

319 ELGIN AVENUE
SCOTT FRUIT COMPANY WAREHOUSE
The J. McDiarmid Co. Ltd., 1914



Downtown Winnipeg, including its warehouse district, was remade in the early 1900s. A sustained period of economic growth led to the construction of dozens of commercial and industrial buildings, extending the area's boundaries westward and its skyline upward.

The expansion stalled with a recession in 1913 and the outbreak of World War I in 1914. Construction activity dropped sharply, then remained at a fraction of its boom-time high for another three decades.

Despite the gloomy outlook, a number of major projects proceeded in 1914, including a new building for the Scott Fruit Company Ltd. at 319 Elgin Avenue on the northwestern edge of the warehouse district. This firm was led by Robert Ross Scott (1857-1924), an Ontarian who came to Winnipeg in the early 1880s with the Macpherson Fruit Company and eventually managed its western Canadian operations. In 1912, Scott and four partners incorporated their own wholesale enterprise, opening branches in Saskatchewan,

Alberta and Minnesota. Scott's son, Stewart M., became vice-president and later president.

The company's three-storey brick warehouse was designed and built for about \$40,000 by The J. McDiarmid Company Ltd., which also erected Scott's home at 29 Ruskin Row in 1914.

Three Scottish brothers, James (1855-1934), Peter (1857-1915) and John (1861-1943) McDiarmid, organized the contracting company in 1906. However, their roots in the city's building trades stemmed back to the early 1880s. As well, James began to practise architecture in the mid-1890s, planning St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Manitoba Hall, the Cumberland (Nokomis), Winnipeg Paint and Glass, Jacob-Crowley and Canada buildings, and the Great-West Saddlery, Merrick-Anderson, Donald H. Bain and Marshall-Wells warehouses, among others.

The Scott Fruit project featured newer technology and materials than were commonly found in the city's warehouses, including a reinforced concrete foundation instead of stone, and a steel beam-and-girder frame in place of a wooden beam-and-post superstructure.

Few changes have been made to the warehouse since its development. The symmetrical front (south) façade displays a dark-hued brick finish. Pilasters extend from the raised foundation to a modestly detailed entablature and parapet, dividing bays of large windows with transoms. Accents include concrete sills and lintels, a continuous concrete belt course above the first-floor openings, corbelled brickwork, and brick panels.

The finished façade wraps around to form one bay of the east wall. The rest of this elevation consists of common clay brick with minimal concrete and brick detailing. Paired multi-pane rectangular windows light the two upper storeys. Fewer windows, as well as entrance and loading doors, appear along the first floor. The west elevation has a window well and a one-storey annex (321-25 Elgin) that was added in 1945.

The main entrance in the southwest corner leads through a vestibule with marble accents and plain wood and glass partition to a concrete staircase. The interior contains spaces for offices and storage and manufacturing uses.

Scott Fruit rented the top floor of its warehouse in the latter 1910s to the Butterick Publishing Company, Standard Fashion Company and New Idea Pattern Company. The fruit wholesaler moved to Ross Avenue in the mid-1920s and was succeeded at 319 Elgin by Mid West Paper Sales Ltd. The latter remained until the mid-1950s. Subsequent occupants included Perfectfit Glove Manufacturers Inc., other clothing manufacturers/wholesalers, a food broker, printer, and Fantasy Theatre for Children. Metro Motors acquired the annex in 1975.