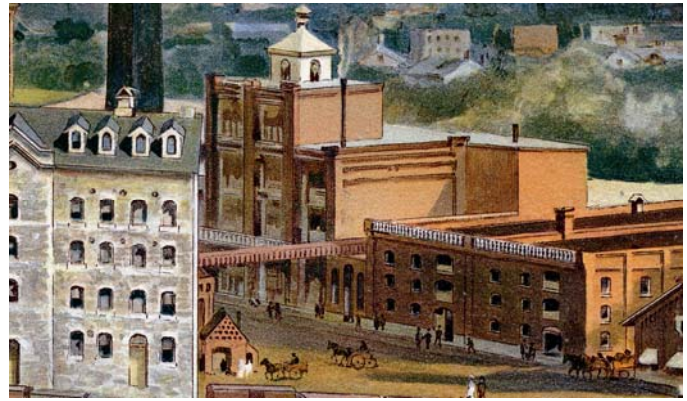


# Building Histories

## Pure Spirits Group: Buildings 53-57, 61 & 62



Pure Spirits buildings, November 1918 CTA

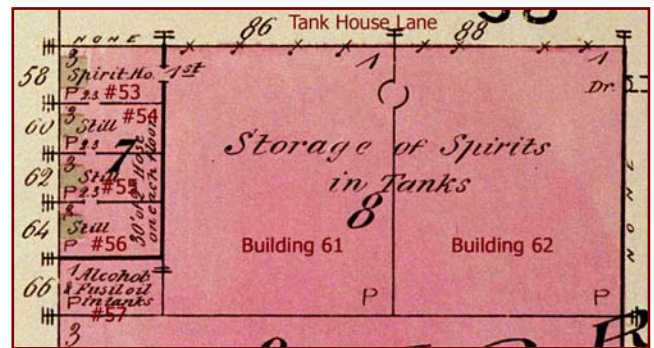


Pure Spirits buildings 1896

DHD

When the west side of Trinity Street had been built-up with the Stone Distillery, the Cooperage and the Maltings (all 1860s and all by David Roberts, Sr.), Gooderham & Worts decided to expand across Trinity Street. First, the cattle sheds were moved across the Don River where the livestock feeding operations continued. Then David Roberts, Jr., who had just overseen the reconstruction of his father's Stone Distillery after the Great Fire of 1869, was given his first solo commission at G & W: the Pure Spirits complex. (There is some uncertainty about the identity of the architect, but Roberts, Jr. seems the most logical choice.)

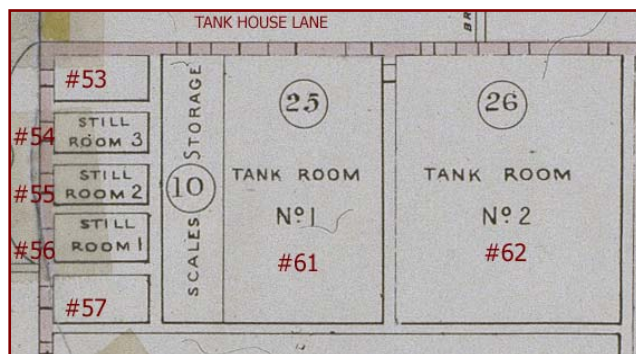
Located on the east side of Trinity Street, the Pure Spirits group contains seven buildings that are linked physically, functionally, and architecturally. Built in 1873 for alcohol purification (aka, rectification) and storage, these buildings dominate the east side of Trinity Street, define the south side of Tank House Lane, and present some of the finest industrial architecture on the site. Stills were located in the structures fronting on Trinity Street, while storage tanks were located in one-storey warehouses behind. Given the potentially explosive nature of the process, the Pure Spirits buildings contained large amounts of glass and wood that would have blown out to save the buildings. The architect solved the practical problem with unusual elegance. Over time, the buildings changed both physically and functionally, but their architectural coherence remained in tact.



