

52 ALBERT STREET – GREGG BUILDING
J.H. Cadham, 1902; F. Evans, 1922



By the early 1900s, Winnipeg was into its heyday as the wholesale trade center for Western Canada. Commercial development expanded along Albert Street and elsewhere in the warehouse district as businesses seized the opportunities offered by large-scale settlement of the Prairies.

One such entrepreneurial firm was George R. Gregg and Company, founded in Winnipeg in 1897 by Gregg, a salesman and manufacturer's agent. He detected a market for Japanese silks, a popular material for women's afternoon and evening wear. His import-wholesale trade grew rapidly, benefiting from general prosperity and rising demand for luxury goods. Silk textiles and tailor-made wear remained Gregg's most important wholesale items, but he also built a profitable business by importing other oriental textiles and items such as china, matting, rugs, curios and toys via a network of Asian buyers. Gregg moved his head office to Toronto in 1904 but maintained branches in Winnipeg and Vancouver.

The Gregg Building, on the west side of Albert between Notre Dame and McDermot avenues, was designed in 1902 by James H. Cadham, an Ontarian who served in Wolseley's 1870 Red River Expedition. Cadham subsequently worked as a contractor in Winnipeg, then turned to architecture in the mid 1890s. He specialized in large warehouses, stores and offices, and strongly influenced the appearance of the warehouse district. Among his commissions were the Merchants, G.F. Stephens, McLaughlin Carriage, Kemp Manufacturing, Stobart Sons and Company, Miller Morse, Scott, and Frost and Wood buildings; the University of Manitoba Medical College; and additions to the Gault, Whitla, McIntyre and Galt buildings.

For the Gregg Building, Cadham employed the Richardsonian Romanesque style popular for heavy masonry construction because it portrayed an image of strength and dignity. The office-warehouse, originally four storeys in height, is constructed of solid, buff-coloured brick with an undressed limestone foundation and trim. A large stone archway surrounds the entrance, meeting the raised foundation 1½ metres above grade. The three bays of paired windows terminate in segmental arches. Cast iron columns and heavy wooden joists have been used to support the warehouse's storage loads. The original interior had plain walls and columned, unstructured spaces. It since has been partitioned and altered on several occasions but the changes mainly have been superficial.

The building was completed in 1903 at a cost of \$26,000 by Kelly Brothers, one of Winnipeg's largest contractors. Their projects included the main Post Office, Grain Exchange, Bank of Toronto and Bank of Nova Scotia. Later known as Thomas Kelly and Sons, this firm dissolved in the aftermath of a scandal over the 1913-14 construction of the Manitoba Legislative Building.

In 1922, Frank Evans designed a fifth-storey addition for G.R. Gregg and Company. He maintained the integrity of the building's lines by repeating the segmental arches over the bays and the original design of the cornice. Evans began his architectural practice in Winnipeg in 1899 but had a relatively low profile, specializing in residential design and appraisal work.

G.R. Gregg and Company was the main occupant of the building prior to World War I; some space also was leased to various textile manufacturers' agents. By the 1920s, the occupants

tended to be more diversified although still largely involved in the dry goods trade. The Gregg Company survived into the mid 1950s, marketing scarves and handkerchiefs through a lone agent in the city in the post-World War II period. Among more than a dozen contemporary tenants of the building are Al Sprintz and Sons, wholesale men's clothing; the Fleet Galleries; All Pro Sportswear; Surgical Elastic Company; and a karate school.