



72 - 74 PRINCESS STREET

**McDERMOT BLOCK
(FORMERLY ODDFELLOWS HALL)**

HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE

1986

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Crescent moons and clusters of seven stars, the cryptic symbols of mystic orders, adorn the cornice of this interesting structure. Located on the south-west corner of Princess Street and McDermot Avenue, the brick building is currently occupied by a furniture store. It is only those people who look up to the third storey who are rewarded by the vision of the moons and stars, a reflection of the building's past history.

It was constructed in 1883 as the first Oddfellows Hall for the Independent Order of Oddfellows (I.O.O.F.). As a fraternal organization, the I.O.O.F. traces its roots to eighteenth century England when working men outside of the guild system banded together for mutual benefit. Bound by vows, its members contribute stiff dues that are dispensed to other members in need, or the widows and orphaned children of deceased members. Using the Bible stories as their standard for the golden rule, Oddfellows advocate friendship, love and truth, symbolized by a triple link.

The first Winnipeg Lodge of Oddfellows was established in 1873, growing quickly to 13 subordinate lodges by 1886. Frontier conditions within an irregular economy made the fraternal order particularly attractive during these decades before the emergence of the welfare state. Like other fraternal orders, the I.O.O.F. had adopted various degrees, rituals and regalia. Elements of British heraldic finery have been mixed with Biblical metaphors in the trappings and finery of the Order. Each lodge adopts its own colours within the definition of the regional grand lodges, a hierarchical arrangement of merit, devotion and duration.

Joined by their female counterparts, the Rebekahs, the Oddfellows embarked on their course of mutual assistance, attracting to their ranks not the rich and famous but sensible family men, often of modest means. They have shown themselves locally to be more committed to practicality than to luxury.

Demonstrating their practical side, the Oddfellows erected this building to serve two ends. First, the third floor of the building contained meeting rooms and a large ballroom for joint fraternal and social functions. Second, the other two floors of the building were leased commercially to pay for the building and generate extra revenue. For example, for the first ten years, the rest of the building served as a warehouse for the eastern clothing firm of Carscaden and Peck.¹

The building is three storeys high, built of solid brick on a stone foundation. Nearly square in shape, its dimensions are 66 feet by 70 feet and it is 60 feet tall. The architect of the new hall was Hugh McCowan with Horace J. Raymer as the contractor. The building cost \$25,000 to construct, a hefty sum in 1883.² Making use of its corner site, the Oddfellows Hall has a façade that starts on the Princess elevation and wraps around the corner and down McDermot Avenue. Each side consists of three bays, with the corner as a flattened centre bay. The original ground floor featured large storefront windows with two entrances located as they are now. Tall round-headed windows on the second floor feature radiating brick heads and wood sills. A projecting brick hood-mould is used to divert the rain. In order to identify that the third floor was space for the Oddfellows, tall windows with Gothic heads are used to signify the medieval roots of the fraternal order along with an eye-brow mould and the triple links.

An elaborate metal cornice crowns the building and is noteworthy for its variety of detail. Miniature Corinthian columns, grouped in threes, terminate the projecting pilasters that give a bay-by-bay division to the building. The brackets above the miniature columns contain embossed initials, lettered in sequence to spell I.O.O.F. and M. No. 1 L. (Independent Order of Oddfellows and Manitoba Number One Lodge). The cornice is also embellished by smaller brackets as well as embossed crescents and stars. There are sections of elaborate saw-tooth patterned ornamentation between the second and third storey windows. With its historic illusions of form and style and its symbolic metaphors of ornament and detailing, this building is clearly Victorian and eclectic.

