

Carpenters' Shop Halifax, Nova Scotia

With humble clapboard siding, the Carpenters' Shop on Upper Water Street is more modest than its brick and stone neighbours near the Halifax waterfront. You have to go back a long way to find the first connections between the Shop and the history of Halifax.



Photo: Mike Foster, General Manager,
Historic Properties, Nova Scotia

The story begins in the late 18th-century, when Halifax was home to the Royal Navy of British North America. At this location, workers dug a trough from the water's edge inland 30.5 metres or more. They lined the trough—or berth—with granite blocks.

In the early 1800s the berth was filled in. Records show that blacksmith Edward Foster built his shop here, at the centre of shipping and mercantile activity. Foster and sons earned a living repairing ships, mills, houses, anchors, and tools.

In the 1830s the shop took on a new function. Called the King's Warehouse, it was one of several warehouses for storing trade goods and the property seized by privateers.

At the time, Halifax was booming with new wealth. Enos Collins, the fabulously rich privateer who founded the Bank of Halifax, built the Ironstone Warehouse and the Pickford and Black Building, two buildings that survive to this day.

In 1904 a fire swept the Halifax waterfront, destroying the King's Warehouse. The Carpenters' Shop of today was built in 1905 to replicate the late 19th-century version. It is a 175 foot long shed topped by a flat composite roof, with evenly spaced windows for light and a series of shuttered double doors for loading merchandise.

In the 1970s Halifax city councillors came close to approving a highway scheme that would have levelled the entire waterfront district of Halifax. Fortunately for Halifax and everyone else who appreciates heritage, several entrepreneurs came forward with a plan to redevelop the area as the Historic Properties and thereby saved the buildings. One of the Properties, the carefully restored Carpenters' Shop is a viable commercial building, with offices and retail businesses, a place that links Halifax to its 300 year past.