

Planning and Land Use Committee Report For the Meeting of September 10, 2015

To:

Planning and Land Use Committee

Date:

August 27, 2015

From:

Jonathan Tinney, Director, Sustainable Planning and Community Development

Subject:

Heritage Designation Application No. 000153 for 727-729 Johnson Street

RECOMMENDATION

That Council decline Heritage Designation Application No. 000153 for the property located at 727-729 Johnson Street as a Municipal Heritage Site.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to present the Planning and Land Use Committee with information, analysis and recommendations regarding an owner request to designate the exterior of the property located at 727-729 Johnson Street.

The following points were considered in assessing this application:

- General consistency with the Official Community Plan (OCP)
- Statement of Significance
- Victoria's Heritage Thematic Framework
- Eligibility for Heritage Designation.

Staff are recommending that Council decline this application for designation because the extent of previous alterations to the building considerably affects its heritage value. Staff are available to work with the applicant to determine the scope and nature of interventions that would be required to achieve a restoration that meets the Standards and Guidelines (information that could be part of a future Heritage Alteration Permit Application) and review the execution of a detailed restoration plan that might lead to a future application for designation.

BACKGROUND

Description of Proposal

An application to designate the exterior of the 1910 property located at 727-729 Johnson Street as a Municipal Heritage Site was received from Michael Alston, Alston Properties Ltd., on July 30, 2015.

The application was reviewed by the Heritage Advisory Panel meeting at its August 11, 2015

meeting and it recommended that Council consider Heritage Designation Application No. 000153 for the property located at 727 Johnson Street and consider the following comments:

- That Council urge the applicant to restore the property consistent with the Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada and the original design, and
- That said restoration would strengthen the existing historical architecture of the south side of this block on Johnson Street, carrying on the rhythm of the three existing character buildings.

Zoning/Land Use

The proposed designation is consistent with the CA-4: Central Area Commercial Office District and surrounding land uses.

Condition/Economic Viability

The subject building has been extensively altered. The exterior fabric, while in fair condition, is largely non-heritage fabric and the condition of any historic fabric that is concealed or altered by previous changes is unknown. The impact of removing previous alterations and non-heritage finishes may also result in changes to the condition of the historic fabric, the extent of which at present is unknown.

The viability of the property is understood to be subject to a future rezoning and the construction of additional storeys on top of the existing structure to offset the cost of seismically strengthening the building and rehabilitating the facade.

ANALYSIS

The following sections provide a summary of the application's consistency with the relevant City policies and guidelines.

Official Community Plan

This application in its current form requests Council's consideration of a non-heritage property that has heritage value because it reflects the surge of development that characterized Victoria's expanding gateway economy and for its continued commercial use over time; is one of the earliest local examples of the use of reinforced concrete as a façade material; and is associated with persons important in the history of Victoria. The heritage value of the façade has been considerably diminished due to previous alterations.

The OCP encourages the consideration of tools available under legislation to protect heritage property. The application is consistent with the OCP where it considers the heritage value of individual properties using the Victoria Heritage Thematic Framework; however, the Statement of Significance notes that the building has been considerably altered.

Statement of Significance

The applicant prepared a Statement of Significance for the purpose of this application, describing the historic place, outlining its heritage value and identifying its character-defining elements, which is attached to this report.

Victoria Heritage Thematic Framework

A key policy of the OCP includes the determination of heritage value using a values-based approach. In this regard, a City-wide thematic framework was developed and incorporated into the OCP to identify the key civic historic themes. This framework functions as a means to organize and define historical events, to identify representative historic places, and to place sites, persons and events in an overall context. The Victoria Heritage Thematic Framework is comprised of a broad set of heritage values and 21 different subthemes, which may be used to support an application for designation. As set out in the Statement of Significance, the subject property has heritage value under Theme 2: Gateway Economy and Theme 5: Cultural Exchange (including Architectural Expression), where architectural interest and streetscape values are prominent.

Eligibility for Designation

Historically, the primary consideration of heritage value has focussed on a property's architectural interest and historical association, including consideration of the impact of previous alterations. Even if a property has heritage value under the Victoria Heritage Thematic Framework, its physical integrity needs to be considered in order to determine whether it is eligible for designation.

The impact of previous alterations may be informed by considering how changes to the building affect its style, design, construction or character.

- In relation to its style, the Edwardian-era features were considerably altered in 1967-68 by changing the window design and pattern in conjunction with façade alterations.
- In relation to design, the massing and overall proportion are recognizable in relation to the building's early appearance; however, the materials, detail and fenestration (door and window arrangement) were extensively altered in 1967-68.
- In relation to construction, the character and appearance of the reinforced concrete structure and brick infill façade has been altered by the application of tile. In addition, the common red brick sidewalls have been painted.
- In relation to character, the extent of alteration to windows, pattern, storefront, materials and details has considerably altered the building's character.

