

A Preliminary Architectural and Social History of 271–275 Duckworth Street, St. John’s



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Introduction

The building currently situated at 271–275 Duckworth Street, St. John’s, Newfoundland, has been described as a “good example of classical revival architecture in a commercial building” (Heritage) (Figure 1). 271–275 Duckworth Street has historical importance due to its association with several commercial ventures. It was originally constructed for the Newfoundland Clothing Company in 1911. Then, from the mid 1950s to 1981, the building housed the province’s daily newspaper The Evening Telegram. This paper traces the construction and use of the building from its earliest period to the present.



Figure 1: 271-275 Duckworth Street, St. John’s, NL

Timeline

A rough chronology of 275 Duckworth Street:

1911 to 1951 - The Newfoundland Clothing Company Ltd.

1956 to 1981 - The Evening Telegram Publishing Co.

1985 - Pizza Palace

1985/1986 - Dallas Lounge

1987 to 1992 - Law Offices of Gittens Casey

1988 to 2010 - CompuCollege

2018 to present - The Craft Council of NL

Pre-1911 history

In 1895, Joseph Mayers established the Newfoundland Clothing Company along with Benjamin Mayers, who managed the clothing department, and Joseph's son Moses Mayers (Figure 2), general manager who owned 22.2 % of the business. The original location for the factory was on New Gower Street, Mayers next moved the business to Water Street, opposite to the Bowring Brothers premises, and then went in partnership with the Water Street concern and manufactured goods in Job's Cove (Smith 1919:2). By 1898 he employed at least 25 people, and "within the next 15 years the business grew until there were at least 112 factory hands" (Joy 1977:48).

In 1901, the business self-declared a "growing time" and moved again, this time to the top floor of a building occupied by the Evening Telegram, with Joseph offering liberal discounts to wholesalers in preparation for the move (Clothing 1901:1). Mayers continued to refine the business:

There is perhaps, not a factory in the city kept so continuously busy for the past two months as the Newfoundland Clothing Company, under the management of Mr. Joseph Mayers. The employees number nearly a hundred and are kept working day and night, and the factory can only now supply the demand. The new and improved machinery used by the Company is of the latest type and is the most modern labor-saving devices known (Regular 1902:3).

The older Newfoundland Clothing Factory building, located on 225-227 Duckworth Street, was designed by carpenter and architect William F. Butler (1866-1918). Butler worked in various locations such as Toronto, Chicago, and Wisconsin, as a superintendent of building construction. After the damage caused by the 1892 Great

Fire, Butler had established himself as a builder of note in the St. John's area (O'Dea 1998:1).

Companies like the Newfoundland Clothing Company were ready to exploit a new and growing market – the working industrial man. In Joseph Mayers' era, a tailored suit would cost about \$12, whereas a factory-made suit could be sold for around \$8 (see Joy 1977:61). By 1911, the readymade clothing industry would produce \$267,000 worth of goods per year.

Joseph Mayers did not live to see the growth of the industry he helped to establish. He died suddenly of cardiac arrest in his home at 34 York Street on August 19th, 1903. The Evening Telegram noted:

Mr. Mayers has only been a few days returned from an extended trip abroad, and his many friends congratulated him on his apparently greatly improved health. Since Saturday, however, he has complained of pains about the chest and though a doctor was called who prescribed for him, it was thought that nothing serious was wrong. Last evening, not feeling well, Mr Mayers had a light lunch at his bedside, and then being improved he joined the family circle in the parlour and took part in the amusement going on and chatted rather cheerfully. Suddenly the pains in the chest returned more violently and the sufferer stood up and fell in his son's, (Mr. Moses's) arms. Doctors were summoned hurriedly, but all too late, as the patient expired in a few minutes at 8:10. Mr. Mayers was one of the best known business men of this city, and his ability, tact and energy was well recognized. Within a few years he has built up a most successful business, his word being always relied on, and his manner towards his employees most considerate. He leaves a son and three daughters to mourn their loss, as well as a large circle of friends, and to them the Telegram extends its sincere sympathy. The funeral takes place to the train at 5 p.m. and interment will be at Montreal (Unexpected 1903:4).

The funeral took place from his home at York street to the railway station as described¹, and the procession was followed by a large number of prominent citizens to whom Mr. Mayers was well known (Funeral 1902:3).

