



141 BANNATYNE AVENUE

THE MACKENZIE BLOCK
(FORMERLY THE BRIGHT AND JOHNSTON BUILDING)

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee

October 1992

**141 BANNATYNE AVENUE - MACKENZIE BLOCK
(FORMER BRIGHT & JOHNSTON BUILDING)**

Although 141 Bannatyne Avenue was not constructed until after the turn of the century, it has ties to Winnipeg's initial boom period of the early 1880s, and therefore with the city's early development.

The building immediately to the east, 137 Bannatyne Avenue (the Swiss Building), shares a party wall with the Mackenzie Block (Plate 1).¹ The former was built in 1882-83 as part of twin warehouses, the second of which was a red brick structure located 18.3 m. (60 ft.) to the west (Plate 2). Both buildings were owned originally by the grocery wholesale firm of Turner, McKeand and Company, which only occupied the red brick structure.² That building was demolished ca. 1958 and its site is now occupied by a one-storey parking garage. Its light-coloured brick twin was built as either a speculative property or to provide for future expansion.³

An important development for the area east of Main Street occurred in ca. 1894 when the Winnipeg Transfer Railway ran a spur track between the north side of Bannatyne Avenue and the south side of Market Avenue. This event stimulated further development of the district because it provided essential transportation to shippers of heavy goods, such as the Ashdown and Marshall-Wells hardware companies, and to businesses dealing in perishable products. Increased attractiveness for industrial and warehouse development in turn raised the area's property values.

In the spring of 1898, the wholesale grocery firm of Bright and Johnston, wishing to take advantage of the spur line, purchased and renovated 137 Bannatyne Avenue (Plate 3).⁴ The company, formed

¹ The Swiss Building was designated a Grade III structure September 18, 1986 by the Historical Buildings Committee. Sheila C. Grover, "137 Bannatyne Avenue - Swiss Building, 141 Bannatyne Avenue - Mackenzie Building (both formerly Bright and Johnston Building)," report for the City of Winnipeg's Historical Buildings Committee, November 29, 1984. The following report is an update and restructuring of this earlier work and much of the text is taken from the Grover paper.

² "The Building Boom," The Winnipeg Daily Sun, October 20, 1883.

³ It was originally occupied by wholesale commission merchants Henderson and Bull, the first such venture in the city.

⁴ "Their New Quarters," The Commercial, May 30, 1898, p. 896; and "Property Transfers," Manitoba Free Press, October 1, 1898, p. 8.

in 1896, was a partnership between Albert Bright and Kenneth John Johnston. Bright, the senior partner, had opened a grocery store at the corner of King Street and Logan Avenue in 1883, also selling wines, spirits, and provisions for homesteaders.⁵ Johnston was a famous high bicycle rider (the "penny farthing" bicycles with the oversized front wheel) and was Canada's top rider for many years in the 1880s. He came to Winnipeg from Ontario in 1882 and worked in a wholesale grocery business, Sutherland and Campbell. The partnership with Bright lasted until 1908 when Johnston became an independent fruit broker.⁶

The firm specialized in wholesale fruits and nuts, importing produce from across Canada and from California and other foreign locales, as well as supplying local honey to area grocers.⁷ Business, like most of Winnipeg's economy, flourished into the new century and the company, again like others in the city, moved to expand. In 1903 it constructed a new building, numbered 141 Bannatyne Avenue East, located between the 1882-83 twins and connected to 137 Bannatyne Avenue. The company moved into the new structure and rented out the older building. Its complex became known as the Bright and Johnston Building.

STYLE

The warehouse at 141 Bannatyne is a utilitarian structures with little in the way of stylistic treatment. Like 137 Bannatyne Avenue and many other warehouses in Winnipeg's expansive warehouse district, it has only minor ornamentation through the use of corbelled brick areas and stone detailing. While period owners, architects and contractors were concerned with the construction of aesthetically pleasing structures, they were building warehouses whose function was far less public than the stylized banks, offices and residential structures found elsewhere in the city. As such, they required less ornamentation. Numerous small warehouses of plain design continue to occupy lots throughout the warehouse district.

