



179 McDERMOT AVENUE

F. W. ALLOWAY BUILDING

HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE

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This building has been altered the least of the nineteenth century façades along the north side of McDermot Avenue east of Main Street. A relative latecomer on the block, it was erected in 1898 by local businessman F.W. Alloway as a revenue block. The title was held in his wife Elizabeth's name, as were several other revenue-bearing properties.

Alloway was co-founder of a Winnipeg private bank, Alloway and Champion. He had come to the west as a youth with the Wolseley expedition of 1870 and stayed on in the tiny settlement. He began his financial career buying and selling scrip, the monetary tokens issued to the Métis landowners as compensation for their lands. In 1879, he teamed up with Henry T. Champion in establishing a private banking practice that was not incorporated until 1912.¹ The bank was based entirely in Manitoba, operating as a normal financial institution in the loaning and saving of money in local investments. Alloway himself eventually became a millionaire as the bank grew to become the largest private bank ever known in Canada.² In 1921, F.W. Alloway returned some of that personal fortune back to the city where he made it by establishing the Winnipeg Foundation. His endowment of over two million dollars created a source of funds for benevolent purposes that has assisted philanthropic institutions and needy individuals ever since.³ Alloway and Champion operated their bank on Main Street and never occupied this building themselves.

There is conflicting evidence as to the identity of the architect of this structure. Tenders published in the newspapers directed contractors to the office of James Cadham⁴ while the name of the architect listed on the plumbing permit was S. Frank Peters.⁵ While Cadham was officially listed as a contractor in Henderson's Directory at the time, it is known that he was also functioning as an architect in designing buildings by 1898. Furthermore, the press later observed "Messrs., Hodgins and Horner", a small masonry contracting firm, were building the new Alloway Block.⁶ To reconcile this evidence, it may be presumed that S.F. Peters designed the

warehouse, J.H. Cadham acted as the general contractor and Hodgins and Horner were sub-contractors.

Although no biographical information on S. Frank Peters has surfaced, we do have partial list of his Winnipeg buildings: the original section of the Ashdown Warehouse; the Massey-Harris Block (1904) at 294 William Avenue; the Cockshutt Plow Warehouse (1903) at 238 Princess Street; and the Manitoba Club (1905) at 194 Broadway. James Cadham also specialized in warehouse design, having lived in the city from his arrival with the Wolseley expedition in 1870 (from which he would know F.W. Alloway) until his death in this city in 1907.

A good deal of the original features of the Alloway Building have survived. The structure is three storeys high, approximately 26 feet, brick on a stone foundation. The limestone carries up a metre and a half from grade, acting as a base for the graceful brick arches over the windows and door. The two upper floor windows have continuous lug sills of stone and flat stone heads. There is a frieze of brick across the top capping walls that are otherwise plain. With a style approaching Richardsonian Romanesque, this building can be linked with several of J.H. Cadham's own designs in the warehouse district such as the Stobart and Sons Warehouse (1903), 275 McDermot, the Kemp Building (1903), 111 Lombard Avenue and the addition to the Gault Building (1903), 92-104 Arthur Street.

Alloway was not the first to build on this site. For 11 years previously, it had been the site of the Temperance Hall, erected in 1877 and destroyed in a fire in June 1888.⁸ It has been used as the offices and plant of the Call Printing Company that had published the Daily Times, The Manitoban and then the Morning Call. This paper was absorbed by its next-door neighbour, the Free Press, in 1889.⁹ The site was vacant from 1888 to 1898.

Upon its completion early in 1899, the new Alloway Block became the home of C.S. Richardson Stationery and Manufacturing Company for the next decade. This was a bookbindery that published blank books and then printed them for commercial use. Later, a commission agency shared the building with Matheson, McLaren and Company tea blenders for the next several

years. This firm experienced a fire in 1907 that did \$10,000 worth of damage to various small suppliers in the building.¹⁰ In 1916, the warehouse became the home of the Louis McLain Company of kitchen equipment.

Late in 1919, this building suffered a second serious fire that gutted its interior and destroyed \$50,000 worth of steam cookers, fireless cookstoves and cooking utensils. Defective wiring was offered as the cause.¹¹ Five thousand dollars worth of repairs were required on the building after the fire,¹² which seems to have eliminated the kitchen equipment supplies.

After an interim vacancy, the Alloway Building housed the Star Electric Company, an electrical wholesale, in the 1920s and into the 1930s. It subsequently was occupied by several smaller warehouse operations such as Dominion General Merchandising, Western Salvage Company and North West Mail Order. After the renovation of the building in the early 1970s, it was sectioned into three smaller offices, one on each floor.

Elizabeth Alloway held title to this property until her death in 1926.¹³ The proceeds of her estate, which totalled \$700,000 were channeled into the Alloways' Winnipeg Foundation.

The Foundation is presently a big contributor in various charitable, hospital, educational, cultural and recreational endeavours in the city. Fifty years along, the Alloway name has remained as the mainstay of the capital fund.¹⁴

FOOTNOTES

1. "Henry T. Champion" in Frank Schofield, The Story of Manitoba Vol. III. The S.D. Clark Publishing Company Winnipeg 1913, p. 141.
2. Ruben Bellan, Winnipeg First Century: An Economic History, Queenston House Publishing Company, Winnipeg 1978, p. 78.
3. "F.W. Alloway, Pioneer Banker and Respected Winnipeg Citizen, Dies," WFP, 3 February 1930.
4. "Tenders," MFP, 7 April 1898, p. 5.
5. City of Winnipeg Plumbing Permit No. 1215, 29 June 1898. The plumbing consisted of a single sink and water closet in the basement. The plumber was J.L. Wells and Company.
6. "City and General," MFP, 27 June 1898, p. 10.
7. City of Winnipeg Building Permit No. 2337, 18 August 1910.
8. Thanks to Randy Rostecki.
9. D.M. Loveridge, A Historical Directory of Manitoba Newspapers 1859-1978, University of Manitoba Press 1981, pp. 127-30.
10. "\$10,000 Blaze on McDermot Ave.," MFP, 29 December 1906, p. 1.
11. "Disastrous Fire on McDermot East," MFP, 17 December 1918, p. 7.
12. Permits, op. cit., No. 32, 1 February 1919.
13. "Largest Individual Gift to Winnipeg Charities left by Mrs. Alloway," WFP, 12 May 1927, p. 12.
14. Serving Winnipeg For Fifty Years: The Winnipeg Foundation, Winnipeg 1971, unpaginated.

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Plate 1 – North side of McDermot Avenue, 1969. 179 McDermot Avenue is at arrow. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Architectural Survey.)

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Plate 2 – McDermot Avenue looking east from Main Street, ca.1945, 179 McDermot Avenue at arrow. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N732.)