



**75 ALBERT STREET
(222 McDERMOT AVENUE)**

SILVESTER & WILLSON BUILDING

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
Researcher: M. Peterson
May 2018

This building embodies the following heritage values as described in the *Historical Resources By-law, 55/2014* (consolidated update July 13, 2016):

- (a) This warehouse was built in 1904, an early 20th century addition to the growing warehouse district in Winnipeg's downtown;
- (b) It was associated for many decades with the Willson Stationery Company, founded ca.1903 and ultimately operating branches in Saskatchewan and Alberta;
- (c) It was designed by noted local architect John H.G. Russell;
- (d) It employs an unusual support system of a combination of cast iron posts and wooden beams and floors;
- (e) It is located in the heart of Winnipeg's Exchange District National Historic Site and surrounded by dozens of contemporary structures; and
- (f) The building's exterior has suffered little alteration.

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Winnipeg in the early 1890s was, although few realized it, on the verge of a spectacular era of growth, development and maturity that would create, by World War I, a large, modern city with all the amenities. But this comprehensive growth followed patterns established decades earlier and resulted in specific districts within city boundaries even after this frenzied period of growth.

The real estate and construction boom of the early 1880s was intimately connected to the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) around Winnipeg and onto the western prairies. Land prices in the small capital city skyrocketed, the population soared and solid brick structures began replacing the small wooden shacks that dotted the mud streets. This development led to the creation of specific districts within the city – residential, commercial and industrial – and their related building-types.¹ The huge advance in land prices along Main Street north of Portage Avenue necessitated the replacement of the earlier residential development with large commercial structures. Investors chose to locate near one of the most important buildings, City Hall, from which would come assistance in advancing both singular business interests and those of the community at large.

Commercial interests, both local and from Eastern Canada, were quick to locate in this area. The city rapidly assumed the role of wholesale hub for all of Western Canada, partially because of its central location and partially because of the preferential freight rates negotiated with the CPR that made it cheaper for manufacturers to ship their goods to Winnipeg, unload them and then send them west to the growing markets on the prairies. Companies like G.F. and J. Galt Company, Stobart, Eden and Company and J.H. Ashdown were all organized and carrying on business prior to the CPR boom. The bust of 1882, while it seriously affected some parts of the local economy, did not have a devastating effect on the wholesale sector. This was mainly as a result of the expanding regional base of the wholesalers as settlement increased on the prairies

¹ R.R. Rostecki, “The Growth of Winnipeg, 1870-1886,” unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Manitoba, 1980, pp. 112-14.

and demand for goods grew. The areas east and west of Main Street, however, were undeniably developing as the warehouse district, slowly through the 1880s and 1890s and then rapidly after 1900 (Plates 1-3).

In 1901, as Winnipeg's economy started to expand, a corner property at McDermot Avenue and Albert Street, in the heart of the warehouse district was sold at \$350/foot for just under \$15,000. Three years later, the property was the site of another fine Winnipeg building, the Silvester and Willson Building (Plate 4).

STYLE

The large block, constructed as a retail/office structure, is unusually detailed, featuring many familiar design details found throughout the warehouse district. Overall, the building is a fine example of the Romanesque Revival style, very popular in warehouse districts throughout North America from the 1880s well into the 20th century. The buildings were nearly always solid brick with a raised basement and featuring rusticated stone accenting around windows and doors and at roof level. Other elements included towers flanking the main façade, quoins, belt courses, corbelled brick panels, chevrons and flat rooflines, with or without cornices and entablatures. The most obvious feature of the style was the use of the arch above openings. Often, straight-topped windows located on the middle storeys were grouped under large arches on the upper floors.² Although the style was applied to private residences and on large public buildings, in Winnipeg it was almost exclusively used in the warehouse district, where the designs were somewhat more subdued. The massiveness and sturdiness of the style appealed to wholesalers looking to promote their businesses and portray the stability of their firms through the design of the structures they occupied.

² L. Maitland, et al., *A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1992), p. 84; and *Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba* (Winnipeg: Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, Historic Resources Branch, 1991), p. 14.

CONSTRUCTION

This is a five-storey structure, tall for the district, located on the southeast corner of McDermot Avenue and Albert Street. The building measures 13.7 metres along McDermot Avenue and 32.0 metres along Albert Street and rests on a 66.0-centimetre stone foundation and utilizes a structural system of cast iron posts and wooden beams and floors throughout (see Appendix I for more technical information). The solid brick walls are 43.2 centimetres thick and stone is used for exterior accenting.