⁵ The City of Winnipeg - The Capital of Manitoba (Winnipeg: Thompson and Boyer, 1886), p. 182.

⁶ "High Bicycle Champion Dies at 93," Winnipeg Free Press, January 5, 1955.

⁷ The Colonist, 1898 Summer Souvenir, Winnipeg, November 1898, p. 13.

CONSTRUCTION

The building is located on the north side of Bannatyne Avenue between Rorie Street and the Red River, on land legally described as 7/8 St. John, Plan 504.⁸ The building measures 15.25 x 36.91 x 18.00 m. (50 x 121 x 59'), and includes an interior driveway between it and 137 Bannatyne Avenue to the east. In total, it provides over 11,500 cu. m. (408,364 cu. ft.) of warehouse space.⁹ The four-storey building is of solid brick construction, with squared wooden beams and columns as internal support. It rests on a 55.88 cm. (22") stone foundation. Ceiling heights in the structure are: basement- 2.59 m. (8.5'), first floor- 3.36 m. (11'), second and fourth- 3.51 m. (11.5'), and third- 3.05 m. (10').¹⁰ Stone is used for accents on the front or south facade.

Total cost of construction was estimated on the original City of Winnipeg, Building Permit as \$32,000. Approximately \$7,000 were billed as architect's fees, while the remainder, \$23,159.38, were spent as listed below:¹¹

Phillip Burnett, masonry -	\$ 9,597.85
S.B. Ritchie, carpentry -	\$10,690.00
Stuart Machinery Co., elevator -	\$ 825.00
Douglas Brothers, galvanized iron and roof -	\$ 967.00
James A. Payne, painting and glazing -	\$ 590.00
J.L. Wells and Co., plumbing -	\$ 403.00
The Hudson Electrical Supply Co., electrical -	\$ 86.53

DESIGN

This building continued the design of the 1882-83 structure, thus bridging the gap between the twin warehouses on either side, although the two older structures were only three storeys in height when the new building was completed (Plate 4). The rough-cut stone base rises 1.22 m. (4') above grade

⁸ City of Winnipeg, Assessment Records, Roll No. 628200, Ward 2, PC 50. Below as AR.

⁹ Ibid.; see also Appendix I.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Figures taken from John Hamilton Gordon Russell, Business Ledgers, Provincial Archives of Manitoba, MG 11, E2, 1903, pp. 214-15. Below as Ledgers.

on the front facade, leading to the clay brick superstructure.¹²

As designed, the front facade was divided into four bays, separated by monumental brick pilasters rising the full height of the ware-house. Three of the bays are matching, save for the large round-headed driveway door that replaces the two show windows of the other two bays. The fourth bay, containing the main door, is thin, highlighting the entrance (Plate 5).

Window openings on the first two floors are arched and embellished with stone lug sills, radiating brick heads, brick keystones and brick drip moulding. The third floor features more plain openings, rectangular in shape, with stone lug sills and brick keystones. The top level, using a familiar technique, contains smaller, more numerous windows, which are round-headed with continuous stone sills and ornamental brick heads. In general, the windows are large and provide ample natural light for the warehouse space within.

The other significant ornamentation on the main facade are two areas of corbelled brick, one separating the third and fourth floors and the other above the fourth-floor windows. The building is finished by a plain brick parapet and flat roof.

The rear facade contains rectangular windows and stone lug sills, with several arched loading doors on the main level. The west wall, partially obscured by a one-storey parking garage, is windowless. The east side of the building is a party wall shared with 137 Bannatyne Avenue.

INTERIOR

As with the exterior, the interior of the former Bright and Johnston Building reflects a concern with functionality more than ornamentation. Large offices on the first and second floor were finished with metal ceilings and used for administrative and showroom space. The remaining square footage was given over to the storing and organizing of the company's highly perishable stock. Give the nature of the enterprise, the warehouse had to be extremely efficient to reduce sitting time. The

¹²

AR.

numerous loading doors, nearby elevator and spur line aided in the quick transfer of goods to and from the building. At present, the ground floor of the warehouse has been partially renovated; access to the vacant storeys above was not possible.

