

## 38-44 1/2 ALBERT STREET – BUSINESS BLOCK

*J.J. Johnston (contractor), 1877; W.A. Irish, 1924*



This unassuming, mixed-use structure on the west side of Albert Street near Notre Dame Avenue consists of two parts – a house that dates back to a time when Winnipeg was little more than a pioneer village and a commercial addition built in the mid-1920s as the city recovered from World War I and several years of economic depression.

The two-storey, wood frame and brick veneer house, built for \$2,000 by local contractor J.J. Johnston in 1877, was established as a rental property by investor-merchant John O. LeCappellain. He operated a wholesale/retail hardware business on Main Street in 1877-78 and also was employed with the Ashdown Hardware Co. He later became a City alderman (1881) and broker (1882).

In March 1882 during a speculative property boom, LeCappellain moved his house several feet to the south to make way for construction of a long, narrow, two-storey business block. He subsequently encountered financial difficulties, however, when collapse of the boom led to

recession. In 1885, the Manitoba and North West Loan Co. assumed title to the site.

The house, which once contained a main-floor bay window, continued to accommodate residential tenants until shortly after the turn of the century when it was converted to commercial use by a new owner, agent R.H. Moody. Successive occupants included a weekly French-language newspaper called L'Echo de Manitoba, a messenger service and a tailor.

This conversion occurred during yet another boom in which much of the housing clustered near Main Street was displaced by warehouses, factories and other new business premises. For example, the St. Charles and Royal Albert hotels were developed in 1913 to the south and north of 44 Albert respectively, while across the street Jerry Robinson's department store was expanded (1902, 1905) and the 11-storey Electric Railway Chambers (1912-13) appeared at Albert and Notre Dame.

Although altered by rear additions and various interior changes, 44 Albert managed to survive this and later periods of physical renewal to stand as a rare example of both early brick veneer construction in Winnipeg and the residential phase of the Exchange District's evolution.

In 1924, the house became less visible to passers-by after it was encompassed by a one-storey, solid brick block with a flat roof. Designed and built by local contractor William A. Irish, this \$7,000 structure was in the unadorned one-part commercial style attractive to investors because it provided a modest-cost, revenue-generating option for land being held in anticipation of future, higher-density redevelopment.

The addition initially contained four retail outlets occupied by Jimy's Barber Shop, tailor W.H. Drinkwater, Wymie Wiseman's watch shop, and J. and J. Taylor, safe works. The house, renumbered as 44 1/2 Albert, was returned to residential use.

Contractor Irish worked with John A. Saul from about the turn of the century to the late 1910s on projects such as the Galt and Ashdown warehouses, St. Stephen's Presbyterian Church (Elim Chapel), and La Verendrye School. The two also built numerous houses that they then sold or

used as rental properties. Both continued in the trade after dissolving their partnership.

Various shops, restaurants and other services leased 38-44 1/2 Albert from the 1920s onward. After ownership was transferred in c.1951 from a United States-based company to local entrepreneurs, the block's façade was altered and the number of retail outlets was reduced to three. At present, the space at 38-40 Albert features large display windows, polished tile above and a stuccoed side wall. The stores at 42-44 Albert are clothed by plain brick and large windows, with an upper panel of raised brick offering the only embellishment.