

78 PRINCESS STREET

*Formerly: 78-84 Princess, Mackenzie and Powis Warehouse, 1891
86-88 Princess, Miller, Morse Warehouse, 1887, 1892*



The pre-1900 buildings that today comprise a single complex at 78 Princess Street share similarities in design, purpose and history.

They symbolize Winnipeg's rise as the major wholesale distribution centre in Western Canada — a role made possible by development of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the 1880s and later enhanced by favourable freight rates and expansion of the regional rail network.

The buildings also represent the early outward growth of the city's warehouse district from its initial locus east of Main Street near the Red River and west of Main around Market Square. On Princess, this growth displaced private homes. The structures that now line the street between Notre Dame and William avenues are among the city's oldest surviving warehouses. As such, they are integral to the area recently designated by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada as a National Historic District.

Both buildings at 78 Princess are of solid brick construction with stone foundations and interior

frames of square timber beams and posts. Both were designed by George Creeford Browne of Winnipeg in the Romanesque Revival style as characterized by their rusticated stone bases, thick brick superstructures, arched doors and windows, and textured detailing. Features such as these conveyed an image of massiveness and sturdiness which gave the Romanesque Revival style wide appeal in the warehouse district where buildings had to accommodate large, heavy loads.

Architect Browne (1852-1919) was active in Manitoba and the North-West Territories in the 1880s and 1890s. He designed most types of buildings for a client base that included governments, the Hudson's Bay Company and church organizations. Notable among his local projects were the Massey Building, Young Men's Christian Association (Birk's) Building, Masonic Temple, and Wesley College (University of Winnipeg) co-planned with S.F. Peters. Browne was born and received his early professional training in Montréal. He worked in New York City and studied in Europe before opening a Winnipeg office in 1882. He returned to New York in c.1910.

The buildings at 78 Princess are joined by a party wall. After ownership of the properties was consolidated under one entity in the mid-1970s, openings were made in the wall to enable the interior to function as a single complex. Further integration occurred in 1991 when boilers were installed in 86-88 Princess to heat both structures.

78-84 Princess Street

This warehouse at the northwest corner of Princess and McDermot Avenue was built in 1891 for the wholesale grocery firm of Mackenzie and Powis.

Its symmetrical main façades originally extended three floors from a raised stone foundation to an ornamented parapet. The east (Princess) elevation was divided into seven bays. On the main floor were two entrances and five large windows set within layered round-arch surrounds and topped by brick drip moulding. The upper bays were delineated by two-storey brick arches that encompassed flat-headed windows on the second floor and round-headed openings on the third. The roof-line was marked by an arcaded and corbelled brick cornice and pedimented parapet. Additional ornamentation was provided by a rusticated stone belt course, stone lintels, sills and

keystones, brick spandrels, and other patterned brickwork. The south (McDermot) elevation was similar in design except that only four of its 10 upper bays were given windows and the parapet was not pedimented.

The building's first owner was organized in Winnipeg in 1882 as Lyon, Mackenzie and Powis. Pioneer merchant William H. Lyon was an American who entered the Red River Settlement in the 1850s. Kenneth Mackenzie, a Scot, and Edmund Powis, an Englishman, were youngsters when their families emigrated to Canada West (Ontario). They eventually met and in 1873 formed a tea importing partnership in Montréal. Prior to then, Powis had worked briefly in Winnipeg for the J. Turner Wholesale Grocery Co.

By the late 1890s, only Mackenzie (1839-1928) remained active in the enterprise which was renamed the K. Mackenzie Co. He retired in 1910. Six years later, the warehouse was sold to the Redmond Co., a manufacturer and wholesaler of furs and other winter clothing. Ownership later passed to the Montreal Trust Co. which rented the premises to various tenants.

The next significant change occurred in the early 1940s when Cornelius Abraham De Fehr (1881-1979) bought the property. He was a German Mennonite who had fled the Ukraine following a Communist takeover in the early 1920s. After settling in Winnipeg, he began to import cream separators, ploughs and small hardware items. He and three sons eventually specialized in the furniture and appliance trade.

Early in the De Fehr company's tenure, the ground-floor exterior of 78-84 Princess was remodelled. Stucco was applied to the east façade, the northern entrance was converted to a window, arched windows were replaced by large, plate-glass openings in metal frames, and basement windows were closed. The ornate parapet disappeared in 1949 when a fourth storey lit by squared windows was added.

Interior alterations also were made over the years. However, most of the brick walls and wooden posts and beams have been left exposed on the upper levels. As well, some original wood flooring and tin ceiling remain visible at the rear of the main floor.

De Fehr Furniture continued on site until the mid-1990s. The property, including 86-88 Princess, was sold to Earn International Inc. in 1997.

86-88 Princess Street

The original three-storey section of this building was erected in 1887 by a hardware wholesaler, Miller, Morse and Company.

The symmetrical front (east) façade was divided into three bays. Rusticated stone covered the basement and main floor. The recessed centre entrance was set in a round arch and accessed via a short flight of stairs from grade. To both sides were large arched windows. Upper floors were faced with brick, divided by pilasters and lit by segmentally arched openings. Second-storey windows were set in layered brick surrounds and topped by decorative keystones. The pilasters at this level also displayed detailed brickwork. Less elaborate keystones and pilaster ornamentation were applied to the third floor. The roof-line was marked by a heavy, bracketed iron cornice, plus a brick parapet. Additional detailing included a rusticated stone belt course, stone sills, brick corbels, and other patterned brickwork.

Capacity was doubled when a building of identical design was added to the north side in 1892. Further expansion occurred in 1920 when two floors were added on top of the complex, displacing the galvanized iron cornice.

Miller, Morse and Co. was formed in 1881 by Hyman Miller and Fred W. and F. Morton Morse. As western settlement expanded, so too did the company's business and need for space. By 1904, it had moved west to new premises at McDermot and Adelaide Street.

Ownership of 86-88 Princess passed to the J. Stuart Machinery Co., a wholesaler of electrical supplies, and William A. Marsh Co. (later Congdon, Marsh Ltd.), a shoe wholesaler. Congdon, Marsh eventually acquired and retained ownership of the entire site until 1974 when the property was sold to C.A. De Fehr and Sons.

Alterations over the years included closure of the northern entrance and changes in interior finishes, lighting and main-floor partitions. However, much of the original upper-storey space remains open and intact.