

## **Heritage Artifacts: Office Safe**



**J & J Taylor safe, with two locks, that kept G&W valuables ... safe**

The Distillery District boasts not only some of the finest Victorian industrial heritage buildings in Canada, but also many fine, sometimes unique, heritage artifacts. This is the first of an occasional series that will identify and discuss these artifacts.

Around the time that this beautiful, and trustworthy, safe was manufactured by J & J Taylor over on Front Street, Gooderham & Worts was reportedly the largest distillery not only in the British Empire, but in the world. Local historian and booster, J. Timperlake, summarized the importance of G&W in the Toronto of 1877:

Messrs. Gooderham and Worts own the largest distillery in the world, they feed more cattle, directly and indirectly, than are fed by any other establishment outside Texas; they mainly run a railway [Toronto & Nipissing], which is of great benefit to Toronto and the northern country; they are the principal owners of a bank [Bank of Toronto], than which none ranks higher in public confidence. They directly sustain a hundred families in Toronto, pay the largest revenue to the Dominion Treasury of any firm in Canada, and are by far the heaviest local taxpayers.

Until the erection of George Gooderham's "Flatiron" Building at Front and Wellington in 1892, the company's headquarters remained at the distillery, in Building 32 on the west side of Trinity Street. Naturally, such major and diverse business activities required the safe keeping of account books, stock certificates, correspondence, legal documents, and even cash for wages.

Gooderham & Worts were well-known for purchasing the best equipment available, so patronizing J & J Taylor (a.k.a. Toronto Safe Works) was a true sign of confidence. Established in 1855, J & J Taylor became Toronto and Canada's pre-eminent safe-making company, devoted to constructing the "perfect fire and thief-resisting safe." By the 1870s, when Gooderham & Worts purchased their safe, J & J Taylor's new factory was located at the corner of Front and Frederick Streets in a red-and-white brick factory that still stands, and the company was exporting safes across the Dominion of Canada and into the United States.

The same Mr. Timperlake who wrote so admiringly of Gooderham and Worts, expressed equal admiration for "Messrs. J. & J Taylor," who had patented a rubber-tubing system that made their safes "perfectly air tight," and used "solid chilled steel bars" and other materials that made any attempts by burglars with drills "fruitless." Even gaining the combination to the safe would prove useless to the "professional cracksman," because the safe's "celebrated time lock ... of the finest clockwork ... and furnished with two separate and distinct sets of works" ensured that the locks wouldn't open - to owner or robber - until the time set in the locks, from one to 46 hours, had expired.

Not only were the safes solid, impenetrable, and trustworthy, but they were also quite beautiful. If you have a chance, take a look at the G&W original, which is now in the back lobby of Building 59 off Case Goods Lane. Check out the two dials (inscribed with the 1855 founding date of the company), the massive bars and hinges, the hefty steel frame, as well as the elegant gilt lettering and delightfully surprising floral designs that were all hand-painted and unique to this particular safe.



**J & J Taylor workers manufacture safes at Front & Frederick Streets 1904 CTA**

The quotations are found in J. Timperlake, *Illustrated Toronto: Past and Present* (1877). In 1904, the same year this rare photograph was taken, J & J Taylor safes proved their worth. As many of Toronto's major business tumbled around them during the Great Fire of 1904, the safes survived ... and were put on display outside the factory at 139 Front Street.

**Post Script to last week's heritage snippet, "Distillery Cows."** Many thanks to reader Betty Pratt for adding to the G&W livestock saga. According to a front page article in the *Evening Star* of January 18, 1894, "Gooderham & Worts [were] shipping one hundred car loads of manure from the byres [across the Don River] to their Oakville farm." Presumably the Oakville farm, in turn, supplied grain or other raw materials to the Toronto distillery ... and the recycling continued.

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