Following the death of Joseph Mayers, the company underwent several changes. Until 1903, Newfoundland Clothing Factory was located on 225–227 Duckworth Street, but in that year Moses Mayers leased a plot of land in which he planned to erect a large building. Mayers was described as an “energetic worker and the pioneer of locally

¹ Joseph's wife Bertha had predeceased him in December 1900, and had also been buried in Montreal (Died 1900:4).

manufactured clothing (Nfld. 1903:4), and as the company was booming, more space was needed to conduct the business.

The business was incorporated in 1904 with paid-up capital of \$45,000. It was effectively controlled by Moses Mayers, owner of 44.4 percent of the stock, and Robert K. Bishop, who controlled 11 percent of the stock. In 1908 the company increased its nominal capital from \$75,000 to \$100,000 (Joy 1977:48).

The stage was set for the next phase of industrial growth.

The Newfoundland Clothing Company Era

On November 11, 1911, the Newfoundland Clothing Company formally opened its doors at 271-275 Duckworth. In celebration, an event in the form of a ball and supper was hosted. Approximately 350 ladies and gentlemen attended the festivities. The interior of the building was described as being “beautifully ornamented and decorated for the occasion, the place was lit by electricity with noonday brightness, while the decorations on the tables were dressed very handsome” (New 1911:7). Both the first and second floor of the building were occupied that evening. The first was for dancing, where most people enjoyed themselves. The second was devoted to games and amusements for those who could not or did not care for dancing.

Moses Mayers (Figure 2), as the owner and commissioner of the company, began the evening with a speech. Mayers was described as a “capital host, making a fluent address of welcome to the guests, stating hopes for the affair to become an annual one” (1911:7). On behalf of the factory employees, the assistant manager Mr. White presented Mayers with a “handsome solid brass writing set and a beautiful electric reading lamp” (1991:7). Mayers received an ovation, with everyone cheering; he presented an eloquent speech thanking the employees for their generosity and thoughtfulness. James Lawson was floor manager for the event, while Gunnerson’s orchestra played the music and P.B. Wood Co. styled the catering. All who attended the affair voted it “a most pleasant one.” (1911:7).

The 275 Duckworth building had been designed by architect (and future City Councillor) Jonas C. Barter (1875-1939). Barter studied architecture at the College of Technical Art in Boston, where he graduated with the highest honours in this class. He built up a practice serving residential and ecclesiastical clients. Barter had a double advantage of being an architect and practical carpenter as that was his initial training. Much of his work was commissioned by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Newfoundland (Bibliographical 2019:1).



Figure 2: Moses Mayers, owner and commissioner of the Newfoundland Clothing Factory.

In 1910, the Evening Telegram posted a Notice to Contractors stating that sealed tenders would be received until noon on Monday, September 12th for the construction of a “Reinforced Concrete Building” to be erected on Duckworth Street for the Newfoundland Clothing Factory, Ltd. Tenders were to be addressed to Mr. M. Mayers, with the envelopes to be marked "Tenders for New Building." Plans, Specifications and other information required could be obtained from Jonas C. Barter Architect, Room 10 Cabot Building (Notice 1910:1).

The Evening Telegram published a “Local Industries” article in 1908, referring to the making of concrete blocks, and Barter’s work:

Considering the fact that local lumber is getting dearer every year, the manufacture of concrete blocks for building purposes is a subject that is bound to claim the attention of builders more and more every year. This industry was first tried in an experimental way by Mr. Jonas Barter in 1904. The sand is brought here in schooners from the Southern Shore and crews often share \$60 a trip for a load of sand. This is where the industry extends its usefulness. The same may be said about stone. We have an abundance of that in Newfoundland, and need never fear that the supply will run short. The industry then converts our stone and sand into commercial value is one that we all should patronize and wish well to. Last year Mr. Barter formed a company which is known as the "Hollow Concrete Block Co." The demand for the stone is increasing at a satisfactory rate, and hardly a building is now erected but some of the material is used in its construction. The trimmings

of the new St. Bonaventure's College are made of it, and while the appearance is equal to free stone, the cost is about one-fourth. Ten men are now working in the industry, but before many years this company hopes to have four times the number. If the demand continues to increase the premises will be enlarged, more machinery installed, and more operators put to work. When we consider that the stone is from 10 to 15 per cent cheaper than brick it is a matter of surprise that the demand is not greater than it is. It is also cheaper than poured cement, a great deal of which latter work is now done in this city. The builders and tradesmen had strong prejudice against the industry in the beginning, as they feared that it would interfere to a large extent with their employment. Now they see that they were wrong in this opinion. The cement used is imported and advanced duty of 25 percent is paid. The price that Mr. Barter has to pay for sand is about three times as great as what stone manufacturers pay in the United States. The weekly wages paid out at the follow Concrete Block Co.'s office is about \$120 a week. The encouraging of an industry like this means as in the case of other industries we have referred to, keeping the money in the country (Local Industries 1908:5).

