Bryson, Graham & Co., Ottawa, Canada

By Ken Elder
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Advertising Card. Bryson, Graham & Co., (front & back) undated
(R. McGuire Collection)

Bryson, Graham & Co., was a staple and fancy dry goods business based in Ottawa, Ontario from about 1880 to 1953. The founder of the business, Charles Bryson, began his career as a clerk for Fingland & Draper, dry goods, about 1866. On September 9, 1870 he formed a partnership with Joseph H. Patterson and traded staple and fancy dry goods under the name Patterson & Bryson. The three storey stone store was located at 53 Sparks Street. In 1873, the partnership was dissolved and Charles Bryson continued the business at the same address. In 1875 he moved the store to 110 Sparks Street and continued the business until 1879. After quitting business for a short time, Charles Bryson secured a better location and in 1880 opened in a 3½ storey brick block located at 152-154 Sparks Street. The building dated from 1871. The same year Frederick John Graham joined the firm. Prior to joining Charles Bryson, Frederick was engaged in the sale of agricultural implements. At the time the business consisted of general dry goods, millinery, dressmaking and tailoring. In 1881, Frederick Graham was admitted to the business as a partner, and the name Bryson, Graham & Co. came into being.

Within a few years the partners decided on a policy of "One price to all." At the time the shopper was accustomed to bargain with the merchant. For a time it cost them business, but as the advantages of it gradually became recognized, patronage increased. Initially the business focused on staple and fancy dry goods but over the years, as they added a broader range of goods, they needed more floor space and extended eastward along Sparks Street. In 1885, about the time they began advertising carpets, they leased the adjoining premises, recently vacated by D, McMartin a tailor and clothier at 150 Sparks Street. In 1887, the decision was taken to open a house furnishing department. The most convenient way to accomplish this proved to be acquiring the entire stock of carpets and curtains, floor oil cloths and furniture of Shoolbred and Company, who occupied an adjoining store at 148 Sparks Street, and taking over the lease. In 1889 they bought out the entire stock of dry goods and silks carried by John M. Garland who was conducting a wholesale house at 146 Sparks Street and moved into the place. In 1890, Mr. John Bryson, a brother of Charles, opened a grocery store in the same building, and while this was conducted as a separate enterprise, for some time, it was afterwards consolidated into the business as a whole. In March 1892 the partners made a further extension by buying out Sam Ashfield & Co., the owner of a china and crockery store at 144 Sparks Street. The corner location also enabled them to open a door at 135 O'Connor Street. At this point Bryson, Graham had 104 foot of frontage on Sparks Street and 100 foot of frontage on O'Connor Street. Given the flurry of expansion it is not surprising that the line of goods carried by Bryson, Graham in 1893 now included dry goods, clothing, boots & shoes, carpets, furniture, groceries, crockery, glassware, plated goods and cutlery. Complete possession of the block was completed in 1896 when Bryson, Graham occupied, 142-142½ Sparks Street, previously occupied by Mrs. M. O. Scott, corseterie/white wear. The 142 Sparks Street site was unique in that it extended the full depth of the block and opened on Queen Street. The same year Bryson, Graham built an extension to 142 Sparks and utilized it as a factory entered from 137 Queen Street.

Ottawa's Greatest Store.

Bryson, Graham & Co.

Sparks and O'Connor Streets.

WE'VE GAINED OUR NAME BY SQUARE DEALING.
"ONE PRICE, AND THAT THE LOWEST PRICE."
"NOTHING'S TOO GOOD FOR OUR CUSTOMERS."

IN
COTTONS . . . .
LINENS . . . . .
CORSETS . . . .
NIGHT ROBES .
EMBROIDERIES
LACES . . . . . .
GLOVES . . . . .
VEILINGS . . . .
HOSE . . . . . .
RIBBONS . . . .
PARASOLS . . .
JACKETS . . . .
WRAPS . . . . . .
FURS . . . . . .

A Free Parcel Counter.

A Lunch Room.
Ice Cream Parlor.
Soda Fountain and Candy Counter

Hot Dinners and Tasty Lunches
Served at all hours on the European Plan.

IN
HATS . . . . . .
CAPS . . . . . .
SHIRTS . . . . .
COLLARS . . . .
TIES . . . . . .
UMBRELLAS . .
RIGBY COATS.
TRUNKS . . . .
BOOTS . . . . .
SHOES . . . . .
CLOTHING . . .
GROCERIES . .
MEDICINES . .
SEEDS . . . . .

Our Carpets, Furniture, Stoves, Etc.,
Have made a record for themselves that is the envy of opponents and our pride.

142, 144, 146, 148, 150, 152, 154 Sparks St.

33 and 35 O'Connor Street. Factory: QUEEN ST.

Advertisement.
(The Ottawa City Directory 1897-98)

In 1909 Bryson, Graham & Co. was incorporated as a limited liability company, under the firm name Bryson-Graham, Limited. The officers of the company at this time were: Charles Bryson, President; Frederick J. Graham, Vice-President; H. Beer, Secretary; and J. F. H. Laperriere, Treasurer.

In 1911, the demand for still greater accommodation forced Bryson, Graham, Ltd. to erect a large warehouse on Queen Street which was later converted into part of the store. Bryson-Graham, Limited closed April 18, 1953. The oldest part of the building (152-154 Sparks Street) is currently [2009] occupied by "Yesterday's Restaurant".

Charles Bryson was the son of John Alexander Bryson and Mary (Gamble) Bryson of Richmond, Carleton County. He came to Bytown/Ottawa in 1864. His first job was with T. Hunt and Son and Company who conducted a general dry goods store on the corner of Sparks and Elgin Streets. His apprenticeship served, Charles Bryson entered the employ of Fingland and Draper on Sussex Street. He married the former Oderia Margaret Bearman (1849-1914), daughter of Frederick and Margaret Bearman of Nepean, on July 5, 1871. They had eight daughters and one son. Charles Bryson played little part in public life, preferring instead to direct all his energies and attention to the business which he had chosen. However, his philanthropies quietly executed, were many. He was a member of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church. Oderia Margaret (Bearman) Bryson died on May 24, 1914. Charles Bryson died suddenly at his summer residence, Kingsmere on August 14, 1917 in his 73rd year.

Frederick John Graham was the son of William Graham and Martha (McCullough) Graham of Huntley Township. For a time, Frederick worked on his father's farm. Later he became representative for the district of various farm implement companies. In 1876, when about the age of 23, he decided to seek a wider field in Ottawa and moved there. He formed a partnership with William Arnold, and they had a place of business on the north side of Sparks Street, operating a seed store and a farm implement depot. In 1880 he joined Charles Bryson in the staple and fancy dry-goods business. He married Margaret Graham Bryson, daughter of John Alexander Bryson and Mary (Gamble) Bryson of Richmond, Carleton County on August 15, 1882. They had one son, William McCullough and two daughters, Mary and Florence. He was a member of St. George's church and a faithful worker and attendant. He was also a member of Doric lodge A. F. &. M. Margaret (Bryson) Graham died August 31, 1922 after a brief and sudden illness in her 67th year. Frederick Graham died at his summer cottage "Grahamhurst" at Britannia on September 4, 1923 in his 70th year.

Table of References

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The Ottawa Evening Journal, May 26, 1914, p. 15 ("Deaths") (Oderia Margaret (Bearman) Bryson")

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