

Heritage Artifacts: Uplifting tale of downward spirals



Building 74 spiral conveyor today



Spiral conveyor, 2nd floor, ca. 1986 LT



Spiral conveyor, 1st floor, ca. 1986 LT

Gooderham & Worts, like other distillers and industrialists, harnessed gravity to lower materials – such as grain, coal, alcohol, barrels and bottles - from one level to another. Gravity was, after all, free and in endless supply. Sometimes the transfer was gradual, for example rolling barrels down ramps. Sometimes the transfer was precipitous, for example dumping grain from fifth-floor hoppers, through chutes, into second-floor high-roller mills and mill stones for grinding in the Stone Distillery.

Anyone walking into the lobby of Building 74 today will be gob-smacked by the looming heritage artifact forming the focal point of that space. It's the largest and most impressive of the downward spirals that were once strategically located around the site to move heavy goods. With both first and second floor sections now revealed in the two-storey lobby, the spiral conveyor is even more impressive today than it was during its working career.

This 15-foot behemoth was installed when the Case Goods building was constructed in 1927. Manufactured by Mathews Conveyor Company of Port Hope, Ontario, the spiral conveyor was originally located slightly to the north of where it now rests and rose through the first and second floor ceilings to

receive goods on the third floor that had been transported by conveyor from the bottling and canning building across the lane. Larry Turner's two photographs from around 1986 show the spiral conveyor in action, in its original location and protruding through the first floor ceiling that has since been removed.

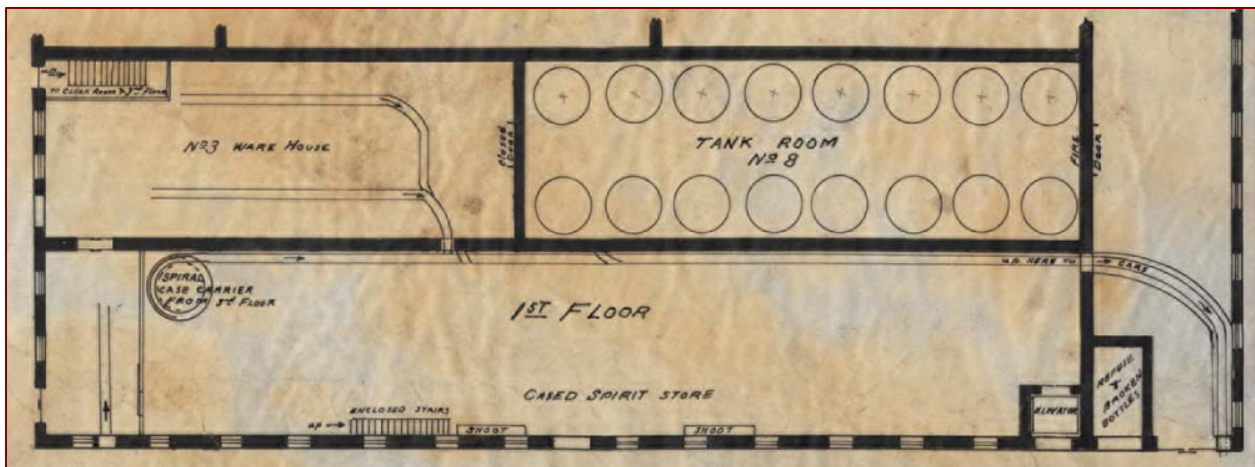
The spiral was connected to a variety of other horizontal conveyors that moved "cased goods," like bottles of booze and cans of antifreeze, from the third floor of the cannery across an enclosed bridge to Building 74. There they were stored on upper floors and ultimately spun down to the ground floor and distributed by truck or train. The ground-floor horizontal conveyor at the bottom of the spiral pointed toward the north door where trucks were loaded. Meanwhile, boxcars were loaded via four freight doors opening onto tracks running along the south side of the building.