The cost of construction was given as \$45,000.³

DESIGN

This combines retail/showroom space on the ground floor with office space on the upper floors. This mixed use on the interior is visually reflected on the building's exterior with a cornice above the first storey windows along the entire front (north) and west side of the building (Plates 5 and 6). This element is repeated between the fourth and fifth storeys (Plate 7), although it only runs along the two outside bays, north and south, on the west façade.

The original central entrance on the main façade was described in City of Winnipeg documents as “old style wooden” referring to the traditional recessed entrance with angled plate glass display windows and support post (Plate 8).⁴ Above, the main façade is divided into three bays each containing large square headed window openings. The window units are designed in a three-over-one pattern in the outside bays; the middle bay windows are internally divided into two, the paired units featuring a two-over-one pattern. Raise brickwork heightens the visual conspicuousness of the windows on the front façade (Plate 9). The building is finished with a complete entablature with heavy overhanging cornice and plain brick parapet. The building's name is prominently featured below the cornice.

³ City of Winnipeg Building Permit (below as BP), #149/1904.

⁴ City of Winnipeg Assessment Record, Roll No. 608740-12-2.

The west elevation also contains a public entrance (replaced by the present element in 1946 – Plate 10)⁵ and features some unusual design elements. It is divided into seven bays; the outer bays continue the fenestration, brickwork and detailing of the front façade. The middle five bays are significantly different – the window openings are smaller and paired, connected by stone lug sills and no brick embellishments. Top floor windows are arched (Plate 11). The south end of the ground floor has, according to visual documentation, always featured large show windows on the ground floor topped by a modest cornice (Plate 12). A metal fire escape is centrally located on this elevation.

Most of the east wall is a party wall with the Leckie Building, 216 McDermot Avenue, the uncovered portion is windowless and unadorned and includes a painted Willson Stationery Limited logo (Plate 13). The rear (south) façade features paired and single window openings with stone lug sills their only embellishment (Plate 14). A raised loading door is found at the east end of this elevation (Plate 15).

INTERIOR

The building's ground floor is divided into two separate retail spaces, the one accessed from the McDermot Avenue entrance also has access to the basement, while the store located in the southwest corner of the building has access to the interior stairs and cage elevator (Plates 16 and 17). These latter elements are unusual in warehouses in the Exchange District and included a skylight (now covered) and stairwell windows to increase the natural light and ventilation to the interior (Plate 18).

The middle three floors are similarly laid out with hallways running off the centre staircase for offices (Plate 19) and a rear hallways leading to the freight elevator in the building's southeast corner.⁶

⁵ Loc. cit.

⁶ The west side of the second floor has been opened up with the removal of much of the original interior partitioning.

All floors, including the basement, feature one or more walk-in safes, some with hand-painted doors. These three levels are used as artists' studios (Plate 20).

The fifth floor, the meeting hall, still boasts the original high ceilings covered in ornamental tin (Plate 21), including rosette grills, and an office in the southwest corner. Much of the original meeting space has been divided into studios by temporary walls.

INTEGRITY

This building stands on its original site, appears to be in good structural condition for its age and has not suffered major exterior alteration.

STREETScape

The Silvester & Willson Building stands on a corner lot and as such, defines and is an integral part of two separate streetscapes – McDermot Avenue and Albert Street (Plates 22 and 23). This warehouse, along with the other buildings in the district, has been recognized as a National Historic District by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. All buildings in the Exchange District are an essential part of the historic streetscape and as such, the Historical Buildings and Resources Committee has given them 60 points.

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS

John Hamilton Gordon Russell, a well-known local architect, was responsible for the design of this structure (Plate 24). He set up a private practice in 1895 and for nearly half a century designed some of Winnipeg's finest buildings, many from his offices in the Silvester & Willson Building (see Appendix I for biographical information). He has been given 20 points by the Historical Buildings and Resources Committee.

