Fairweather had been designing buildings in Saint John as early as 1857,³⁷ and McKean had begun advertising in the local business directory by 1862.³⁸ The firm received the lion's share of contracts during the rebuilding. In addition to dwellings, warehouses, and various public buildings in Saint John, they designed St. Paul's Valley Church;³⁹ City Hall on Prince William Street;⁴⁰ Protestant Orphan Asylum on Brittain Street;⁴¹ the impressive insurance block owned by Robert Marshall, at the corner of Market Square and Prince William Street;⁴² the Masonic Temple, Germain Street;⁴³ and the Telegraph Building, situated at the corner of Canterbury and Church streets.⁴⁴

McKean and Fairweather also prepared working drawings for the customs house and the Savings Bank (fig. 46), from designs received from Ottawa.⁴⁵ They dissolved their partnership on 1 September 1880.⁴⁶ Among the buildings later designed by Fairweather are the charming L.P. Fisher Memorial Library in Woodstock, N.B. (fig. 86)⁴⁷ and the massive stone St. Bernard's Roman Catholic Church in Moncton (fig. 87).⁴⁸

William Morgan Smith and R.C. John Dunn (fig. 88) formed a partnership and began to advertise their professional services less than a month after the fire.⁴⁹ The latter, son of a local cabinet maker and manufacturer of lumber, had studied in various parts of the United States, including Boston and especially in Chicago. In 1875 he returned to Saint John and opened an office.⁵⁰ From 1875 Smith had advertised in the local business directory.⁵¹ Besides various residences⁵² and business houses,⁵³ Smith and Dunn also designed the police station on King Street East during the building boom.⁵⁴

Smith and Dunn dissolved their partnership on 1 May 1878.⁵⁵ A year later, Smith was appointed government architect, in place of Matthew Stead upon the latter's death.⁵⁶ In 1880, Smith prepared the plans for the Carleton F.C. Baptist Church, a brick-cased building on Charlotte Street.⁵⁷ A month after the dissolution of their partnership, Dunn went on to prepare the plans for the drill shed and armouries on Barrack Square for the Department of Militia and Defence.⁵⁸ He became a well-known architect throughout the province and among his later buildings are the Departmental Building, Fredericton (fig. 89), and the Gloucester Court House (fig. 90) in Bathurst, N.B.

The oldest and probably most established architect in the city in 1877 was Matthew Stead, Sr., an Englishman from Ludlow, Shropshire, who had designed buildings in Saint John and around the province for at least forty years by the time of the Great Fire.⁵⁹ He was responsible for the design and/or decoration of the first seven Provincial Exhibition Buildings in New Brunswick, beginning in 1852 (see fig. 91).⁶⁰ In addition, he designed many churches and private and public buildings, including the old post office, which was lost in the Great Fire, the new one which replaced it, and the Dorchester Penitentiary.⁶¹

Competition from Stead during the post-fire boom was probably lessened by his advanced age. This factor, and his death on 10 October 1879,⁶² created a vacuum which his former clients and a horde of architects were anxious and prepared to fill. The Eighth Provincial Exhibition (Fredericton) was designed by Croff and Camp, the prominent architectural firm from New York.⁶³

David E. Dunham (fig. 92) received the design contract for the Ninth Provincial Exhibition Building in Saint John (fig. 93) in 1880,⁶⁴ at what was probably the peak of his career. Dunham, a native of Hampstead, N.B., had trained with a builder as a boy and went to Saint John in 1863.⁶⁵ In 1869 Dunham began to advertise as an architect; he discontinued building and concentrated on designing and superintending.⁶⁶ At the time of the fire Dunham was 37 and, although not formally educated in the profession, had established a reliable reputation as an architect. After the fire he formed a four-month partnership with architect W.P. Clarke.⁶⁷ Dunham and Clarke designed the Commercial Block (fig. 94), which was described as “a handsome addition to the appearance of King Street”,⁶⁸ and contained a total of fourteen stores and several warehouses.⁶⁹ The plans were considered by the *Telegraph* as “very attractive (as well as economical in their construction).”⁷⁰

Among the many buildings designed by the firm was a brick and stone residence for Henry Vaughan, shipping magnate,⁷¹ whose former home on Mecklenburg Street had been destroyed.⁷² The dwelling, with its ornate entrance and bay windows extending from the ground floor to the top of its mansard roof, is located at 22 Mecklenburg Street (fig. 95). The firm also prepared plans for Dr. Maclaren’s residence at 76 Charlotte Street⁷³ (fig. 96). The two-storey brick building was similar to its predecessor, designed by Dunham

and built just nine months before the Great Fire. The building accommodated the office, waiting rooms and residence of the doctor. Aside from its mansard roof, this building, with pressed brick front, is similar to the Commercial Block on King Street, also designed by this firm.⁷⁴ Dunham and Clarke drew the plans for the attractive residence at 71 Orange Street (fig. 97).

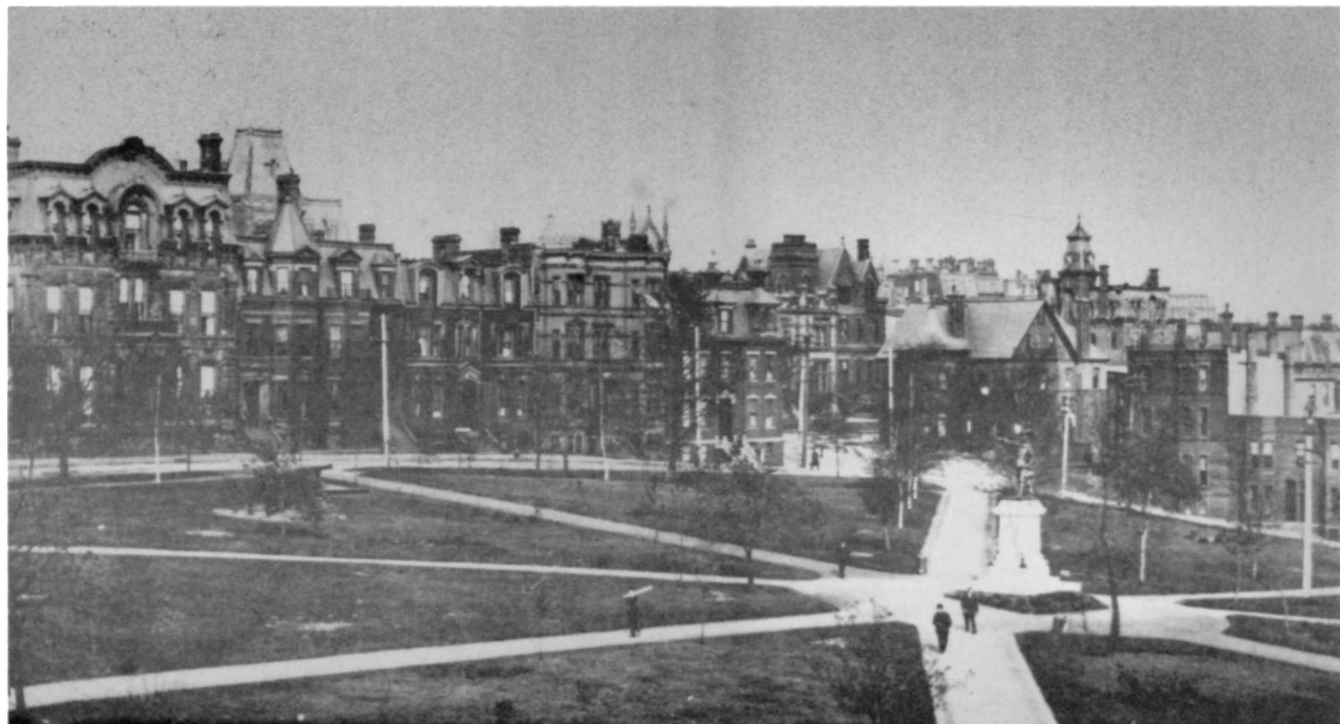
After the initial work pressure following the fire, Dunham and Clarke, like many other firms at the time, dissolved their partnership and each resumed his independent professional status. Dunham continued to design residences for the prominent families in the city, warehouses, the Marine Hospital,⁷⁵ and other buildings, until his early death in 1883.⁷⁶

Much of what has been said of the effect of the influx of materials on the city’s appearance after 1877 applies as well to the architects and builders. Their numbers and their variety of expertise, training and origins brought an international up-to-date flavour to the city’s architecture. The professional atmosphere was stimulating; both non-resident and local architects were challenged to create competitive and attractive designs. With a wide variety of foreign and locally produced materials, the craftsmen to execute their plans, and a multitude of clients, the architects were able, and forced, to respond with all their skill and imagination.