From its completion in 1884 to the opening of the I.O.O.F. Temple on Kennedy Street in 1910, this building served as the headquarters for Oddfellowship in Manitoba. Its committee rooms and meeting areas served several local lodges while the large ballroom continued to service joint

functions into the 1940s. Although the Kennedy Temple took over as the main administrative centre, this hall continued as the base for Manitoba Lodge Number One. During the huge I.O.O.F. convention held in Winnipeg in 1912, 15,000 Oddfellows and Rebekahs flooded into the city from across Canada and the United States, staging the biggest parade ever seen in Western Canada. Besides the parade, there were many other events held within the city. The I.O.O.F. Hall, with its open spaces, was the scene for competitive degree contexts (dramatic representations of Biblical teachings) and drills by various lodges.³ The Oddfellows were so numerous that they virtually swarmed into every downtown hall and auditorium for their various collective rituals.⁴

Manitoba Lodge Number One, which contained several smaller camps or groups, continued to make the I.O.O.F. Hall their headquarters into the 1940s. A major fire in January 1930⁵ destroyed many of their records and regalia, and gutted much of the interior of the building. Architect F.R. Evans and contractors Wallace and Akins were commissioned to rebuild the interior as well as underpinning the building and altering the ground floor façade.⁶

Because the Oddfellows used only the third floor of their building, the lower two floors and basement have always been occupied by commercial tenants. The clothing wholesale of Carscaden and Peck in the 1880s⁷ gave way to the Ames Holden and Company boot and shoe wholesale in 1894.

In this century, the Oddfellows Hall has had a large variety of tenants with few of long duration. In 1905, Kingdon Printers occupied the first floor with offices and the second floor with its plant.⁸ The British Fure Company of the prewar period became the Standard Fur Manufacturing of the 1920s, the first of several garment manufacturers to occupy the space. During the 1930s and 40s, Empire Brass, a plumbing and heating supplier, became the principal tenant but again in the 1950s, the needle trade predominated. For many years, a small lunch bar called the Squeeze Inn was located on the ground floor. Now named the McDermot Block, the warehouse has been home to Shologin and Stewart, a furniture wholesale, since 1974.

A curious mixture of functions encompassing the most active period of the I.O.O.F. in the city, as well as its traditional warehouse function, seems to be reflected on the face of this unusual building. Seemingly resigned to its commercial role in a Romanesque/Victorian genre, the upper floor of this building suddenly comes alive in proclaiming its mystic and ritual functions for the Oddfellow fraternity. Despite a thorough remodelling of the ground floor exterior, as well as much of the interior space⁹ this 1883 structure retains a degree of integrity. There has been little alteration of the second and third storey façades, leaving both the original structural features and detailing preserved. As well, the third floor interior, the Oddfellows' space, seems to have survived with a minimum of alteration. The large open ballroom, with a pressed metal ceiling, is largely original.

This building represents both the early social organization of Winnipeg men and women in the Independent Order of Oddfellows and the commercial development of the historic warehouse district.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Theo A. Ross. Odd Fellowship: Its History and Manual, the M.W. Hazen Co. (New York), 1890, p. 9 & 408.
- 2 “The Building Boom!” The Winnipeg Daily Sun, 20 October 1883, p. 3.
- 3 “Degree Contests and Drills,” Manitoba Free Press, 17 September 1912, p. 18.
- 4 “Delegates to Big I.O.O.F. Convention Welcomed to City,” Manitoba Free Press, 17 September 1912, p. 1.
- 5 Thanks to Randy Rostecki, Historic Resources Branch.
- 6 City of Winnipeg Building Permits No. 153, 3 February 1930. Repairs after fire and alterations, costing \$10,000.
- 7 In 1894, Carscaden and Peck expanded into their own building down the block at 33 Princess Street. “Peck Building, 33 Princess Street”, report by Sheila Grover for Historical Buildings Committee, 1984.
- 8 Goad’s Fire Plan of Winnipeg, 1895, Map No. 243, 72-74 Princess Street.
- 9 Permits, op. cit., No. 4637-1927 fire escape at rear; No. 153-1930 repairs and alterations after fire. See above; No. 3274-1949 interior alterations; No. 5556-1950 alterations to restaurant kitchen.