Contractors for the building were the short-lived partnership of Saul and Brown. The pair appears to only have worked together during the 1904 construction season. Besides the Silvester-Willson Building, they were named in the City of Winnipeg Building Permit for a store for A.H. Pilford, Portage Avenue (demolished) and four fire halls: No. 4, 470 Gertrude Avenue (demolished); No. 5, 354 Sherbrook Street (demolished); No. 6, 66 Pearl Street (demolished); and No. 7, 349 Burrows Avenue.⁷

PERSON/INSTITUTION

The construction of the Silvester & Willson Building was financed by an individual, George Silvester, and the Willson Stationery Company.⁸ Silvester arrived in Winnipeg from Toronto, ON in the early 1880s, working in Winnipeg, Emerson and Brandon for A. Harris, Son and Company, farm implement dealers and then for Massey-Harris Company in Virden. In ca.1897, Silvester purchased two hardware firms in Elkhorn, MB and combined them into his own company, adding a local lumber yard in 1900 (Plate 25).⁹

Willson Stationery Company was founded in ca.1903 by Henry Lee Willson (1870-1950), who was born in Newmarket, ON and came to Winnipeg, purchased the Ford Stationery Company on Main Street and renamed it Willson Stationery, ultimately operating branches in Saskatchewan (Moose Jaw, Regina, Saskatoon) and Alberta (Calgary) – Plate 26 – and building a large warehouse on Gertie Street.¹⁰

The Silvester and Willson Company was organized to manage the building and Willson Stationery was the ground floor retail tenant into the 1960s.¹¹ Early tenants included manufacturers' agents,

⁷ City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books, 1899-1926.

⁸ There is evidence, through newspaper articles, that both men or their extended families, were from the Newmarket, ON area. According the City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls, Roll No. 608740-12-2 (below as ARo), the building was owned from 1905-1909 by Willson Stationery Company founder H.L. Willson's mother, Eliza Jane Willson (ca.1851-1938).

⁹ Manitoba Free Press, June 28, 1902, p. 18.

¹⁰ BP #1917/1910, east side of Gertie Street between McDermot and Notre Dame avenues.

¹¹ ARo, 1905-1970; and Henderson's Directory, 1905-1970.

barristers, a dentist, a cigar dealer, a tailor and meeting space known as “Friendship Hall”¹² and after 1960 the building has been owned and occupied by a number of individuals and companies.¹³ In 2008, the property was purchased by the Exchange Community Church with support from the district churches in Manitoba and Saskatchewan of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (Canadian Midwest District).¹⁴

EVENT

There is no known significant historic event connected with this building.

CONTEXT

Built in the midst of Winnipeg’s early 20th century expansion phase, this building fits into the associated rise in demand for modern office and retail space in the downtown. Winnipeg’s warehouse district not only attracted large businesses in need of storage space but also companies from the United States and Eastern Canada that required offices for local personnel setting up branches in Winnipeg. The growth in population also necessitated an increase in the demand for professional services – lawyers, doctors, dentists, etc. all found an increasing clientele. This building, and several others like it, was built with capital from two successful local businesses to address this need for modern space and it has continued to fill this need to the present.

LANDMARK

The Silvester & Willson Building is located at a busy intersection in the heart of Winnipeg’s Exchange District. It is a conspicuous and well-known structure in the area.

¹² Manitoba Free Press, April 9, 1906, p. 12.

¹³ ARo, 1960-1990; and Henderson’s Directory, 1960-1990.

¹⁴ Exchange Community Church website, www.exchangechurch.ca, no date.



APPENDIX I

CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report Assessment Record

Building Address: 75 Albert Street
(222 McDermot Avenue)

Building Name: Silvester and Willson Building

Original Use: retail warehouse

Current Use: retail/warehouse

Roll No. (Old): 608740 (10072)

Municipality: 12

Ward: 2

Property or Occupancy Code: 50

Legal Description: 6 St. John, Plan 586, Lots D: E

Location: southeast corner Albert Street & McDermot Avenue

Date of Construction: 1904

Storeys: 5 + B

Construction Type: Ordinary

HERITAGE STATUS: ON NOMINATED LIST

Building Permits (Plans available: [CS] City Storage):