Notes

- 1 William H. Carre, *Art Work on the City of Saint John* (n.p.: 1899). Vol. 4.
- 2 *SJDT*, 7 August 1877, p. 2.
- 3 Ibid., p. 3.
- 4 Ibid., 22 September 1877, p. 2.
- 5 Ibid., 14 November 1877, p. 3.
- 6 Ibid., 7 December 1877, p. 3.
- 7 Ibid., 27 June 1878, p. 1.
- 8 Ibid., 7 March 1878, p. 3.
- 9 Ibid., 5 October 1878, p. 2.
- 10 Ibid., 7 March 1878, p. 3.
- 11 Ibid., 13 January 1879, p. 3.
- 12 Ibid., 16 July 1877, p. 3.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid., 10 June 1878, p. 3.
- 15 Ibid., 5 October 1878, p. 2.
- 16 *SJDT*, 8 December 1880, pp. 1-2.
- 17 Ibid., 13 September 1877, p. 2.
- 18 Ibid., 19 March 1879, p. 3.
- 19 Ibid., 24 July 1877, p. 1.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid., 27 August 1877, p. 3.
- 24 Ibid., 4 April 1878, p. 1.
- 25 Ibid., 3 January 1878, p. 2.
- 26 Ibid., 11 May 1878, p. 2.
- 27 Ibid., 3 July 1877, p. 3.
- 28 Ibid., 5 October 1878, p. 2.
- 29 Ibid., 22 August 1877, p. 2; 10 December 1877, p. 2.
- 30 Ibid., 11 July 1877, p. 3.
- 31 Ibid., 22 August 1877, p. 2.
- 32 Ibid., 10 December 1877, p. 3.
- 33 Ibid., 28 August 1877, p. 1.
- 34 Ibid., 28 February 1878, p. 2.
- 35 *Arts in New Brunswick*, op. cit., p. 211.
- 36 *SJDT*, 27 June 1877, p. 3.
- 37 *Saint John Business Directory and Almanac, for 1857* (Saint John: C.A. Everett & Geo. W. Day, 1857).
- 38 *The St. John and Fredericton Business Directory 1862* (Saint John: Hook & Greenough, 1862).
- 39 *SJDT*, 5 August 1879, p. 3.
- 40 Ibid., 30 May 1878, p. 3.
- 41 Ibid., 4 August 1880, p. 2.
- 42 Ibid., 28 June 1877, p. 2.
- 43 Ibid., 2 July 1878, p. 3.
- 44 Ibid., 29 October 1878, p. 2.
- 45 Ibid., 2 November 1878, p. 3.
- 46 Ibid., 1 September 1880, p. 2.
- 47 George Frederick Clarke, *Fiftieth Anniversary of the Lewis Peter Fisher Memorial Library Woodstock, N.B.*, n.p.: Board of Commissioners of the L.P. Fisher Memorial Library, 1964), pp. 17-18.
- 48 C.A. Hale, "St. Bernard's Church, Moncton, N.B." (04103000400045), report on file, Canadian Inventory of Historic Building, Parks Canada, Ottawa, 1976.

- 49 *SJDT*, 16 August 1877, p. 2.
- 50 *Biographical Review* (Boston: Biographical Review Publishing Co., 1900), pp. 285-86.
- 51 *City Directory*, 1875.
- 52 *SJDT*, 29 June 1877, p. 1 (house for Wm. Sandall, on site of his former residence); 5 July 1877, p. 2 (two-storey building for Patrick Ferie, corner of Sydney and St. James streets); 29 June 1877, p. 1 (brick residence for Geo. Thomas, on Princess Street); 5 July 1877, p. 2 (brick building for James Knox, corner of Queen and Sydney streets); 29 June 1877, p. 1 (brick building for Patrick Morrisey, corner of Prince William and Duke streets); 5 July 1877, p. 2 (brick cottage for Edward Fisher, on Pitt Street); 5 July 1877, p. 2 (two-storey house for George V. Nowlin on Leinster Street).
- 53 *Ibid.*, 5 July 1877, p. 2 (brick block for D.J. McLaughlin, Jr., corner of King and Canterbury streets); 5 July 1877, p. 2 (four-storey brick building for William Kennedy, on King Street); 13 July 1877, p. 1 (brick building for Louis Ansley, on King Square); 6 July 1877, p. 2 (brick building for George A. Knodell, on Church Street).
- 54 *Ibid.*, 29 September 1877, p. 2.
- 55 *Ibid.*, 6 May 1878, p. 2.
- 56 *Ibid.*, 17 October 1879, p. 3.
- 57 *Ibid.*, 23 July 1880, pp. 1 & 3.
- 58 *Ibid.*, 3 June 1878, p. 2.
- 59 *The Dominion Annual Register and Review*, ed. Henry J. Morgan (Ottawa: McLean, Roger & Co., 1880), p. 423.
- 60 *SJDT*, 4 October 1880, p. 1.
- 61 *The Dominion Annual Register and Review*, op. cit.
- 62 *SJDT*, 11 October 1879, p. 3.
- 63 *Ibid.*, 4 October 1880, p. 1.
- 64 *Ibid.*
- 65 *St. John and Its Business* (Saint John: H. Chubb & Co., 1875), p. 166.
- 66 *Ibid.*
- 67 *SJDT*, 30 June 1877, p. 2.
- 68 *SJDT*, 20 August 1877, p. 3.
- 69 *Ibid.*
- 70 *Ibid.*
- 71 *Ibid.*, 13 August 1877, p. 2.
- 72 *Ibid.*, 18 August 1877, p. 2.
- 73 *Ibid.*, 22 September 1876, p. 1.
- 74 *Ibid.*, 18 August 1877, p. 2.
- 75 Canada. Parliament, "Reports of the Chief Architect", in *Sessional Papers, 1883* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1883), p. 20.
- 76 *Globe*, 26 October 1883, p. 2.



