

Fraser Warehouse History  
1316-1318 Wharf Street, 1864

Source: Developer and Architect materials presented to City of Victoria

Built in 1864, the warehouse structure located at 1316-1318 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.

Assessments indicate that the warehouse was first owned by the Honourable Donald Fraser (1810-1897). Born in Scotland, Fraser came to Victoria in 1858 and shortly after his arrival became the unofficial advisor to Sir James Douglas (1803-1877), governor of the Colony of Vancouver Island. Fraser was a member of the Vancouver Island Legislative Council between 1864 and 1866. Not only was Fraser politically active, but he was also a wealthy speculative land developer, owning numerous lots in the downtown core. Following the collapse of the Vancouver Island Colony in 1866, Fraser returned to London, England, but continued with his speculative land development in Victoria.

An article in the Evening Express dated May 10, 1864, outlines the cost and scope of the warehouse and also Donald Fraser's reputation as a landowner in Victoria:

“Local Intelligence – City improvements: The Hon. Donald Fraser recently pulled down and re-erected two wharves next adjoining the late price's wharf. Two stone and brick stores will be immediately built on wharf Street by the same gentleman, all under the superintendence of Mr. Thomas Trounce. The total storage accommodation will reach fifteen hundred tons, at a cost including the wharves, of \$12,000. This large outlay will be by a gentleman who has been held up to the public as an incubus upon the City, as belonging to the “non-productive class.”

Designed by prominent local architect Thomas Trounce (1813-1900), the warehouse is constructed of random rubble stonework; the structure exhibits quoins of the “Halifax” manner. With symmetrically massed front and rear facades, the warehouse at 1316-1318 Wharf Street demonstrates a conscious awareness on Trounce's behalf to create a dual commercial image for two separate businesses. The stonework is characteristic of early masonry structures in the City and is also typical of the work of Trounce, who designed and built many local stone structures. After following several gold rushes, Trounce arrived in San Francisco in 1850, and worked as a builder until 1858, when another gold rush in British Columbia brought him to Victoria, by 1861, has completed Tegrew in James Bay, one of the first stone houses in British Columbia, built of random rubble stonework with walls two feet thick. Most of Trounce's buildings were of masonry construction, an influence from his Cornish background. Trounce continued his architectural practice throughout the 1870s and 1880s, designing such buildings as Morley's Soda Water Factory on Waddington Alley, and a number of residential dwellings.

Donald Fraser's estate owned the building until 1898. According to directories, by 1894 R.P. Rithet & Company occupied the warehouse, along with the adjacent warehouse located at 1314 Wharf Street. The 1903 Fire Insurance Map shows that the building was utilized by manufacturing agents. By 1915, the Victoria Junk agency occupied 1316 Wharf Street and the Victoria Cartage Company occupied 1318 Wharf Street. 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 1949, A. Worthington applied to have plumbing installed at the premises. A number of alteration have occurred to the front façade, but the building form is substantially intact. the rear of the building retains most of its character-defining element. Currently the building is vacant and is often referred to as one of the Northern Junk Buildings.