



48 ALBERT STREET
ROYAL ALBERT HOTEL

HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE

12 December, 1980

48 ALBERT STREET
Royal Albert Hotel

This hotel has an elusive history shaped by factors of time and place. It was never exceptionally glamorous or luxurious, thus missed particular attention from the press or the glossy booster pamphlets which Winnipeg's Chamber of Commerce published. Its location on a narrow winding street kept in shadow by nearby tall buildings made it difficult to photograph. Although familiar to its patrons and to people doing business in the area, this first block of Albert Street became a backwater as the flow of traffic was directed away from the street onto more efficient thoroughfares. Yet, the Royal Albert Hotel¹ has endured in its particular niche and served its patrons well since its opening in 1913.

As Winnipeg's economy continued to boom, countless numbers of people passed through the city on business or came to live. The demand for hotel space spawned the construction of many hotels of all grades and sizes. The city was quite full of itself in these years, seeming to view each new public building as furthering its aspirations. Hotels were taken by some as a barometer of a city's success:

Good hotels - not necessarily luxurious, but in keeping with the size and importance of a community - are essential to the welfare of any town or city of progressive tendencies; just as much as is a transient class itself necessary to give an added stir to the town or city's commercial, industrial and social activities.²

Unfortunately for the Royal Albert, the construction and opening of the Fort Garry Hotel, Grand Truck Pacific's prestigious railway hotel, occupied the press utterly. The opening of the Royal Albert in the fall of 1913 received no comment, although the Free Press had run a picture of its excavation and foundation work the previous spring.³

The site had previously held a boarding house containing 11 suites. At the same time as the Royal Albert went up, another hotel on the corner of Albert and Notre Dame was also constructed. The aforementioned photograph shows teams of horses and wagons hauling the earth out of the site in the early spring while labourers hack away more earth.⁴ The permit for occupancy was given on 14 October, which allowed the furniture to be moved in.

The hotel was designed by Edgar D. McGuire, who was listed both on the building permit and in Henderson's as an architect. W.M. Scott, a prominent structural engineer in the city, built the hotel. Scott had come to the west with the Winnipeg Hydro development activity some years before. When the dam sites became operational in 1911, he went in business as a consulting engineer until becoming Chairman of the Winnipeg Water District's Board of Commissioners in 1920.⁵ The proprietors of the new Royal Albert were J. Patrick Grogan and Angelo Ferrari, names which give credence to the hotel's advertisement as on the "European Plan."⁶

The hotel is four storeys, originally containing 53 private rooms on the upper three floors. The bathrooms were centrally located on each floor and there were also three common parlours. The ground floor was entirely typical of hotels at the time. There was a cigar stand, the kitchens, a serving area and private offices. The bar was on the south length of the building where the restaurant is presently located. On the north side was a long café, lit overhead by a beautiful skylight of stained glass which is still a feature in the pub. Located in the basement were a barber shop, wine cellar and beer cooler, a vegetable cellar and the boiler rooms.

The hotel is mainly rectangular in shape with a slight jog across the front to accommodate a curve in the street. There is a cutaway section on the north side for the skylight. Plans show concrete footings regularly spaced under the concrete foundation. The dimensions are 48 feet 11 inches by 139 feet. The walls are made of brick and the roof was originally slightly peaked. Construction of the hotel (excluding the lot and furnishing) cost \$85,000.⁷

McGuire's design of the Royal Albert was certainly intended to support its European style. The rusticated treatment of the main floor façade, which mimics arcading, the red tile roof and stylized iron lights, and the ornate wrought iron balconies give an impression of Italianate architecture popular thirty years before. The interior was considerably more traditional with dark woodwork and a utilitarian furnishing of the upper floors.

At the time of its construction, the Royal Albert was in the heart of a thriving and vibrant warehouse

district which supported a large number of buyers, agents and sales staff. We may presume that these were a good part of the hotel's clientele. Over the years, the Royal Albert changed as the downtown area changed its functions and needs. Revitalization of the hotel and of the Albert Street area has given the Royal Albert more prominence than it has had for decades.