67. Queen Square, 1925

Courtesy of the National Archives of Canada, PA 47950



68. Hon. John Boyd residence on Queen Square

Courtesy of PANB, P13/126



69. Germain Street, 1899

Carre, Art Work on the City of Saint John



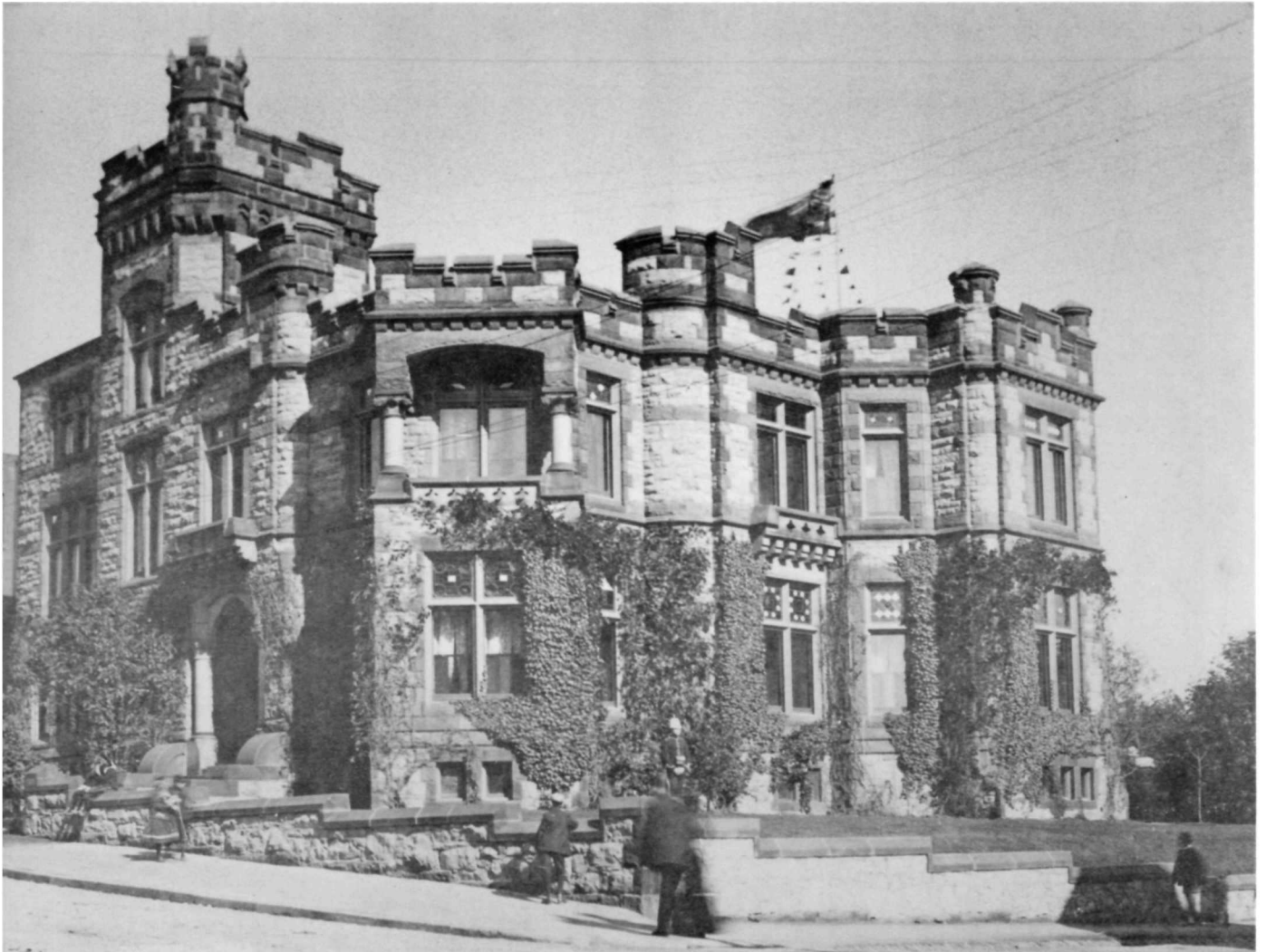
70. Orange Street, 1899

Carre, Art Work on the City of Saint John



71. Mecklenburg Street, 1899

Carre, Art Work on the City of Saint John



72. Caverhill Hall, Sydney Street

I. Erb photo, courtesy of PANB, P11/10



73. Pratt House, Chipman Hill
Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum

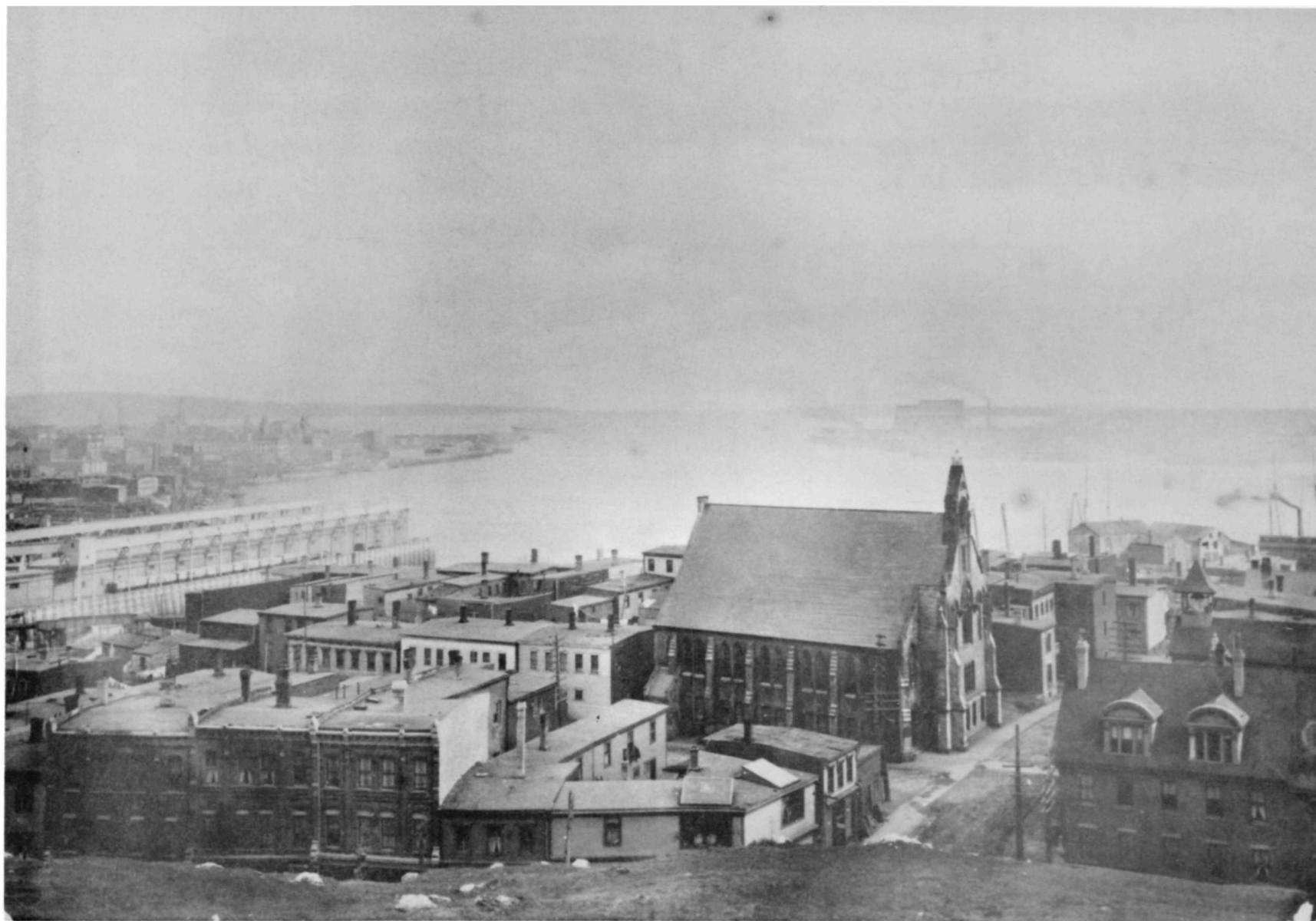


75. Detail of plaster cornice, 1977
Ron Keith photo



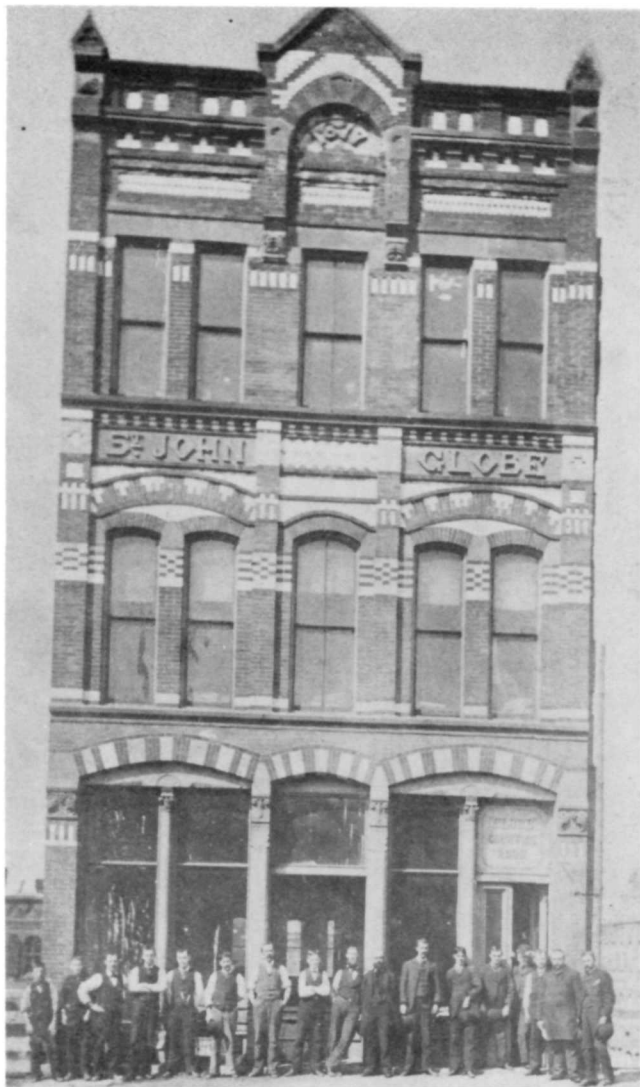
74. Residence at 13 Prince William Street, 1977

Ron Keith photo



76. Main Street and the harbour, early 1900s

Courtesy of the National Archives of Canada, PA 31738



77. *Globe* building, since destroyed
Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum

Caledonia Freestone Quarry.

THE finest Olive Free-Stone in the Dominion; chosen above all others for the front of New Post Office, for its color and texture; received the Highest Prize at the Philadelphia Exposition; and has been used in many of the leading Public and Private buildings in Boston, New York and Philadelphia.