Staff consider that the extent of alteration to the building considerably affects its style, design, construction and character.

Resource Impacts

The applicant has indicated their intention to seek financial assistance through the Tax Incentive Program to rehabilitate the exterior.

CONCLUSIONS

This application for the designation of the property at 727-729 Johnson Street as a Municipal Heritage Site involves a building that has heritage value because it reflects the surge of development that characterized Victoria's expanding gateway economy and for its continued commercial use over time; is one of the earliest local examples of the use of reinforced concrete structure with brick infill as a façade material; and is associated with persons important in the history of Victoria. However, it is also necessary to consider whether the extent of alterations to the building make it difficult to tell what it looked like during the period of its significance.

The heritage values of the place have been considerably impacted by the extent and nature of previous alterations. Staff have previously advised the applicant that if the building were restored to its pre 1910 appearance in accordance with the *Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada*, that an application for heritage designation could be considered after the rehabilitation work is completed. Assessing a property's eligibility for heritage designation is based on existing conditions of heritage value at the time of application for designation rather than on the basis of a future desired state.

A portion of the exterior wall that was apparently opened up to examine how the previous alterations were carried out, will be relevant to any restoration objectives. It is acknowledged that there may be practical difficulties in removing the previous alterations without damaging the historic fabric. Staff are available to work with the applicant to determine the scope and nature of interventions that would be required to achieve a restoration that meets the Standards and Guidelines (information that could be part of a future Heritage Alteration Permit Application) and review the execution of a detailed restoration plan that might lead to a future application for designation.

Staff therefore recommend that Council decline Heritage Designation Application No. 000153 due to the impact that previous alterations have had on the building.

ALTERNATE MOTION

That Council consider Heritage Designation Application No. 000153 for the property located at 727-729 Johnson Street pursuant to Section 967 of the *Local Government Act* as a Municipal Heritage Site.

Respectfully submitted.

Murray G. Miller

Senior Heritage Planner Community Planning Jonathan Tinney

Director

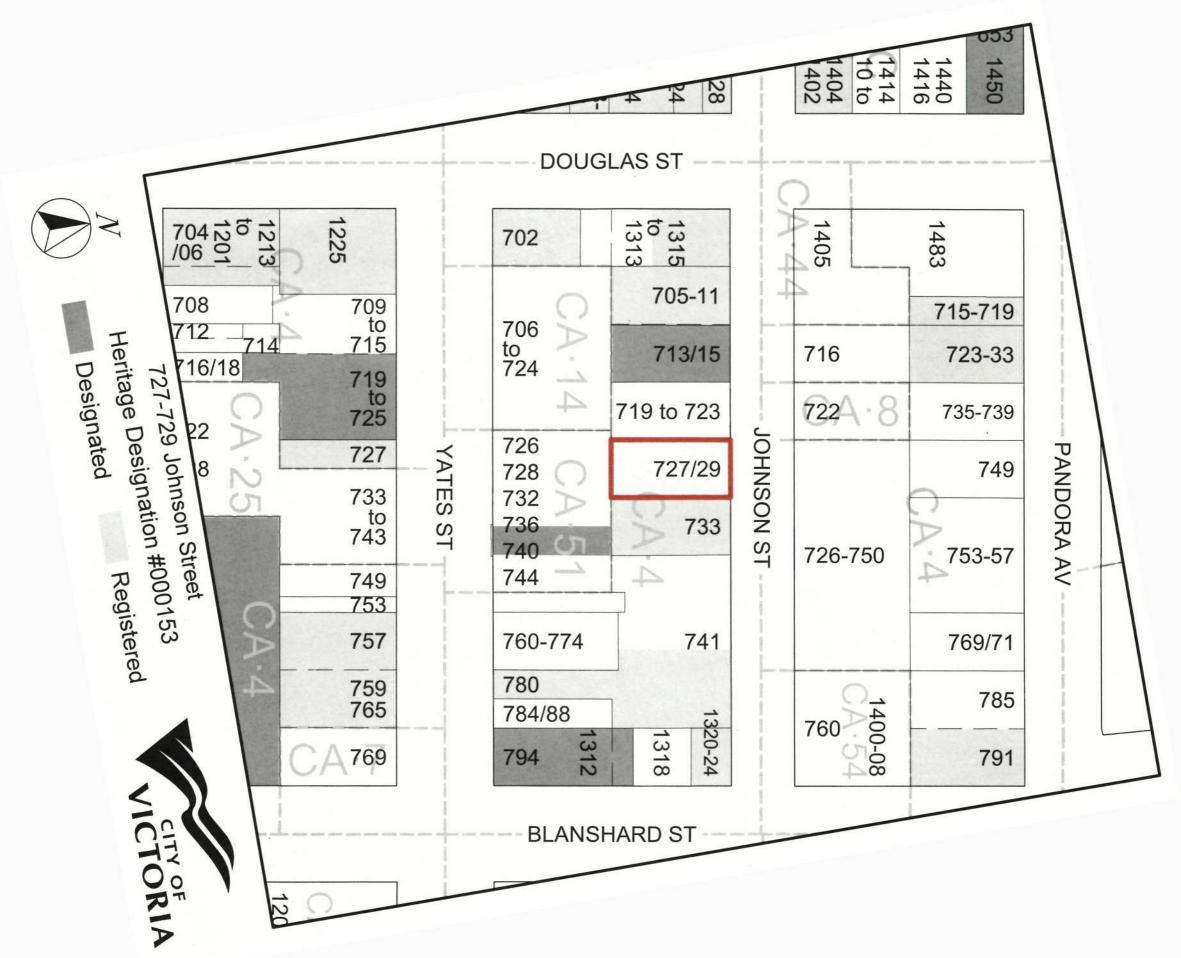
Sustainable Planning and Community Development

