

## **Demolitions, Conversions and What's Left in the Ground**

I would like to begin by showing a few images of the great demolitions that occurred primarily in Waterloo, but also in Kitchener starting around 1993. The fact that so much of our industrial heritage has vanished should be cause for concern, since it underlies one of the most salient features of the Information Age, which is its speed. This, combined with an inherent instability, has the potential to create havoc, such as we are now experiencing with the global recession. I suspect this to be as much a function of information technology as it is due to the consequences of human greed and stupidity as typified by the world's financial industry, since the introduction and pace of new technology requires a relatively quiescent period of absorption and assimilation.

The industrial demolitions of the nineties were astonishing to me as much for their speed as for their sense of finality – it was possible, looking at the new horizon opened up in the heart of Waterloo by the concurrent demolition of the Labatts brewery and the Seagram distillery, to feel that an age had ended, and something new was about to begin. What was impressive about these demolitions, and more than a little disconcerting, was the violent energy with which they were carried out – huge mechanical excavators literally chewing their way through the buildings, causing whole walls to crumble, the demolition by dynamite of large smokestacks, and a fierce fire that destroyed the most handsome and significant building in the Seagram Distillery complex. Demolition occurred in Kitchener to the old B. F. Goodrich rubber plant and later to the Forsyth shirt factory.

This clearing of the decks in such a dramatic manner as well as its scale had a profound effect on my sensibilities; it really did seem to be the end of an age, with all that that implied. I have recently come to view this period of demolition as a kind of emotionally charged fault line separating the new Information Age from its industrial predecessor. A reading of both myth and history suggests that when epochs end and great empires collapse a reckoning occurs – a summation of what that period was really all about. We should also know by now that such times are inherently unstable, as the last year or so has taught us. It is human nature to look for signs of stability during such upheavals, even if it sometimes means clutching at straws.

The value of preserving at least some memory of industrialization – architecture, machinery, archival material – lies in its ability to act as a real stabilizing force to counteract the instability of information technology. It

allows us to see where we have come from, while at the same time providing clues about the technology that is replacing it which may help us to see what is in store. This played a large part in my decision to found the Kitchener Industrial Artifacts Project in 1996.

The placement of selected pieces of vintage industrial machinery in public locations has created a kind of network of historic linch pins that reflect the strong impact of industrialization on our communities. They are also intended to interact with the surviving works of industrial architecture, at least three of which carry deep significance both as historic structures and for their relationship to the community.

The earliest of these is the Vogelsang button factory, located at the corner of Queen and Courtland Streets in downtown Kitchener and built circa 1872. Currently a housing co-operative, this structure is a rare gem of nineteenth century industrial architecture that deserves more appreciation. Excellent brickwork details abound, such as the dentils below the roofline and the treatment around the windows and corners. A new wing, probably made close to the turn of the century, was added when the Williams Greene and Rome Company took over the premises to manufacture shirt collars. This company later became Cluett Peabody Canada Inc., manufacturers of Arrow shirts. Cluett Peabody subsequently opened a modern factory close by during the nineteen twenties, which today lies derelict, having been in the process of conversion to condominiums for the past seven years. This fate, not uncommon for many old industrial buildings, was avoided by the Kaufman Footwear plant on King Street, also located in the downtown core. Renovation started around 2003, and was concluded well before the recession hit.

The Kaufman factory may be one of the most significant pieces of industrial architecture in Canada, as it was designed by the foremost industrial architect of the twentieth century, Albert Kahn. Kahn was Henry Ford's architect of choice, and was responsible for the Highland Hills model T plant, built in 1910, as well as the giant River Rouge complex built in the early twenties. The first two stages of the Kaufman plant were contemporary with Highland Hills, being constructed in 1908 and 1911 respectively. It is therefore not surprising that they bear a strong resemblance to the Detroit factory, the difference being largely a matter of scale. A. R. Kaufman himself seems to be reminiscent of Henry Ford, sharing his visceral dislike of unions and for philanthropy on his terms.

Also of interest is Kaufman's pioneering introduction of birth control methods, starting during the Depression, and continuing into the sixties of the last century. In addition to manufacturing diaphragms and possibly

condoms, Kaufman encouraged his male employees to have a vasectomy, which was performed in the plant's nurse's station, surely a novel use of a footwear factory.

The challenges of converting an aging industrial building to a residential one are daunting, not only in bringing the structure up to code, but also in maintaining the integrity of the original building, which is all too often compromised in the renovation process. In this case, the exterior appearance of the old Kaufman plant has been largely maintained, including the two fine entrance porticos on King Street, and I feel that the conversion has been successful and is now an asset to the downtown.

The third industrial structure is another Kahn edifice built circa 1912 for the Consolidated Rubber Company, which later became the Dominion Rubber Company, then Uniroyal and finally Uniroyal-Goodrich. At the time of construction this enormous building was located on the Western edge of Berlin, then newly incorporated as a city with a population somewhere between twelve and fifteen thousand people. The building is still in use today, including a rubber manufacturing operation, although it is currently underutilized, probably due to its size.