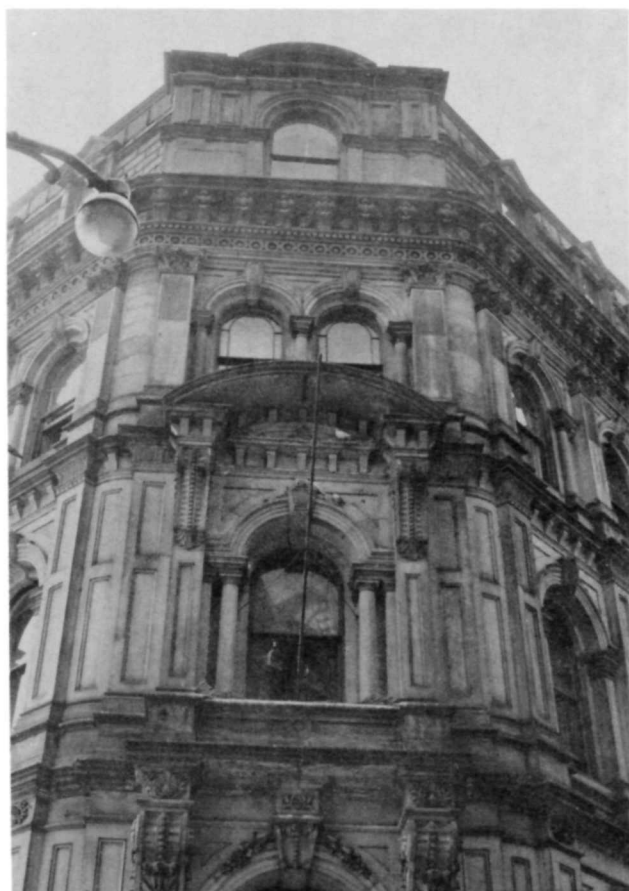
One Thousand Tons, now ready, for sale low, and shipment by

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 jy13 1m Rockland, near Dorchester.

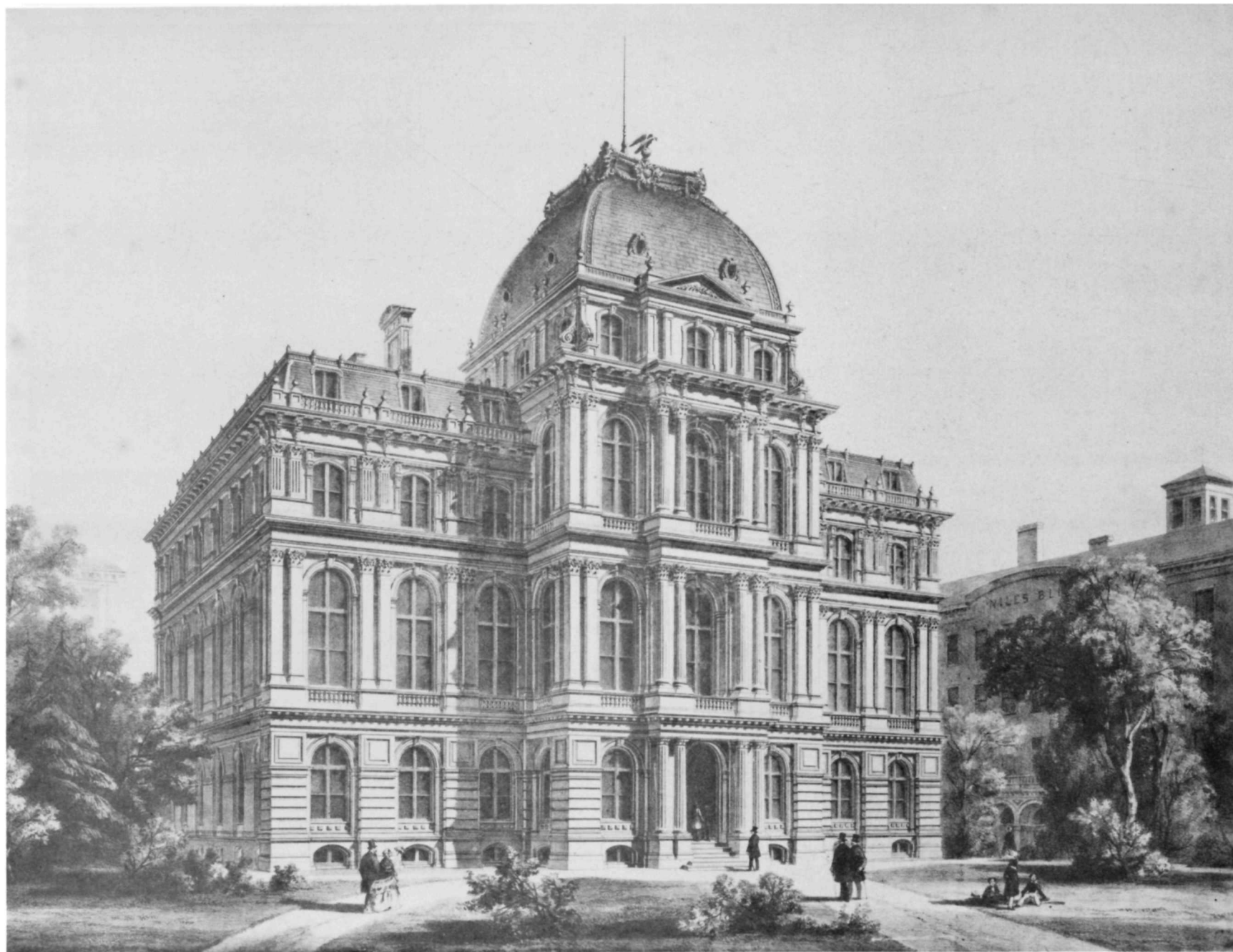
79. *Saint John Daily Telegraph*, 13 July 1877



78. Bank of Montreal (old Domville building), 1899
Carre, Art Work on the City of Saint John

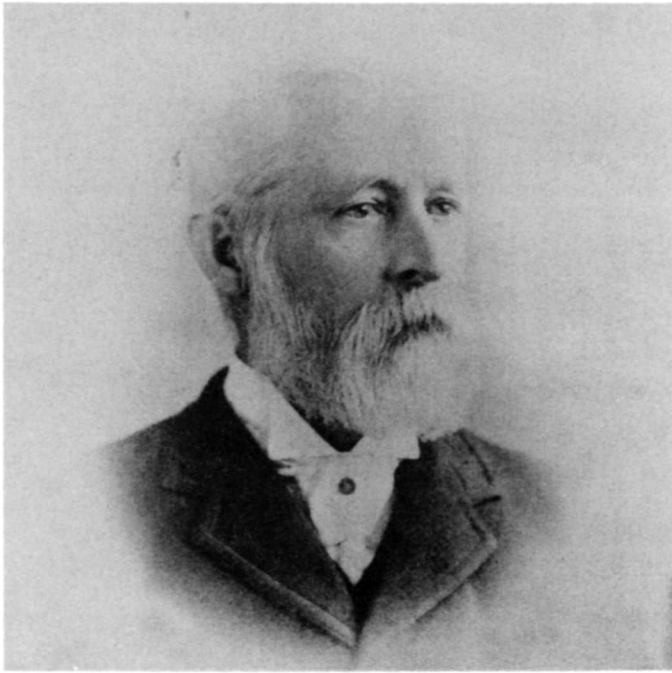


80. Detail above main entrance, Montreal Telegraph Company,
 Rue St.-Francois-Xavier, Montreal
Courtesy of Canadian Inventory of Historic Building