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:

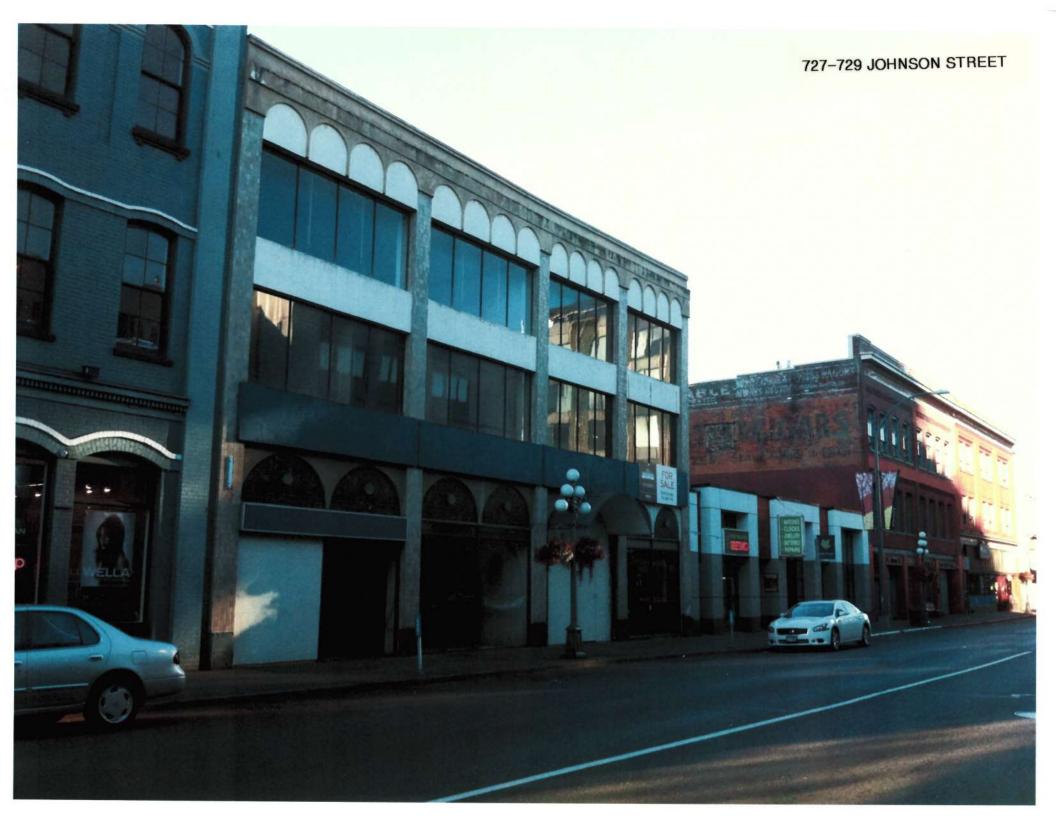
Jason Johnson

List of Attachments

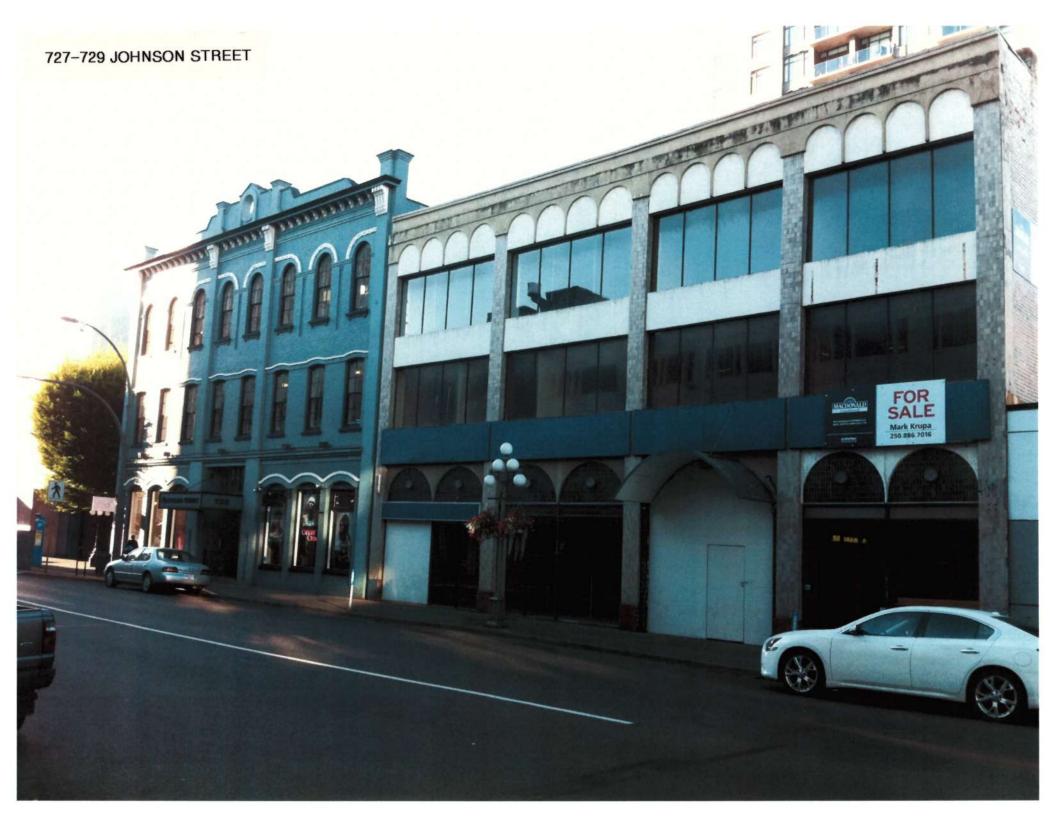
- Subject map
- Aerial map
- Photographs
- Applicant's letter, dated July 30, 2015
