

217 McDERMOT AVENUE – BATE BUILDING
Architect unknown, 1883



This brick building was erected in 1883 to house Lyon, MacKenzie and Powis, a grocery wholesale firm. Its principal owner, William H. Lyon, had been an Indian trader before opening a store in the Red River Settlement in 1860 that eventually grew into a large and prosperous wholesale partnership.

Because of the heavy loads of wholesale goods, the Lyon Block was particularly well constructed, with oversized joists and a stone foundation. The building was a three-storey structure designed in Romanesque style similar to other buildings in Winnipeg's burgeoning warehouse district. The details and quality of the brickwork on the Lyon Block, however, made its design especially notable and successful.

In 1900, the *Free Press* took over the Lyon Block shortly before one of Canada's foremost editors, John W. Dafoe, joined the paper in 1901. Clifford Sifton, owner of the *Free Press* and a powerful Minister of the Interior in the government of Wilfred Laurier, teamed with Dafoe to

make the newspaper the strongest voice in Western Canada. Dafoe joined the paper just after it had reorganized its production system around new typesetting machines and high-speed presses. The *Free Press* grew to require even more space, and moved from its location on McDermot Avenue, Winnipeg's "Newspaper Row", in 1905.

In 1905, Sir James Aikins of the law firm of Aikins, Loftis et al (now Aikins, MacAulay), purchased the building to house his office. Aikins added two stories and converted the interior from warehouse to commercial space, with retail stores on the main floor. This addition, designed by J.H.G. Russell, was successful in matching material and styles, while giving the block a handsome cage elevator and durable, modern offices.

Aikins, the son of Manitoba's Lieutenant-Governor in the 1880s, was himself appointed to that position in 1916 after being knighted in 1914 for his community work. Intimately involved with the local Y.M.C.A., Wesley College and other organizations, Sir James also founded the Canadian Bar Association, a national forum for the legal profession, in 1914.

Besides the Aikins offices, accountants, realtors, loan companies and insurance companies occupied the Aikins Building. From 1917 to 1923, the building was a nucleus for the film exchange business in Winnipeg at a time when owners loaned private copies of Hollywood movies. Over the years, there evolved a mixture of professional and service offices and manufacturers' agents. A clothing store and a restaurant have traditionally shared the commercial space.

In 1942, the drug wholesale firm of Bate and Bate purchased the building, changed its name, and has occupied office and warehouse space on the third floor ever since. At present, the Bate Building contains several manufacturers' agents, some professional offices and several art studios. Both the exterior and most of the interior of the Block are substantially intact from 1905.