

Memory Lane

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The Lister Block

Joseph Lister Jr. opened a dry goods store on the northeast corner of James Street North and King William Street on land owned by his father. It expanded rapidly and in 1852 he constructed a four-storey limestone building on the site that would become known as the Lister Chambers. It was one of the most up to date structures in the city thanks to a separate heating plant, elevators and an interior designed for commercial enterprises. With the opening of the Great Western Railway the ideal location of Lister's building made it an ideal location for many prime tenants. One business listed in the City of Hamilton's 1885-86 directory located in the Lister Block included Anderson & Bates Eye and Ear Surgeons. Their advertisement promised to straighten crossed eyes. By late 1922 the Lister Block had more than 150 tenants and a newly completed shopping arcade. There were 20 stores, more than 100 offices and several private residential apartments. It was one of Hamilton's first multi-use commercial buildings.



The Lister Block as it was in the 1800s.

On Thursday February 23, 1923 at 2:36 a.m., a fire was reported in the Lister building at 34 James Street North at King William. The building was totally destroyed by the fire. Every piece of equipment and firefighter in the city was called out to fight the huge blaze. It was determined that the fire started in the rear of the Hudson Fashion Shop then rapidly travelled throughout the entire building. Within half an hour all four stories were engulfed in flames. In total 77 businesses were completely destroyed. The total loss was estimated at over \$1,000,000. This was the worst fire in the city's history to that date, it was so cold that the water froze as it was being poured on the building. What was left of the walls was torn down on March 23, 1923.

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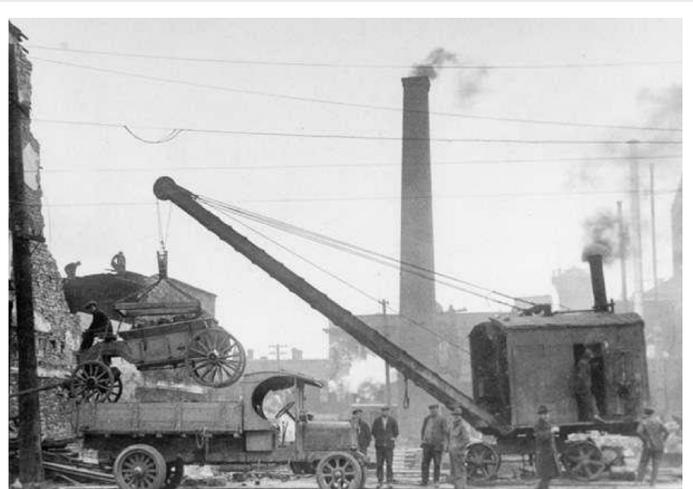
Aftermath of the 1923 fire at Lister Block.

The Lister Block ...continued



Aftermath of the 1923 fire at Lister Block.

The Lister Building we know today was built on the same property and opened on May 1, 1924. It featured a terracotta lower façade and a unique L-shaped two storey shopping arcade.



Construction of the new Lister building after the fire.



The Lister Block pictured at the corner of King William Street and James Streets. This is how the new building built after the fire appeared, similar to today's Lister Block. Zellers can be seen on the opposite corner.