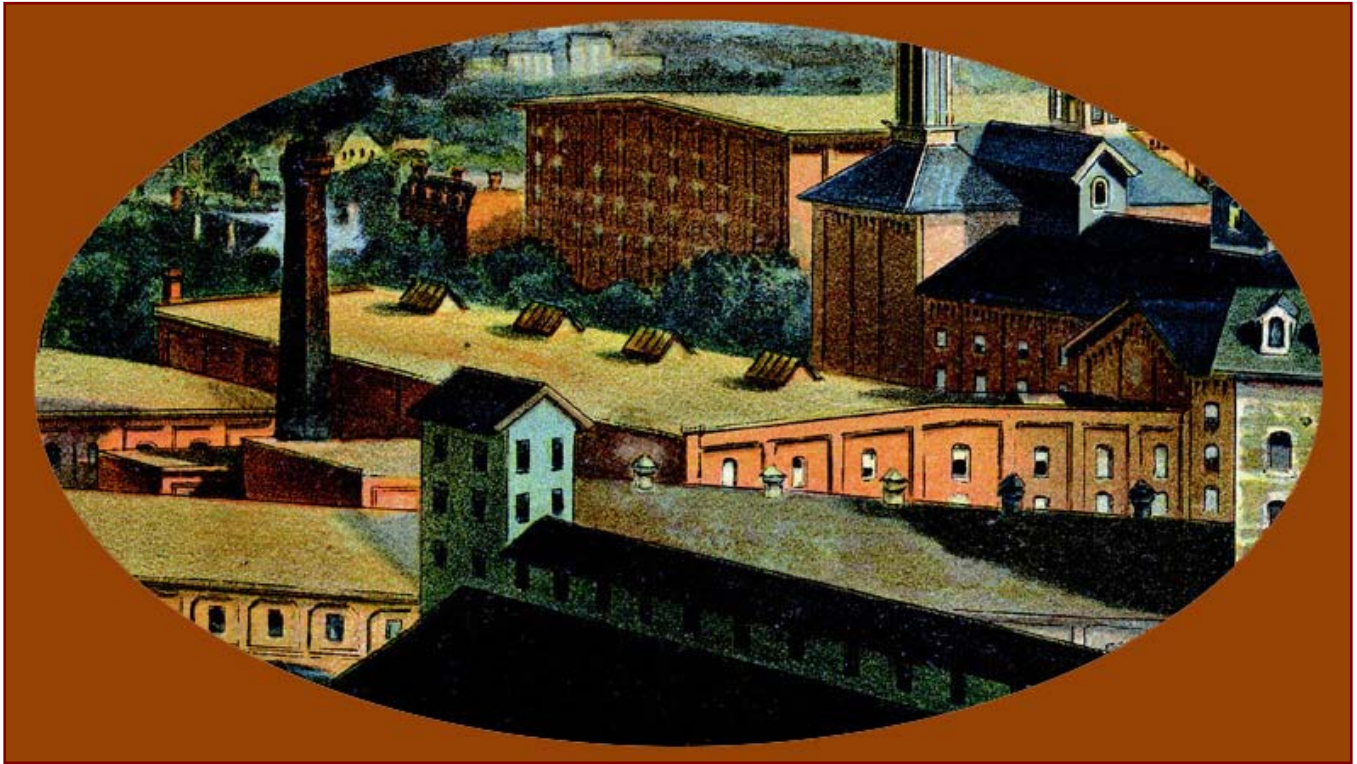


Building Histories

Building 25: Barrels, Offices & Labs



Long, low “Barrel Wash House” surrounded by diverse distillery buildings, 1896

DHD

Constructed in part of William Gooderham’s extensive garden between Mill Street and the Stone Distillery, Building 25 was originally much larger than today’s structure. Probably designed by David Roberts, Jr., who also designed Buildings 8 and 9 across today’s Distillery Lane, Building 25 was described as a “Barrel Wash House” on an 1889 plan of the distillery. It stretched west from the Cooper Shops in Buildings 28 and 32, and northward to Mill Street, adjacent to an “Open Air Barrel Store” yard located between the Wash House and the Malt House and Kiln Building fronting on Trinity Street. It covered a lot of ground.