Earliest map: Goad's 1880 plate (labels added)  
Buildings 53-56 are 3-storeys high CTA

The Pure Spirits Buildings share a complicated, sometimes still mysterious history. The precise processes and distribution of equipment often remain unknown. For ease of understanding, let's look first at the Trinity Street buildings (#53 to #57) and then at the tank houses behind them (#61 and #62).

Collectively, the Trinity Street buildings performed distilling functions. Rather than sharing a single, large room, the 1873 copper stills were placed in three of four separate structures called “still houses” or “still rooms” (later designated Buildings 54, 55 and 56), in case of explosion. Each still house was solidly built of brick on a stone foundation with metal doors connecting some of the interiors. Building 53 at the corner appears to have functioned as an entrance, but did have a water still on an upper floor. Building 57 was devoted to alcohol and fusel oil storage. (Fusel oil was a smelly-but-useful byproduct of distilling.)



**1889 G&W plan shows 3 “Still Rooms” and the scale tank loft above Building 61**

The four, multi-storeyed distilling buildings present a dramatic and unified Trinity Street façade, featuring large, multi-paned doors and windows stretching between red-brick piers that sit on a Kingston limestone base. The piers extend the full height of the building. A surprising, decorative wrought-iron balcony embraces the group around the second floor. (Legend suggests that the reason the Trinity Street buildings were so decorative was because William Gooderham’s office window was directly across Trinity Street.)



**View from William Gooderham’s office ... today**



**Building 57 supporting pipe bridge**

Originally, Buildings 53 to 56 were only three-storeys high with a ventilating cupola capping the central buildings. Today, only Building 53 at the corner of Trinity and Tank House Lane retains its original height. By 1896, fourth storeys had been added to Buildings 54 and 55 (see lithograph) and by 1918 an additional storey had been added to Building 56 (see photograph). These created a mansard roof that still distinguishes the three buildings. Building 57 has always been one-storey and played a supportive role to the adjacent stills. Not only did it contain storage tanks, but it also, literally, supported the pipe bridge that ran from the Stone Distillery via the top of Building 31 to the roof of Building 57. Until 1990, these pipes fed alcohol into the Scale Tank loft located above Building 61 and behind the still houses (see 1889 plan). Other pipes connected the Scale Tank loft with various tank houses to the east. The distinctive ventilating cupola disappeared some time between the 1930s and 1960s.



The exterior of Buildings 53 to 57 has remained remarkably similar through time. The most obvious change is the concrete barrier introduced under the window of Building 54. According to a long-time employee of Gooderham & Worts, that was added in the post-World War II period to create a truck dock. The interior floor of Building 54 was raised so that trucks could back right up to the dock and roll drums of antifreeze straight off the truck, through the revised window, into the building. (You can also see the concrete supports for a wooden floor inside the building.)