Much of Barter's design work was gothic in style and often made of wood frame construction, so the concrete Classical Revival building was a bit of a departure from his regular work. The building's Statement of Significance on the Provincial Register of Historic places notes:

The main floor features rounded arched windows and doors in a street level arcade. Within each arch is a keystone feature and between these are alternating square stones. The cut ashlar façade has unique diagonal and other oddly shaped stonework. Above each window and door are etched, arched windows, which help to establish the arcade, while the stone between each arch is designed to resemble columns with heavy bases. Also on the main floor below the windows are moulded fascia boards with heavy brackets. The second, third and fourth floors are delineated from the first by a wide band and cornice moulding which is used for the building's signage. Above this is a plain, concrete façade with several Classical elements. Tall, ionic pilasters stretch from the second floor to the top and they have heavy bases and decorative volutes on the capitals. The fourth floor also features arched windows, while those on the second and third floors are square. This lends to the overall look of an arcade above the main floor. Above each arched window is a keystone motif. A heavy moulding and dentil effect span the eaves to finish the classically inspired building (Heritage NL 2019).

The Evening Telegram described the building as:

A new factory, six story reinforced concrete modern building, fitted with up-to-date machinery to meet the growing demands of the trade. This establishment, besides being an addition to the labor giving concerns of the

city, will be an ornament to east Duckworth Street. Its front will be one of the artistic in the city, of the Graeco-Doric order, and reflects the greatest credit on its designer, Mr. Jonas C. Barter. The building is to be constructed with a view to the comfort of its employees, so that a large space is given to lighting. Mr. Mayers is a believer in the power of sunshine on the health, work, and general efficiency. May success attend this enterprise and every other that tends to keep our money in the country (New 1910:6).

The building is of reinforced concrete, and the steel was imported from Middlesbrough England from Dorman Long and Co. Steel company. Middlesbrough and Teesside are renowned for their association with the iron and steel industry. Iron has been produced on an industrial scale since the 1850s.

Interesting for its time, the building had a lavatory on every floor of the building and a Ginnell Fire Extinguishing Co. fire protection system. No firemen were said to have been needed if a fire was to break out. The system was intended to work automatically to sprinkle water with a pressure of 110 lbs. The work was done by the melting of the Ginnell heads placed 10 feet apart on the pipe along the ceiling, releasing the water. Therefore, the insurance on the building was lowered by 75% (Newfoundland 1916:41).

Inside the Factory

When the company was originally incorporated, it was known as the “Newfoundland Clothing Factory Limited.” The name was changed January 29, 1912, to the Newfoundland Clothing Company Limited (see Joy 1977:48).

The 1912 motto of the Newfoundland Clothing Factory Ltd. was “Improvement in manufacture and careful attention to all orders.” The company sold a multitude of brands, including Fitreform, Progress, Truefit, Americus, Stylenfit, The Mode, Faultless, and Superior (Figure 3). Men and boys overcoats, suits, shirts, and overalls were of popular significance, with advertised “unbeatable prices.” (Newfoundland 1912:1).

The company turned out suits for men and boys, top coats, trousers, windbreakers, overalls, dungarees, coveralls, shop coats, whiteware, aprons, and work clothes, with racks stacked ready for the purchaser to examine (Newfoundland 16:5). By 1913, The Newfoundland Clothing Company was the largest clothing company in Newfoundland.

