

1656 Barrington Street

Halifax, N.S.

BY SARAH SAWLER

ON BARRINGTON

Street, just past Saint Paul's Cathedral but not quite to Starbucks, there's an easily overlooked granite building tucked into a row of structures that are more prominent in both size and reputation. When renowned Atlantic Canada architect Andrew Cobb designed the building, he'd already worked with Sydney Dumaresq on the Dingle Memorial Tower, designed the Strand Theatre (which would eventually become Neptune Theatre) and would go on to work on a number of buildings on the Dalhousie and King's College campuses.

Compared to those projects, the Acadia Insurance Building is a humble edifice. But for 19 years (from the time of its construction in 1919 to 1938), it appears to have been Cobb's physical muse: it's where Halifax's celebrity architect chose to work. He wasn't the only tenant, though—the Canada Permanent Mortgage Corporation and Canada Permanent Trust Company in Nova Scotia both moved in at the same time and stayed until long after Cobb left.

In 1963, when it was time for the Canada Permanent Mortgage Corporation and Canada Permanent Trust Company to head on down the road (quite literally; they just moved a couple doors down), Acadia Fire Insurance Company, one of Canada's first insurance companies, took over.

Then, in the mid-eighties, Sam moved in and he brought all his records with him. For the next 20 years or so, 1656 Barrington Street was home to the best come-from-away music store on the East Coast, Sam the Record Man.

Today, creative work is still being done within those walls; the upper floors are home to Verb Interactive, a digital marketing agency that focuses on tourism, and works with clients like Celebrity Cruises and Universal Studios Hollywood.



Circa 1920: Welcome to the neighbourhood! Looking south on Barrington from Prince Street: walk a few doors down, look to the right, and you'll find the Acadia Insurance Building. (Notman Studio, Nova Scotia Archives, accession no. 1983-310, number 7320)

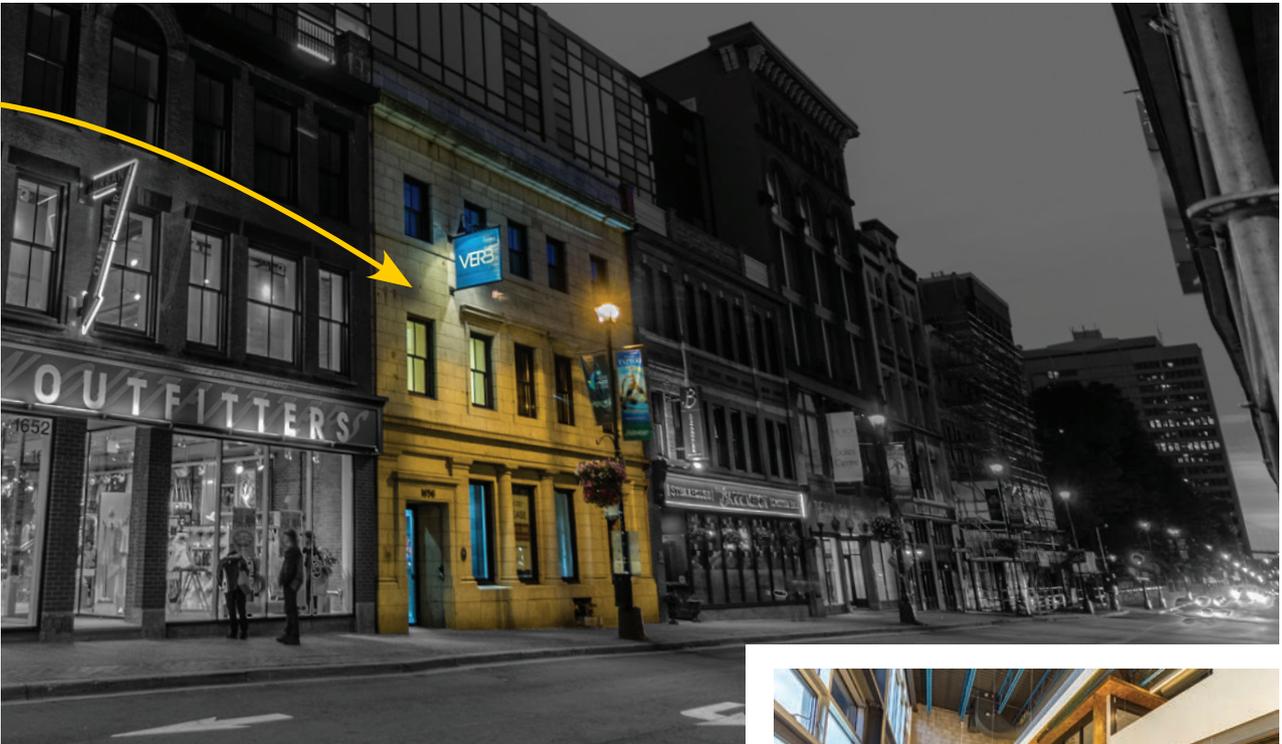


The Acadia Fire Insurance Company was Nova Scotia-owned until the early 1900s when it was acquired by an English company called Phoenix Insurance Company.



May, 1945: A sailor resting or napping in the window of the Canada Permanent Mortgage Corporation. It's the end of WWII. The Halifax Chronicle, 9 May 1945, p.5, reported: "...all kinds of people lugging one or two cases under their arms and bulging their coats and jackets with bottles of spirits. Most people stopped at a convenient spot—parks, doorsteps and street corners—and started their mammoth orgy." (David Hall, Nova Scotia Archives, accession no. 1981-412 9)

Present Day: President Andy MacLellan launched Verb Interactive (shown below) about 15 years ago, and the digital marketing agency has been thriving ever since. In February of this year, the Halifax company expanded its operations to Victoria, B.C.



Premises is a new department profiling historic Atlantic Canadian buildings and the businesses that have made their home there. Suggestions are welcome.

FEEDBACK

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