

250 McDERMOT AVENUE – MERCHANTS BUILDING

James H. Cadham, 1898 & 1902 (south addition)



This massive brick and stone warehouse has occupied an important corner location in the heart of Winnipeg's Exchange District since its construction in 1898.

The warehouse was built in two sections, the north portion completed in 1898 and the south built in 1902 with construction materials and design consistent with the older section. The two public façades, north facing McDermot Avenue and west facing Arthur Street, begin at grade with a raised rough-cut stone foundation ending at the sills of the ground floor windows. Both façades are divided into bays by plain giant order brick pilasters running from the sills of the ground floor windows to the heads of the top storey openings. The building's original entrance is located on the north façade at the east end while a second door (date of construction unknown) is located further west on the front façade. The upper three storeys are similarly designed with paired window openings in each bay. These openings are separated internally by delicate brick elements and joined

externally by stone lug sills and heads. Brick corbelling finishes the openings on the fourth floor. The flat roof is embellished by more brickwork, designed to represent a modest bracketed cornice. The west façade also includes a raised arched loading door in the fourth bay from McDermot Avenue, two metal fire escapes, the large arched opening of the dray way and an arched entrance door near the south end of the building.

The rear (south) elevation includes original elements such as the multi-paned industrial type windows of the ground floor and newer elements – the replacement window units of the upper three floors, the metal fire escape and the painted signage in the upper west corner. The east façade is partially covered by a neighbouring building. The central and rear sections can be observed from back lanes and include the dray way and an unadorned rear section.

The rough textures, flat roofline, stone accenting and arched openings are typical of the Romanesque Revival style, very popular in warehouse districts throughout North America from the 1880s well into the 20th century. The building employs the most common construction method of the time – the mill system – a square timber beam and post support network where beams were attached to the solid brick exterior walls and covered by wood plank flooring and often a hardwood finish – a very popular system because of its sturdiness, the ease of adding additional storeys and its ability to suffer fire damage and not collapse.

The interior of the building has seen numerous alterations, including its conversion into office space. Original elements still in place include wooden banisters and pressed tin ceilings accenting the main staircase and hardwood flooring.

James H. Cadham, Ontario born architect, designed this warehouse and the 1902 addition. Cadham was one of a number of self-trained designers who worked in the city in the late 19th century, Cadham being one of the most prolific. He also was responsible for the design of the R.J. Whitla Warehouse, located across the street at 70 Arthur Street (Plate 23). Well-known local contractor Philip Burnett, built the 1898 warehouse with the Malcom Brothers in charge of the construction of the 1902 addition.

Once completed, the building became the home of hardware dealer George D. Wood, who had come west to open a western branch of his father's successful Eastern Canadian company. Woods, like so many other wholesalers and retailers, saw a huge increase in their business and Woods flourished. He died in 1907 and the company reorganized as Wood Vallance Company under the direction of John C. Falls (1861-1924), long-time vice-president and general manager. The company continued to occupy space in the building until the mid-1920s. Ultimately, North American hardware giant Marshall-Wells Company acquired the Wood Vallance Company. Beginning in the mid-1920s, the building took on a number of smaller tenants, including wholesale stationer John Gibb Company (1929), Michael Butovsky, confectioner (1939), Buffalo Cap and Neckwear (1939-1969) and Brown Fashions (1979). It was owned and occupied by Silpit Industries Limited from the 1970s until recently.

Elements of the building that would require approval if alterations were planned are:

Exterior (unless otherwise stated, elements described refer to both the north and west façades):

- The rectangular plan of the warehouse with prominent façades fronting Arthur Street and McDermot Avenue
- Exposed, roughly-dressed limestone block base with buff brick superstructure divided into bays by giant-order brick pilasters
- Paired square-headed window openings throughout, with limestone lug sills and lintels, save the multi-paned industrial style windows of south elevation; corbelling atop fourth floor windows
- Two square headed doorways on the north façade, and three round-arched openings on the west elevation, one being the east/west dray way
- Details including a corbelled brick cornice, metal fire escapes on the west and south elevations, painted signage on the rear (south) and east façades, flagpole atop, some decorative wood sashes, limestone steps at northwest entrance, etc.

Interior:

- Plank wood floors throughout
- Some exposed brick walls
- Vestibules off McDermot entrances
- High ceilings with ornamental tin panels
- Some exposed cast-iron columns with splayed capitals and some exposed timber posts
- Wooden balustrades with some carved spindles