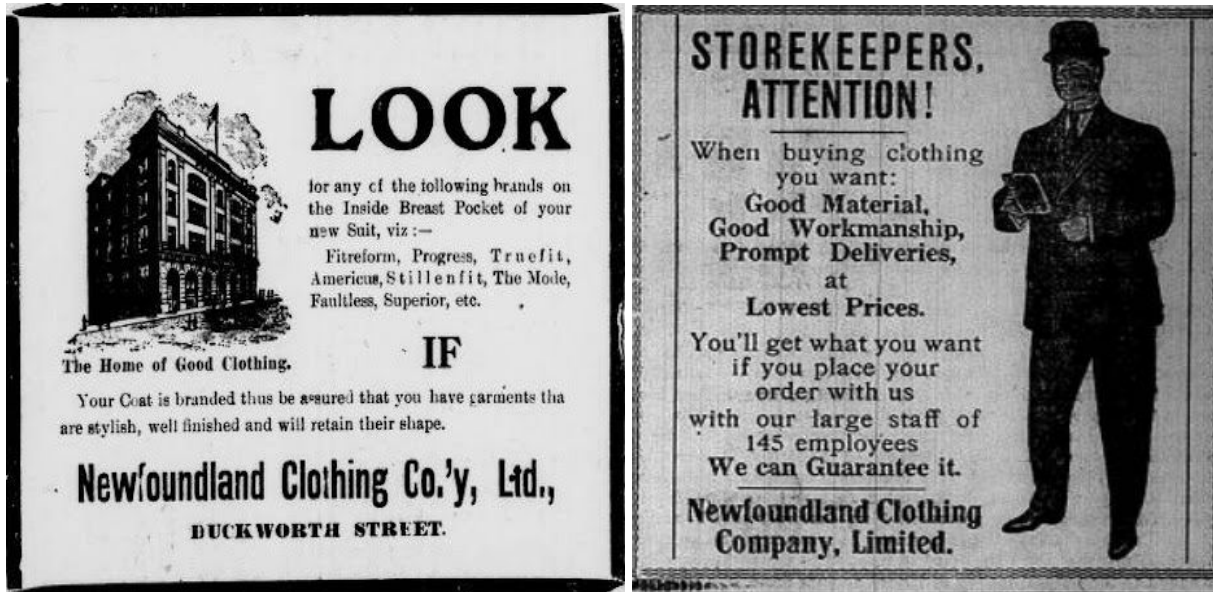


Figure 3 & 4: Newfoundland Clothing Company Ads, circa 1915.

In 1915, the Women's Patriotic Association awarded a contract to the Newfoundland Clothing Company 5,000 wool flannel shirts for the soldiers of the Newfoundland regiment (Patriotic 1915:3). The shirts would have been shipped on a monthly basis. There were 25 machines on the top floor making coats, vests, uniforms and coats for the Regiment (Newfoundland 1916:41). By 1916, business was very successful with a 75% increase over the year. The total annual wages paid was roundly \$40,000 amongst the workers, and the total amount of business done estimated at a quarter of a million dollars. The factory had 180 employees; 150 people in the building and 30 outside (Figure 4).

There are six stories including the basement. The basement is reached at the Water Street level, and was used for receiving and shipping. Located in the basement, there was a customs warehouse where customs had been locked up by the custom authorities until the duties had been paid. This area was where the cardboard boxes were manufactured, and where the furnace that heated the building was located.

According to Warwick Smith, in the Newfoundland Magazine:

The cases were unpacked here, and bales of cloth were stocked higher than one's head. Representing an immense investment of capital. Large purchases mean better prices for the purchaser, and enable him to sell goods at a cheaper rate. One truck containing about twenty bales of serge represented an outlay, including freight and duty, of nearly \$10,000.00. Some of the material cost the company more than in weight in silver, a single bolt of cloth costing nearly \$500 (Smith 1919:3).

The second floor was for stock and ready made goods, and the third was used as a main wareroom where goods were stocked ready for sale. The offices were also located on this floor including Mr. White the Manager, Mr. Chown his assistant, and Mr. Vavasour the chief accountant (Newfoundland 1916:41).

The fourth floor was taken up by the cutting room, this is where the cloth was unrolled and cut into lengths. These lengths of cloth were placed one on top of the other until about forty thicknesses of cloth ready for cutting. On the top layer, the patterns were marked out in French chalk. Patterns were placed so there was no loss in material, as the strips between the pattern were used for belt straps, cuff straps on trousers, and overcoats. Smaller clippings and waste material were sorts and exported to be used in paper mills and in the making of felt. An electrically driven machine by hand was used to cut the cloth, and could cut up to seventy thickness of suit material. The cutter was Mr. A. Boone and Mr. Gordon Smith cut the patterns, both men had been working at the factory for quite some time making both men experts. (Smith 1919:3).

