

**91 ALBERT STREET – IMPERIAL DRY GOODS BLOCK**  
*J.H. Cadham, 1899*



This three-storey structure originally extended from its front door on Main Street back to Albert Street and was constructed as a retail outlet for R.J. Whitla and Company, dry goods wholesalers. This was a large and prominent Winnipeg firm that supplied clothing, fabrics and furs to the entire prairie region that was developing at an astounding rate at the turn of the century. Whitla's was one of many wholesale interests based in Winnipeg's warehouse district, and Whitla himself had built three large warehouses when he opened the Imperial Dry Goods Block in 1899.

It had the best of both worlds, the front in a bustling retail strip, the rear loading docks in the heart of the warehouse district. Inside was a feast of dry goods stock: linens, clothing, notions and toys. However, the Main Street block between McDermot Avenue and Bannatyne Avenue

soon took on a different complexion as the financial district sprawled northward. The Bank of Toronto built beside the Imperial Dry Goods Block. In 1908, Whitla sold his store and land to the Royal Bank. Building within the side walls of the former store, the bank erected a new structure on Main Street the following year. Only the Albert Street section remained, approximately one-third of the original store. New windows and a door were added to this, and a heavy brick party wall was erected to separate the old store from the bank.

This Albert Street section was first used as warehouse space for a variety of businesses until it was sold in 1929 to the Canadian Legion. In 1935, the Max Steinkopf family bought the structure and converted it into the Young Men's Hebrew Association. Until 1952, the YMHA on Albert Street was a hive of recreational, social and cultural activity until the group outgrew the facilities and built the existing "Y" on Hargrave Street. From 1953 to 1975, an auction mart and small businesses were located at 91 Albert Street until the building was renovated by Trend Interiors, creating new and vibrant commercial and office space in the old dry goods store.