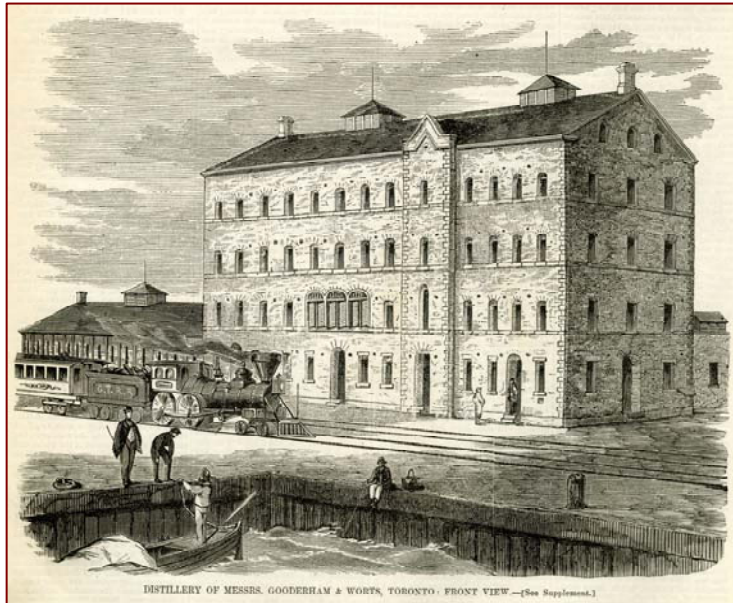
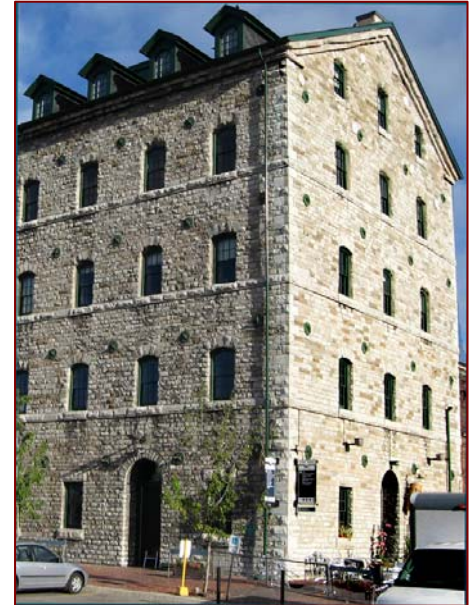


Architecture: David Roberts, Sr.



Earliest known image of the Stone Distillery, 1863 TPL



Stone Distillery 2007

*T*wo men were responsible the design and construction of many of the buildings still standing in the Distillery District: engineer David Roberts, Sr. (1810 or '11-1881), and his architect son, David Roberts, Jr. (1845-1907).

Impressive sleuthing by architectural historian Stephen Otto reveals that David Roberts, Sr. was a multi-talented civil engineer – with perhaps some architectural training – who emigrated from Ireland to the United States in 1842. In 1844, he settled in Toronto, where his son and future partner was born in 1845. There, his expertise as a millwright, metal-founder, and designer of stationary steam engines, soon brought him to the notice of up-and-coming millers and distillers, William Gooderham and his new partner James G. Worts, who were about to make the first of several major improvements to their business: a wharf and distillery expansion.

Roberts appears to have worked on that expansion, but his main contributions to G&W came 15 years later with the great Stone Distillery (1858-1860) and then the Maltings & Cooperage (1863-'64) – two very different building complexes.

