

Barnes Block

3-7 Queen Street East

Sault Ste. Marie

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**This is a copy of the original document, originals included in the Municipal Heritage Committee Binder – Titled: “Barnes Block”*

The Barnes Block, located on the southeast corner of Queen and Gore Streets, has been around longer than Sault Ste. Marie has been a city. It was built at the turn of the century and was acquired by Theron T. Barnes in June of 1902.

Originally, the building housed two business establishments on the first floor along with private practises on the upper two floors. The two larger businesses were the Star Clothing House and the Barnes Drug Company. By 1913, T. T. Barnes was doing well enough to build another office block just east of the Fawcett Block. Here he opened a second drug store in 1915. Unfortunately the fire of 1914 was severe enough to cause the Star Clothing House to move out. This left one half of the lower floor vacant for a couple of years until T. T. Barnes expanded and took over the space. It seems that when Mr. T. T. Barnes sold his drug store business in 1919 he opened up an office as an optician and carried this business on until his death in 1937.

As was mentioned, along with the two major business establishments, a number of offices were found overhead. Clinton A. Kerr, a dentist, resided there from 1910 to 1915, along with McFadden & McMillan, Barristers, who were located there from 1912 to 1918. Where upon, James D. Becking, Barrister, entered the scene and stayed from 1919 to 1931 with his own practise. As well throughout this whole time period, starting from the original opening was the Barnes Hall. This hall was the scene of many a social gathering over the years. There were even boxing matches held in here. It is said that the local legend, Billy Hughes, fought many a round against Canadians and American alike.

In 1919, Mr. T. T. Barnes got out of the drug store business and sold his two stores to Mr. Fredrick S. Dent and Mr. Henry E. Allcock, the two of which had formed a partnership. Both Mr. Dent and Mr. Allcock were graduates of the Ontario College of Pharmacy. Mr. Allcock was from the Sault while Mr. Dent was from Woodstock, Ontario and had served his apprenticeship with the C. T. Adams Drug Store. The two partners decided to keep the business under the original name of Barnes. Together they provided an outstanding service to their customers with Mr. Dent minding the Central Store and Mr. Allcock minding the Queen and Gore Store. In 1947, Barnes Drug Company became an I.D.A. member and was able to better serve their customers.

The outstanding service was not limited to their customers, but rather expanded into the community around them. Both Mr. Allcock and Mr. Dent made outstanding contributions as citizens of Sault Ste. Marie. Both served on the Sault Chamber of Commerce for years. Mr. Dent was quite influential in the local Kiwanis Club while Mr. Allcock was an active Rotarian. Mr. Dent was also an avid promoter of juvenile sport in Sault Ste. Marie. This, of course, was due to his own athletic interests and abilities. Fred Dent made the headlines in 1910, while attending Woodstock College and Varsity, when he ran the 100 yard dash in ten seconds flat. This was a feat to be rarely equalled. He also won many intercollegiate and interscholastic meets.

1969 was the year that the Barnes Drug Company closed its doors. With it went the end of an era, which for over half a century the city of Sault Ste. Marie was served honestly.

One other interesting fact about the history of the Barnes Block is that Sir William Hearst, who was the Premier of Ontario from October 1914 to November 1919, owned a portion of the land which could have included part of the smaller building to the east of the Barnes Block. Sir William and Lady Isabel acquired it in January 1932.

The building itself can be somewhat attributed to two architectural styles. The turret is of Gothic origin while the north facade seems to lend itself towards a Victorian Romanesque origin. Although this façade is not polychromatic at its fullest, the colour variation of the window arches, trim and sills with the brick face is compatible with this style as are the arched windows. The windows do vary in size and shape. The top floor has windows with full semi-circular arches on top, while the middle floor has windows with a slight curve at the top of them. They vary in number as well. The first Bay has two, the second has three and the third has two. Each of the Bays is bordered by pilasters, which are capped with a capital-like stone. The arches over each window are accentuated through the use of a large keystone. The cornice on the building is consistent with the simplicity of the rest of the façade. It consists of evenly spaced scroll-like modillions with horizontal mouldings below. The cornice continues right across the small building attached to the Barnes Block.

This smaller building was built in the likeness of the larger block. It was built a year or two after the Barnes Block. One observation that substantiates this is that the stone work over the windows is of a different kind of stone than is found on this building beside it. At present there is no upper cornice, but earlier pictures reveal that there was one at one time. The lower cornice is still there today only it has been covered over with plywood.

The west side of the Barnes Block is quite different than the front. It seems somewhat like an anti-climax after looking at the front. This side is plain and free from decoration except for the row of dentils across the top. This seems to be the side that no one was to see yet it is located on a side street. There is one interesting feature found on this side, which is the oriel or the protruding bay window on the second floor.

The turret on the corner that joins the west side to the front façade is the most significant feature of this building. Turrets can be found around Sault Ste. Marie, but usually on residential buildings as opposed to commercial. Aside from a couple of old hotels, the Barnes Block is the only business establishment that has a turret. The mortar and pestle that rise from the truncated turret roof is an age old symbol of druggists. This is quite appropriate since the building was built originally as a drug store and lasted nearly seventy years as such.

The mortar and pestle look as though they may have been originally constructed out of copper. The roof of the turret is of a copper colour, but was not likely made of copper since it would have turned green due to weathering over the years. Also the spots where the copper colour has come away seem to be rusted, indicating that the material must be some sort of sheet metal. At one time there was ironwork that extended from the turret roof up to the mortar and pestle. On the vertical face of the turret is found over-lapping wooden

shingles forming a weather tight imbrication. At the bottom of the turret is found a black, reflective material that most likely is vitrolite, a form of early plastic. This fibrolite extends across the top of the storefront visually tying in the turret with the storefront.

Over the years, the Barnes Block became somewhat of a landmark in the west end of the downtown. Not only a physical landmark, but a social landmark as well. It was a gathering place for the citizens of the area. The building itself is quite sound. The architectural features of this building along Queen Street make it an outstanding building. It is both because of the building's contributions to the city and its architectural features that make this building worthy of preservation in our community.



1995



Barnes Block

Photos Taken: July 2004