The 1896 print shows 10-year-old Building 25, surrounded by diverse other distillery buildings, as it first appeared: a long, two-storey, red-brick store house similar in design to the younger Roberts’ rack and tank houses found around the site. Featuring the same recessed-panel-and-projecting-pier construction, with a decorative, sawtooth brick pattern running along the top of the panels, Building 25 displayed a gently pitched gabled south façade, but a flat roof behind the parapet. The decorative brickwork fell victim to later renovations.

No plans or pictures of the original interior have surfaced, nor have any descriptions of barrel-washing operations been discovered. Interior construction was probably similar to that found in the rack houses of the era: squared timber columns supporting ceiling beams and exposed roof joists. Barrel-washing at least required a

source of water and plenty of elbow grease. Whether any additional equipment was required or available remains unknown.

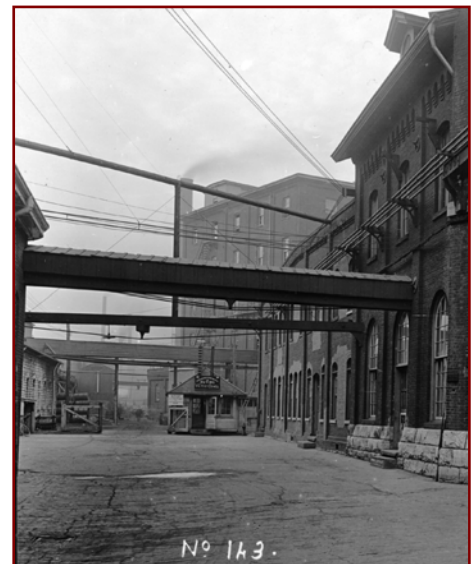
Just why this large barrel-washing space was required in 1886 also remains something of a mystery. Several factors probably influenced the decision to build it. Certainly, Gooderham & Worts had continued to expand. More whisky ... more barrels. Perhaps more important was the requirement by the Federal Government in 1885 that distillers must age whisky for two years. Instantly, Gooderham & Worts had to double its storage space, and would have required more barrels to be created, stored, and subsequently cleaned for reuse. Around the same time, Federal regulations were changed so that distillers not only could, they had to bottle their products, which may have had an impact on the barrel creation, use, and reuse process.



Original configuration, 1889 DHD

Just when the barrel-washing function was no longer required, or no longer required on this central site, also remains unknown. Certainly, by the time that Gooderham & Worts was transformed into British Acetones for the duration of the First World War, the building had undergone major changes. Some of these may have occurred before the war. Others certainly occurred during the war to make operations more efficient.

During this period, Building 25 served several distinct functions: business office, architectural drafting, and laboratory. While still extending north to Mill Street, the building itself appeared to be a jumble of structures. In the absence of architectural plans, identifying precise locations for the various functions is virtually impossible. But a superb series of photographs taken at the end of that war documents both exterior and interior conditions, without providing conclusive evidence of exactly what went where.



Building 25, Nov. 1918: looking east (left) & looking west toward guardhouse (right) CTA 1583

Photographs reveal that the south façade of Building 25 still featured its original, gently sloping gable and Roberts' decorative brickwork. The windows, however, had been extensively changed, principally to provide more natural light for the office, drafting, and laboratory functions that replaced barrel-washing. (Compare photographs with 1896 print.) Additional changes to the windows and doors were done during later renovations, principally in the 1980s, so today's façade reflects those changes as well.



Ground floor office workers CTA 1583-154

Second floor bacteriological lab CTA 1583-146

Located on the ground floor, the business office was staffed primarily (perhaps exclusively) by women. The Stone Distillery across the lane was visible through the round-headed, six-over-six pane windows. Interior walls and columns were finished in wood, providing a more refined air than the usual industrial finishes of rough brick, concrete floor, and exposed timbers.

Laboratories played an important role in developing and ensuring high-quality products, both industrial and beverage alcohols. During the First World War, British Acetones Toronto took over and expanded the distillery's bacteriological and chemical laboratories to support the manufacture of a key element for smokeless gunpowder that depended on a special fermentation process. In a very rare description of early activities in Building 25, Colonel Albert E. Gooderham's post-war staff report summarized the changes made during the war:

When the system of fermentation was enlarged to its final proportion, the laboratory space was found to be inadequate. It became necessary to alter the space occupied by the offices and draughting room to make the premises suitable for laboratories....