81. Old City Hall, School Street, Boston, 1860s

Courtesy of Bostonian Society



82. James Dumaresq
Courtesy of PANS, N-3748

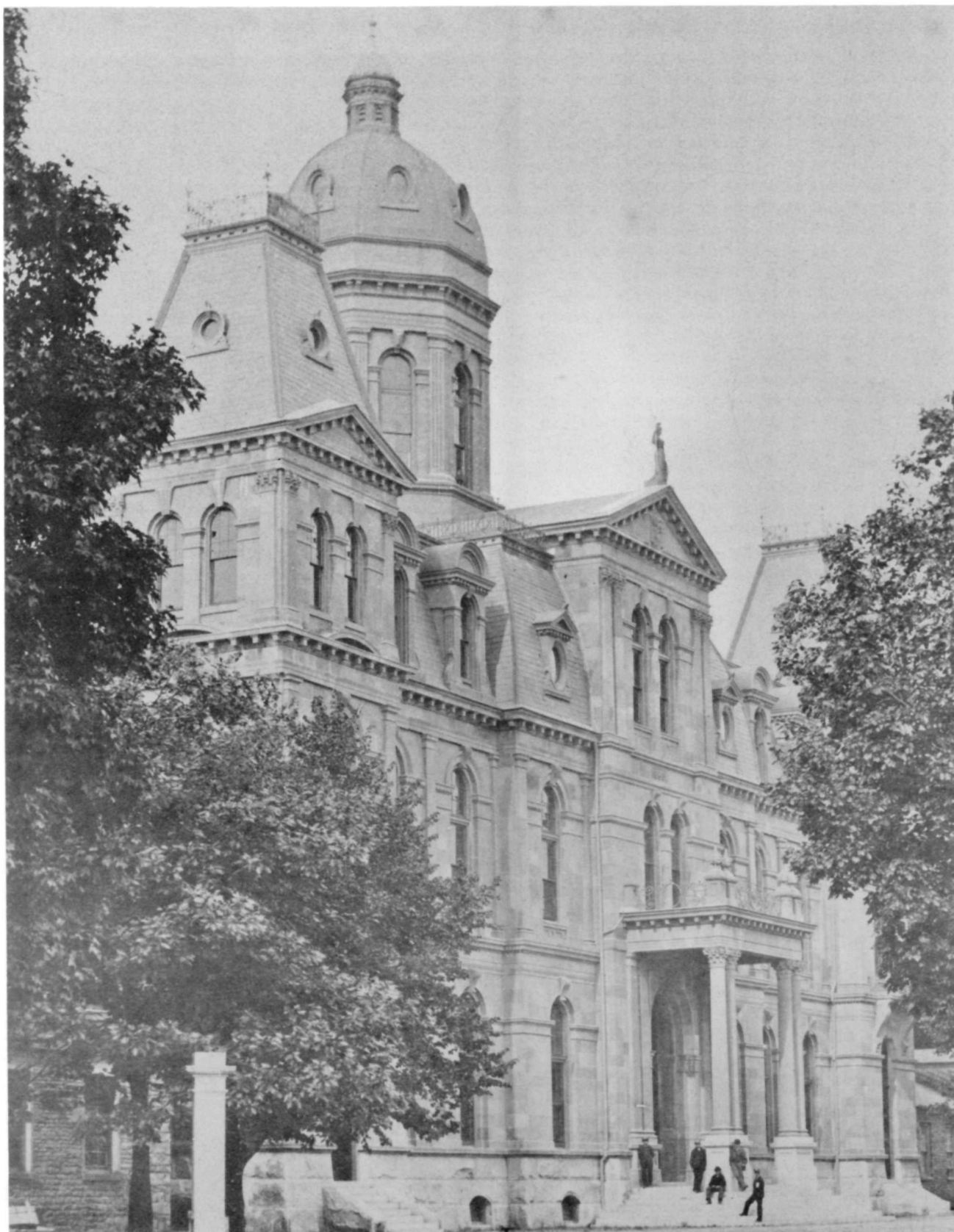


83. Andrew Dewar
Courtesy of PANS, N-689



84. School for the Deaf, Halifax, N.S.

Courtesy of PANS, N-668



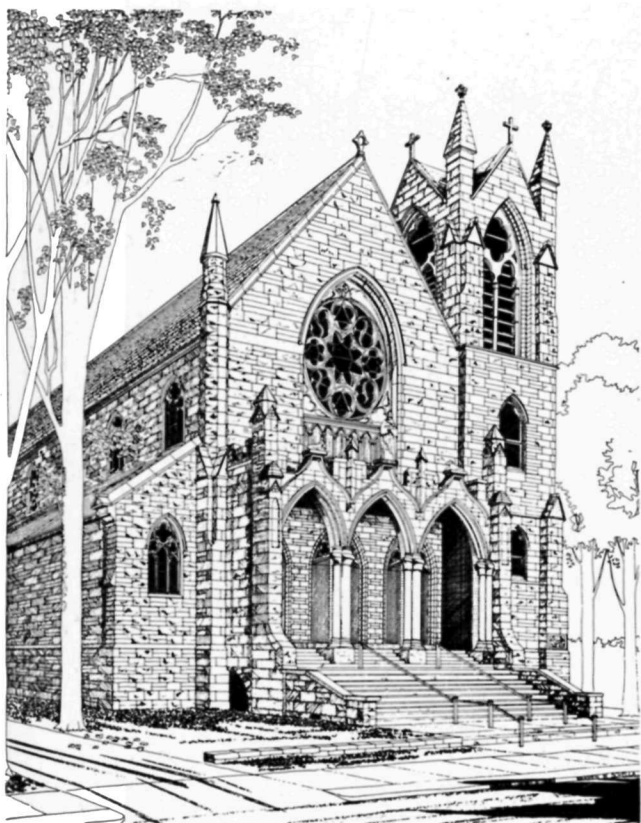
85. Legislative Building, Fredericton, N.B.

G. Taylor photo, courtesy of PANB, P5/165

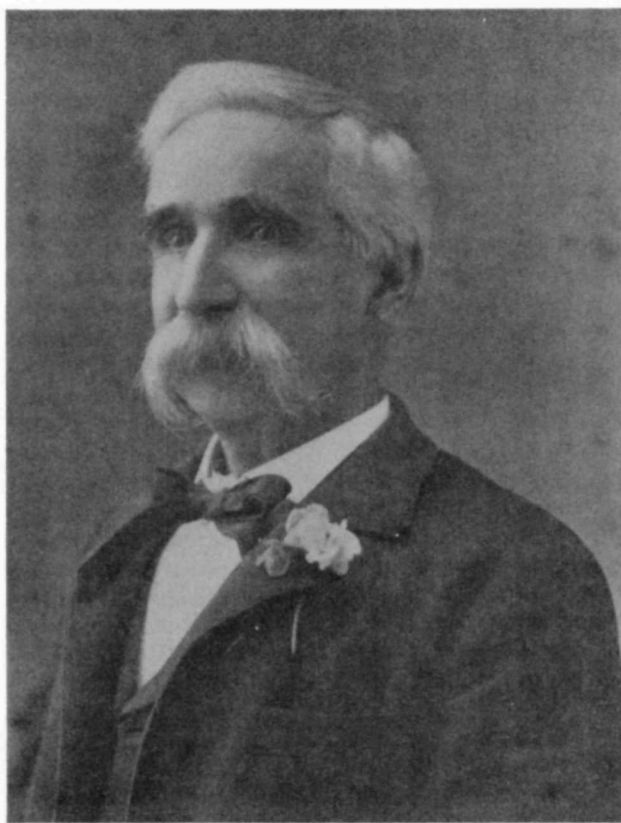


86. L.P. Fisher Memorial Library, Woodstock, N.B., 1970s

David Myles photo, courtesy of N.B. Historical Resources Administration



87. St. Bernard's Roman Catholic Church, Moncton, N.B., 1973.
*Sketch by W.W. Schella, courtesy of Rev. L. J. Hynes,
 St. Bernard's Rectory*