INTEGRITY

The warehouse stands on its original site and appears to be in fair structural condition. A number of alterations have occurred over time, mainly due to fires of varying severity (see Appendix I for a list of City of Winnipeg, Building Permits for the property).

In January of 1907, a fire on the second floor nearly gutted the warehouse, although the walls held up and there was no damage to 137 Bannatyne Avenue (Plate 6). Stock loss was estimated at \$183,000.¹³ The company decided to rebuild the 1903 warehouse and also to extend its fourth floor over the 1882-83 building to the east. Total cost of the rebuilding was \$27,735.05 and included:¹⁴

Campbell and Bailey, clean up -	\$ 490.00
S. Brynjolfsson and Co., brick and plastering -	\$ 5,988.80
W.R. Ritchie, carpentry -	\$13,597.00
C.C. Young Company, plumbing and heating -	\$ 3,185.85
The Shipman Electric Co., electrical -	\$ 110.70
James A. Payne, painting and glazing -	\$ 937.70
Douglas Brothers, galvanized iron and roofing -	\$ 875.00
Darling Brothers, elevator -	\$ 2,260.00
Grose and Walker, elevator doors -	\$ 290.00

In 1915 another fire occurred, this time of a less serious nature. Stock damage was estimated at \$55,000 and total repairs from the fire cost \$5,330.45, including replacement of ground-floor joists and new shipping doors.¹⁵ A third fire in 1926 caused damage throughout the building, costing an estimated \$4,500 to repair.¹⁶ Other alterations have occurred in the interior as tenants and their use

¹³ Winnipeg Telegram, January 29, 1907, p. 1.

¹⁴ Ledgers, 1907, pp. 4, 5 and 7.

¹⁵ Ibid., 1915, p. 98.

¹⁶ Manitoba Free Press, May 26, 1926, p. 1; and City of Winnipeg, Building Permit, # 31/1927.

of the building have changed; however, the exterior has remained virtually unaltered since construction in 1903.

STREETSCAPE

This modest structure, together with its connected neighbour, fit perfectly into the warehouse district east of Main Street. The McClary Building and the Ashdown Warehouse are only two of a number of similarly adorned buildings in the immediate vicinity. The former Bright and Johnston Building is an important contributor to this area's historical character.

ARCHITECT

John Hamilton Gordon Russell (1862-1946), one of the city's most prominent and prolific architects, designed the 1903 structure, oversaw the fire repairs of 1907 and 1915, and designed the fourth floor addition to 137 Bannatyne Avenue. His list of accomplishments is long and varied and he has been given 20 points by the Historical Buildings Committee (see Appendix II for biography).

INSTITUTION

The partnership of Bright and Johnston lasted until 1908, when Johnston started his own company and Bright formed Bright and Sons, crockery wholesale. As chain stores and their centralized purchasing replaced independent stores, the need for commission agents or local suppliers lessened and they were often bought out by larger regional or national firms. Bright and Sons was taken over in the 1920s.

The building had numerous small-scale companies for tenants, including Kraft Cheese, Chase and Sanborn, and W.L. Mackenzie and Company, manufacturers' agents.¹⁷ The last firm grew to occupy more and more of 141 Bannatyne as their business expanded. Originally general merchandise agents, they ultimately specialized in bakers' supplies. By the early 1940s, 141 Bannatyne had been

¹⁷ Henderson's Directory, Winnipeg, 1920-28.

renamed the Mackenzie Block, while 137 Bannatyne had become the J.G. Building (later the Swiss Building). Mackenzie and Company subsequently became the marketing agents for MacDonald Tobacco and remained in the building until the 1970s.¹⁸ At present, the ground floor is occupied by D and E Designs, screen printing and the upper levels are empty.

EVENT

There is no significant event connected with this building.

CONTEXT

This warehouse is part of several patterns of growth in the city. It is part of the development of the warehouse district east of Main Street that grew subsequent to the district west of Main. The construction of spur lines was an important factor in this development, as was the locating of major warehouses in the area, such as the Ashdown Warehouse.

