

**379 HARGRAVE STREET – AMBASSADOR APARTMENTS
(BREADALBANE APARTMENTS)**
J. Woodman, 1909



The wedge-shaped Breadalbane rounds the southeast corner of Hargrave Street and Cumberland Avenue in a transitional zone between downtown commercial land uses and the residential Central Park / North Ellice area. The five-storey block, completed in 1909, was built for middle-class tenants during a boom period when housing was at a premium in Winnipeg.

The original owners were entrepreneur John D. McArthur and lawyer James Fisher. McArthur came to Winnipeg from Ontario in 1879. He established a successful railway contracting firm, and a lumber and timber business in Manitoba and British Columbia. He also developed real estate, including the McArthur (Childs) Building on Portage Avenue. Fisher practiced law in Ontario before moving to Winnipeg in 1883. His firm was chief solicitor for railway magnate James Hill. The Breadalbane was named after Fisher's birthplace in the Scottish Central Highlands.

The partners chose architect John Woodman and contractors MacQuarrie and McLeod for their speculative venture. Woodman, an Ontarian, worked for the Canadian Pacific Railway in Winnipeg for some 20 years, becoming chief engineer for the western division. In 1901, he set up a private practice, later forming partnerships with Raymond Carey and A.E. Cubbidge. His work included the Paris, Lindsay, Allen, Somerset, Free Press and Public Press buildings, and several houses and blocks planned with Cubbidge in the 1920s.

Woodman's design of the Breadalbane attempts to maximize street views and natural lighting. The building runs about 43 metres along Hargrave and 49 metres along Cumberland. The south elevation contains a large light well which originally provided many suites with extra windows and double entrances off the courtyard.

The block has brick masonry walls, a raised stone foundation punctuated with windows, and reinforced concrete floors. The façade is light brown, trimmed with limestone belts and sills. The first floor has rusticated brick and there are brick quoins at the corners of the middle three floors. These storeys also feature wrought-iron balconies lining the corner windows at Hargrave and Cumberland. Their grillwork matches railings on the balconies above the front entrance and on the main interior staircase. The iron cornice, bracketed and dentilled, is surmounted by a low parapet.

The recessed main entrance on Hargrave has three stone archways, a double-return staircase, and carved stone balusters. The balconies overhead are now enclosed and a metal canopy extends over the entrance. There are two side entrances on Cumberland beneath arched windows on the second and fifth storeys.

Original layout of the interior provided 12 bachelor, one- and two-bedroom suites on each floor, with a janitor's suite in the basement. Larger units had a drawing room, dining-room, kitchen, bathroom and hall closet. Plans initially included a fifth-floor restaurant with a smoking room over the central balcony and small suites along Cumberland. Most of this space was converted to suites when the restaurant was not installed, but the smoking lounge was retained. The building was served by elevators for passengers and freight.

The Breadalbane filled quickly and maintained stable occupancy into the 1950s. Its tenants tended to be middle-class, Anglo-Saxon singles and childless couples who worked in the downtown. John McIvor, a financial agent, acquired the Breadalbane c.1927. He installed suites in the basement and smoking lounge, bringing the building's capacity to about 70 units, and renamed the block as the Ambassador in 1928.

Since the 1960s, there has been a greater mix and turnover of tenants. By late 1987, the building was largely vacant and privately-initiated renovations were underway as part of an overall revitalization of the North Ellice area.