



104-108 PRINCESS STREET

WAREHOUSE

HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE

22 February 1983

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The five-storey brick building at 104 Princess Street and the plain three-storey brick warehouse beside it share a common history as well as the same foundations. Dissimilar as they are at present, both were once twin sections of an original 1885 wholesale warehouse.

Built as a speculative venture by the Confederation Life Association,¹ this building has never had a name, being identified only by the various businesses within its walls. Its very year of construction, 1885, was unusual because the focus of attention of Winnipeg and the west was focussed on the Métis struggles in Batoche and Fish Creek. Many Winnipeg men enlisted as soldiers to fight Riel's insurgents, leaving a temporary vacuum in the City for several months. Construction essentially ceased with only two other large buildings erected in the City that year. The building record for 1885 was the smallest since 1880² although the population of the burgeoning City had trebled in size.³

The building constructed by Confederation Life was three floors of solid brick on a foundation of stone. It was divided into two symmetrical sections separated by a party wall. The tender for its construction was let by William Brydon and B.R. Robertson, a partnership of general contractors and suppliers of building materials. The name of the architect, if any, is unknown.⁴ An excellent photograph of the 1885 building survives, reproduced in this report, showing the two original businesses. Hodgson, Sumner and Company, in the south section, was a firm of "dry goods (textiles), small wares and fancy goods". With a staff of 12, the company imported its products from overseas and the east and distributed them, with the help of travelling salesmen, to western retailers.

The north half of the building was occupied by Sutherland and Campbell, a wholesale grocery firm. With over 50 wholesale operations in the City at the time, these two companies

represented the two leading wholesale industries: groceries in the number one position with dry goods and hardware struggling for second place.⁵

The 1885 building was nearly square with six regular bays across the front and six identical bays down Bannatyne Avenue. Each half of the façade and large store front windows with recessed entries and exposed basement windows. Brick pilasters separated each bay with brick belt courses and sills providing the horizontal definition. The windows were identical, although some of the side windows on the ground floor were blind. A brick parapet supported a cornice of pilaster caps. Because neither street was paved or even fully graded in 1885, parts of the foundation were exposed beneath the wooden sidewalk while the loading docks at the rear were then nearly two feet higher from the ground than at present. Both companies had large signs under the parapet across the Princess Street elevation.

In 1890, Hodson, Sumner and Company relocated to Portage Avenue West and their section of the building, with the street address 104 Princess, came to be occupied by Parsons, Bell and Company, a wholesale firm of stationers. Sutherland and Campbell were eventually bought out by the larger grocery wholesale Campbell Brothers and Wilson, who kept the former Sutherland and Campbell Warehouse at 108 Princess Street until ca.1903.

In 1904, a two-storey addition was made to the building.⁶ At a cost of \$17,000, the original cornice was removed and the bays extended upwards two more floors. The window treatment and bay pattern was left intact although some of the brick detailing was sacrificed. The cornice from 1904 is also a departure from the original 1885 cornice. Perhaps the greatest change at this time, aside from the addition, was the replacement of the storefront windows with six large archways, composed of one or two doors and four or five windows. The wooden anchors of the metal cornice over the original ground floor windows remain, which indicates that they may have survived past the 1905 alterations. The architect of these changes was D. Smith of Winnipeg. The building permit could not be found for confirmation.

Completed early in 1905, the enlarged building became the home of the Consolidated Stationery Company Limited. Under the presidency of Henry Bell, this large wholesale firm may have

absorbed Parsons, Bell and Company, the stationery firm located for thirteen years previous in this building. Besides stationery, Consolidated stocked wrapping paper, programs and cardboard, fancy good, notions, pipes and even sporting goods. A small job printing press was also part of its service.⁷ This company, which seems to have used both sections of the enlarged building, erected a stand-up sign on the rooftop, the remains of which survived until at least 1970. The word “pipes” can be seen on the Bannatyne Avenue side in one 1907 photograph.

By the 1920s, the stationery wholesale had been replaced by two smaller supply firms with the Lloyd W. Locke Company, grocery brokers, at 104 Princess Street and Darling Brothers Limited, a national firm supplying pumps and heating apparatus, at 108 Princess.⁸ By and large, there was a rapid turnover of small businesses in the twin sections for the next thirty years. In 1935, Lloyd Locke outfitted the first two storeys into office space with new floors and glass partitions. The door onto Bannatyne Avenue was added at this time. The contractor was the Malcom Construction Company and the alterations cost \$5,000.⁹

Of interest, during the mid-1930s was the establishment of the government single Men’s Relief Registration office here. Unemployed single men, many of whom had drifted to the city from the farms and mines, were assigned to various relief construction projects and bush camps. They were paid in wages or room and board from joint government projects that were not dismantled until the close of the decade.¹⁰