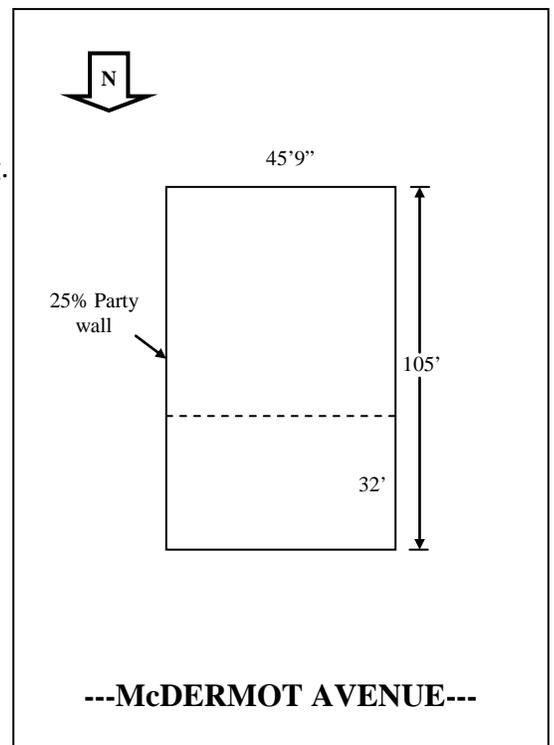
- 149/1904 \$45,000 (original - 45 x 105); 4672/1946 \$1,500 (alteration); 5156/1948 \$100 (alteration);
2231/1968 \$7,000 (alteration); 3462/1969 \$2,000 (alteration – 2nd floor); 4195/1969 \$700, (alteration – 3rd
floor); 3069/1977 \$1,300 (main floor renovation); 1471/1977 [CS] \$7,000 (main floor renovation)

Information:

- 46 x 105 x 78+ = 380,796 cu. ft.
- Front Elev. – Old style wood store, plate glass from sill to beam, centre entrance. Upper floors – brick, stone sills, cornice
- Wall Thickness – 17” Brick, stone foundation – 26” thick
- West elevation – Albert Street – wood front, stock brick
- Rear – common brick. East wall partial party wall w/ Leckie Bldg.
- 1945 – structurally sound, slight settlement. Exterior good
- Permit 4672/1946 – New doorway to Albert Street front
- Permit 2534/1957 – Asphalt tile floors 1st and 2nd, some new elect.
- 1965 Assessment – Appears fair condition
- 1951 – 3rd and 4th floor decorations
- 1961 – no structural changes – building completely occupied.
Lighting mostly fluorescent
- Permit 2231/1968 – new exterior entrance – 2 sets alum. doors, new hallway partitions
- 1985 Appeal – “fair condition” – elevator not working
- 1990 – Heating system converted to gas boiler hot water
- 1997 – basement, main and 2nd occupied, 3rd – vacant

ARCHITECT: J.H.G. RUSSELL

CONTRACTOR: SAUL AND BROWN



APPENDIX II

John Hamilton Gordon Russell

J.H.G. Russell was born in Toronto, Canada West (Ontario) in 1862, the son of a dry goods dealer. After attending school in that city, he went to work for H.B. Gordon, a prominent area architect. Russell was with Gordon from 1878 until his departure for Winnipeg in 1882.¹ From 1886 to 1893, Russell travelled throughout the United States, learning civil engineering, surveying and architecture in centres such as Chicago, Illinois, Spokane and Tacoma, Washington, and Sioux City, Iowa.²

In 1895, two years after returning to Winnipeg, he set up his private practice, coinciding with the city's period of unbridled growth. His designs were (and are) scattered throughout the city, province and Western Canada, covering a variety of building types, sizes, prices and uses. His business continued to be steady during World War I and after, when many architects struggled to find commissions.

Russell was president of the Manitoba Association of Architects (1925) and served for three terms as the president of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (1912-15). His chairmanship of the Presbyterian Church Board of Managers³ and his devotion to Presbyterianism partially explain the large number of churches he designed for the denomination in Winnipeg and Western Canada. Russell died in 1946.

A complete list of his designs would be lengthy indeed. Many of his earlier works have been demolished and therefore usually are no longer included in inventories of his portfolio.

¹ G. Bryce, A History of Manitoba (Toronto: The Canada History Company, 1906), p. 480.

² Ibid., p. 480; and M. Peterson, "The Wilson House (Klinic), 545 Broadway," report to the Historical Buildings Committee, May 1990, Appendix I, n.p.

³ M. Peterson, op. cit., n.p.