The fifth floor was the assembly department where 70 men and women worked year-round. This is where the pieces that make up each individual coat, vest or pair of pants were placed together. There were 35 machines all going at once.

In the pants department, Mr. M. Marshall was in charge. The first things made in a pair of pants was the pockets. These were made of a special material called pocketing. The next sewed is the fly, and the two legs joined together at the back. The waistband is then attached, each of these operations were done by different women. A boy then would give the pants their first pressing, in order to open out the seams (Smith 1919:4).

On the sixth floor was the last department, where 65 hands were employed. Laurence Kennedy was the foreman, and the women were under the superintendence of Mrs. Colton, an experienced forelady (Smith 1919:4).

Every suit made to order was first planned out on paper, like an architect plans a building- everything being drawn to scale. Most of the stitching was done by hand, and the sewing was done by an expert so that each part of the garment may fit properly. (Smith 1919:4).

Machines used during manufacturing include the serging machine; which uses two threads and sews a stitch at the edge of the cloth to prevent fraying. The sacking machine, this reinforced the pockets which was much quicker than an ordinary sewing machine. The back pockets, hip buckles, and the hooks and yes we all fastened by a different machine. The buttonhole machines were of two kinds. The bachelor button was on overalls and typically pants of lower grade, this was done by a

machine operated lever. The button with a straight bar across the centre and the four-hole buttons were sewed on by another machine, sewing eight stitches each way. By moving a specific lever, each you could set the machine to each kind of button. With this sophisticated machine, after it was set, all you had to do was place the button correctly. (Smith 1919:5).

Much of the work in the factory was done by “tailoresses” – young, single women. Researchers Nancy Forestell and Jessie Chisholm write,

Many women who worked outside the home in St. John’s were young, childless, and single. Perhaps almost 350 girls and women worked at the two largest local factories, the Colonial Cordage Company and the Newfoundland Clothing Company. They sewed and finished garments, knitted nets, and made twine. Contracting and subcontracting were also standard practices among many marginal and tailoring and clothing firms. Many women who married worked at home, employed at piece-rates by the factory. Piece-work completed at home was commonly done by rates far below the factory scale, and the women in the factory were paid wages very small, averaging \$1.75 to \$3.00 weekly. Throughout the decades, there are indications that home-work declined and businesses consolidated production within their factory gates. In 1914, manager of the Newfoundland Clothing Company testified that company work was “now all done in the factories. For some years we gave out trousers to be done... now... all work is done in factories” (Forestell, Chisholm, 1988:143).

In January 1912, tailoresses in the pants department protested a reduction in piece-rates. Some of the strikes obtained employment in other St. John’s factories; others were to resume work without obtaining any concessions. As clothing was being made for the Newfoundland regiment, by the outbreak of war in 1914, more female hands were employed by the Newfoundland Clothing Company than by union tailor shops (Forestell, Chisholm, 1988:146).

In January 1916, the proceeds from a dance held by the employees of the Newfoundland Clothing Factory was donated “in aid of the sick and wounded and the soldiers and sailors at the front.” A total of \$100 was donated by the manager Mr. William White (W.P.A. 1916:4). By 1920 the company was also sponsoring prizes for the annual Quidi Vidi rowing regatta (Regatta 1902:4).

In the “City of St. John’s Manufacturing” journal for 1948, the Newfoundland Clothing Company is listed under the leading industrial firms. Visitors from outside of the province who came to the industrial and trade fair were reported as being “pleased with the fine display of clothing” by the company (Report 1950:31).

With models and work all up to date, items sold quickly. The clothing company had installed more efficient machinery to cope with potential increase in trade and stiffer competition. During the early 1950s, clothing was one of the most competitive manufacturing sectors, and to stay on top was critical for success. The days of the Newfoundland Clothing Company were limited. By the early 1950s, the company had shut its doors, setting the stage for the next stage of the building's life.