During the first half of the 1940s, this building was vacant but was then taken over by the firm of Robinson and Weber, manufacturers’ agents for a paint and chemical supply firm. They leased part of the building out for storage. In March 1945, there was a tremendous fire in the northern section of the building that fed on stores of alcohol, turpentine and sawdust bags. Eighty firemen and 20 hoses battled the blaze, but before it was over, two firemen had died, four were seriously injured and the north section of the building had collapsed. Miraculously, firemen were able to save the south section behind the fire wall, although the heat was so intense that small fires continued to break out for two days after.¹¹

The devastation was so complete that the north section was pulled down to its foundations. In 1950, Robinson and Weber rebuilt the north section of their warehouse within the foundations of the 1885 building. Fire doors connected the two sections.¹² Only two storeys high, this new brick section looks unrelated to the southern section at 104 Princess Street. Only at the rear of the building does the construction reveal itself. Here one can see the old brick of the original ground floor as well as the remains of an original window and the first loading dock. No attempt was made to match the new section with the old.

More recently, the building was used as a warehouse space for the C.A. DeFehr and Sons furniture business at 78-86 Princess Street.

This building has undergone a considerable evolution. The twin sections of the 1885 building were added to 1904, but of this only the south section endures. With the exception of the Single Mens' Relief Registration office, the function of this building has consistently been the warehousing of various companies' stock, from the pioneer wholesale firms of the 1880s to the present warehouse businesses in the district.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ “Building in Winnipeg 1885,” The Commercial, 2 February 1886, p. 364. Also “City and Province,” Manitoba Free Press, 20 July 1885. “The Confederation Life propose erecting a large solid stone and brick building, for wholesale purposes, in the Northwest corner of Princess and Bannatyne Streets, at one.”
- ² Loc. int.
- ³ Alan F.J. Artibise, Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth 1874-1914, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal and London, 1975, p. 130.
- ⁴ “To Contractors,” Manitoba Free Press, 28 July 1885. Brydon also had a store selling sewing machines, pianos and organs. Steen and Boyce, Winnipeg Manitoba and Her Industries, Winnipeg, January 1882, p. 93.
- ⁵ Ibid., p. 129.
- ⁶ “\$9,000,000 for 1904 - The Official Building List,” Manitoba Free Press, 24 November 1904.
- ⁷ Advertisement, Henderson’s Directory for Winnipeg, 1909.
- ⁸ Ibid., 1922.
- ⁹ City of Winnipeg permits No. 2275, 29 January 1935.
- ¹⁰ Ruban Bellan, Winnipeg First Century: An Economic History, Queenston House Publishing Co. Ltd., Winnipeg, 1978, pp. 205-220.
- ¹¹ “Two Firemen Die in Princess St. Blaze,” Winnipeg Free Press, 24 March 1945, p. 1. This address is within the western boundary of the high pressure main districts, which facilitated the huge amounts of water used to fight the fire. In 1919, fire insurance underwriters had observed that chemicals, carelessly stored in improper containers, were a fire hazard to the brick warehouse. 1919 Fire Insurance Plans Vol. I Plan 234.
- ¹² Permits, op. cit., No. 981, 28 March 1950.

104-108 PRINCESS STREET - WAREHOUSE



Plate 1 – Warehouse, 104-108 Princess Street, not long after its construction, ca.1885. The warehouse at Princess Street and Bannatyne Avenue contained the firms of Hodgson, Sumner and Company, a dry goods wholesale, and Sutherland and Campbell, wholesale groceries. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N1066.)

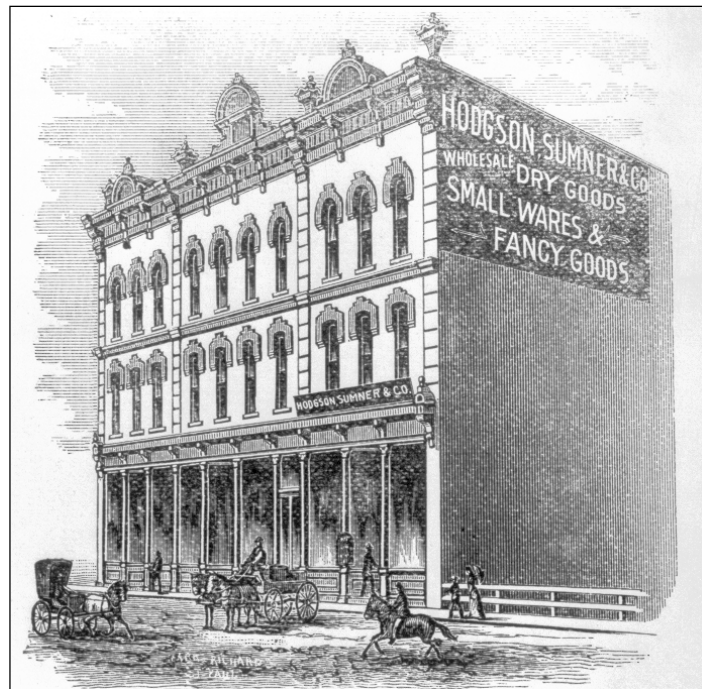


Plate 2 – The original Hodgson, Sumner and Company Building, Princess Street, ca.1884. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N5074.)

