

Charles Ogilvy Limited, Ottawa

By Ken Elder
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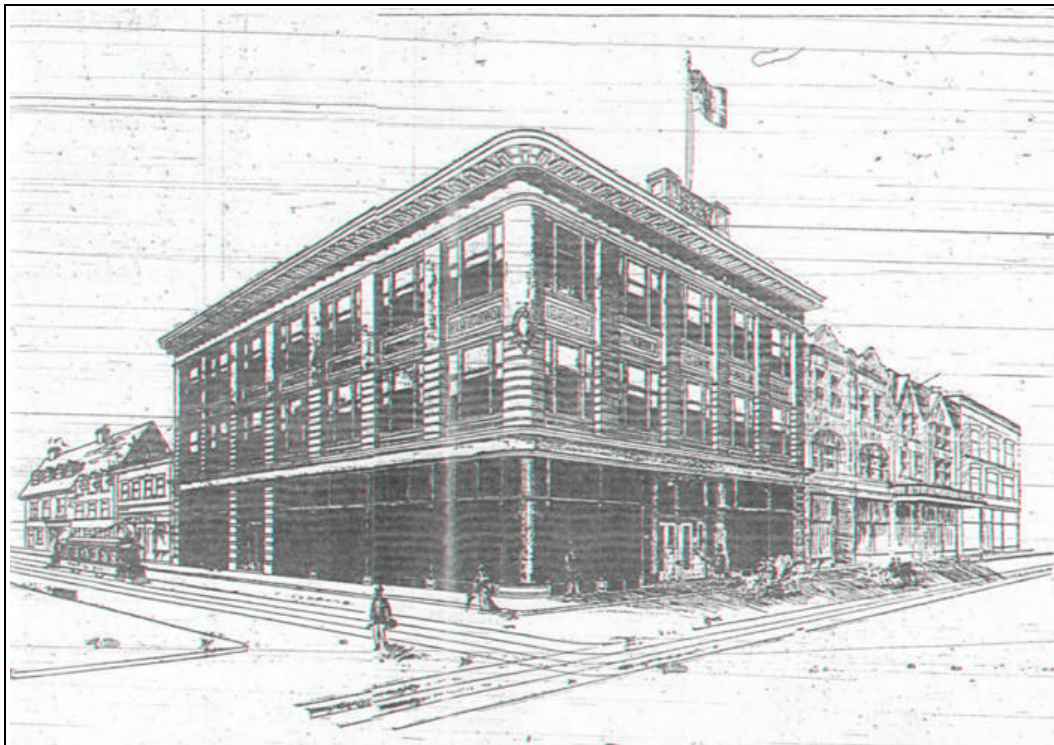
Charles Ogilvy Limited, or "Ogilvy's", was a department store in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, founded in 1887. For much of the 20th century, Ogilvy's was one of Ottawa's higher-end department stores.



Postcard. Ogilvy's Boy's Clothing Dept. n.d.
(K. Elder collection)

Charles Ogilvy (1861-1950) was born in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1861 and immigrated to Canada with his family in 1863. His father, James Ogilvy, established a stationery store in Ottawa. In 1885, he married Lily Allison, the younger daughter of George A. Allison and Martha M. Allison of Cornwallis, Nova Scotia. Charles Ogilvy was an ethical businessman, known for his honourable behaviour. He was on the executive committee of the Union Mission for many years. Elizabeth 'Lily' Ogilvy died at her home 488 Edison Avenue in Westboro on February 5, 1946 in her 87th year. Charles Ogilvy died in 1950. He bequeathed the store to his employees.

Charles Ogilvy opened a dry goods shop at 92 Rideau Street near the corner of Mosgrove Street on November 16, 1887. Charles Ogilvy, John Pittaway and one clerk comprised the staff. Prior to opening his own shop, Charles Ogilvy was a clerk with Elliott and Hamilton, Dry Goods. The business prospered and more stores were annexed; 94 Rideau Street (1892), 96 Rideau Street (1897) and 98 Rideau Street (1900). The interior divisions were removed and a rear extension of 25 feet added to No.'s 96 and 98, giving to all the four stores, now thrown into one, a total width and depth of 70 by 90 feet. Departments were laid out in a modern and convenient form, resulting in still further growth of the business which just about doubled itself since the last important change in 1900. In due course, Ogilvy's outgrew the accommodation provided by the premises at Rideau and Mosgrove Streets and in 1907, a three storey structure was erected at 126-132 Rideau Street (corner of Rideau and Nicholas Streets) on land purchased from the Dolan estate. The new building occupied one half of the block (5 bays facing Rideau Street and 7 bays facing Nicholas Street). The architects for the project were Northwood and Noffke.