Footnotes--

1. The hotel was clearly named for its location, which was named for Prince Albert, the Prince Consort of Queen Victoria. Together with King and Princess, this forms a sequence which occurred in some combination in many towns and cities through Canada.
2. "New Hotels in the Canadian West" Construction May 1910 p. 84.
3. "Excavating for the Royal Albert Hotel on Albert" Free Press 5 April 1913 p. 11.
4. By comparison, a new steam shovel was used in the excavation work of the Fort Garry Hotel.
5. "W.M. Scott Retires Dec. 31 From Two Boards" Tribune 27 November, 1950.
6. Henderson's Directory for Winnipeg, 1914. Advertisement for the Royal Albert Hotel. The rates given were \$1.50 to \$2.00 a night.
7. City of Winnipeg Building Permit no. 265, 14 March 1913.

48 ALBERT STREET – ROYAL ALBERT HOTEL

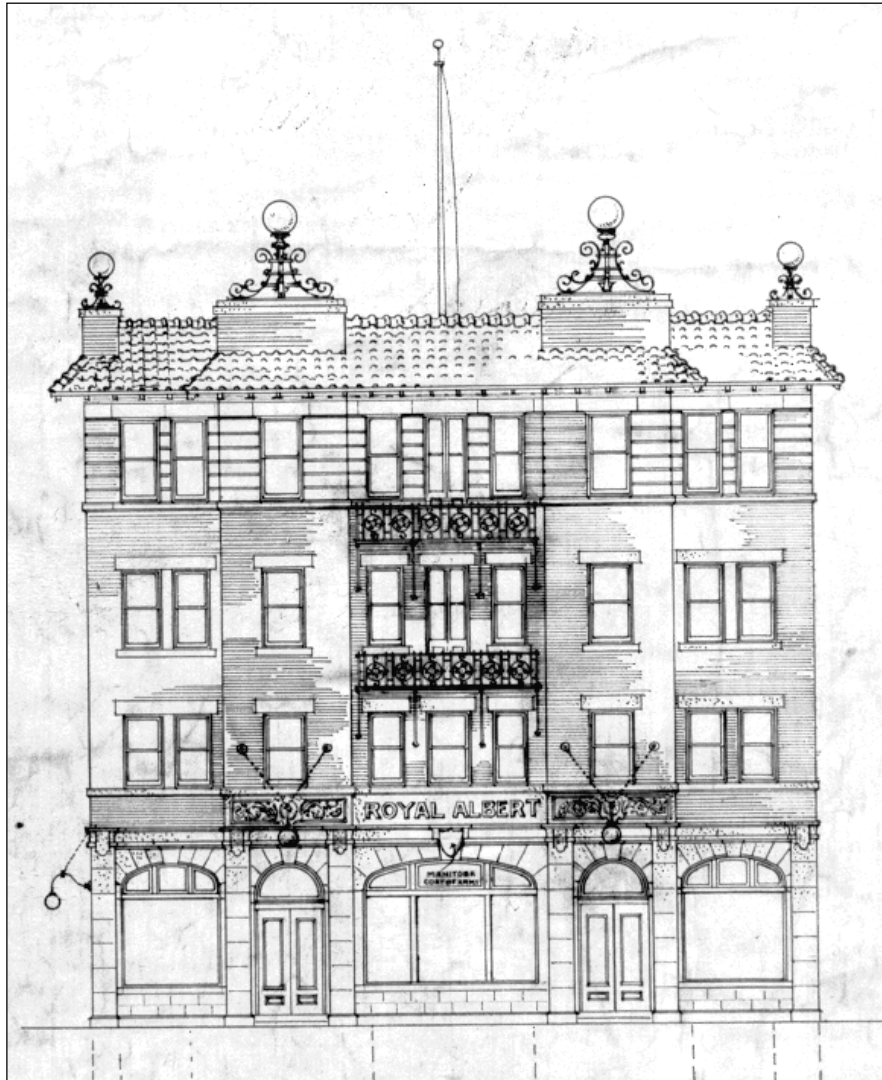


Plate 1 – Architect’s Plans, “Front Elevation,” 1913. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N1399.)