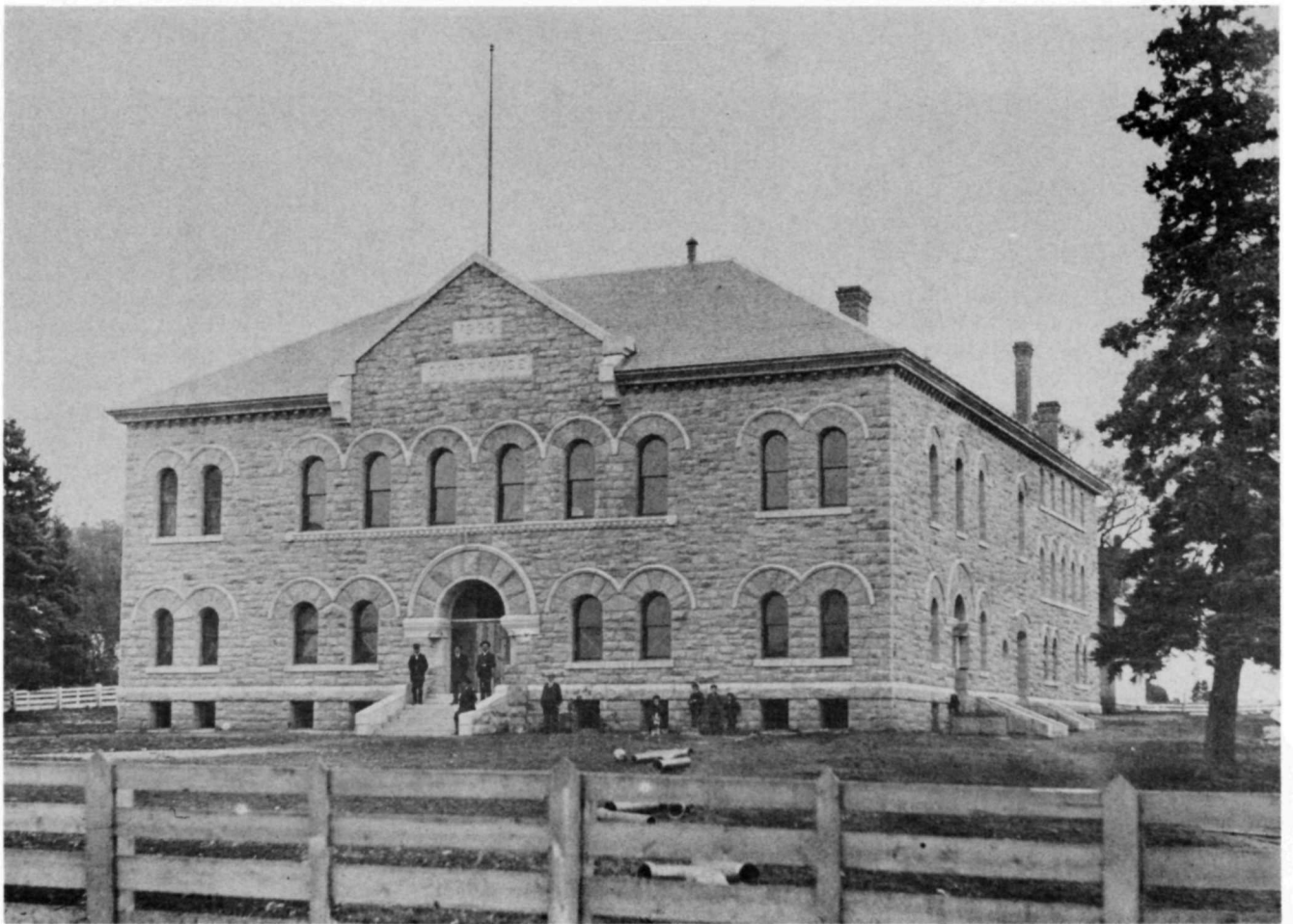


88. R.C. John Dunn
*Reproduced from I.A. Jack, ed., Biographical Review
 (Boston: 1900)*



89. Departmental Building, Fredericton, 1970s

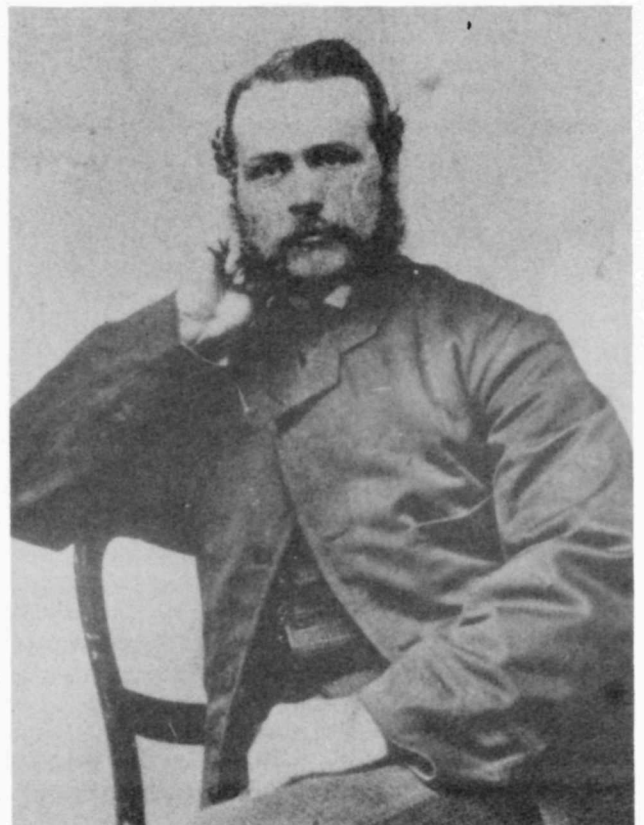
C.A. Hale photo, courtesy of Canadian Inventory of Historic Building



90. Gloucester County Court House, Bathurst, N.B., c.1903
Courtesy of PANB, P18/113



91. Saint John Skating Rink, used in 1867 and 1875 to stage the
 Provincial Exhibition. *Courtesy of PANB, P7/116*



92. David E. Dunham
Courtesy of PANB, P61/350

PROVINCIAL

EXHIBITION
BUILDING,
ST JOHN, N.B.

D. E. DUNHAM ARCH'T.

1880.



93. Ninth Provincial Exhibition Building, designed by David E. Dunham

Saint John Daily Telegraph, 5 October 1880



94. The Commercial Block on King Street, south side, from Germain to Canterbury
Courtesy of the New Brunswick Museum



95. Henry Vaughan residence, 22 Mecklenburg Street, 1970s
Courtesy of Canadian Inventory of Historic Building



96. Residence of Dr. Laurence MacLaren, 76 Charlotte Street, 1970s. Robert Power photo, courtesy of N.B. Historical Resources Administration



97. George McLeod residence, 71 Orange Street, 1970s

Courtesy of Canadian Inventory of Historic Building

Conclusion

In the mid-nineteenth century, Saint John was one of the most prominent cities in British North America. Referred to as the "Liverpool of North America," it had carried on a large shipping trade with the West Indies and supplied fish and lumber to England and other foreign ports. On 20 June 1877, "Black Wednesday," one of the most disastrous urban fires of the 19th century in North America laid waste two-thirds of the central part of the city's surface. Within forty hours, the public buildings, monuments of civic pride, residences, schools, hotels, nearly all of the churches, and most of the banking and commercial structures were gone. By the end of 1881, only four and one-half years after the conflagration, the city's core had been substantially rebuilt. In a short time, Saint John's appearance had altered dramatically. A number of important factors combined to determine the method and effect of the reconstruction.

The complete destruction of approximately \$15 million capital in a time of depression was a serious consequence of the Great Fire. Not only did property owners suffer, but insurance companies, banks, manufacturers and merchants of Canadian as well as British and American origin, sustained such great losses that several firms failed. It was this aspect of the calamity, aside from humanitarian factors, which led the insurance companies to play a major role in the rebuilding process. Because of their extensive losses and the bankruptcy of some of their colleagues, the insurance companies had a vested interest in preventing a recurrence of such disasters. They lobbied for the use of fire resistant materials and safer construction methods, as well as for co-operation among property owners, particularly in terms of building uniformity and cost-sharing for fire-proof dividing walls between buildings. Their position was strengthened by the increased rates charged for wooden buildings as opposed to brick, and threats of withdrawal from the city if their demands were not met.

At a special session of the provincial legislature held shortly after the fire a new building code was passed. To ensure its effectiveness, the position of building inspector was established for the first time. The new building laws were rigorous, and the power of the building inspector was reinforced by the authority to impose fines or even short terms of imprisonment. With the memory of the disastrous fire still vivid, newspapers and local magistrates alike co-operated with the inspector, in both a regulatory and an educative capacity.

Although the people of Saint John had traditionally

displayed a preference for wood as a basic building fabric, the fact that its use was discouraged, and in some prime areas outlawed after 1877, resulted in the introduction of new materials and, with them, new construction methods and designs. Many of the new materials were prefabricated and mass-produced, and were supplied from a wide variety of sources in Canada and the United States. Their abundance, and consequently reduced price, aided by a special reduction of importation tariffs, facilitated the transition from local wood to an international, modern selection of fire-proof materials.

Labourers, contractors, builders and architects from many places in Canada and the United States were drawn to the city by the building boom. The architects came from such centres as Toronto, Montreal, Boston, New York and, of course, Saint John itself. Many among them had European experience. Never before had the city had so many building experts and artisans at its disposal. Their varied backgrounds, expertise and training, as well as the competitive atmosphere induced by their large numbers, resulted in a challenging and creative atmosphere. Opportunities for employment were plentiful, and the vast supply of materials and craftsmen who knew how to use them permitted a broad expression of imagination and ingenuity.

The presence of all the necessary ingredients for building, better construction techniques, and the willingness of property owners to proceed, resulted in a speedy reconstruction and a much improved type of building. Massive and elegant brick blocks replaced the old uneven ones, making a finer display of edifices, according to one source, "than any other city with like population on the continent."¹ The effect of the city's new appearance on the spirit of pride, optimism and ambition of its citizens is aptly expressed in the following, although unfulfilled, hope:

...the vastly improved architectural grade of the leading thoroughfares will heighten the reputation of the city in the opinion of all future visitors, and will also make it the most fitting centre in which all the leading public offices of the Province should be located, for whether the present discussion relative to the transfer of the Parliament of the Province of New Brunswick from its present seat in Fredericton to Saint John be decided in favour of the last city or not, it is only a question of a few years of postponement at most...but every argument from the impartial standpoint of fitness points to Saint John as the legitimate capital of New Brunswick, as it is by far the greatest trade centre of the influence and wealth and intelligence in the Province.²

Notes

- 1 NBM, "St. John, N.B. The Phoenix City of the Maritime Provinces," New Brunswick Historical Society, C27, p. 242.
- 2 Ibid.