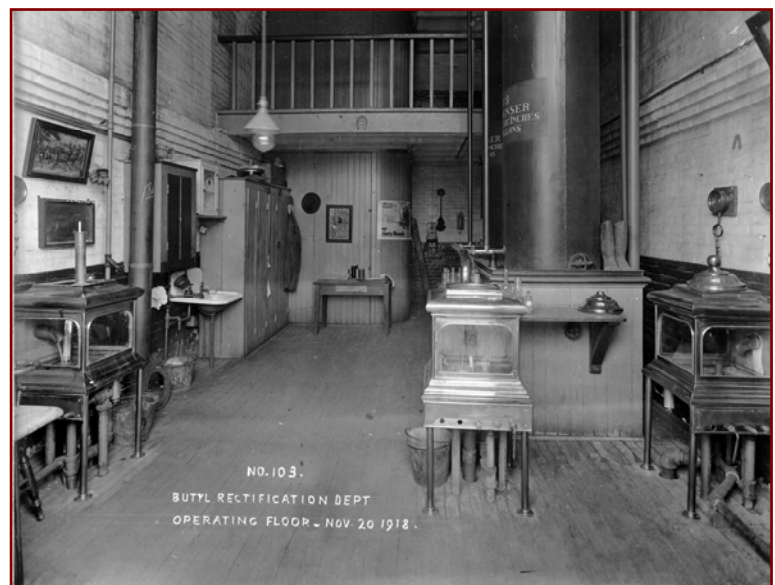


**Building 54: Interior truck loading floor ca. 1986** *L Turner*



**Exterior-Interior today**

Originally built for alcohol rectification, the still houses were used for butyl alcohol rectification during the First World War when British Acetones manufactured a key ingredient of smokeless gun powder at the distillery. An exceptionally rare photograph taken at the end of the Great War provides a glimpse into distilling in the Pure Spirits complex, not only during the war, but also for the periods immediately before and after 1918. Probably taken on the second floor of Building 54, it shows two condenser columns, one behind the other, on the south (right side), several glass-faced tail boxes (or spirit safes) used to monitor the distilling process; a copper drain pipe on the north (left) wall that helped identify the location; a mezzanine that is still in place; and a wooden structure that might have enclosed other distilling equipment. (A major 1924 appraisal of the site suggests that two rectifier columns were also in the still room.) Among the equipment are touches of worker life, such as the lockers where they exchanged street clothes for cover-alls, a first-aid kit above the sink, a “Victory Bonds” poster on the back wall, and (surprisingly) a framed print of elegant eighteenth-century riders.



**Second-floor still-house set-up, Nov. 1918** *CTA 1583*

After the First World War, Buildings 53 to 57 continued distilling, but the precise arrangements remain unclear. Photographs provide insight into both later industrial life of these buildings, as well as their remarkable contrast to today's post-industrial uses. Here, we'll concentrate on ground floor views that can be imagined and directly compared with today's spaces when you visit the Distillery District.

By 1969, the first floor of Building 53 functioned as a main entrance to the tank houses behind it. The metal door shown in Larry Turner's photograph is now behind a new partition at east end of the building, but can be seen through the windows of the (new) door opening off Distillery Lane. Although the stairs and furniture have been removed, marks from the wooden stairway can be seen on the south wall. Above all, the original glass-and-wood façade remains and still provides a striking view of the 1860s buildings across Trinity Street.



**Building 53 entrance to Tank Houses, 1986**



**Historic view today**

Buildings 54, 55, and 56 contained assorted stills and served various clients, such as James Barclay Company Limited during the 1940s and 1950s. Larry Turner's mid-1980s photograph of the ground floor of Building 56 shows not only the suspended rectifying column that is featured in today's space, but two other large, much-used, distilling columns at the back. The original enclosed, tongue-and-groove stairway still runs up the south wall ... and provides a fine display space.



**Building 56: 3 stills, 1986**



**Building 56 today: rectifying still & original stairway**





Finally, graceful one-storey Building 57 at the southern terminus of the complex continued to store alcohol and fusel oil in three huge tanks that filled most of the floor space and nearly touched the 20-foot high ceiling. Larry Turner's photos show the final, much-used tanks and their many pipe connections. After Gooderham & Worts shut down, the tanks were removed, but some of the pipes and the metal fire door on the north wall remain. Today, Building 57 retains a strong industrial feel ... softened by flowers and garden ornaments.



**Storage tank nears ceiling & blocks door, ca 1986**



**Full view today**



**Fire door & flowers**

Now let's turn to the Pure Spirits Tank Houses. Behind the Trinity Street distilling buildings stand two single-storey, red-brick tank-storage houses (now Buildings 61 and 62) where alcohol produced elsewhere in the distillery was stored, diluted, and blended from the 1870s until 1990. (The almost-pure alcohol had to be cut to lower proof with distilled water originally distilled on an upper floor of Building 53.) Built in 1873, these are the oldest tank houses on site. Again responding to the fear of explosion, architect Roberts, Jr. created large, multi-paned windows that would have blown outward and saved the buildings. The series of eight tall fan-windows and doors create an elegant and harmonious façade along the south side of Tank House Lane. Photographs from 1918 and 2008 indicate that the tank-house exteriors – now containing art galleries – have changed remarkably little. In fact, the brick pavement (using recycled pavers) provides the greatest change from the earlier rutted dirt road.