48 ALBERT STREET – ROYAL ALBERT HOTEL

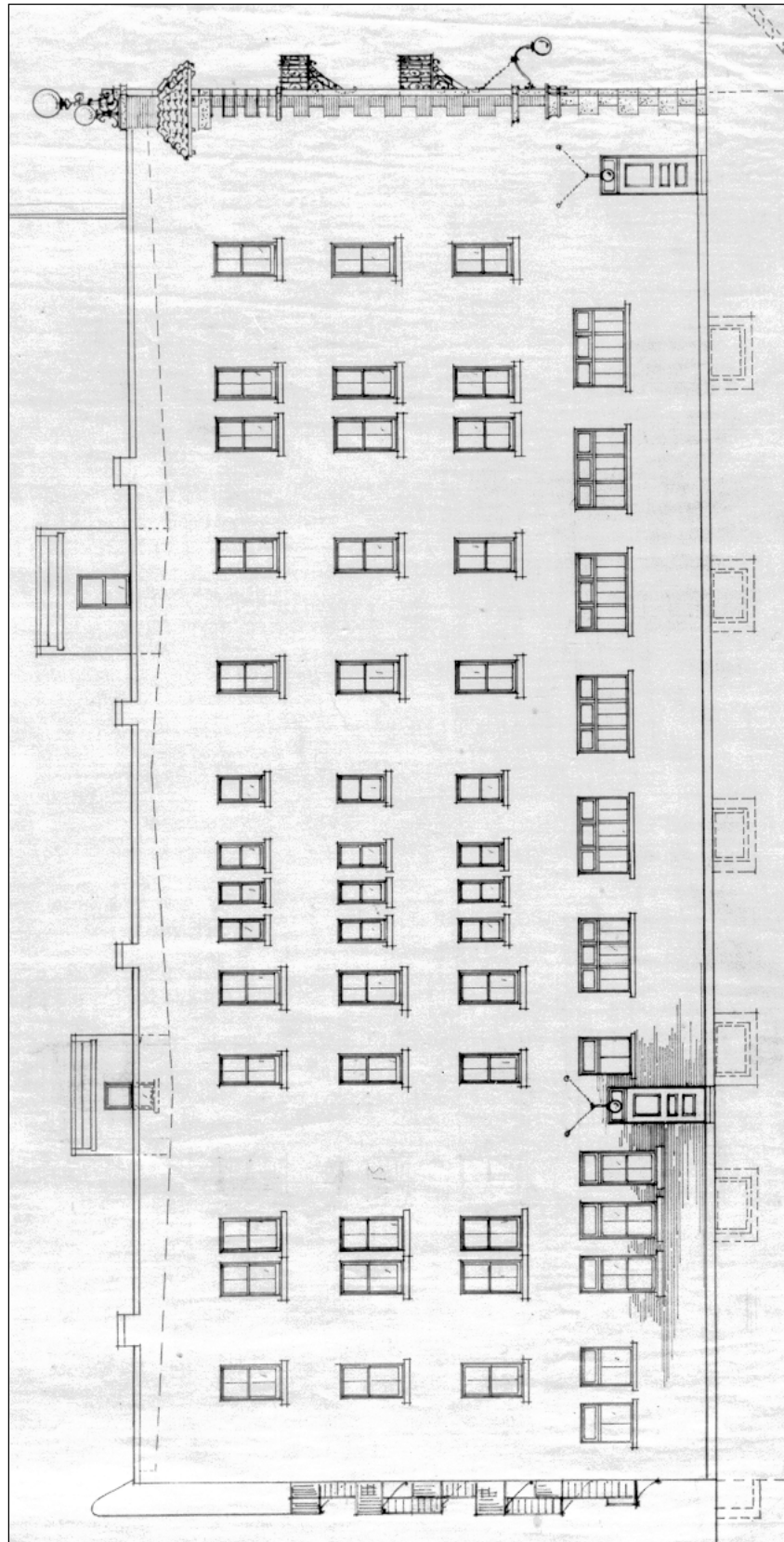


Plate 2 – Architect’s Plans, “Side Elevation,” 1913. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N1400.)