104-108 PRINCESS STREET - WAREHOUSE

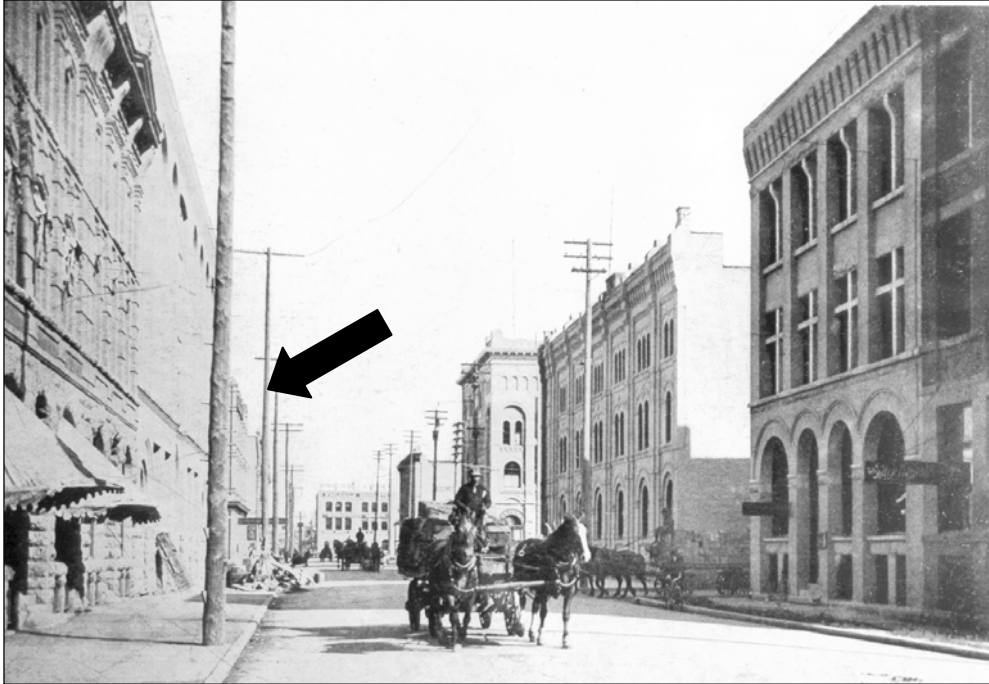


Plate 3 – Princess Street, looking north from McDermot Avenue, ca.1903 (#104-108 at arrow). The various wagons loaded with goods shows the vibrancy of the district. . (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N3249.)

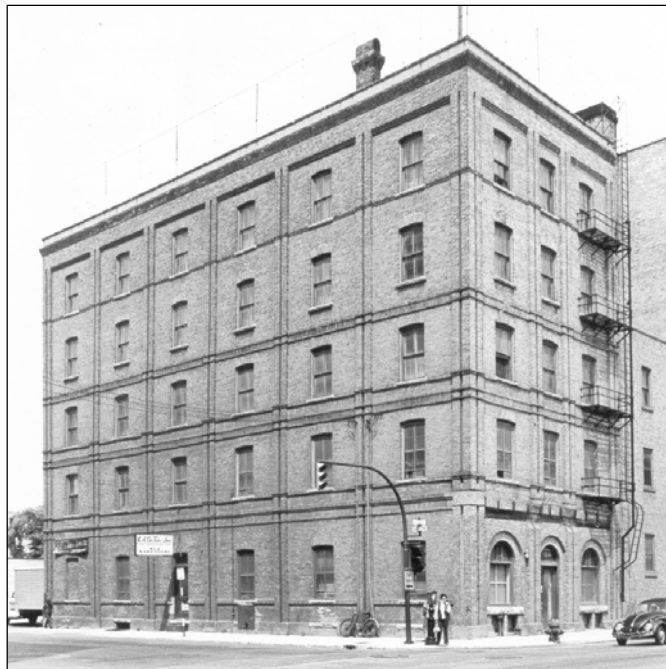


Plate 4 – 104-108 Princess Street, 1970. . (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Architectural Survey.)