

**54 ARTHUR STREET – ROBINSON, LITTLE & COMPANY BUILDING**  
*James H. Cadham, 1903*



This massive brick and stone warehouse, although similar in appearance to the neighbouring structure to the north, was built four year after. It intentionally borrowed design cues and materials from the senior building to give a more consistent appearance along the streetscape of two of the Exchange District's main thoroughfares, Arthur and King streets.

Built in 1903, it was designed by Ontario-born architect James H. Cadham in the Romanesque Revival style. This is characterized by the use of round arches, solid brick superstructure resting on a raised stone foundation and flat roofline – combined with other ornamental detailing to create a massive and sturdy structure. The internal support system of square timber beams and posts and heavy wood floors, known as mill construction, gave these warehouses the strength to withstand heavy loads and the ability to maintain integrity after fires.

Both the west (King) and east (Arthur) elevations of the six-storey building are similarly designed, with square headed windows featuring heavy stone sills and heads on the first five floors and arched openings connected by delicate brick drip moulding on the top floor. A modest brick cornice completes both rooflines and an arched, centrally located entrance graces both façades. The north façade abuts the neighbouring building and the south side features painted signage, an open metal fire escape and several raised loading doors. The building appears to be in excellent condition and little alteration has occurred to its exterior elements.

The interior is a mixture of old and new materials, conversion to offices and fire protection upgrading was completed in the 1960s and 1970s and has considerably altered the layout of the interior – the actual warehouse space has been divided into small offices on every floor. Some of the original finishes, tin ceilings for example, are still present. Because of its ownership and use as a combined facility, exterior party walls have been cut and doorways created to allow interior access to both buildings.

The original owner/tenant of the building was Greenshields Western Merchants, wholesale dry goods dealers. This ownership was short lived; Robinson, Little & Company, wholesale dry goods and floor coverings purchased the building and occupied much of the space. Founded in 1875 in London, Ontario the company prospered, moving its headquarters to Winnipeg and soon opening department stores throughout the West. Ultimately known as the ‘big chain of little department stores,’ the company operated over 180 “Robinson Stores” in Western Canada by the 1970s. Competition forced its bankruptcy in 1985.

The company’s connection to the building continued until the 1960s when it became associated with the Silpit Industries Company Limited, clothing manufacturer and distributor, headquartered in the building immediately north but occupying much of the upper floor space at 54 Arthur Street. Silpit still maintains an office in the building; however its manufacturing and warehouse operations have been moved elsewhere.

Elements of the building that would require approval if alterations were planned are:

Exterior:

- The east-facing warehouse with main façades fronting Arthur and King streets
- Boxy, rectangular plan with exposed, roughly-dressed limestone block base and buff brick superstructure
- South façade with roughly-dressed limestone block base, raised loading doors, metal fire escape and painted signage displaying the Silpit logo
- Prominent east entrance inset in radiating rough-cut limestone voussoirs, limestone steps and fanlight
- Regularly spaced window openings with square heads and roughly-dressed limestone accenting, save the round-arched top floor openings with brick drip moulding
- Details including corbelled brick cornice, pilasters, flagpole in southeast corner of building, etc.

Interior:

- High ceilings with ornamental tin panels
- Plank wood flooring
- Some exposed cast-iron columns
- Arched openings connecting the building to 70 Arthur and sliding metal fire doors
- Simple wooden banisters on staircases
- Plank wood bathroom stalls