- Statement of Significance, August 2015.

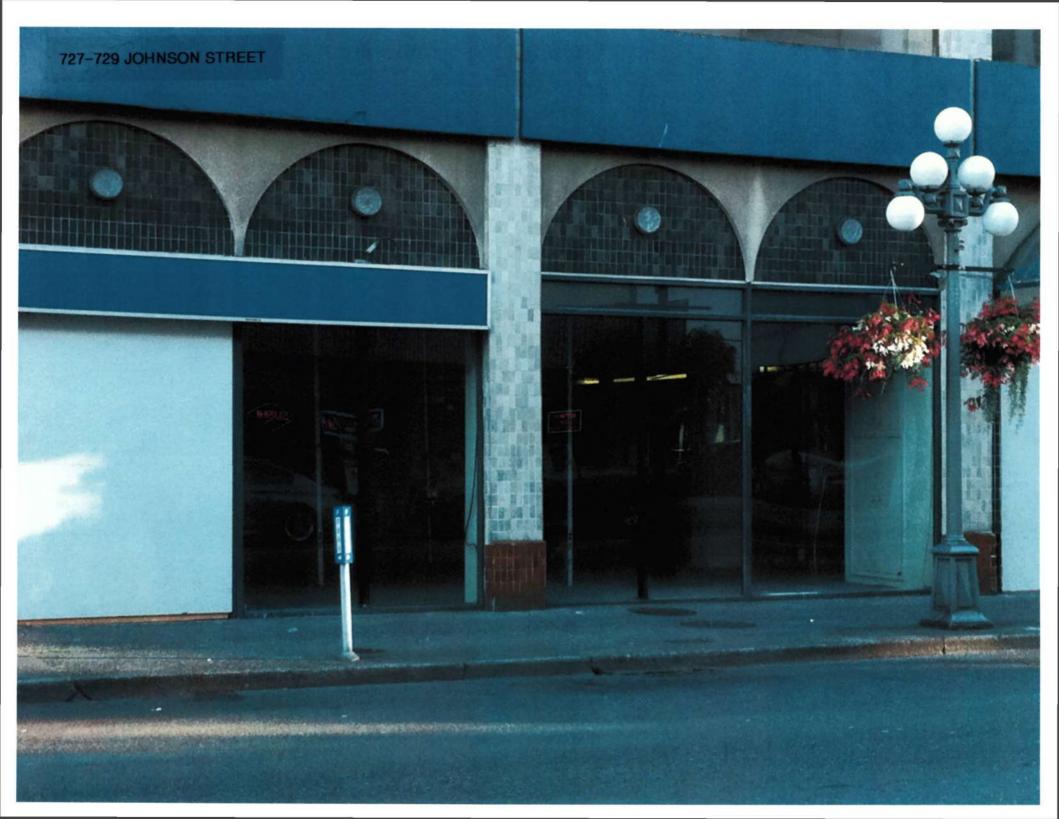














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Alston Properties Ltd #5, 602 Barbon Street, Victoria, B.C

July 30, 2015.