Mathews' motto: "continuous flow principle of handling materials"
Mathews' 1927 label featuring a roller **1927 Mathews' rollers today**

The conveyor industry was actually started around 1900 by a group of Minneapolis-St. Paul workers who were unloading wooden shingles from rail cars and came up with the idea of using steel tubes to roll the bundles forward. Rufus P. Mathews started the Mathews Gravity Conveyer Company in Pennsylvania. By 1927, one of Port Hope, Ontario's major industries was the Mathews Conveyer Company tapped by Gooderham & Worts to install its new equipment.

In fact, G&W had already used horizontal roller conveyors by Mathews in other locations, including [Building 58 and 59](#) where bottling, canning, and some storing occurred. According to the comprehensive 1924 monetary appraisal of the site, there was a 71-foot long Mathews gravity conveyor on the first floor, as well as a "special spiral gravity conveyor" connecting the first and third floor

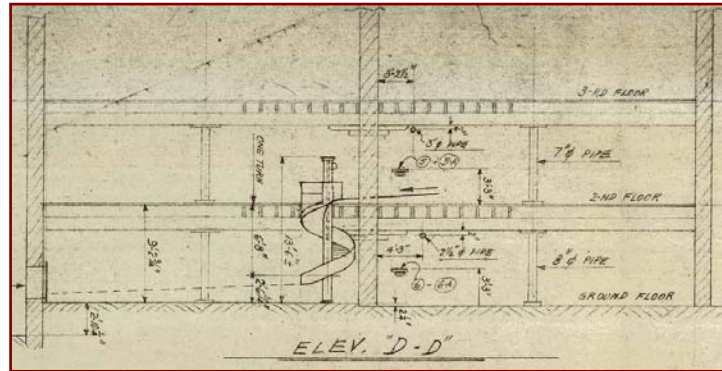


Building 58 & 59: "spiral case carrier from 3rd floor" & horizontal conveyors, 1924 DHD-CTA

that was located approximately where a later slide was installed. This 1924 spiral conveyor was not identified by manufacturer and has disappeared.

What have survived are two of the spiral slides (as opposed to roller conveyors) that were installed by the Mathews Conveyer Company in the late 1940s when the Cannery was reconfigured for more efficient canning of antifreeze.

A June 1948 drawing by Mathews Conveyer Company of Port Hope provides details about where spiral slides were located and how they were installed. The detail reproduced here provides dimensions (13 feet six inches from central post top to bottom) and illustrates how the spiral curved up and through the ceiling with a horizontal element where materials were started on their downward journey. The slide ends near a horizontal gravity conveyor leading toward a “new shipping port.” The Mathews company’s overall “conveyor system” combined spirals, permanent and portable horizontal roller conveyors.



Mathews conveyor system, June 1948 DHD/CTA

After canning stopped around 1970, these slides were left in place where Larry Turner photographed them for his employer ... and posterity.



Building 59, Mathews spiral slide, ca. 1986 Larry Turner

Looking north through an opening into Building 58, with light flowing through two Trinity Street windows, Turner documented the 1948 spiral slide in its original location, just south and slightly east of where it is now located. Like the iron columns, the slide was painted silver and red, stood on a floor that was about two feet higher than today’s floor, and connected with the second floor. Since the canning operation had ceased about 15 years before the photograph was taken, it’s impossible to identify exactly where the horizontal

conveyors were hooked up. But each slide was connected to a network of permanent and portable horizontal elements.



Building 59 spiral slides today: in Corktown Design (left) and Pikto (right)

When the Cannery was adapted for modern uses in the early 2000s, the ground floor was lowered, the spaces were reconfigured, and two of the 1940s spiral slides were moved into new locations where the industrial heritage of the building could be celebrated. The Corktown Design spiral slide was relocated slightly northwest of its original location. (If you look closely at the ceiling, you can spot where the old cavity to the second floor has been boarded over.) The original silver-and-red paint pattern has been retained. And the old doorway into Building 58 has been bricked-in. The Pikto spiral slide next door was relocated from further east in the building and repainted. Its grey matte finish transforms the slide into an elegant, abstract curve that piques curiosity.

Taken together, the great black conveyor in Building 74, and the silver and the grey slides in Building 59 tell the uplifting tale of the Distillery District's downward spirals.

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

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