48 ALBERT STREET – ROYAL ALBERT HOTEL

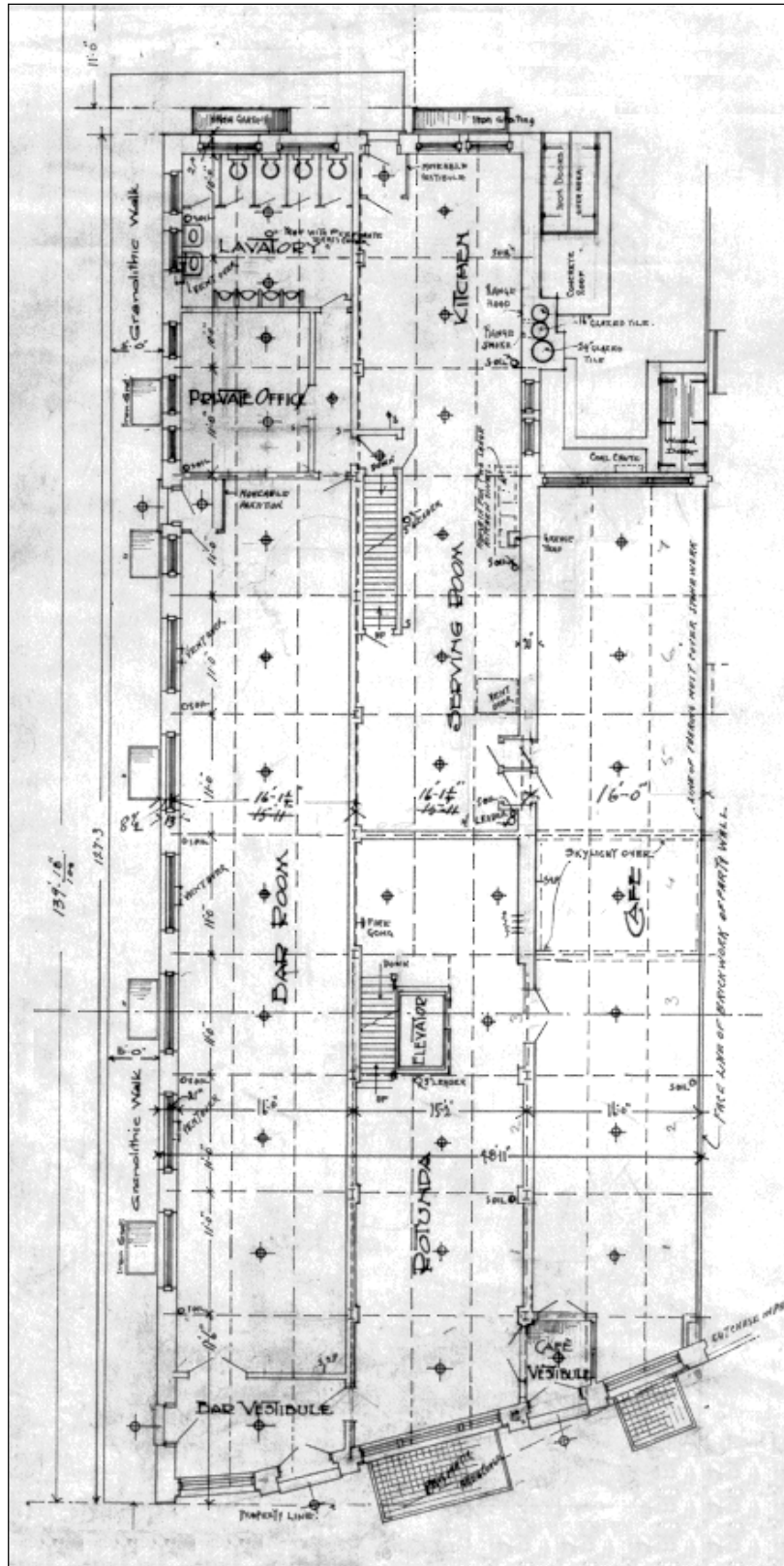


Plate 3 – Architect’s Plans, “Ground Floor Plan,” 1913. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N1406.)

