

**141 BANNATYNE AVENUE – BRIGHT AND JOHNSTON BUILDING  
(MACKENZIE BLOCK)  
*J.H.G. Russell, 1903***



Up to World War I, Winnipeg's strategic location in the transcontinental rail network, plus its ability to gain freight rate concessions, ensured that its firms, and not eastern wholesalers, would store and handle the bulk of supplies destined for other centres on the Prairies.

Bright and Johnston, a wholesale grocer, was one of the local partnerships established to take advantage of this opportunity. Formed in 1896, the firm specialized in the sale of fruits, nuts and honey. Senior partner Albert Bright previously operated a grocery and liquor store at King Street and Logan Avenue. Ontarian Kenneth John Johnston, a champion high (penny farthing) bicycle rider, moved to the city in 1882 and worked with wholesale grocers Sutherland and Campbell.

In 1898, Bright and Johnston acquired and renovated a three-storey warehouse at 137 Bannatyne Avenue between Rorie Street and the Red River. The site was particularly attractive for a firm handling perishable produce because it stood adjacent to a spur line built in c.1894 by the Winnipeg Transfer Railway.

The partners' success soon led to a need for larger facilities. In 1903, they had John H.G. Russell design a four-storey building at 141 Bannatyne, immediately to the west of their existing premises. The warehouse was erected for \$23,160 by several local tradesmen, principally mason Phillip Burnett and carpenter S.B. Ritchie. It was connected to 137 Bannatyne by a party wall and enclosed driveway/loading dock area. The entire complex became known as the Bright and Johnston Building, with the owners occupying #141 and renting out #137.

Russell (1862-1946) was one of Winnipeg's most prolific architects during the turn of the century. Several of his churches, office and institutional buildings still stand. He also exerted substantial influence over development of the warehouse district to the east and west of Main Street. His plans often reflected the neoclassical models of noted American architects, H.H. Richardson and L.H. Sullivan. In the case of 141 Bannatyne, however, Russell applied a restrained, utilitarian approach with minimal stylistic treatment. As a result, the warehouse complemented its western neighbour and 137 Bannatyne, both of which were designed by Mancel Willmot and George W. Stewart in 1882-83.

Russell's solid brick structure is supported by a rough-cut stone foundation and internal network of squared wooden beams and columns. The front (south) facade is divided by brick pilasters into four bays, the narrowest of which highlights the main entrance. Large arched openings on the first two floors are embellished with stone lug sills, radiating brick heads, brick keystones, and drip moulding. Plain rectangular windows appear along the third floor, outlined by stone lug sills and brick keystones. The fourth level displays a series of smaller, round-headed openings with continuous stone sills and ornamental brick heads. This floor is further distinguished by corbelled brickwork and string courses both below and above the windows. A plain brick

parapet and flat roof complete the design.

Large offices and showrooms with metal ceilings originally were located on the first two levels, while the remaining space was devoted to storage.

Elevator and loading dock facilities were organized to facilitate the quick transfer of perishable stock. Much of the interior was reconstructed after a 1907 fire. This work, valued at \$27,735 and directed by Russell, included extension of the building's fourth floor over 137 Bannatyne. Subsequent, but less extensive, repairs were required at #141 after fires in 1915 and 1926.

The Bright and Johnston partnership dissolved in 1908. The latter became an independent fruit broker; the former reorganized as Bright and Sons crockery wholesale, remaining at 141 Bannatyne until taken over in the 1920s. Subsequent occupants included W.L. Mackenzie and Company, a general merchandise agent that later specialized in bakers' supplies, then MacDonald Tobacco products. By the early 1940s, 141 Bannatyne had been renamed the Mackenzie Block. The company left the site in the 1970s. A screen printing firm occupied the building's renovated main floor as of late 1992, but the upper storeys were vacant.