The Evening Telegram Era

The building today is largely remembered as being one of the locations of the Evening Telegram newspaper, and in association with the newspaper's founder, William J. Herder. Herder apprenticed as a printer for the Courier in 1863, and by 1879 he bought out the newspaper, beginning Newfoundland's first daily newspaper. The Evening Telegram offices have been in several locations over their 140 year existence, including 271-275 Duckworth Street. It is the longest running daily newspaper in the province, and the only 19th-century newspaper to survive into the 21st century (Figure 5).



Figure 5: The Evening Telegram Christmas Party.

From 1956 to 1981, the Telegram operated mainly from 275 Duckworth Street. The mailroom was located at 154 Water street and newspapers were shipped out of this location. Joseph Moore, once a paper-boy at the Evening Telegram, remembers:

The Evening Telegram used to come out 3 or 4 pm everyday, except on Sundays. The delivery boys would come from the buildings entrance on Solomon's Lane (Figure 6), and fight their way through the wicket to pick up their papers. There was no invoice, so you had to pay for your papers then and there. You took your papers and went your various ways to deliver them. There must have been an easy 60 newspaper boys around the wicket waiting for the newspapers to come out. So I would come get the paper, and everyone's route would start from the duckworth building. I used to go from the Evening Telegram over to Prescott Street, take a right on Duckworth, pass by bonmarche and went to the stores looking for customers seeing who wanted to buy a paper that day. I had houses along the way that I would go to on a regular basis. I used to go up King's Road, and I had a house on Hanley Place which is still there. I would then go farther up King's Road, go around the back and get up to Military road, go around Monkstown road and Catherine street, then I was home. You sell your papers there and then, I also had customers on a regular basis and I would pick up the money from them on a Saturday. But I had to pay for the papers every day at the Telegram when I got them, and as you did the man would be counting out the money. They cost around 5 cents (ICH Blog 2018).



Figure 6: Men and Boys of the Evening Telegram, posing on Solomon's Lane.

The Evening Telegram at the time had morning deadlines, and when the press would start up in the basement, the building would shake. Dozens of Compositors would be setting up pages along side the linotype machine. Lead type was used to set the print for the newspaper pages (Sweet 2019:2).

For a 2019 Telegram article on the history of the 275 Duckworth building, reporter Barb Sweet interviewed several former building workers. Bob Wakeham, a Telegram columnist and retired CBC producer, and Mary Mckim, a reporter, remembers:

The building was a lively one, on the third floor there were portable typewriters, the non-stop ringing phones, the whirring wire machines, and the blue language of the mostly male editorial staff at work in an ever present haze of cigarette smoke. It was well known around the business if you were ever sent to the fourth floor, it was not good (Sweet 2019:4).

You had to be able to read upside down and backwards. On the third floor, there was a massive, old-fashioned horseshoe desk where the editors sat. The space was described as very-old timey, the editors wore the green shade things on their heads. The typewriters were beaten up, and looked as if they had survived Beaumont Hamel. On sweltering summer days, the employees would take their typewriters and out on the adjoining roof to work and catch a breeze from the harbour. Lunches were often spent at Dirty Dick, which is now the Ship Inn (2019:4).

By the 1980s, the newspaper's association with the building was coming to an end. On Saturday, October 31, 1981 the Evening Telegram published its final newspaper from the building. The paper noted:

The Evening Telegram operated for the last time from 275 Duckworth Street. As a result of the closure, the Telegram's 81 year-old press (Figure 7) fell silent at 6 am as it printed it's last ever copy. Its successor, an 80-page Goss press, printing by the offset method was to take over after the move. During the last week of operation here, the six-section, 96-page Hoe press turned out more than 230,000 copies of the The Telegram, made up of a press run of 36,000 Monday through Friday, and 49,000 copies of their last issue printed at the Duckworth location (The Evening Telegram 1981:1).