Table 1: The Losses of the Insurance Companies in Saint John as a Result of the Great Fire (from the *Globe* [Saint John], 19 June 1878, p. 4)

The following gives the names and origins of the insurance companies operating in Saint John at the time of the Great Fire. Net and gross losses are indicated, as well as the amounts of re-insurance per company within the first year following the fire.

ENGLAND	Gross Loss	Local Re-Insurance	Net Loss Saint John Agency	Total Net Losses
N.B. & Mercantile	\$ 988,945.74	\$ 96,162.21	\$892,792.53	
Queen	\$ 732,709.89	9,026.75	723,683.14	
Imperial	558,473.97		558,473.97	
Royal	497,345.02		497,345.02	
Northern	493,864.00	28,656.00	465,148.00	
Liverpool, London and Globe	528,189.74	63,157.69	465,032.05	
Lancashire	450,000.00	5,000.00	445,000.00	
Guardian	425,000.00		425,000.00	
Commercial Union	357,182.22	5,000.00	352,182.22	
				<u>\$4,824,656.93</u>
UNITED STATES				
Aetna, of Hartford	240,434.00		240,434.00	
Hartford, Hartford	143,032.00		143,032.00	
Phoenix, of Brooklyn	65,000.00		65,000.00	
				<u>\$ 448,466.00</u>
CANADA	Gross Loss	Local Re-Insurance	Net Loss Saint John Agency	Total Net Losses
Royal Canadian	\$ 370,436.00	\$ 30,000.00	\$340,000.00	
Stadacona	346,000.00	16,000.00	330,000.00	
Citizen's	148,000.00	20,000.00	128,000.00	
Provincial	125,000.00		125,000.00	
National	127,139.29	22,000.00	105,139.29	
Western	96,410.00	6,000.00	90,410.00	
Canada Fire & Marine	54,000.00	8,000.00	46,000.00	
British America	29,000.00		29,000.00	
Canada Agricultural	8,000.00		8,000.00	
				<u>\$1,201,549.29</u>
LOCAL				
Central of Fredericton	55,000.00		55,000.00	
St. John Mutual	75,000.00		75,000.00	
Maritime Mutual	20,000.00		20,000.00	150,000.00
Totals	\$6,933,674.87	\$309,002.65		<u>\$5,624,672.22</u>
Computed Totals	[\$6,934,170.87]			

Table 2: The Number, Material and Value of Buildings Erected June 1877 to June 1878 (from the *Globe* [Saint John], 19 June 1878, p. 2)

The following includes an estimate of buildings completed or under construction in Saint John by the end of the first year after the fire. The statistics quoted in the text for this period are consistent with those from the *Telegraph*, but the *Globe's* estimates for this year are shown here because they included street-by-street estimates of costs. Corrugated iron structures are included in the wood category, while both stone and brick-cased buildings are categorized as brick buildings. The totals given in the original table do not represent the sum of each column. Corrected totals appear in brackets. Whether the original inaccuracy is in the individual statistics per street or in the totals is unknown. Generally, the latter do not differ dramatically from the corrected figures. Consequently, the newspaper's estimates are quoted in the text.

Name of Street	Buildings			
	Brick		Wood	
	No.	Cost	No.	Cost
Mecklenburg	4	20,000	21	39,000
Horsfield	3	21,800	8	12,000
Queen	9	46,000	45	62,000
St. Andrews	1	2,500	13	16,000
Queen Square	7	80,000		
St. James	4	41,300	44	50,000
Harding			8	12,100
Pagan Place	1	8,000	1	1,750
Brittain	3	14,500	61	95,300
Sheffield			25	21,435
Main	3	35,000	28	37,000
North Wharf	9	85,000	2	900
South Wharf	16	35,000		
Nelson	5	34,000	1	400
Robertson Place	1	6,000		
Ward	2	12,000		
Peters' Wharf	7	26,000	2	3,200
Water	15	136,000	11	6,000
Market Square	6	78,000		
Church	2	13,000	2	1,350
Prince Wm	39	600,000	5	8,500
Germain	26	310,000	15	16,000
Canterbury	8	50,000		
Charlotte	14	125,000	33	40,000
Sydney	16	140,000	30	55,820
Carmarthen	11	149,000	45	81,000
Wentworth	10	97,500	22	33,000
Pitt	4	30,000	12	15,050
Duke	7	52,000	49	46,000
Orange	11	41,000	13	16,000
Princess	27	250,000	31	45,700
Leinster	11	90,000	10	15,530
King	31	450,000	4	3,700
Dock	19	218,000		
Smyth	9	63,400	7	5,000
Mill	5	41,000	2	2,200
Georges	1	6,200		
Union	5	30,000	6	7,000
Total	352	\$3,456,200	536	\$739,332
Computed Total	[352]	[\$3,437,200]	[536]	[\$749,335]

Table 3: The Number and Material of Buildings Erected June 1877 to June 1879 (from the *Telegraph* [Saint John], 20 June 1879, p. 2)

The following shows the number of buildings completed or in the course of erection at the end of two years of rebuilding. The enumeration of shops refers only to shops and warehouses on the ground floors of buildings. The totals given in the original table do not represent the sum of each column. Corrected totals appear in brackets. Whether the original inaccuracy is in the individual statistics per street or in the totals is unknown. Generally, the latter do not differ dramatically from the corrected figures. Consequently, the newspaper's estimates are quoted in the text.

Name of Street	Dwellings		Shops		Buildings	
	brick	wood	brick	wood	brick	wood
Prince William	17	5	75	5	43	5
King	9	16	45	1	26	9
Dock	4	—	51	—	22	—
Germain	26	23	40	10	31	15
Charlotte	18	60	19	26	16	42
Sydney	34	71	4	15	19	35
Carmarthen	22	79	2	13	13	40
Wentworth	12	52	—	6	10	24
Pitt	2	22	—	8	1	15
Mill	7	4	8	3	5	2
Union	9	4	9	5	8	4
Nelson	—	—	8	—	8	—
Smyth	3	5	8	5	8	—
North Wharf	—	—	20	1	11	1
South Wharf	1	—	25	—	15	—
Other wharves	—	—	25	4	20	3
Ward	—	—	5	—	5	—
Water	1	2	42	21	24	14
Canterbury	1	5	20	—	10	4
Church	—	1	7	2	5	1
Leinster	16	20	1	5	13	15
Princess	33	64	22	15	37	35
Horsfield	19	9	—	—	9	6
Orange	19	37	—	2	13	21
Duke	23	104	3	15	11	51
Mecklenburg	4	43	—	5	4	22
Queen	18	96	5	2	9	46
St. Andrews	—	50	—	2	—	15
Harding	—	23	—	4	—	11
St. James	6	115	2	16	6	56
Brittain	7	125	3	22	3	71
Sheffield	—	51	—	23	—	32
Main	4	63	—	14	3	32
King Square	7	1	4	8	3	4
Queen Square	7	—	—	—	7	—
Market Square	—	—	11	—	6	—
Other Streets, etc	2	4	4	—	6	2
Total	336	1,155	468	256	429	646
Computed Total	[331]	[1,154]	[468]	[258]	[429]	[636]

Table 4: The Number and Material of Buildings Erected June 1877 to June 1881 (from the *Telegraph* [Saint John], 20 June 1881, p. 2)

The following shows the number of buildings erected or in the course of erection during the first four years. The totals given in the original table do not represent the sum of each column. Corrected totals appear in brackets. Whether the original inaccuracy is in the individual statistics per street or in the totals is uncertain. Generally, the latter do not differ dramatically from the corrected figures. Consequently, the newspaper's estimates are quoted in the text.