Some time in 1858, Roberts was asked to prepare plans for “the most ambitious industrial building erected in the city to that time,” according to Otto. Roberts was peculiarly well suited for the task, having put up between thirty and forty mills in England and Ireland, as well as being familiar with

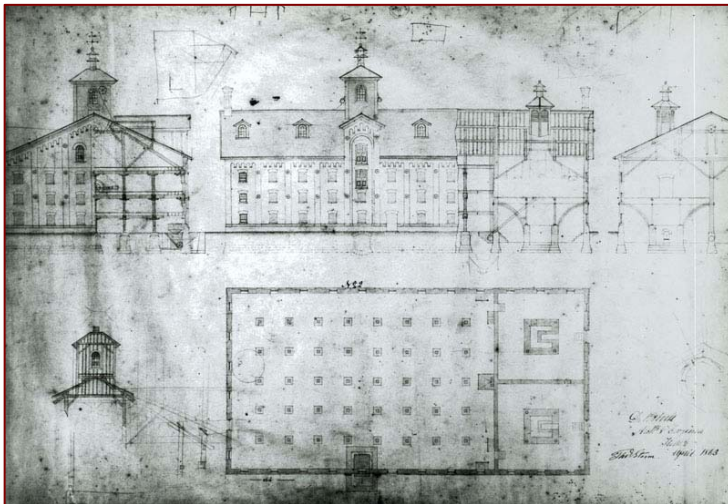
steam technology. Whether he was familiar with distilling, however, goes unrecorded.

Roberts produced plans for the simple-but-grand limestone structure that still dominates the Distillery District. Work on the 300 by 80-foot building began in April 1859, involved between 400 and 500 labourers, and was finished 21 months later, in January 1860. Roberts Senior supervised every aspect of the operation, from designing the building and much of its machinery, to hiring the builders and other contractors, to supervising actual construction. The final cost was \$150,000, a huge sum for the time.

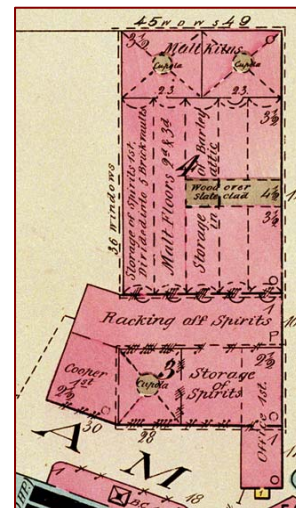
Roberts was suitably praised for his efforts. *The Globe* of February 7, 1862 waxed enthusiastic:

The architectural superintendence of the building, as well as the complete machinery contained within its walls, was entrusted to Mr. David Roberts, who during a period of nearly three years, from the first conception of the enterprise to its successful completion, gave the work a most assiduous and intelligent oversight. The establishment reflects the greatest credit upon his engineering abilities, and our city is fortunate in possessing among its professional men, a gentleman competent for such an undertaking.

Given the undoubted success of the new distillery, it's not surprising that Roberts was almost immediately set to work on the next expansion of the business, the red-brick buildings extending north along the west side of Trinity Street to Mill Street. These reflected new processes, such as manufacturing of malt, and improved processes, such as better rectifying (or purification) of alcohols. This complex included: the three-storey Malt House and Kiln Building at the north end; lower Offices; four-storey Rectifying House; and adjacent Cooperage.



David Roberts, Sr., Malt House, April 1863 (AO)



Roberts' 1863-4 buildings on 1880 map (CTA)

Here, the style of the buildings changed quite dramatically, from thick-walled, imported limestone to red-brick, panel-and-pier construction on stone foundations. It's not clear why the style changed so dramatically – whether for reasons of cost, utility, or taste - but Roberts Senior's new style set the basic pattern for later expansions. His red-brick "boxes" also display some delightful decorative features, such as ornamental cupolas, elegant glass-and-wood doors, and distinctive arcaded brick corbels. Look for these on your next visit.



David Roberts, Sr. architectural details, 1863-'4

In the early 1860s, David Roberts Sr. retired to farm in Elgin County, but may have continued to act as a consulting engineer on a few projects, such as the reconstruction of the Stone Distillery after the great fire of 1869.

Sources include the following items by Stephen A. Otto: *Gooderham & Worts' Distillery* (Gooderham & Worts Heritage Plan Report No. 2, March 1988); *Inventory of Archival Sources* (Gooderham & Worts Heritage Plan Report No. 4, March 1994); and "Roberts, David, Sr." and "Roberts, David, Jr." in Eric Arthur, *No Mean City* (3rd ed., 1988), p. 257.

Please send your comments or questions to Manager of Heritage Services, Sally Gibson, sg@thedistillerydistrict.com.