

271 PORTAGE AVENUE – HAMPLE BUILDING
John D. Atchison, 1906



The mere rumour that commercial giant T. Eaton Company was going to build a new store on Portage Avenue was enough to shift Winnipeg's post-1900 retail centre away from its historic location on Main Street and onto the still unoccupied city lots along Portage Avenue. The massive department store officially opened in July 1905, setting the stage for a decade of activity that transformed the once quiet cart trail into Western Canada's retail hub.

One of the most popular types of structures built during this pre-World War I development was the mixed-use building, combining retail space on the ground floor and offices and/or residential space above. In 1906, the Hample Building, a modestly ornamented structure was completed, offering two retail shops at grade and professional offices on the upper two floors.

Stylistically, the building is designed in the two-part commercial style, so named because of its visual division between the lower and upper levels, mirroring the different uses of the structure. It is a common style, found in most urban centres and ranges from plain, frame buildings to elaborate masonry clad structures with a wealth of ornamentation.

Architect John Danley Atchison (1870-1959), a renowned local designer, was responsible for the Hample Building. American-born and educated in Chicago, Atchison set up his office in Winnipeg 1905, beginning several decades of work in Western Canada. Best known for his larger, more complex work, the Hample Building represents one of Atchison's earliest local commissions and one of the oldest reinforced concrete frame building in the city, a structural technology Atchison was familiar with from his time in the United States.

This three-storey brick-clad building originally featured recessed entrances with large display windows on the ground floor. A third door, at the west end of the building, gave access to the staircase to the upper floors. Original exterior ornamentation on the main (south) façade included a wide, light-coloured belt course separating the ground floor space from the upper two floors, square and arched windows with diamond-shaped stone inserts in the spandrels between the floors and brick quoins topped by large ornamental shields or cartouche-like elements. The building was finished by a complete entablature with oversized parapet. The unadorned rear façade includes painted signage dating from the original opening of the building.

The original ground floor design has been severely altered over the years and is now one large recessed area. The roofline has also been seriously altered – gone are the ornamental shields, pilaster heads and entablature, replaced by an unadorned concrete band and many of the exterior elements are suffering from weathering.

On the interior, the retail space of the ground floor has been opened into one area with a mezzanine and loading area at the rear. The offices of the second and third floors were replaced in 1924 by a billiards hall and bowling alley, respectively. The second floor is now completely open except for a small set of offices at the rear and the third floor features offices and open space.

The building, which has stood vacant since the late 1990s, is named for the Hample family, a name long connected with the commercial history of Winnipeg, beginning in the mid-1880s when Adolphe G. Hample was listed as a hide dealer in the city. By 1895, he operated a butcher and catering business with the help of his wife Martha J. Hample from a shop at 271 Portage Avenue, the site of the present Hample Building. A.G. Hample died ca.1900, but his widow continued to run the family catering business until 1906 when she had the old building demolished and the new Hample Building constructed on the same site. She owned the property until 1918. From 1947 to ca.1989, People's Credit Jewellers, Canada's first time payment plan jewellery, owned and occupied the ground floor of the Hample Block.

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

Exterior:

- The south-facing three-storey brick-faced building located mid-block on Portage Avenue
- The (south) façade with three bays; the second floor featuring three-lite square-head windows, and the third floor featuring three-lite segmental-arched windows, all with top lights and decorative spandrels
- Brick detailing including decorative window surrounds, medallions inset in decorative panels along the roofline and quoined edges
- Painted signage on the rear (north) façade