

335 MAIN STREET – BANK OF MONTREAL
McKim, Mead & White, 1913



At the south-east corner of Portage and Main stands the Bank of Montreal – a landmark created by America’s leading neo-classicists, McKim, Mead & White, and their only Winnipeg building. The structure occupies a unique place in Bank of Montreal corporate architecture. Its classical and unadorned simplicity make it a prime example of that institution’s particular style.

The Bank of Montreal has enjoyed a long and profitable history in Winnipeg. In 1877 it opened its first branch in rented premises at Broadway and Main. Several years later, corporate directors concluded that a location closer to the city’s main business district would attract new clients. In 1881, the time to capitalize on a land boom associated with the arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the bank opened a new brick building near the south-west corner of Main and Portage. A handsome edifice, this second Bank of Montreal stood the test of time. Its attractive mahogany beam-panelled ceiling, central light dome and mahogany pillars attracted customers. Yet not even the Bank of Montreal could thwart an early twentieth century move to grandiose and monumental banking facilities. In 1910 the Bank of Montreal opted for new quarters.

The present Bank of Montreal closely resembles a Roman temple – the image that its owners wished to convey. More pronounced than smaller structures in Hamilton, Sherbrooke, Brantford, and Calgary, the building is characterized by a massive colonnade extending upwards from ground level and crowned by a substantial entablature and pediment. Except for the bank's name and a brief inscription on the pediment, there is no detailing. The building stands starkly conservative, but neo-classical in its unadorned stonework.

Nothing but the finest materials went into the building. Its exterior was constructed from granite quarried at Bethel, Vermont. Inside the main banking hall, architects specified Botticino marble imported from northern Italy. Floor, columns, and counters are finished in marble while a custom gold-leaf ceiling looms overhead. Upstairs, former officers' quarters have long since been converted into office space. In 1910, the building cost \$1,295,000 to construct.

The building stands as a tribute to the abilities of its architects – McKim, Mead & White. Trained in France, members of this firm only designed monumental edifices and confined themselves to buildings with restrained neo-classical or new-Renaissance motifs. Along with Columbia University, the Boston Public Library, the Minneapolis Museum of Fine Arts, and Pennsylvania Railroad Station, the Bank of Montreal stands as one of this firm's major achievements.

The building's owners have understood the historical value of their banking hall. Since its 1913 completion, the building has been meticulously maintained. In 1974, the Bank of Montreal undertook a \$2,400,000 exterior and interior restoration. In 1976 a modern heating system was installed. Today Winnipeg's Portage and Main landmark proclaims to all its pre-World War I magnificence.