City of Victoria, Sustainable Planning and Community Development 1 Centennial Square, Victoria, B.C. V8W 1P6

Attention: Mayor and Council

RE: Heritage Designation Application for 727 Johnson Street, Victoria

In determining the highest and best use for this under performing building we researched the Victoria archives and discovered that this building once had an admirable facade.

The storefront level had high glazing offering great street-front exposure for retail on the ground floor level. The upper floors offered large window in each bay creating plenty of natural light to the interior of the building.

The existing structure allows sufficient special areas in each bay for the possibility to create living accommodation within the space.

Our proposal is to replicate the original facade within the restrictions of current code requirements to create upper floor residential apartment units and ground floor retail.

The building has significant heritage value based on our submitted Heritage Statement of Significance as prepared by Donald Luxton.

By restoring the building's facade to its original heritage style this will further enhance the streetscape of this block that currently has three other neighbouring heritage building on the same side of the street.

By repurposing the existing structure to its highest and best use we recycle a building that no longer had value or demand as 'C' class office space in our downtown core.

Sincerely,

Michael Alston

For

Alston Properties Ltd.



DR. GARESCHÉ STABLES & OFFICES 727 JOHNSON STREET VICTORIA, B.C.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE AUGUST 2015

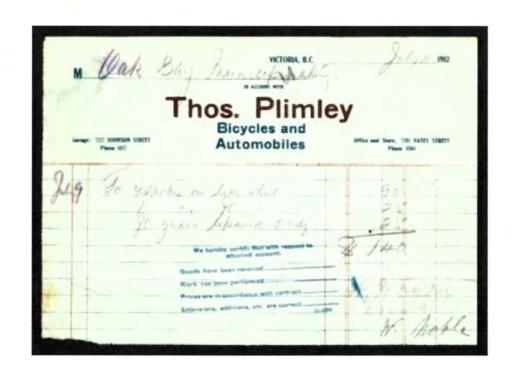


DONALD LUXTON AND ASSOCIATES INC

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1. INTRODUCTION



Name: Garesché Stables & Offices Address: 727 Johnson Street

First Owner: Dr. Arthur John Garesché

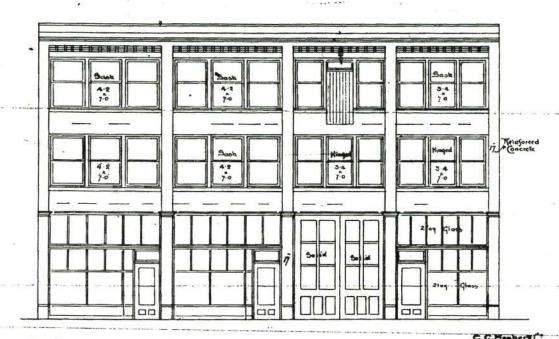
Architect: George C. Mesher Co. Contractor: George C. Mesher Co.

Date of Construction: 1910

Located mid-block on the south side of the 700 block of Johnson Street, the western half of this three-storey structure was built as a stable for City Livery, with rooms for carriages on the ground floor, horse stables on the second floor and a hay loft on the top floor. The eastern half of the building was rented as stores, and soon after construction was occupied by the Plimley garage.

Alterations were made to the storefronts in 1962 when the ground floor became the temporary premises of the Bank of Nova Scotia. An extensive alteration, designed by architect L.O. Lund in December 1967, inserted a retail arcade at the ground level; at that time the front elevation windows and storefronts were completely altered.

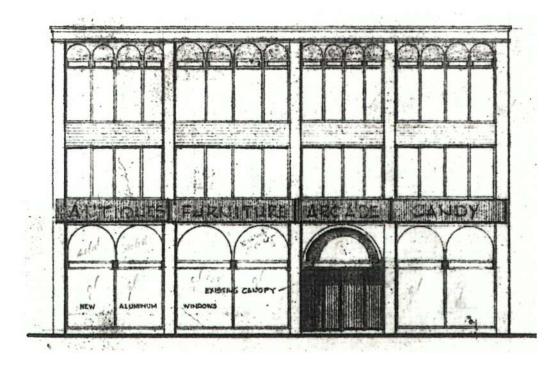
DR GARESCHE-STABLES &- JOHNSON ST - Scale Steer to One lack-



FRONT ELEVATION

These are the growings rejerred to in Agreement dated Teb 10-1910.

Above: Original Appearance, 1910 [City of Victoria Plans]. Below: 1967-68 alterations [City of Victoria Plans].





Above: City of Victoria Archives M00707. Below: City of Victoria Archives M01247.



2. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

2.1 FIRST OWNER: DR. ARTHUR JOHN GARESCHÉ

Arthur John Garesché (1860-1952) was born in Volcanoville, California on October 24, 1860 and came to Victoria in 1866 with his family. His father was Francis Garesché of the banking firm Garesché, Green and Company. He began his apprenticeship in dentistry in Portland, Oregon, in 1881 and later attended the University of Pennsylvania Dental College, graduating in 1887. He returned to Victoria in 1895 and opened a dental practice. On August 18, 1902 he married Millicent Mary Trimen, who was born at Wroxall, Isle of Wight, England on August 30, 1873. She was the daughter of architect Leonard Buttress Trimen and Susanna Mary Chaillé, and lived in Exeter, Devonshire before immigrating to Canada in September 1892. On October 3, 1892 she arrived in Victoria, where her father had already set up his architectural practice. Dr. Garesché died in Victoria, on September 14, 1952, three months after closing his practice. At the time of his death, he was reputedly the longest-serving dentist in North America.



2.2 ARCHITECT AND CONTRACTOR: GEORGE C. MESHER CO.

Left: George Mesher [courtesy John R.H. Ley family]

George Charles Mesher (1860-1938) developed an excellent reputation as a contractor in Victoria. Although not formally trained in architecture, later in his career he designed a number of very prominent buildings. Born in Weybourne, Surrey, England, in 1860, he was the oldest of eight children. His father, George Mesher, was born in Brompton, Co. Kent, England in 1831 and had earned his living in England as a builder and contractor, and his son had worked with him learning the trade. The widowed Mesher Sr. came to Victoria B.C. with his family in 1886 at the age of fifty-five. He created a new business operation called George Mesher & Co. with his son, and they offered services both as architects and builders on commercial and residential commissions

The Meshers were fortunate to arrive in Victoria when a building boom was underway. One factor in their success was the abundant energy of G.C. Mesher. His grandson recalled that he only "needed four hours sleep" and "he liked to get up early." Now established,

the Mesher family built a large home at 60 Second Street in 1888. The following year they bought three adjacent lots and built two more houses. Their' growing reputation soon led to some of the largest contracts of their career, and they were busy constructing mansions in the prestigious Rockland district as well as a number of downtown commercial blocks. Their biggest contract in the 1890s was a four-storey office building, the Five Sisters Block, designed by Sorby & Wilson. This was followed by the contract to construct Maclure's Temple Building on lower Fort Street.

Despite a busy work life, G.C. Mesher found time in 1892 to go to England and bring back a bride, Janet Elizabeth McDonald. The couple soon had two daughters, Theresa and Violet. A few years later George bought lots on South Turner Street in James Bay and built a large residence, a fine example of Queen Anne style, along with a similar house he built in the Cowichan Valley; for these houses Mesher was probably adapting pattern book plans. Mesher Sr. retired in the mid-1890s, although he kept his hand in

the business almost until his death in 1912. Though construction was slow after 1892, Mesher kept busy by developing property in the Rockland, Fairfield, and James Bay neighbourhoods. Around 1900 he entered into an investment partnership with Dr. I.W. Powell, an important figure in B.C.'s early political history. Among their acquisitions was a two-acre parcel fronting on Dallas Road, where Mesher put up several residences. The finest and largest house built on the Dallas parcel was the one he designed for his own family, completed in 1904.

During Victoria's great building boom, 1907-12, Mesher worked increasingly as an architect. Undoubtedly his diverse experience gave him confidence, and he designed almost all the major buildings he constructed during this period. To Victoria's burgeoning downtown, Mesher contributed three reinforced concrete structures, each six storeys high, with ground floor retail and upper floor offices. Sparsely ornamented and functional, they reveal the influence of the popular Chicago School. The largest belonged to Pemberton & Sons, the city's most successful real estate development firm. The exterior of the Pemberton Block, 1911, was a grid of large window bays separated by clean horizontal and vertical lines and crowned by a wide bracketed cornice. It was one of Mesher's most accomplished buildings and, for a while, the largest office block in the city. This building also demonstrated that Mesher was one of the pioneers of the use of reinforced concrete construction on the west coast. He made innovative use of flat plate construction in the Pemberton Building by extending floor slabs to form outer wall beams that are boldly expressed on the facade of this substantial office building. The Sayward Block, 1911, on the corner of Douglas and View Streets, resembled the Pemberton Block, and was named after its principal investor, prominent businessman J.A. Sayward. The last of this triumvirate was the Metropolis Building on Yates Street, 1913, similar to the others but with the upper floors used as a hotel.

