

Caire & Grancini Warehouse History  
1314 Wharf Street, 1860

Source: Developer and Architect materials presented to City of Victoria

Built in 1860, the Caire & Grancini Warehouse at 1314 Wharf Street is among the oldest commercial warehouses in Victoria's Inner Harbour and is linked with the development of Commercial Row, the locus for commercial and retail ventures in the city. The materialization of Commercial Row during the Victorian era was spurred by the advent of Victoria's resource-based economy and the Fraser River gold rush during which time Victoria became the primary supply town for miners. The warehouse, which forms an integral component of the early streetscape, is situated on a sloping bank between Wharf Street and the Inner Harbour waterway.

The warehouse itself is an example of a design by architect John Wright (1830-1915) who had a prolific career in Victoria. Wright was born on May 15, 1830 at Killearn, Scotland. He arrived in Victoria in 1858 and in 1860 partnered with George H. Sanders (1838-1920) to form the architectural firm of Wright and Sanders (1860-1895). Together, Wright & Sanders soaked up the major governmental, institutional, commercial and domestic commissions in the City. In 1866, Sanders and Wright moved to San Francisco. This warehouse is among Wright's earliest commercial projects in Victoria and is a rare surviving example of his work.

Assessment records indicate that the lot where the warehouse sits was originally jointly owned by the Honorable Donald Fraser (1810-1897), Justin Caire (1827-1897) and Ermengildo Grancini (1827-1879). A tender call placed in the Colonist newspaper in 1860 by Wright indicates that the warehouse was purpose-designed for Caire & Grancini, Merchants, Justinian Caire and Ermengildo Grancini used the premises for their successful hardware firm Caire & Grancini. Their firm was first established in San Francisco shortly after Caire, who was originally from France, immigrated there in 1851.

Caire's hardware business specialized in the sale of mining equipment and imported household items such as porcelain and plates. Caire later formed a partnership with Ermengildo Grancini, who hailed originally from Milan, Italy, but had immigrated to San Francisco in 1850. Capitalizing on the Fraser Gold Rush and Victoria's rapidly growing economy, Caire & Grancini opened a branch of their firm at 1314 Wharf Street in 1860. The Victoria branch specialized in the sale of iron, hardware, imported glassware and crockery.

Caire & Grancini's Victoria hardware firm grew rapidly and in 1864 the Victoria Daily Chronicle reports that an extension was completed to the building reflecting their prosperous

trade and need for additional space. It appears that it was Grancini who ran the Victoria franchise with Caire remaining in San Francisco. Grancini married Blanche Chassang in 1875 and resided on Cormorant Street in Victoria. The business continued to operate at 1314 Wharf Street until 1875, after which time directories records show Grancini operating as a sole proprietor on Government Street.

Ownership and occupancy of the warehouse is unclear between 1875 and 1893, with directories simply listing the building as “warehouse”. By 1894, the warehouse was home to R.P. Rithet & Co. bonded warehouse, affirm who continued to operate out of the space until circa 1908. A series of tenants subsequently occupied the warehouse over the years with it continuing to function as utilitarian space.

Over time the warehouse has been subject to numerous additions and alterations, reflecting the changing needs of its occupants and desire for modern amenities. In 1890, the architect John Teague designed in-house sewers, which were connected with public sewers. The original storefront, which has since been covered with a facade and the signage “Northern Junk”, featured a metal cornice and wooden porch. The rear of the building still retains its original appearance with random-rubble on the lower course and granite brick lintels, with a brick cornice capping the rear elevation. Currently the building is vacant and is often referred to as one of the Northern Junk buildings.