Across the intersection from the Kaufman Lofts lies the new University of Waterloo School of Pharmacy and its associated medical faculty, a satellite of the De Groote School of Medicine of Mac Master University. This site was also once occupied by a rubber factory, the old B.F. Goodrich plant, built in 1919. Other than an interesting looking cooling plant, which featured tall Romanesque windows, this factory had little to recommend itself architecturally, and its demise has been un lamented. The site itself was badly contaminated, probably by naphtha, and required extensive remediation.

On the opposite side of Victoria Street from the new UW Kitchener campus is the old Lang Tannery, which is now undergoing conversion into new office space as well as becoming a digital media centre. Combined with the pharmacy and medical school this area is an excellent example of how the boundary between Industrial Age and Information Age has been crossed, and owes its provenance to the transformation of the City of Waterloo from a small industrial community to a globally significant Information Age one.

Waterloo is especially interesting in this regard because along with high-tech companies as exemplified by RIM and Open Text, it has become a centre of scientific research (The Perimeter Institute) as well as international governance with The Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) and its affiliated Balsillie School of International Relations.

The scale of the Waterloo industrial demolitions, which were almost

all located in the core area, means that there is now little left of the city's historic industrial architecture; indeed one of the few remaining examples, the Waterloo Bedding factory on Allen Street, is slated to be demolished to make way for a high-rise condo development, while its neighbour, the Bauer Felt plant was demolished for the same reasons earlier, with a small vestigial section being kept, possibly as a piece of nostalgia.

The energy of the twenty-first century, in Waterloo at least, is palpable and yet also unsettling – to see the entire downtown area literally re-made in the space of a few years is to experience the Information Age at ground zero, as delineated, and perhaps even orchestrated, by the ubiquitous Blackberry.

What stays in the ground are the fragments of a culture – those foreign objects that will be unearthed by future generations whose task it will then be to try and attach some sort of meaning to them. The Perimeter Institute is built on an old dumpsite which was at least partially revealed during the building's construction in 2003. Even today, as the institute expands into its second phase, some old bottles lie unearthed on the freshly excavated till.

Perhaps two feet below the surface, and running in a straight line between the CIGI building, a former Seagram Distillery barrel warehouse, and the Zeller's Plaza on Bridgeport Road, lie remnants of a pipe that once carried mash under pressure from the distillery to the Seagram Stables where it was fed to the Seagram family's racing horses. That at least is the story that appeared in the local press a few years ago.

Physical traces of the old name of Berlin have now all but disappeared, although until comparatively recently there were at least two seals stamped by the Berlin Paving Company in the sidewalk (the "n" of "Berlin" being reversed) and dated 1910 – one at the corner of Schneider Avenue and David Street, the other on Queen Street near Schneider Avenue.

Likewise, until two years ago, a steel plate could still be seen on Ahrens Street near Queen that once belonged to the Berlin Light Commissioners, hinting at an early state of street lighting. As a relevant aside, it should be noted that Berlin was the first community in Ontario to receive hydro-electric power from Niagara Falls in the fall of 1910. Hibner Park, also located on Ahrens Street, has a charming fountain dating from around 1895 that is still in working order, the park being named for Daniel Hibner, a former mayor of Berlin whose name and title grace the rim of the fountain's basin.

Sea shells can sometimes be found in both cities, often as a result of roadwork or other construction. Usually containing two to three penny size holes, they are the detritus of the large button industry that once gave Berlin

the moniker of “Button capitol of Canada”. An early use of what must have been an abundant supply of debris was to use them as aggregate in cement, as may be found in an old retaining wall off Charles Street in Kitchener.

The Vogelsang Button factory appears to have dumped its shells in nearby Schneider Creek, where they were later exposed as a continuous vein running about eighteen inches below ground surface when the creek suffered the indignity of being turned into a concrete-lined storm drain in 1984. Construction was halted long enough for a cursory archaeological investigation that revealed a few potsherds (possibly from the Joseph Schneider family) and small animal bones, no doubt a source of food. It would have been interesting to see what a more extensive dig might have revealed, given that an aboriginal trail once followed the course of the creek down to Doone, and that native people once camped in what is now Victoria Park.

Reconstruction of the sidewalk and retaining wall in front of the Kitchener-Waterloo Vocational School and Collegiate Institute a few years ago exposed the earthen bank and revealed what is most likely a bovine or equine tooth. Given its depth from the surface, there is however, at least a slight possibility that it may also be the tooth of a Woodland Buffalo, a species that roamed freely in this region, at least until early in the nineteenth century.

Finally, I would like to return above ground to a once prominent industrial artifact, the Waterloo barrel pyramid, placed in front of the old Seagram barrel warehouse when it became part of the short lived Seagram Museum in 1984. Recently demolished to help make way for the new Balsillie School of International Relations, this loss is another reminder of the pace of the Information Age, when even the displayed reminders of a previous era are swept away. Waterloo, once world famous for whiskey, is now world famous for Blackberries.

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