**Tank House Lane (looking east), 1918 CTA 1583**



**Tank House Lane (looking west), 2008**

Like the rest of the buildings in the Pure Spirits complex, Buildings 61 and 62 have changed dramatically over time. Another photograph taken at the end of the First World War provides a valuable view inside one of the two tank houses. It shows war workers standing on a concrete work-floor containing duplex pumps and other equipment. Behind them is a raised wooden platform containing three large metal storage tanks standing at the north end of rows of four tanks each. (If you look closely, you can see war-time graffiti etched onto the tanks.)

Which building is documented? Given the location of three rows of large tanks standing on a wooden platform behind a work area stretching along the north side of the room, this is almost certainly Building 61 at the moment when it was used for “racking off butyl alcohol.” When photographed in the 1980s and renovated in the early 2000s, Building 62 did not have the same sort of raised deck supported on brick walls interspersed with arches that is found in its neighbour.



**Tank House One (Building 61), Nov. 1918**



**Building 61 with tanks on raised deck ca. 1986**

For a long period of time, Buildings 61 and 62 were not only linked to each other through large metal doors, but also to Building 53 on Trinity Street and (after 1883) with the long, shipping room (Building 62A) now transformed into a restaurant. (Look for evidence of these linkages on the refinished walls.) Sometimes barrels or drums would be rolled through Building 53 into the adjacent tank houses. (Look for the worn-down threshold at Building 53) Sometimes they would be delivered directly to the rooms from trucks parked in Distillery Lane. A comparison of the 1918 photograph with Larry Tanner’s photograph from the mid-1980s indicates that the set-up in Building 61 remained amazingly similar. Big changes, however, were in store after the distillery shut down in 1990 and all the metal tanks were removed and sold. (There had been 16 tanks in Building 61 by the end of its life.)



**Two views of Building 61 in transition by Thane Lucas**



**Building 62 in transition by ERA**



Today, both Buildings 61 and 62 have been transformed into art galleries that celebrate their industrial heritage, but in very different ways. Building 61 has retained part of the masonry understructure for the tank platform, using the masonry walls and arches to organize the space, creating a blend of open and intimate areas, and offering gallery visitors intriguing vistas. Other heritage elements include pyramidal skylights overhead and an unusual “dumping trough” in the floor below, decorative iron brackets high on the north wall (probably used to hold piping), a rough red-painted bench, and modern furniture fashioned from recycled rack-house timber.

For [Building 61](#), Toronto architects Shim-Sutcliffe retained part of the masonry understructure for the tank platform to organize space, creating a blend of open and intimate areas, and offering gallery visitors intriguing vistas. Take a close look at the brick walls and arches punctuating the space. Other heritage elements include pyramidal skylights overhead and an unusual “dumping trough” in the floor below, decorative iron brackets high on the north wall (probably used to hold piping), the bricked-in opening to Building 53 near the entrance, a rough red-painted wooden bench, and modern furniture fashioned from recycled rack-house timber.

Meanwhile, [Building 62](#) celebrates the impressive volume of industrial space created to contain large alcohol storage tanks and now used to display (often large) contemporary works of art. Italian architect Ugo Bruno featured the 12 by 12-inch wooden posts that support heavy timber roof beams and an open roof structure; the pyramidal skylights; and exposed brick walls, now painted a uniform white. Be sure to inspect also the 1950s-era Fairbanks Morse platform scale in the northeast corner where drums and barrels were weighed on their journey through the tank house and the shipping room next door.



**Reflections of chimney  
Building 62**



**One of six “pipe hose” windows  
Building 63**

For contemporary images of [Building 61](#) and [Building 62](#) visit the gallery websites.

Please send your comments or questions to Manager of Heritage Services, Sally Gibson, [sg@thedistillerydistrict.com](mailto:sg@thedistillerydistrict.com).

For more about the history of the Distillery District, visit [www.distilleryheritage.com](http://www.distilleryheritage.com).

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