

72 PRINCESS STREET – ODD FELLOWS HALL (McDERMOT BLOCK)
Hugh McCowan, 1883



Elaborate cornice details, highlighted by embossed clusters of stars and crescent moons, reveal the fraternal origins of this three-storey commercial building in Winnipeg’s warehouse district.

The Romanesque-style structure was erected in 1883-84 on the southwest corner of Princess Street and McDermot Avenue to provide meeting rooms and revenues for local lodges of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF).

This fraternal benefit organization was founded in eighteenth century England by workers outside the guild system. They banded together for mutual aid, contributing dues to needy members or their survivors and maintaining solidarity through a series of shared principles, rituals and degrees.

The first IOOF lodge in Winnipeg began in 1873; by 1886, 13 subordinate groups had formed. The third floor of the Princess Street hall provided space for local lodge meetings and social events until the 1940s, although its role as the organization's Manitoba headquarters was assumed in 1910 by the Odd Fellows Temple on Kennedy Street. The hall's other floors were leased to commercial tenants to pay for the building and generate revenues for other IOOF endeavours.

The nearly square hall was designed by Winnipeg architect Hugh McCowan and built by Horace J. Raymer at a cost of \$25,000. It consists of solid brick on a stone foundation. Twin finished elevations face McDermot and Princess with a faceted corner entrance. Both contain three window bays separated by pilasters which terminate at the cornice in miniature trios of Corinthian columns.

The long, upper storey windows have segmented heads on the second floor and lancet heads to distinguish the IOOF space on the third level. Brick detailing and saw-tooth-patterned ornamentation appear between the second and third-storey windows. An arched panel with the IOOF's triple link symbol, representing friendship, love and truth, tops the third-floor corner window.

The elaborate metal cornice features Corinthian columns and embossed clusters of seven stars framed by crescents. Brackets above the columns carry an embossed series of initials, spelling in sequence IOOF and M L No. 1 (Manitoba Lodge Number One).

The IOOF's interior space included club rooms and a large, free-span auditorium complete with musician's gallery and ballroom dance floor.

The building's first commercial tenant was eastern-based Carscaden and Peck, a clothing wholesaler. It was followed by other wholesale, printing, plumbing and heating, and garment manufacturing firms. For many years, a small lunch bar called the Squeeze Inn was on the main floor. A furniture wholesaler has been the main occupant since 1974.

A 1930 fire damaged the building's interior and destroyed IOOF records and regalia. Architect F.R. Evans and contractors Wallace and Akins were commissioned to rebuild the interior, underpin the structure, and alter the ground-level façade. The large, original storefront windows were altered, the main floor cornice was removed, and additional windows were inserted on the McDermot elevation. However, the integrity of the original upper storey façade, and of the ballroom with its pressed metal ceiling, largely has been retained.

The building recently was cleaned and the cornice restored as part of exterior upgrading assisted by the Winnipeg Core Area Initiative's Historic Winnipeg Development Program.