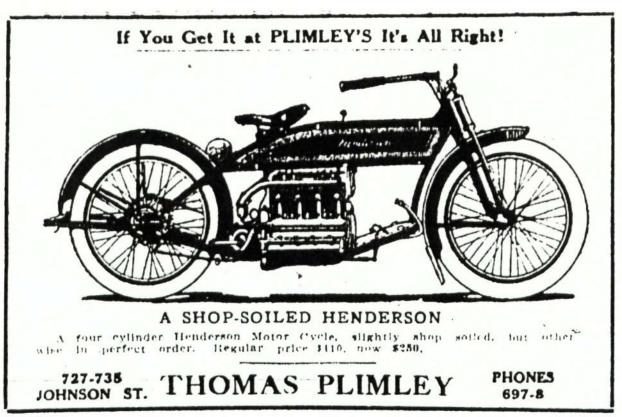
During the boom period, attractive apartment blocks with all the facilities for independent and respectable living sprang up in Victoria, and Mesher built three of the finest: October Mansion, 1910; The Savoy Mansion, 1911; and Hampton Court, 1913. There was little construction work available after the outbreak of the First World War. Although Mesher was a prolific builder and generated considerable income, he was not a good business manager. According to his grandson he ran into financial difficulties in 1916 and for a time relied upon liquor revenue from a Yates Street hotel in which he had interests, but that was lost when prohibition started in 1919. Mesher retired about 1924 and in 1928 moved to the Alberni Valley where he built a large house with his own hands. He died in Vancouver in 1938.

2.3: THOMAS PLIMLEY

This building is also associated with pioneer auto dealer Thomas John Plimley (1871-1929) who trained as a machinist in his hometown of Birmingham, England. He immigrated to Victoria in 1893, worked with Albion Iron Works, and then opened a bicycle shop called Plimley & Ritchie Limited. In 1905, he established one of the first automobile businesses in Western Canada. He was dedicated to bringing the newest transportation technologies to the people of Victoria, and in 1901 he sold the first car in the city, a tiller-steered Oldsmobile The firm sold a number of the famous early autos: Daimler, Hupmobile, and Overland. His wife Rhoda (née Hanis, 1872-1927), born in Staffordshire, England, was the area's first female driver. In 1907, Thomas's brother, Allan, moved from England to join him. Plimley's Garage opened at this Johnson Street location in 1910. The business continued to expand, and in 1922 the company was incorporated as Thomas Plimley Limited. In 1927, Thomas Plimley built a new used car showroom at 1010 Yates Street. Their son, Thomas Horace Plimley, took over the family business in 1929, and opened a British car dealership in Vancouver in 1936. From 1957 to 1986, Horace's son Basil was one of the few third generation executives of a B.C. business.



Plimley Automobile Co. Ltd. Showroom, 606 Government Street, circa 1905 [British Columbia Archives A-03052].



Plimley Advertisement, Victoria Daily Colonist, 1915.

3. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Description of the Historic Place

The Garesché Stables & Offices is a three-storey, masonry commercial building, located midblock on the south side of Johnson Street between Douglas and Blanshard Streets, in downtown Victoria. It forms part of a grouping of older structures of similar scale that remain on part of this block. The front façade is divided into four bays by concrete columns, with tall ground-floor storefront openings and banked upper floor windows.

Heritage Value of the Historic Place

The heritage value of the Garesché Stables & Offices is summarized below in accordance with Victoria's Heritage Thematic Framework.

Theme 2: Gateway Economy Subtheme 2.2: Resource Base

The Garesché Stables & Offices has been constantly adapted for new uses, and is valued for its continuous commercial use over time. Constructed during the height of the pre-World War One real estate boom, the Garesché Stables & Offices is valued as a reflection of the surge of development that characterized Victoria's expanding gateway economy. With its substantial size, masonry construction and simple detailing, it remains a prominent presence on the street. Built in 1910 as a purpose-built stable, it has been used continuously for commercial purposes, and is a significant contribution to the historic character of this block of Johnson Street. The scale of the building reflects the optimism and rapid growth of the Edwardian era, prior to the collapse of the local economy in 1913 and the outbreak of World War One in 1914. This building also demonstrated the transition in transportation that was occurring rapidly at the time, housing both a livery stable and the soon to be dominant automobile.

Theme 5: Cultural Exchange

Subtheme 5.1: Architectural Expression / Edwardian Era Architecture

Built to be overtly functional, the Garesché Stables & Offices is significant as one of the earliest local examples of use of reinforced concrete as a façade material. The architect and contractor, English-born George Charles Mesher (1860-1938), developed an outstanding reputation as a contractor. In 1886, Mesher and his widowed father, George Mesher Sr., relocated to Victoria. Mesher Sr. had earned his living in England as a builder and contractor, and his son had worked with him learning the trade. The Meshers were fortunate to arrive in Victoria when the resource-based economic boom was underway. When they set up shop in Victoria in 1887 they continued as partners in their contracting work. Although not formally trained in architecture, Mesher designed a number of prominent buildings in Victoria. He was also one of the pioneers of the use of reinforced concrete construction on the west coast. This evolving technology enabled broad spans of glazing at the ground floor and upper floor levels. With its tripartite articulation, interwoven horizontal and vertical bands of reinforced concrete and banked windows, the building also demonstrates the influence of the Chicago School on Victoria's Edwardian-era commercial buildings.