The ground floor has been converted into a Chemical Laboratory to be used in connection with distillation of acetone and manufacture of M.E.K.

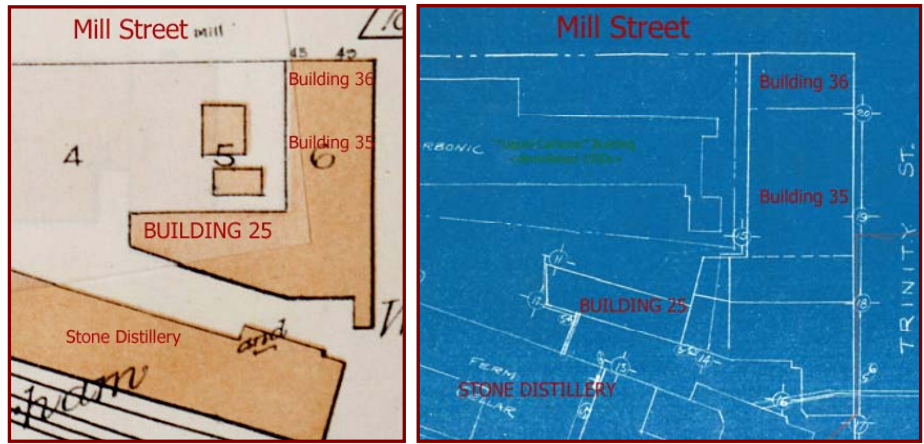
The upper floor has been altered to suit the condition of the Bacteriological Process Laboratory. This section is connected to the second floor of the Distillery Building by means of a balcony, thus permitting attendants to pass from the Laboratory to the Fermenting

Department without having interconnecting doorways between the departments.

The alteration of the building consists chiefly in benches, lockers and fixtures suitable for laboratory work in addition to the plumbing required.

Some of the equipment, plumbing, partitioning and other changes mentioned in the report are evident in the photograph.

Again, for reasons that remain unknown, Building 25 underwent radical surgery between 1918 when it still stretched up to Mill Street, through 1923 when much of the northern wing was demolished, until 1941 when the building attained its current shape, except for a small western extension added in 1987. These changes are shown on the Goad's plan of 1923, which shows some small, temporary buildings on the former site, and a Lighting plan of May 1941, which shows a large "liquid carbonic" building that remained on the site until the early 1950s. Now the Pure Spirit condo rises on that Mill Street frontage.



North part demolished by 1923 Essentially today's shape by 1941

From the end of the First World War until major renovations in 1987, Building 25 was used for assorted purposes, such as offices, labs, general storage, even vault storage of archival records and samples of the company's beverage alcohols and antifreeze products. During this period, the original gable and decorative brickwork fell into disrepair and was demolished around 1960. Today's roofline reflects this loss.

In 1987, when Building 25 was radically altered inside-and-out for Gooderham & Worts – Hiram Walker offices, the old lab was closed down and a new one built across Distillery Lane above the Fermenting Cellar where it operated for only three years before the plant shut down in 1990. An enclosed bridge still connects Building 25 with that location. New brick additions were constructed at the northeast corner and the west end of the building. Meanwhile, the interior was renovated and divided up into modern offices with newer materials (such as drywall, carpet, and tile) concealing the older structure. After the plant shut down, the building appeared in various film productions, such as *Top Cops* and *Scales of Justice*.

Today Building 25 is plainer and smaller than the 1886 original. But even without its northern extension and original gable and decorative brickwork, it plays an important role by defining the north side of Distillery Lane and contributing to the site's Victorian industrial atmosphere.

Inside, Building 25 provides office and film related facilities on the second floor, as well as a ground floor restaurant where some of the original, industrial construction

features can be admired. Note the re-exposed brick walls, timber post-and-beam construction, new concrete floor, and exposed ducts that mimic practices illustrated elsewhere on site and over time ... back to the original 1886 industrial building. If you look closely, you can see that the wooden beams rest on projecting brick corbels. The view out the line of windows still captures the limestone walls of the Stone Distillery and a constantly changing pageant of post-industrial human activity.



Ground floor view across lane South façade with gable removed Timber construction revealed

Thanks to Jim White who knew Building 25 from the mid-1980s onward and helped explain its later distillery working life.

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

For more about the history of the Distillery District, visit www.distilleryheritage.com.

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