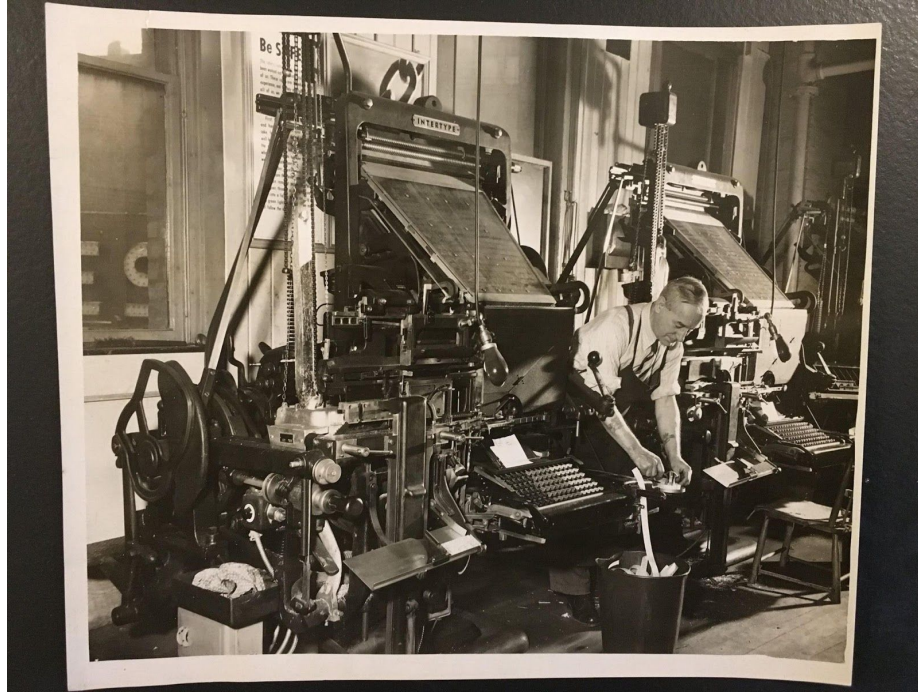


Figure 7: Ewen Hennebury (Printer at the Evening Telegram), near the printing press.

The 1980s and '90s

After the Evening Telegram left the building in 1982, Pizza Palace occupied the building for a short period of time in 1985.

The Dallas Lounge was another business to occupy 275 Duckworth, circa 1985 and 1986. The Muse advertised “Specializing in Chicken and Ribs, happy hour: 8:00-10:00 pm. Music Nightly, restaurant opened daily 11:00am-9:00pm”. (Dallas 1985:17).

The Law Offices of Gittens and Casey was situated on the top floor of the building in 1987 to 1992. CompuCollege was then located in the building from 1988 to 2010. After they moved, 275 Duckworth was vacant for several years.

Into the Twenty-First Century

275 Duckworth was purchased by St. John’s businessman and developer, Victor Lawlor. Following extensive interior and exterior renovation and restoration, his hope is to open a 40-room boutique hotel called the Factory Hotel, an homage to the building’s origins. In the hotel, he hopes to include a small restaurant and a rooftop patio. Half the rooms are planned to be one-bedroom suites with full kitchens complete with granite countertops (Oliver 2017:1).

In 2018, the Craft Council of Newfoundland and Labrador moved into the building, occupying the two lower levels, with the Council's gallery, shop, and administration offices all located on the ground level, with their main entrance off Solomon's Lane. The Craft Council is a membership based organization founded in 1972. They support and celebrate the integrity of the handcrafted object, the creativity of the maker, and the viability of the industry:

The Craft Council has been working to maintain and advance the craft industry in Newfoundland and Labrador. Craft in Newfoundland and Labrador originated as people needed to make their own goods for use in daily life. Craft skills have been handed down from generation to generation, and are still used in present day. Today, craftspeople continue to create both traditional and contemporary work as an expression of culture, creativity and important economic activity (Strategic Plan 2018:4).

The Craft Council has published a "Craft Council of Newfoundland and Labrador Strategic Plan 2018-2023". The goal was to consult widely with members and stakeholders, and develop a strategic plan that would guide the work of the organization. This plan would ensure that the work of the craft council would meet the needs and expectations of the public, and enable the organization to support a thriving craft industry.

Conclusions

271-275 Duckworth Street was designated as a heritage structure for its aesthetic and historic values by the City of St. John's in 1989.

This building mirrors the shift in the history of St. John's from its industrial years to its current functions. It represents transformations through time from manufacturing, to publishing and printing, and restaurants.

This structure is of historical importance due to its association with several commercial ventures. It was originally constructed for the Newfoundland Clothing Company in 1911. Then, from the mid 1950s to 1981, the building housed the province's daily newspaper the Evening Telegram. The building was then occupied by Pizza Palace, the Dallas Lounge, and Law Offices of Gittens and Casey. 275 Duckworth continues to serve as the home of the Craft Council of Newfoundland and Labrador, with future hopes of becoming a boutique hotel called "The Factory."

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