Among his larger projects were:

J.H. Ashdown Warehouse, 157-179 Bannatyne Ave. (1899-1911 additions) – Grade II
Lake of the Woods Building, 212 McDermot Ave. (1901) – Grade II
Hammond Building, 63 Albert St. (1902) – Grade III
J.H.G. Russell House, 237 Wellington Cres. (1902) – demolished
Porter and Company Building, 368 Main St. (1902-1903) – demolished
McKerchar Block, 600-602 Main St. (1902-1903)
J.D. McArthur House, 159 Mayfair Ave. (1903) – Grade III
Thomson Block, 499 Main St. (1903) – demolished
Adelman Building, 92-100 Princess St. (1903) – Grade II
Bole Warehouse, 70 Princess St. (1903)
Bright and Johnston Building, 141 Bannatyne Ave. (1903 & 1907 additions) – Grade III
McClary Building, 185 Bannatyne Ave. (1903 & 1904 additions) – Grade III
Augustine Presbyterian (United), 444 River Ave. (1903-1904) – Grade II
R.R. Wilson House, 545 Broadway (1904) – Grade III
Starbuck Presbyterian (United) Church, Starbuck, MB (1904)
Silvester and Willson Building, 222 McDermot Ave. (1904)
Green and Litster Block, 235-237 Fort St. (1904) – demolished
Franklin Press, 168 Bannatyne Ave. (1904) – Grade III
Addition to Daylite Building, 296 McDermot Ave. (1904) – Grade II
J.H. Ashdown Store, 211 Bannatyne Ave. (1904) – Grade III
Allman Block, 592-594 Main St. (1904)
Porter Building, 165 McDermot Ave. (1906) – Grade III
Crescent-Fort Rouge Methodist (United), 525 Wardlaw Ave. (1906-1911)
Treherne Presbyterian (United) Church, Treherne, MB (1907-1908)
H. Archibald House, 176 Roslyn Rd. (1909)
Child's (McArthur) Building, Portage Ave., (1909) – demolished
Casa Loma Block, 644 Portage Ave. (1909) – Grade II
Glengarry Block, 290 McDermot Ave. (1910) – Grade III
Ormsby House, 119 Campbell St. (1910)
Westminster Presbyterian (United), 745 Westminster Ave. (1910-1912) – Grade II
Dingwall Building, 62 Albert St. (1911) – Grade III
Chatsworth Apartments, 535 McMillan Ave. (1911)
Y.M.C.A., Selkirk Ave. (1911) – demolished
Robertson Memorial Presbyterian (United), 648 Burrows Ave. (1911)
Robertson Memorial Presbyterian Institute, 650 Burrows Ave. (1911)
Y.M.C.A., 301 Vaughan St., with Jackson and Rosencrans of New York (1911-1913) – Grade II
Great West Permanent Loan Company Building, 356 Main St. (1912) – demolished
Guelph Apartments, 778 McMillan Ave. (1912)

J.H.G. Russell designs (continued):

J.H. Ashdown House, 529 Wellington Cres. (1913) – Grade II
Knox Presbyterian (United), 400 Edmonton St. (1914-1917)
Home St. Presbyterian (United), 318 Home St. (1920)
Marlborough (Olympia) Hotel, 321 Smith St. (1921-1923 addition) – Grade II
Odd Fellows Home, 4025 Roblin Blvd. (1922)
St. John's Presbyterian (United), 250 Cathedral Ave. (1923) – Grade III
Riverview Presbyterian (United), 360 Oakwood Ave. (1925)
R.R. Wilson House, 680 Wellington Cres. (1925)
Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Portage Ave. (1928)
Hugh John Macdonald School, 567 Bannatyne Ave. (1929)
Eastman Kodak Building, 287 Portage Ave. (1930) – demolished

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Plate 1 – McDermot Avenue looking west from Main Street, ca.1881. (Photo courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba, "Winnipeg- Streets- McDermot #1".)



Plate 2 – The same view approximately two decades later (ca.1903). Large brick and stone warehouses and retail/office buildings have replaced all the residential property in this shot. The Leckie Building is at the arrow. (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba.)

