

RUTLEY, Thomas John (1847 – 1910)

In early days it was often a rare thing to find one architect, let alone several, flourishing in a small community. It is quite unusual then to find three architects with the same last name, Rutley, living and working in Chatham in the late 19th century. Two were brothers—the subject of this sketch, Thomas and his brother Frederick while the third, W. A. Rutley, came to Chatham in 1858. No real connection can be found between the latter Rutley and the brothers.

Thomas Rutley was born in the “Maple City” in 1847, the son of T. R. G. Rutley. His brother Frederick was eight years his junior. Little is known of his architectural training but it appears he set up practice in his home town in the 1870’s. Rutley established a partnership with his brother Frederick which lasted until the late 1880’s after which he practiced on his own.

Rutley designed many of the prominent build-

ings in Chatham including St. Joseph’s Hospital, the Market building, Garner house and many fine residences. Two Morrish style commercial structures, the Stephen’s Building and the Stone Building were constructed with a cast iron frame and facade in 1888.

His major achievement was the grouping of three public buildings at the five-street intersection of Fifth, Sixth and Wellington streets. It was unusual then for an architect to get a chance to design a group of buildings in relationship to one another. Harrison Hall, Chatham’s former City Hall (1889), First Presbyterian Church (1892) and the Central School, now demolished (1896) were all designed in the Richardson Romanesque style. The design of the Presbyterian Church was influenced by H. H. Richardson’s Trinity Church in Boston and was so popular in the Presbytery that replicas were built in Paris, Ontario and Detroit, Michigan.

Important work:

Northwood block, Chatham, Ont.	1887
Public School, Wallaceburg, Ont.	1887
Stephens Building, Chatham	1888
Harrison Hall, 5th St. at 6th St., Chatham	1889
First Presbyterian Church, Chatham	1891
Presbyterian Church, Paris, Ont.	1893-94
Central School, Chatham, Ont.	1896
Kent County Jail, Chatham, Ont.	1899
Town Hall & Market building, Chatham	1905