Theme 1: Coastal Settlement

Subtheme 1.2: Multi-Cultural Origins

The structure is additionally significant for its association with pioneer Victoria resident Dr. Arthur John Garesché (1860-1952), born in California, who came to Victoria in 1866 with his family. After obtaining his education in the United States, he returned to Victoria in 1895 and opened a dental practice. At the time of his death, he was reputedly the longest-serving dentist in North America. The Garesché Stables & Offices is also valued for its association with pioneer auto dealer Thomas Plimley (1871-1929) and the Plimley family. English born, Thomas Plimley began his career in Victoria by selling bicycles. He was dedicated to bringing the newest transportation technologies to the people of Victoria, and in 1901 he sold the first car in the city.

Character-Defining Elements

Key elements that define the heritage character of the Garesché Stables & Offices include its:

- location on the south side of Johnson Street, in Victoria's downtown core, part of a grouping of historic buildings of similar scale;
- continuous commercial use;
- commercial form, scale and massing as expressed through its rectangular, three-storey height, rectangular plan with a flat roof, and tall storefront openings;
- construction materials, such as its reinforced concrete façade and common red-brick side walls;
 and
- Edwardian-era design features such as its tripartite articulation and banked upper floor windows.

RESEARCH SOURCES

Name: Garesché Stables & Offices Address: 727 Johnson Street

First Owner: Dr. Arthur John Garesché

Architect: George C. Mesher Co.
Contractor: George C. Mesher Co.
Date of Construction: 1910

CITY OF VICTORIA BUILDING PERMIT

 #1510; February 12, 1910; Dr. Garesche, Johnson Street; Lot 33, Block 3; Stable, 3-storey brick; \$15,000.

BUILDING PLANS [CITY OF VICTORIA]

• Dr. Garesché Stables &, Johnson Street, G.C. Mesher Co., Architects, 1910.

PLUMBING PLANS [CITY OF VICTORIA]

#3920: Building Belonging to Dr. Garesché, Filed June 14, 1910.

PUBLISHED SOURCES

Contract Record, vol. 24, no. 4. January 26, 1910: A three storey brick building for stores and
offices on land 60 by 120 feet is contemplated on Johnson Street, adjoining the warehouse of
the Brady-Houston Pickling Company. Estimated cost, \$12,000. Owner, Dr. A.J. Garesche.

PUBLICATIONS

• Luxton, Donald. Building the West: The Early Architects of British Columbia. Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2nd ed., 2007.

BC VITAL EVENTS

- Groom Name: Garesche, A J; Bride Name: Trimen, Mellissent [sic] Mary; August 18, 1902; Event Place: Victoria; Registration Number: 1902-09-010996; Event Type: Marriage.
- Garesche, Arthur John Francis; Gender: Male; Age: 91; Date: September 14, 1952; Event Place: Victoria; Registration Number: 1952-09-008994; Event Type: Death.
- Garesche, Millicent Mary; Gender: Female; Age: 103; Date: February 26, 1977; Event Place: Victoria; Registration Number: 1977-09-003620; Event Type: Death.
- Plimley, Thomas John; Gender: Male; Age: 58; Date: December 18, 1929; Event Place: Victoria;
 Registration Number: 1929-09-414972; Event Type: Death.
- Plimley, Thomas Horace Gender: Male; Age: 89; Date: March 21, 1985; Event Place: Victoria;
 Registration Number: 1985-09-005506; Event Type: Death.

MESHER, George Charles: Sources

B.C. Vital Events; company records and voters lists (held at BCA); and interviews with his grandson, John R.H. Ley (1990), grandniece, Kathleen Johnston (1993) and Pheona Hislop (2001). Published sources include directories; *Colonist* references and tender calls; obituaries and local news items. Also *This Old House*; *Victoria Architecturally*, 1911; Segger & Franklin, *Exploring Victoria's Architecture*; and Mills, *Architectural Trends in Victoria*.

CITY DIRECTORIES

Henderson's Greater Victoria Directory, 1910-11, page 125

- · Johnson 725 City Livery Stables
- Johnson 727-31-33 B C Hardware Co

Henderson's Greater Victoria Directory, 1910-11, page 215

• City Livery Stables Dr C R Richards prop 725 Johnson

Henderson's Greater Victoria Directory, 1912, page 157

- Johnson 725 City Livery Stables
- Johnson 727 Plimley's Garage
- Johnson 731-33 Vacant

Henderson's Greater Victoria Directory, 1912, page 542

- · Plimley Horace collr Thos Plimley lvs 109 Douglas
- Plimley Thos automobiles and bicycles 730 Yates and 727 Johnson h 109 Douglas

Henderson's Greater Victoria Directory, 1913, page 305

- Johnson 725 City Livery Stables
- Johnson 725 Richards C R vet surg
- Johnson 727 Plimley Thos Garage
- Johnson 727 Johnson Alf J printer
- Johnson 727 Vallence Geo G adv agt
- Johnson 727 Belsize Motor Express
- Johnson 731 Victoria Labour Temple Ltd
- Johnson 733-735 Plimley's Garage