Name of Street	Dwellings		Shops		Buildings	
	brick	wood	brick	wood	brick	wood
Prince William	17	5	78	5	46	5
King	13	18	45	1	29	10
Dock	4	—	51	—	22	—
Germain	29	27	40	10	32	17
Charlotte	21	60	19	28	19	44
Sydney	36	76	4	16	20	37
Carmarthen	22	80	2	14	13	41
Wentworth	13	54	—	7	11	26
Pitt	2	22	—	8	1	15
Mill	7	4	8	3	5	2
Union	9	4	9	5	8	4
Nelson	—	—	10	—	10	—
Smyth	3	5	8	5	8	4
North Wharf	—	—	20	1	11	1
South Wharf	1	—	25	—	15	—
Other wharves	—	—	26	4	21	3
Ward	—	—	5	—	5	—
Water	1	2	42	24	24	17
Canterbury	1	5	20	—	10	4
Church	—	1	7	2	5	1
Leinster	16	20	1	5	13	15
Princess	35	64	23	15	39	35
Horsfield	20	9	—	—	11	6
Orange	21	41	—	2	15	24
Duke	26	106	3	17	12	53
Mecklenburg	4	45	—	5	4	23
Queen	19	98	5	2	10	48
St. Andrews	—	50	—	2	—	15
Harding	—	23	—	4	—	11
St. James	6	117	2	16	6	57
Brittain	8	130	3	22	4	75
Sheffield	—	55	—	24	—	36
Main	4	65	—	15	3	33
King Square	7	1	4	8	3	4
Queen Square	8	1	—	—	7	1
Market Square	—	—	11	—	6	—
Other Streets, etc	2	4	4	—	6	2
Total	359	1,193	475	240	452	679
Computed Total	[355]	[1,192]	[475]	[264]	[454]	[669]

Appendix A: Streets Destroyed by the Great Fire
(from the *Telegraph* [Saint John], 11
July 1877, p. 2)

Brittain
Carmarthen
Church
Drury Lane
Georges
Harding
King Square
Leinster

Canterbury
Charlotte
Dock
Duke
Germain
Horsfield
King
Main

Market Square
Mill
North
Pagan Place
Princess
Queen Square
Robertson Place
Smyth
St. Andrews
Ward
Wentworth

Mecklenburg
Nelson
Orange
Pitt
Prince William
Queen Street
Sheffield
Sydney
St. James
Water
North Wharf
South Wharf

Appendix B: List of Architects and Builders Advertising and/or Operating in Saint John during the Rebuilding Period, 1877-78.

Architects and builders (some of whom also designed buildings) are listed in alphabetical order, in two separate sections. Since the *Telegraph* contained more information on the former, in the form of advertisements or articles, the architect index indicates the professional origin of the architect and his partnerships during the reconstruction period. The years during which each appears to have worked in the city are in brackets after each architect's name. The partnerships themselves are listed under the firm's name. Some of these were of short duration and were

dissolved after the first few years of the post-fire building boom. Consequently, the years which appear in brackets after the name of each architect or architectural firm or their previous place of employment represent the specific years during which they operated in Saint John. In most cases, each year is indicated separately so as not to give the impression that the length of their association with the Saint John rebuilding was necessarily the beginning and the end of their partnership. The builder index is a compilation of names obtained from building reports and notices in the Saint John *Telegraph*, rather than the city directory. When a builder was described specifically as a carpenter, this designation is included below and in brackets after his name.

Architects

A

Allison, J.C. (& R. Brown, 1879)

B

Babcock, John C. (New York)
Black, Henry Nelson (Boston; & James Gridley Fox Bryant, pre-1878)
Black, H.W. (& W.P. Clarke, 1878)
Briggs, John L. (& Henry Paston Clark, 1878)
Brown, R. (& J.C. Allison, 1879)
Brown, R., and J.C. Allison (1879)
Bryant, James Gridley Fox (Boston; & Henry Nelson Black, pre-1878)
Bryant & Black (pre-1878)

C

Camp, F.T. (New York; & G.B. Croff, 1877, 1878, 1879)
Clark, Henry Paston (& John L. Briggs, 1878)
Clarke, W.P. (Saint John; 1876, 1877, 1878)
Clarke, W.P. (& Frank Goddard, 1877)
Clarke, W.P. (& H.W. Black, 1878)
Clarke, W.P. (& David Elson Dunham, 1877)
Croff, G.B. (New York; & F.T. Camp, 1877, 1878, 1879)
Croff & Camp
Currier, James M. (& John L. Flaxon, pre-1878)
Currier & Flaxon (pre-1878)

D

Dewar, Andrew (Halifax; & David Sterling, pre-1877)
Dewar, Andrew (Halifax; & J.C. Dumaesq, 1877, 1878)
Dunham, David Elson (Saint John; 1863-83)
Dunham, David Elson (& W.P. Clarke, 1877)

Dunham & Clarke (1877)
Dunlop, S.F. (Montreal)
Dunn, R.C. John (& William Morgan Smith, 1877, 1878)
Dunn, R.C. John (1878, 1879, 1880)

E

Eaton (& Shepherd)

F

Fairweather, G. Ernest (Saint John, 1857-?)
Fairweather, G. Ernest (& J.T.C. McKean, 1877, 1878, 1879, 1880 - dissolved)
Flaxon, J.L. (Boston; 1878)
Flaxon, J.L. (Boston; & James M. Currier, pre-1878)
Fowler, H.P. (1877, 1878)

G

Goddard, Frank (& W.P. Clarke, 1877)
Gray & Billings (architects & engineers, 1878)

H

Hopkins (Montreal; & Wily, 1877, 1878)
Hopkins & Wily (Montreal; 1877, 1878)

K

Kain, Frank (1876, 1877)

L

Langley, Langley & Burke (Toronto; 1877)

M

McKean, J.T.C. (Saint John; 1862-?)
McKean, J.T.C. (Saint John; & G. Ernest Fairweather, 1877, 1878, 1879, 1880 - dissolved)

P

Preston, W.G.

S

Shepherd & Eaton Smith & Gemmell (Toronto; 1877)
Smith, William Morgan (& R.C. John Dunn, 1877, 1878 - dissolved)
Smith, William Morgan (government architect, 1879)
Smith & Dunn (1877, 1878 - dissolved)
Smith & Van Noorden (Boston; 1877)
Starbuck, Henry F. (Boston; 1877)
Starbuck, Henry F. (Boston; & Vinal, 1877)
Starbuck & Vinal (Boston; 1877)

Contractors/Builders

A

Alexander, John Anderson, John A. (carpenter, died in Saint John, December 1877)
Anderson, Thomas
Armstrong, Robert

B

Blaine, Henry
Brady, Richard
Brass, E.I.
Burke, James
Butcher, William

C

Calman, George
Causey, William
Charlton
Chrisholm, William
Christie (& Ferguson)
Christie & Ferguson
Clarke, Daniel (carpenter)
Clark, Saunders (brother of Daniel)
Collins, F. & H.
Cormack, Peter (died in Saint John, 1877)
Crabb, William
Crawford Brothers
Crocket (& McMurray)
Crocket & MacMurray
Curry, Thomas

D

Donnelly, John Doody, John

Stead, Matthew (Ludlow, Shropshire, England; Saint John, 1852-79)
Stead, Matthew, Jr. (Saint John; 1877)
Stevens, John, & Son (Boston; 1877, 1878)

T

Thomas, W.T. (Montreal; 1877)

W

Welsh (ch?), John (1877, 1878)
West & Anderson (New York; 1877)
Wickenden, W.C. Osborn (1877)
Wily (Montreal; & Hopkins, 1877, 1878)

E

Emery (& Sterling)
Emery, Leslie (Turner Falls, Massachusetts, 1877)
Erb & Purcell
Ewing, Robert

F

Fanning (Ottawa; & Porter 1878)
Fanning & Porter (Ottawa, 1878)
Fellows (& Keening)
Ferguson (& Christie)
Fisher, G.S. & Co.
Flewelling, J.R.
Flood, M., & Sons (Patrick & John)
Fowler, W.M.

G

Gallagher, D.F.

H

Harris, Arthur
Henniger, Edward
Hopkins, Robert
Hoyt
Houston (& McGowan)
Houston & McGowan

J

Johnston (& Scott)
Johnston, James (carpenter)
Jones, Frank

K

Keening (& Fellows)
Keening & Fellows (master-builders)

L

Ladd, A.J.
Lee (& McIntyre)
LeLacheur, G. (carpenter)

M

Mann, Ephraim
Markem, Charles
Maynes, Daniel
McMurray (& Crockett)
McGowan (& Houston)
McGuiggan, M.M.
McIntyre (& Lee)
McIntyre, Robert
McIntyre & Lee
McKenzie, J.
McLaren, Alexander (carpenter)
McMonagle, George
McMurray (& Crockett)
McNamara, Bart.
McSorley, John
McWhinney, Samuel
Melrose, R.
Mills, C.P.
Miller, William (carpenter)
Munroe, Isaac
Mooney, B., & Sons
Moore, John
Moore, Robert
Morrisey
Morrison, John
Mullin, James
Myles, Andrew

P

Pitman, John
Pomeroy, Thomas

Porter (& Fanning)
Prince, William

R

Richardson, F.A. (Boston?)
Roden, Frank
Ross, J. (carpenter)
Ross, William
Ruddick, George

S

Scott (& Johnston)
Scott & Johnston
Seaton, John S.
Shamper, Jacob
Sharp, John (carpenter)
Shirley, Daniel
Steel, John
Sterling (& Emery)

T

Thompson

U

Urquhart, Francis

W

Watt, John Whittaker (carpenter)

Y

Youmans, George
Young, George

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