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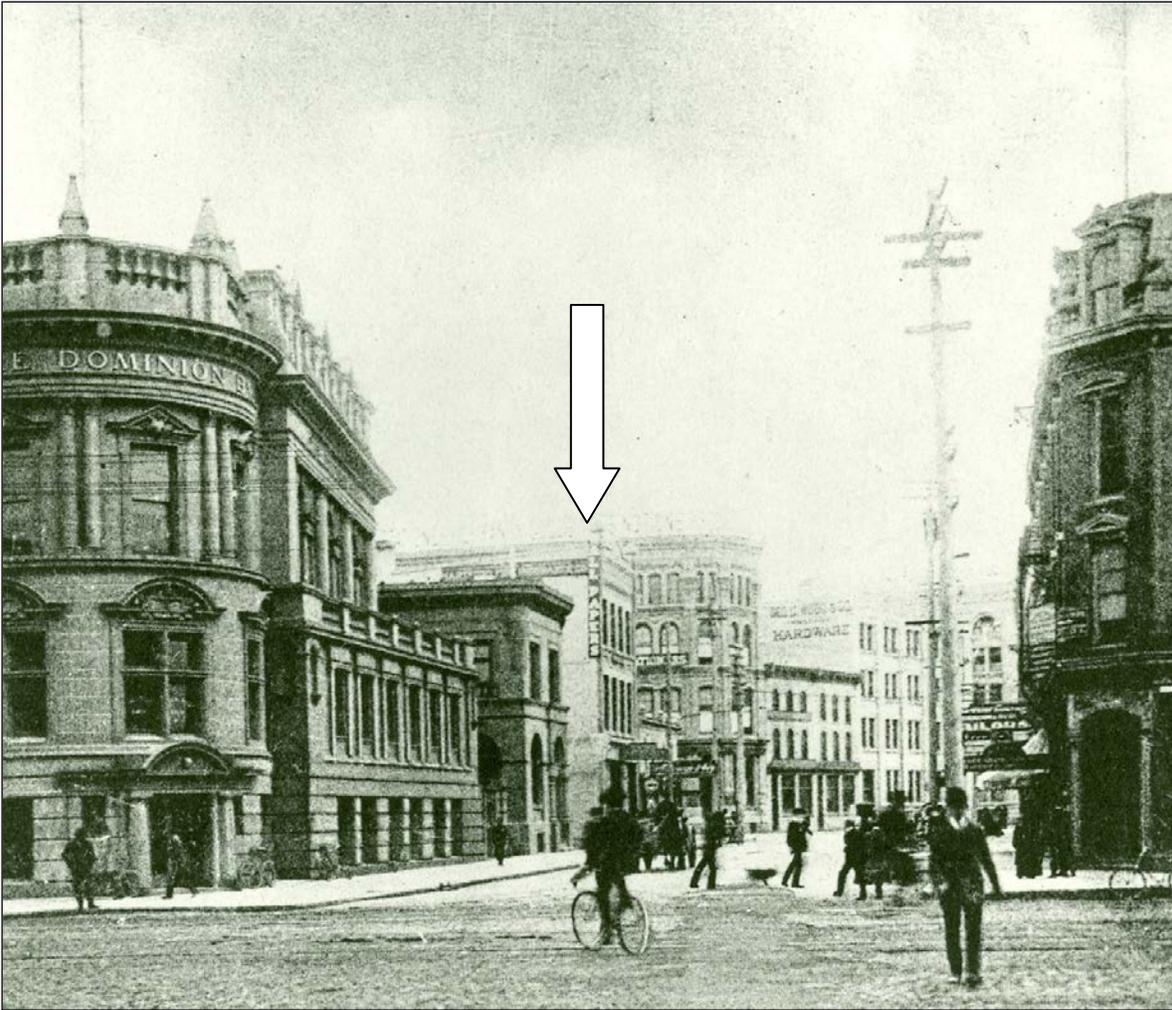


Plate 3 – Looking west along McDermot Avenue from Main Street, ca.1900. The Silvester and Willson Building (located just west of the Leckie Building [arrow]), has not yet been built. ([Archives of Manitoba, “Winnipeg- Streets- McDermot- 5”](#).)

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Plate 4 – Drawing of the Silvester and Willson Building, McDermot Avenue at Albert Street, 1904. (Reproduced from the Manitoba Free Press, November 24, 1904, p. 18.)

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Plate 5 – Silvester and Willson Building, 75 Albert Street, north façade, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 6 – Silvester and Willson Building, 75 Albert Street, west façade, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)



Plate 7 – Silvester and Willson Building, 75 Albert Street, detail of north façade, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 8 – Silvester and Willson Building, 75 Albert Street, McDermot Street (north) entrance, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 9 – Silvester and Willson Building, 75 Albert Street, northwest corner detail, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 10 – Silvester and Willson Building, 75 Albert Street, west side entrance, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 11 – Silvester and Willson Building, 75 Albert Street, north and west façades, 1985. (City of Winnipeg, 1985.)