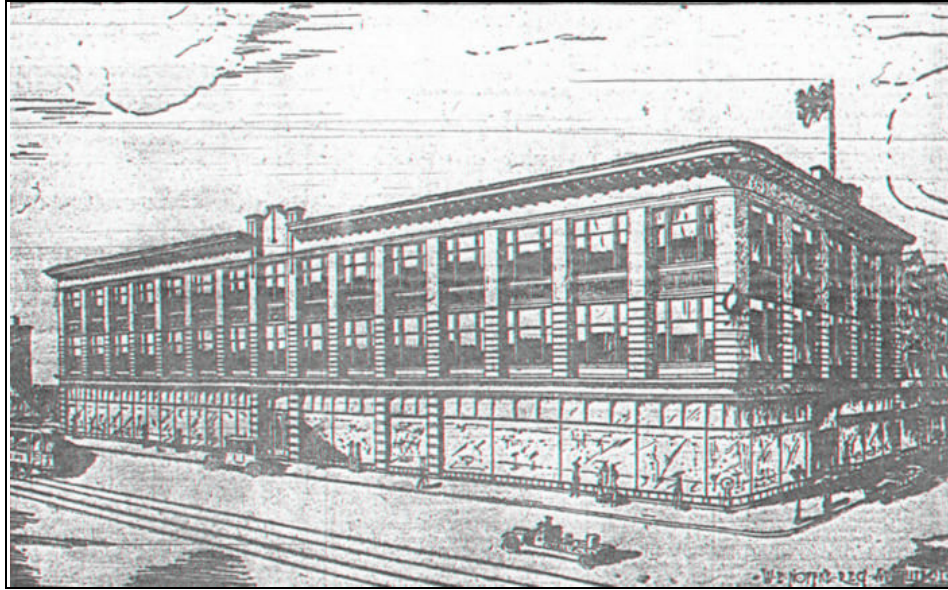
Architectural perspective of new dry goods building to be erected at the corner of Rideau and Nicholas Streets by Mr. Charles Ogilvy.
(The Evening Journal, May 12, 1906)

The new building, one of the first steel and concrete edifices in Ottawa, provided a striking contrast to the original store at 92 Rideau, where the floor space was only 20 x

30 feet. One of the main features was that the whole front and side of the structure presented an unbroken and immense show window without the usual piers. Instead of these, an adequately strong steel frame work was placed back of the window- glass, the visible parts being covered with bevelled plate glass mirrors. The outside walls were built of buff, pressed brick with Indiana sandstone trimmings and inside walls were lined with hollow terra-cotta brick. The floors were entirely fireproof, the Clinton fireproofing system of the Clinton Fireproofing Co., of Clinton, Mass., being adopted. The style of the building was Classic, with simple Grecian effects, harmonizing with the principal design and imparting a solid yet pleasing appearance.

The building was three-storeys high and basement, but provision was made in the walls and steel work to carry three additional storeys when required. The ground floor had a high ceiling with “mezzanine” floor between for offices. The first floor had a handsomely furnished ladies’ parlour and toilet rooms and the basement provided mens lavatories and other requisites. An Otis-Fensom elevator was installed to reach the several floors and both it and the stairways to the different flats were enclosed with fireproof encasement. The cost of the building was about \$40,000 and the contractors were: masonry and brickwork, Cowie & Daugherty; carpenter and joiner work, Christie & McCready; painting and glazing, J. B. Duford; plastering, Jas. McLaughlin; cement fireproofing, George Latham; electrical work, P. S. Marchand & Co.; galvanized iron and fireproof windows, McFarlane & Douglas; roofing, J. D. Sanderson; Butterworth & Co., heating; and Locomotive Machine Co., steel work.

The new store was opened on August 6, 1907. On entering the store patrons were met with rich “golden oak” colour, fixtures fabricated by S. L. Kyle. In 1908 a Limited Company was formed and the firm emerged as Charles Ogilvy Limited. In 1914, Werner Edgar Noffke (1878-1964) designed an addition to the building which would double its size by extending back a further 7 bays to Besserer Street. Since 1907, the volume of business had more than doubled. Construction began August 1, 1914.



