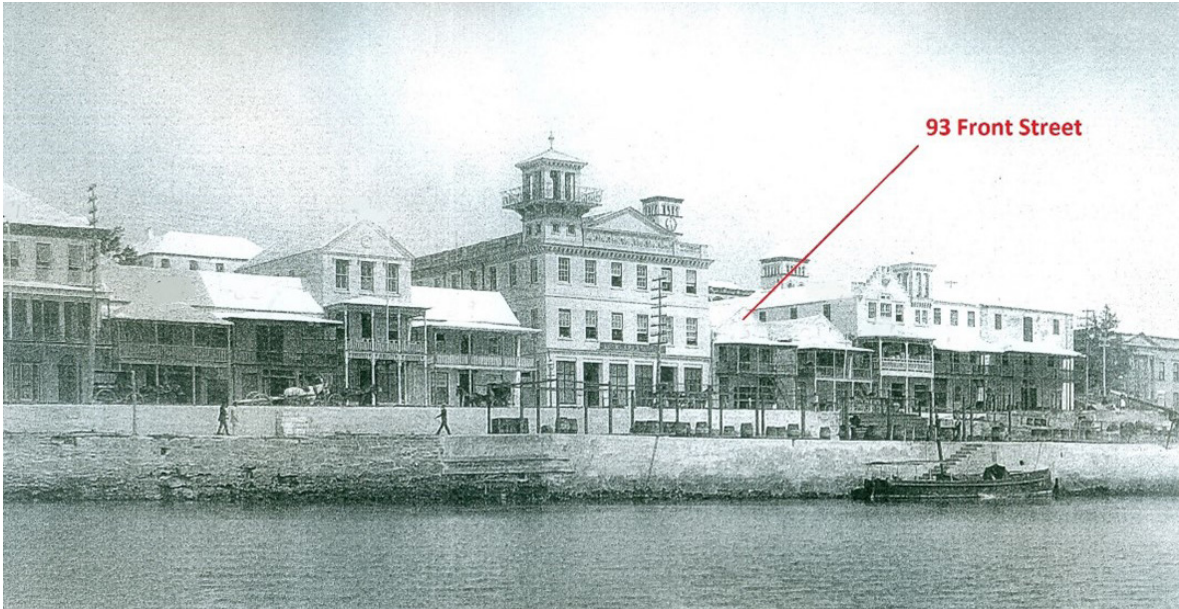


93 FRONT STREET



Front Street between Burnaby and Parliament streets photographed around 1898.

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This is part of a series of architectural articles by the Bermuda National Trust that will highlight some of Bermuda's endangered historic buildings.

Regardless of one's point of view, it cannot be disagreed with that the face of Front Street is changing. The recent planning application by the owners of 93 Front Street to demolish the building, and subsequent demolition, means yet another sad loss of Bermuda's architectural heritage. Its neighbour to the west, 91 Front Street, the former Rum Runners/Café Cairo building, was demolished recently and is being replaced by a nine-storey building totally inappropriate for the area. And a few lots to the west there is a big empty space, ripe for development, where the old J B Astwood/Onion Jack building stood before it was destroyed by fire.

The City of Hamilton Plan 2023 classifies this as a Historic Area that is protected under Section 31 of the Development and Planning Act 1974. The Plan notes this area "contains a variety of architectural styles from different time periods which have combined to provide one of the most enduring and characteristic images of Bermuda".

93 Front Street had a long and interesting history. It was one of the only two vernacular buildings remaining structurally intact on this section of Front Street. The two buildings [93 and 95 Front Street] were built by Henry Gilbert Hunt on one lot, probably in 1814, with gable ends facing the street, and looked almost identical. The buildings were separated by an alley, now known as Bermuda House Lane, which was a right of way for both buildings and for Bermuda House itself on Reid Street.

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This lot was part of an area that had originally been reserved for public buildings and therefore was not offered for sale until 1810. The Corporation of Hamilton minutes record that the area was surveyed in January 1810 and the eight lots were sold at public auction on 26 April. They indicate that Henry Hunt was beginning to build in 1814 when he complained that Robert Bassett next west [the site of the recently demolished former Rum Runners/Café Cairo building, number 91] had encroached on his lot.



Early 20th century postcard when the building housed Bourne's Bazaar.

Hunt's two buildings were constructed as warehouses. When artist Thomas Driver painted this section of Front Street in 1819 they had plain gable fronts, but each had a set of wooden steps leading to small, roofed platforms in front of a central door on their upper storeys. By the time of the earliest surviving photographs in the late 1800s the buildings had wooden verandahs.

Hezekiah Frith in his 1828 court proceedings against the Corporation of Hamilton described the front of every building along Front Street. The Hon H G Hunt's had 'thereon two stores with gable ends facing the street'. This basic structure is exactly as it remains today. The two buildings did not then have verandahs.

With Henry Gilbert Hunt's death in 1851 the ownership of the two buildings was divided. The eastern building went to his nephew Henry Robert Hunt while the western one went to another nephew, also named Henry Gilbert Hunt, who died in 1880. In 1886 when the Bermuda Colonist newspaper moved from St George's to Hamilton its offices occupied the upper floor while various shops used the ground floor premises. In 1902 the building was sold to Arthur Ernest Bourne.

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Apparently Bourne was multitalented. In the classified section of the 1899 Bermuda Almanack he is listed as a cabinetmaker, pastry cook and confectioner as well as ice cream manufacturer. In 1905 he registered trademarks for coloured postcard designs of an angel fish and the Bermuda coat of arms. He opened Bourne's Bazaar and appears to have got away with his larger-than-life signs considering they probably were contravening the Advertising Act of 1911.

93 Front Street was best known as the ticketing office for Pan American Airways. When the airline closed it reverted to shops, Benetton and then Swiss Timing. It had been shuttered up for quite some time.



The wooden verandahs had long been replaced by concrete but Henry Hunt's two warehouses were still structurally the same when photographed about 2014.

It is understood that, probably weakened by the preliminary construction works for the nine-storey building next door, and without care having been taken to stabilise it, part of its western wall collapsed in the recent hurricane, and now the building has been demolished.



Its disappearance means that another piece of Bermuda's architectural heritage has been lost.

Part of the western wall of 93 Front Street, exposed after the demolition of 91 Front Street, collapsed, perhaps partly due to the impact of Hurricane Ernesto.