

65 RORIE STREET – NORTHERN ELECTRIC BUILDING
J.O. Despatie (Montreal), Pratt and Ross, 1928



Located at the intersection of Bannatyne Avenue and Rorie Street, the Northern Electric Building has played an important part in the current revitalization of the eastern section of the Exchange District. The building was erected in 1928 as an office and depot for Northern Electric, a large Montreal-based firm that manufactured and distributed a broad range of products: telephone components; wire and cable; electrical apparatus; and radio sets. A small branch office had been established in Winnipeg in 1908 but the phenomenal growth of the city and the prairie provinces in the latter 1920s necessitated larger facilities.

The plans for the new office and warehouse were drawn up by J.O. Despatie, the company's own architect in association with the Winnipeg architectural firm of Pratt and Ross. Carter-Halls and Aldinger were the general contractors for the \$150,000 building.

The design of the building points out what was considered to be "most modern" in warehouse construction. Fire-proof steel construction rising three storeys was veneered in dark brick with

Tyndal stone trim. The 90 feet square warehouse was originally planned to be four storeys. The concrete foundation is finished in rusticated stone that rises a few metres above the ground level. The large main doorway is emphasized by a limestone surround. Projecting brick pilasters, providing a vertical by-by-bay division, contain the uniformly arranged windows with limestone lintels and sills. A substantial belt course of stone defines the limits of the main floor and the upper stories. The parapet, which has segmental gables at the corners, is trimmed with copper coping, now oxidized to a deep green shade.

The minimal decoration of the building, with few historical details acting as links to the styles of the past, was an attempt by the architects to present a modern look to the warehouse. This modest structure stands out from the numerous Richardsonian influenced warehouses that make up Winnipeg's historic district.

The warehouse featured a combination of steel frame construction with a conventional post and beam interior. Designed to carry heavy loads, the building contains special features such as oversized joists and posts, and floors 2 x 4's laid on edge. The general office and display area were located on the first floor. The warehouse had a heavy freight elevator at the rear of the building.

The formal opening of the building was attended by company officials from across Canada. The top floor of the building was artistically decorated for the occasion and the Capitol Theatre orchestra provided entertainment for the evening.

In the late 1950s Northern Electric relocated to an industrial park and the building became home to a garment factory. Vacant in 1975, the building was then purchased and attractively renovated by its owner Richardson Realty. The newly restored ground floor is now a popular nightclub – The Rorie Street Marble Club. The renovation of this building serves as an excellent example of private sector investment responding to the recent public spending in the Bannatyne Avenue Streetscaping Program under the Winnipeg Core Area Initiative Heritage Program.