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Plate 12 – Silvester and Willson Building, 75 Albert Street, southwest corner, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)



Plate 13 – Silvester and Willson Building, 222 McDermot Avenue, east façade, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 14 – Silvester and Willson Building, 75 Albert Street, rear (south) façade, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 15 – Silvester and Willson Building, 75 Albert Street, rear loading door, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 16 – Silvester and Willson Building, 75 Albert Street, interior of cage elevator, not presently functioning, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 17 – Silvester and Willson Building, 75 Albert Street, stairs to the third floor, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 18 – Silvester and Willson Building, 75 Albert Street, stairs to the fifth floor with interior windows, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 19 – Silvester and Willson Building, 75 Albert Street, 3rd floor hallway, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 20 – Silvester and Willson Building, 75 Albert Street, 3rd floor studio, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 21 – Silvester and Willson Building, 75 Albert Street, fifth floor ceiling, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 22 – McDermot Avenue looking east from Albert Street, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)



Plate 23 – McDermot Avenue looking west from Main Street, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 24 – John Hamilton Gordon Russell, ca.1913. (Reproduced from F.H. Schofield, The Story of Manitoba [Winnipeg, MB: S.J. Clarke, 1913], Vol. II.)

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Elkhorn Hardware and Lumber Mart

G. SILVESTER
PROPRIETOR



For hardware of every description, cutlery in large variety, shelf and heavy hardware in all its branches. Builders' supplies a specialty. Plasterers' goods—hair, cement, plaster paris. Large and fine display of silverware, nothing less than quadruple quality carried. Mixed paints and the new celebrated wall finish "Murallo" in a large variety of colours and tints. Stoves and ranges from the great Majestic range to a neat and cheap stove at \$20.00.

A well stocked lumber yard wherein is carried pine, spruce and British Columbia cedar and fir, mouldings, sashes, doors, screen windows and doors.

Our cellar and store is full of goods of the variety found in a well established and up-to-date hardware store. **COAL AND WOOD YARD AND SHEDS.**

Plate 25 – 1902 advertisement for G. Silvester's Elkhorn Hardware and Lumber Mart. (Reproduced from the Manitoba Free Press, June 28, 1902, p. 19.)

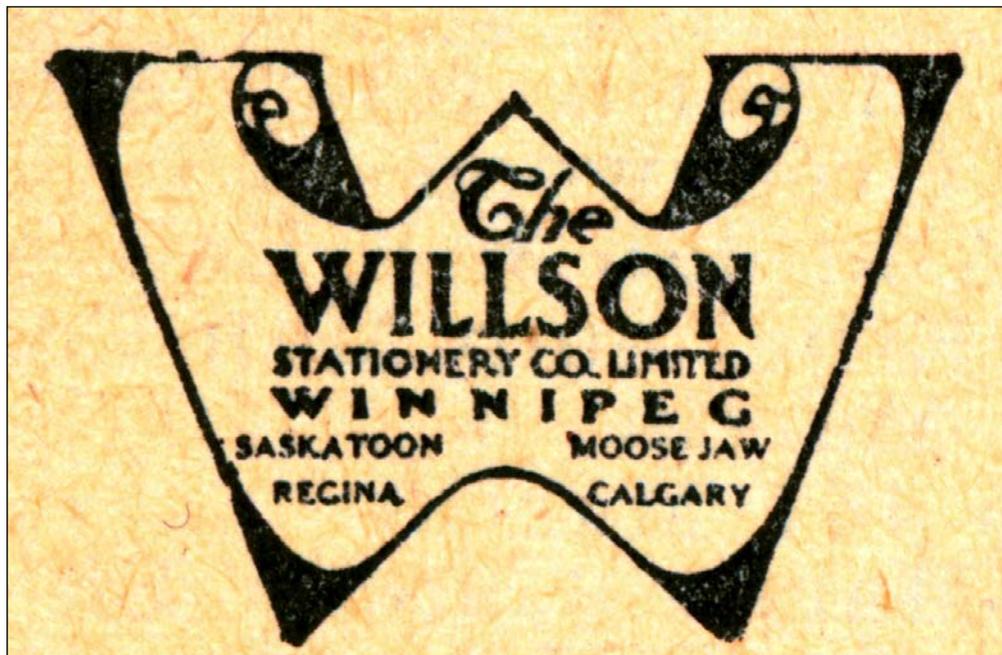


Plate 26 – Willson Stationery Company Limited logo, 1943. (Reproduced from Henderson's Directory, 1943.)