W. E. Noffke perspective of enlarged store premises of Charles Ogilvy Limited, 1917
(The Ottawa Evening Journal, May 10, 1917)

The building was similar in height and detailing to the 1907 store. The contractors for the project were Shuttleworth and Black. Important features of the enlarged store were the favourable lighting facilities obtained from the three streets, Rideau, Besserer and Nicholas, on all of which the store faced. The expectation was that the extension would be complete on April 1st, 1915. Owing to circumstances largely brought about the war, the work was stopped. In May of 1917 the project was re-started and completed the same year.

By 1931 all space in the building was being used and in spite of the depression an additional storey, designed by Ottawa architect, A. J. Hazelgrove, was added. In 1934 a fifth and final storey, also designed by Hazelgrove, was added, making it the largest department store in Ottawa.



Postcard. Rideau Street elevation of Charles Ogilvy.
Store decorated for Royal Visit of 1939.
(C. R. McGuire collection)

Ogilvy's was a thriving retail enterprise, and had over 300 employees by 1943. It was famous for its "tartan boxes" decorated with the Ogilvy hunting tartan. The success of Ottawa's local department stores, such as Ogilvy's, Freimans, Murphy-Gamble and Caplan's discouraged the expansion of national chains (including Eaton's, Simpson's, Simpsons-Sears and The Bay) into the National Capital Region until the 1950s (Simpsons-Sears opened its Carlingwood outlet in 1955).

In 1942 Ogilvy's purchased "Westboro Woodworkers" at the corner of Richmond Road and Winona Avenue to obtain a supply of unpainted furniture. They also opened a number of small satellite stores in proximity to its Rideau Street store. On April 1, 1954 Ogilvy's opened a branch store, designed by A. J. Hazelgrove, on the site of the former "Westboro Woodworkers" in Westboro. On June 7, 1954 the Charles Ogilvy Warehouse (shared by C. S. Walker Uniform Manufacturing Co.) at 72 York Street was destroyed by fire. In 1960 a two storey and basement addition was made to the main store, 132 feet on Rideau Street and along Besserer for 99 feet. In 1962 another store was opened at the suburban Billings Bridge Plaza in south Ottawa. At this point Ogilvy's had 700 plus employees. In April of 1968 construction started on the Lincoln Fields Shopping Centre at the intersection of Richmond Road and Carling Avenue. The centre, designed by Webb, Zerafa, Menkes architects of Toronto, included a new Charles Ogilvy Limited store, as a replacement of their Westboro branch store. The store opened in 1972.

On December 28, 1969 the Ogilvy Annex on Rideau Street was the victim of a major fire which originated in the Guardsman restaurant next door. The main store suffered extensive smoke damage. The fire, the expansion of national department store chains into Ottawa and the harsh economic climate of the 1980s, all proved disastrous for Ogilvy's. The main store was expanded and re-opened as part of the Rideau Centre project on March 16, 1983, but changes were on the horizon. Charles Ogilvy Limited merged with the G. W. Robinson Limited chain, based in Burlington, on December 27, 1984, and operated under the Robinson-Ogilvy banner for 20 months. Although, Robinson Ogilvy spent more than \$2 million renovating the Rideau Street store and upgrading the other two Ottawa stores, retail analysts noted sales had slipped in recent years because of competition from specialty stores and Ogilvy's image as an expensive place to shop. In September 1986, Robinson-Ogilvy was sold to Comark Services Inc., a specialty fashion retailer and the "Ogilvy" was dropped from the store name, and the small chain became known as "Robinson's". An era in Ottawa retailing was over.

The Place d'Orléans Robinson's store was the first to close in 1992, and the closure of the remaining Ottawa locations followed soon thereafter. In 1996, the Hudson's Bay Company acquired the remaining assets of Robinson-Ogilvy Ltd, although by that time the firm had been absent from Ottawa for four years. The Robinson's/Ogilvy's store was converted to a Zellers store in 1996.

Ogilvy's former Rideau Street store remains, although it has been vacant for a number of years. Designated under the Ontario Heritage Act in 2000, most of the building's Rideau and Nicholas Street façades will be preserved when the building is incorporated into a planned expansion of the downtown Rideau Centre shopping mall.

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