48 ALBERT STREET – ROYAL ALBERT HOTEL

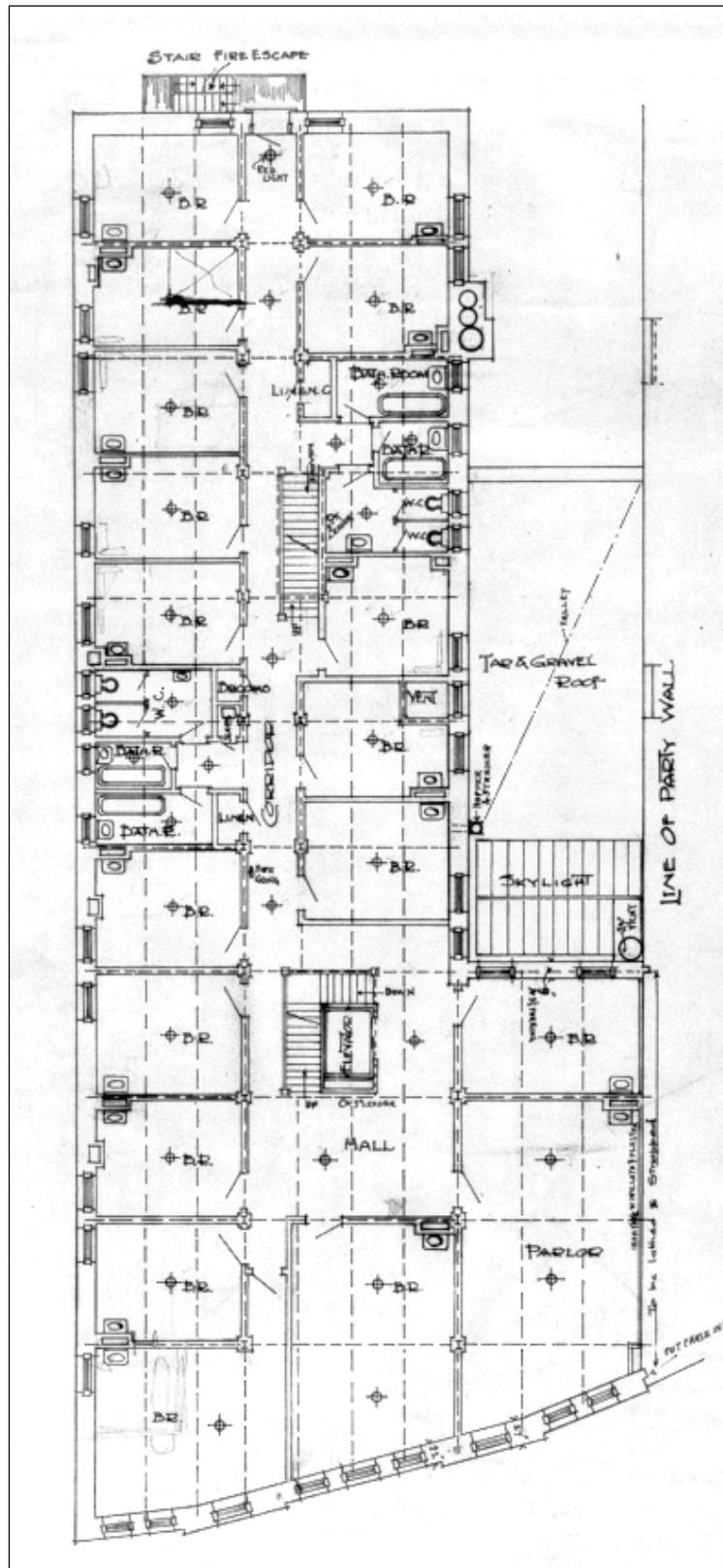


Plate 4 – Architect's Plans, "First Floor Plan," 1913. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N1407.)

