

**441 MAIN STREET – IMPERIAL BANK OF CANADA
(CANADIAN IMPERIAL BANK OF COMMERCE)
*Darling and Pearson (Toronto and Winnipeg), 1906***



For 80 years, the Imperial Bank of Canada served as one of the northern sentinels of Winnipeg's Bankers' Row, operating almost continuously at the northeast corner of Main Street and Bannatyne Avenue from 1881 through to 1961.

The Imperial, incorporated in Toronto in 1875, was one of several eastern-based financial institutions attracted to the city during a speculative boom in the early 1880s. It opened in rented premises in the three-storey Robertson Block at Main and Bannatyne. The branch was temporarily displaced by a fire in early 1882, but returned to the site after the block was rebuilt. Within a decade, the bank had doubled its space by expanding into an adjacent store. It purchased the property in 1898.

By then, the pace of western development had increased substantially, as had Winnipeg's prospects as a trade, transportation and financial centre. Banks began investing in magnificent new structures on Main Street between Portage and William avenues to proclaim their confidence in the economy and compete for a share of the prosperity.

When the Imperial opted to redevelop its site in 1906, it turned to Frank Darling and John Andrew Pearson of Toronto to design the new facility. This architectural partnership, which established a Winnipeg office with W. Percy Over in 1902, was responsible for numerous local projects. Among them were the Dominion Bank (1898), Canadian Bank of Commerce I (1899) and II (1910), Union Bank (1903), Post Office (1905-08), the Nanton, Grain Exchange and Travellers buildings (1906), and the Bank of Nova Scotia (1908).

The Ontario-born Darling (1850-1923) trained with Henry Langley, then practised for three years with George Edmund Street and Arthur Blomfield of London, England, before returning to Toronto. Pearson (1867-1940), an English immigrant, joined Darling and Curry in 1889 and became a full partner three years later. The association resulted in major designs across Canada for corporate, medical and educational clients. Darling received a gold medal from the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1915. Pearson participated in the post-fire reconstruction of both St. John's, Newfoundland (1892-95) and the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa (1916).

In the case of the Imperial Bank, the architects planned a richly ornamented and symmetrical three-storey, Classical Revival structure. It was built for some \$200,000 by Kelly Brothers and Mitchell of Winnipeg.

Rectangular in form with rectangular openings, the steel-framed building has reinforced concrete footings, a concrete foundation, brick exterior walls, and finishes of cut stone from Bedford, Indiana on its Main and Bannatyne elevations.

Abutting the recessed front entrance are single, fluted Ionic columns that rise from massive, shoulder-high pedestals to an unadorned, second-storey entablature. Another full entablature with a modillioned cornice and plain parapet tops the third storey. The windows of the narrow

façade are set in singles, pairs and trios, including two mezzanine openings adorned by pseudo-balconies, pilasters and enriched pediments. Carved wall panels appear above the entrance and on both sides of a trio of openings on the third storey.

Several elements carry over to the Bannatyne façade, including the entablatures, parapet and wall panels. As well, two more openings are treated with balconies and pedimented heads. The eastern-most example tops the side entrance, providing light for a staircase to the upper-storey offices. Distinguishing the Bannatyne façade are large, but simple, Doric pilasters that run from high pedestals to the second-storey entablature. In between are five bays of long vertical windows to light the banking hall and pairs of smaller, second-floor openings. Even smaller windows set in triplets line the top storey.

The front entrance originally had two vestibules. The outer one featured heavy oak doors, marble flooring, oak-panelled walls and ceiling, and a revolving mahogany door. The inner vestibule had mahogany panelling, an enriched plaster ceiling, and a mahogany screen door to the main banking hall. The hall was appointed with a 7.8 metre-high ceiling; skylights; marble floors, counters and desks; mahogany panels, fluted columns and balustrade; plaster walls with burlap panels; oak and mahogany trim; and bronze grille-work.

The main floor also held the manager's office and a double-tiered vault. Marble-treaded steel stairs led to the front mezzanine where work areas had maple flooring and mahogany trim. Mississquoi marble was used on stairs to the basement safety deposit, storage and other rooms.

The upper floors originally were occupied by the bank, including living quarters for its clerks on the top storey. That space was converted in 1929 to rental offices. Other alterations included connection to the Amy Street steam heating plant in 1949, installation of an acoustic ceiling with fluorescent lighting in the banking hall in the early 1950s, and the replacement of windows on the Main and Bannatyne facings.

This building remained an Imperial Bank until 1961 when a merger led to formation of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. The latter continued to use the premises as a branch

bank, then solely as offices, into the late 1980s. The property subsequently was put up for sale. It most recently has accommodated cabaret tenants.