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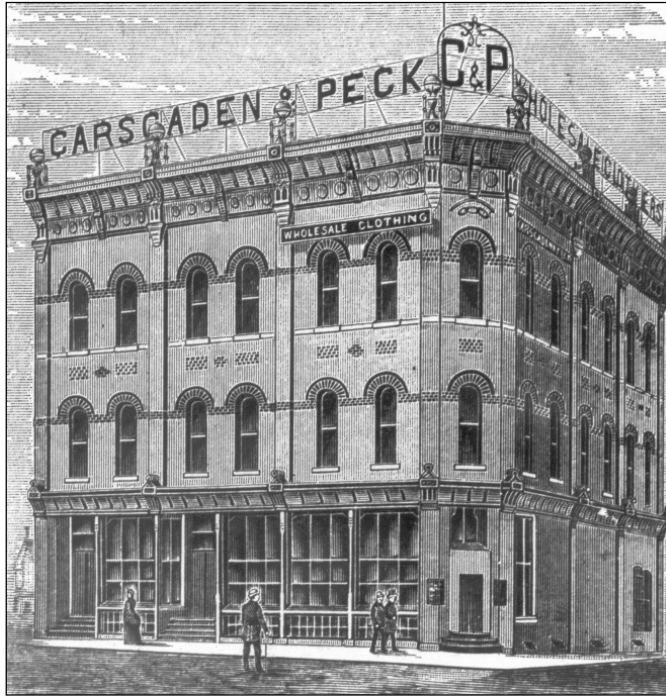


Plate 1 – Sketch of the “Carocaden & Peck Building,” (I.O.O.F. Building), 1888. (Reproduced from The Commercial, Vol. 6, February 13, 1888 [N8596].)



Plate 2 – McDermot Block, 72-74 Princess Street, no date. (City of Winnipeg Planning Department.)

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Plate 3 – McDermot Block, exterior detailing, no date. (City of Winnipeg Planning Department.)



Plate 4 – McDermot Block, exterior detailing, no date. (City of Winnipeg Planning Department.)

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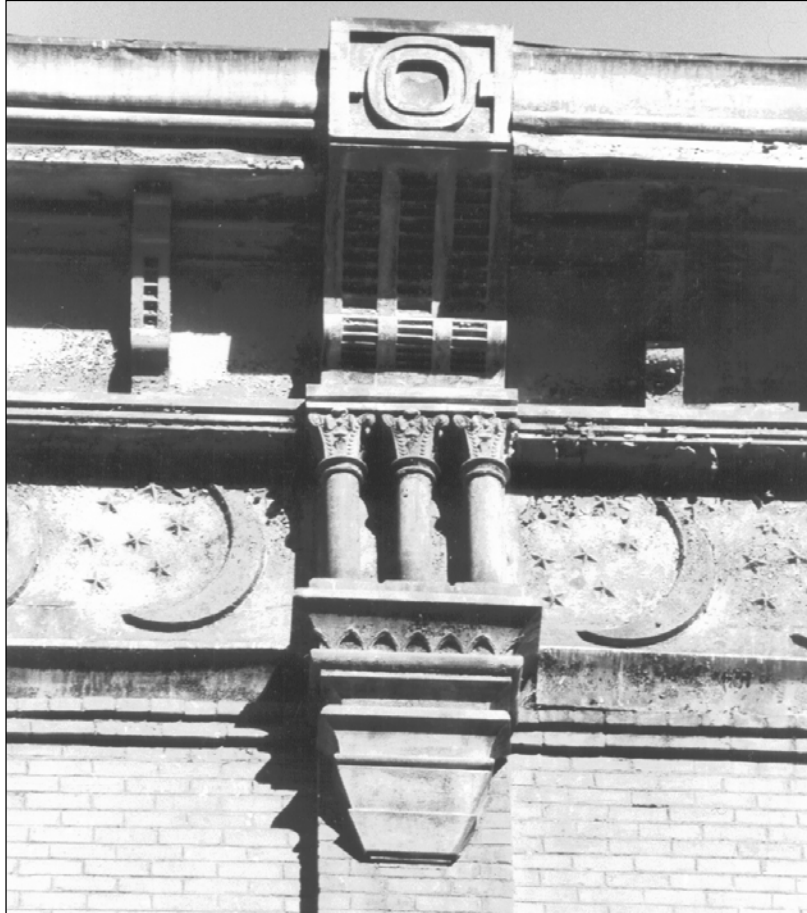


Plate 5 – McDermot Block, exterior, no date. (City of Winnipeg Planning Department.)