48 ALBERT STREET – ROYAL ALBERT HOTEL

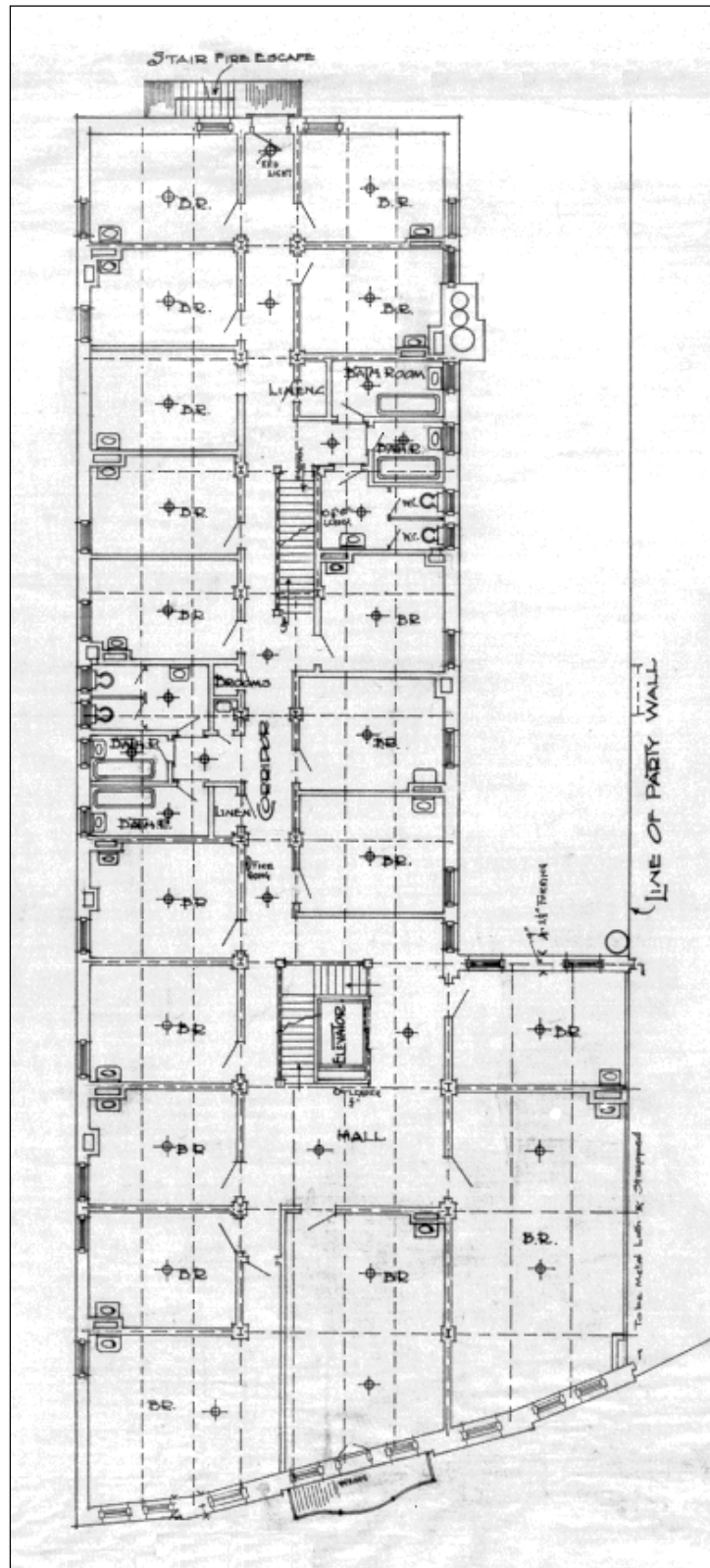


Plate 5 – Architect’s Plans, “Second and Third Floor Plan,” 1913. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N1408.)