

Flash from the Past: Corporation Square was built on site of Krug mansion

BY JON FEAR, RECORD STAFF

In the summer of 1969 construction crews cleared away the surface of a downtown Kitchener parking lot at Duke and Ontario streets. Two years later the doors opened at Corporation Square, an office-theatre-commercial complex with twin 11- and six-storey towers — developed by Major Holdings and Developments Ltd. of Waterloo for the then impressive price tag of \$5 million.

The Royal Bank was a key tenant — and remains so today — in the taller of the two towers. And for several years the Waterloo County Board of Education had its administration offices on three floors of the same tower.

Last week's mystery photo, an old Record image, looks north from Duke Street West. On the left side you can see the old St. Mary's High School on the west side of Ontario Street (now the City of Kitchener's Downtown Community Centre) and beyond it a corner of Zion United Church on Weber Street. On the right you can see a back wing of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church at Queen and Weber streets, and behind it the apartment tower at 100 Queen St. N.



Dan Cardy of Kitchener wrote by email to say that he had done some sleuthing to determine where the photo was taken. “I figured by the age of the church in the photo that it must be in downtown Kitchener so I took a quick drive with my wife and located Zion United Church at 32 Weber St. W. From there we determined that the excavation is for Corporation Square at the corner of Ontario and Duke.”

So what was on this building site before it became a parking lot?

One of the big properties at 117 Ontario St. N., was a grand 30-room residence that was the home of Hartman Krug, founder of the H. Krug Furniture Co. Ltd. (now Krug Inc.) and owner of Doon Twines Ltd. (later called Canada Cordage). The Krug family also had a controlling stake in the old auditorium on Queen Street South, a venue for hockey but also for dance bands and political gatherings.

In 1880, Krug married Annie Theresa Dunn and together they had 10 children. Their Ontario Street home was built in 1896 by local contractor Casper Braun (Ontario Street was then called Foundry Street) and included a brick coach house and stables. After Krug died at home on April 10, 1933 — Hartman Krug Called By Death, the Record headline said — his widow continued to live there. She died at home on Jan. 4, 1950. The big house was demolished about 1964.



Also demolished about the same time was a neighbouring home that was once the residence of William (Daddy) Simpson, another kingpin of the 19th century furniture industry in Berlin, now Kitchener.

“I remember the stately homes that were there,” said longtime Kitchener lawyer Adolf Gubler who phoned to identify the photo location. He practises law with the firm Walters Gubler in an office at Corporation Square.

Bill Bernhardt of Waterloo also remembers the big homes along Ontario Street. For many years he was the owner of Bernhardt Insurance Service Ltd., still operating today at 151 Ontario St. in a building constructed in 1876. It’s the two-storey, yellow brick building visible from the side at the top left corner of the construction site in the photo.

Bernhardt said by phone that his father, William (Archie) Bernhardt, started the business in 1937 on King Street in Kitchener, then moved it to Ontario Street in about 1955. Bill Bernhardt later took over the business from his dad. He sold it to his employees in 2000 when he retired. Land surveyor Brian Campbell recognized the site in the photo. In the 1960s his father, James, worked at 11 Weber St. W. (it backs onto the construction site in the photo) with J. Douglas Ansley Ltd., Ontario Land Surveyors. Campbell himself purchased the business in 1994 and moved it across Weber Street to a house beside Zion United. He later sold the firm, but remains a land surveyor with Stantec Consulting.

Notes re Photographs:

1. Record photo: Corporation Square was built on this site at Duke and Ontario streets in Kitchener. On the left you can see St. Mary's High School, now the Downtown Community Centre. The church is Zion United on Weber Street.
2. Record photo: The 30-room Hartman Krug home was at 117 Ontario St. N., now the site of Corporation Square. It was demolished about 1964.