

**173 McDERMOT AVENUE – THE MITCHELL BLOCK
(GRANGE BUILDING)
*A.T. Timewell, 1886-1887***



One of the oldest structures on McDermot Avenue, east of Main Street, is the Grange Building originally built for the W.J. Mitchell Drug Company in 1887. The drug supply firm was founded by Messrs. Trolt and Melville in 1875. In 1880 W.J. Mitchell joined the firm and became sole proprietor three years later. He established a retail store on Main Street and with the expansion of the western frontier began to manufacture and distribute his own patent medicines. Such products as Mitchell's Botanic Bitters, Mitchell's Liver Pills, Mitchell's Carbolic Cerate, Urquhart's Worm Specific and Prairie Pain Relief were manufactured in this building to be sold across the west by Mitchell's travelers.

Mitchell commissioned British-born architect Arthur T. Timewell to design the new warehouse and drug manufacturing facility. Timewell was an early citizen of Brandon, Manitoba, and is

known chiefly for designing two buildings in that city: the first Brandon Firehall; and the “Crystal Palace,” a wood frame octagonal building constructed in 1883 as the main exhibition hall of the fledgling Brandon Agricultural Exhibition, demolished during a severe storm in 1904.

Built at a cost of \$7,000, the Mitchell Block was decorated with an ornate exterior much of which is now missing. In a symbolic gesture to the function of the building, Timewell placed a stone mortar dish and pestle rising from the center of a broken pediment over the doorway. Stone urns capped the two corner pilasters, providing an eye-catching roofline. The upper floor windows also received special treatment; the mullions are designed like miniature Tuscan columns, faithful in every detail. Unlike the elaborate cornice, the decorative window details have survived. The ground floor and entranceway have been substantially altered. The symmetrical façade has projecting brick pilasters that provide a bay-by-bay division with light coloured stone lintels and sills that provide a horizontal balance.

The ground floor contained the sales office and a display of the various products offered by the wholesale firm. The second floor was the laboratory, Mitchell’s “wet and dry department,” where various tinctures and drug preparations were mixed. On the third floor assorted bottles and corks were sorted.

In 1890 Mitchell sold the wholesale portion of his business, but continued to own the building. The E.W. Gillett Company, an American manufacturing firm, purchased the building in 1910. With a factory in Toronto, Winnipeg became their western wholesale outlet for Royal Yeast Cakes, Magic Baking Soda and Gillett’s Lye. During the thirties, 173 McDermot Avenue was known as the Grange Building after its principal occupant, the Grange Stationery Wholesalers. It is currently occupied by the Canadian Diabetes Association and Lombard Graphics.