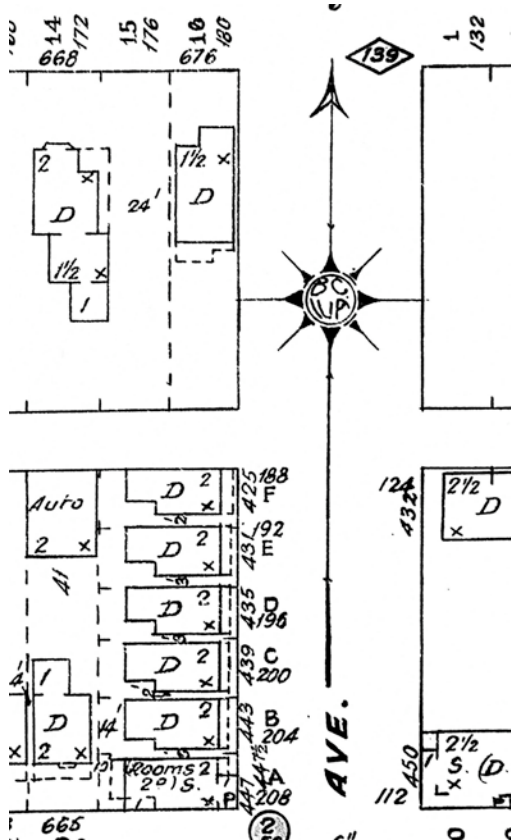


THE HEATLEY BLOCK - A BRIEF HISTORIC OVERVIEW

Samuel Plastino, the Italian-born proprietor of the Windsor Hotel at 52 East Hastings commenced construction of the two-storey combination commercial and apartment building known as The Heatley Block in 1931. Before he started construction, he had two houses, originally numbered 668 and 676 East Hastings, moved to the back of the lot and reoriented to face onto Heatley. The fire insurance map below shows the two houses in 1930, just before they were moved.



668 East Hastings was built in 1889 and is one of very few houses of that vintage still standing in Vancouver. It was moved from Hastings Street to the extreme south of the current property. 668 East Hastings became 417 Heatley Street.

676 East Hastings was built in 1898 by Scottish-born Maxwell C. McCord. It was moved so that it stands parallel to 417 Heatley Street and was renumbered to 407 Heatley Street. These two old houses were not demolished, they were recycled and subdivided into duplexes—an early example of eco-density. 407 Heatley became the home of the first manager of the Heatley Block, Mrs. Catherine Cox.

The first time the Heatley Block appears in the directories is 1932. The address for the upstairs apartments was 405 Heatley and in 1932, 12 apartment units were occupied. Downstairs the building was divided into a number of commercial outlets, first four, then five. The corner unit, 696 Hastings, was a drugstore operated by Miss Vera E. Jones, 692 was the Heatley Market, operated by Hugh McAninch. 688 was the Italian run Hastings Bakery, and 682 was the Hastings Millinery run by Finnish-born Mrs. Ena Laitenan.

By 1936, a fifth commercial unit, 694 East Hastings was added. This was occupied for a number of decades by Elite Dry Goods & Dressmaker, later known as Elite Cleaners, and was operated by On Louie. For a number of years, two other commercial addresses were included in the Heatley Block on the Heatley side of the building: 401 and 403 Heatley. Sometimes these addresses were used as residential units. Over the decades, a large number of the proprietors of the businesses in the Heatley Block actually lived with their families in the back of the shop.

Up until 1941 there was a strong Japanese commercial presence in the block. 684 East Hastings, Frieda's Beauty Shoppe, was run by Mrs. Kimi Kutsukake. 688 East Hastings was a barber shop run by Mrs. Dell Shizuko Okugawa. The Kutsukake and Okugawa families were wrested from their homes and businesses and forced to move, like all other residents of Japanese origin, to the interior and points beyond in 1942 after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour.

The diversity of people and occupations represented by the residents of the upstairs apartment block over the decades reflects the demographics of the old East End. The apartments were home to families and single residents. Though mostly working class in origin, there were a number of residents who were business owners and proprietors also living in the block. Italian shoe repairmen and terrazzo workers lived alongside Scottish mariners and butchers, Finnish fishermen, Swedish loggers, English blacksmiths, French Canadian taxi drivers, and Chinese cooks. In later decades the proportion of single working people and retirees, mostly from forestry and harbour based industries, came to predominate.

The Heatley Block is the last viable commercial/residential block of its type on East Hastings. 517 Heatley is one of the oldest pioneer houses left in Vancouver. Given its historic, aesthetic, and healthy business-attracting value, the Heatley Block and its two adjoining heritage houses should be protected from demolition and designated at least Heritage B.