The building is also illustrative of the type of growth experienced by many of the city's wholesale firms from the late 1890s to World War I. There are countless examples of warehouses which became too small for the enterprises within, resulting in annexes and/or additional storeys. The growth made wealthy businessmen out of owners who often had come west only a few years before with little capital. It was part of Winnipeg's command of the Western Canadian economy during this era, as almost all supplies going west from eastern Canada had to be handled in Winnipeg.

LANDMARK

The redevelopment of the warehouse district into restaurants, retail shops, residential space and clubs has meant an increased visibility for the entire area. The Mackenzie Block, with its tidy appearance, is an important part of the neighbourhood and is conspicuous on that level.

¹⁸ Ibid., 1930 - present.

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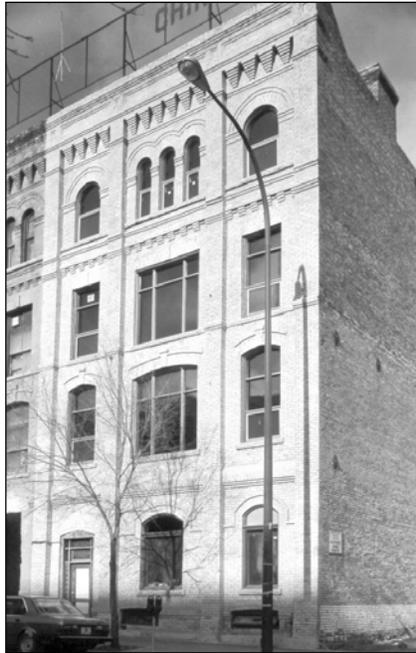


Plate 1 – Swiss Building, 137 Bannatyne Avenue, designated Grade III; built 1882-83, architects Willmot and Stewart; front or south façade, ca.1984. (City of Winnipeg, Planning Department.)



Plate 2 – View of Bannatyne Avenue East, from Rorie Street to the Red River, ca. 1903. The twin warehouses are indicated by the arrows. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Negative N3928.)

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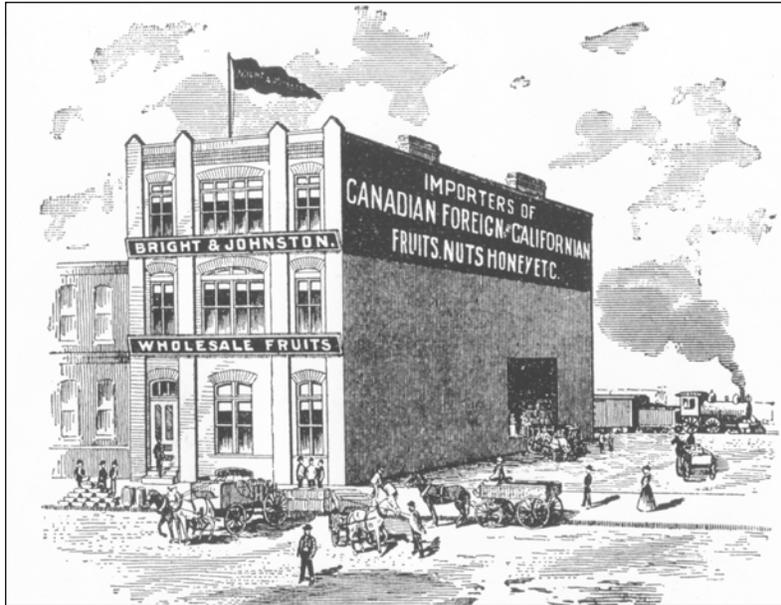


Plate 3 – Bright and Johnston wholesale fruits, 137 Bannatyne Avenue, 1898. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N7323.)



Plate 4 – View from the foot of Bannatyne Avenue East, looking west, ca. 1905. Notice the smaller warehouses on either side of 141 Bannatyne Avenue which is indicated by the arrow. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Stovel Advocate Collection, #65.)

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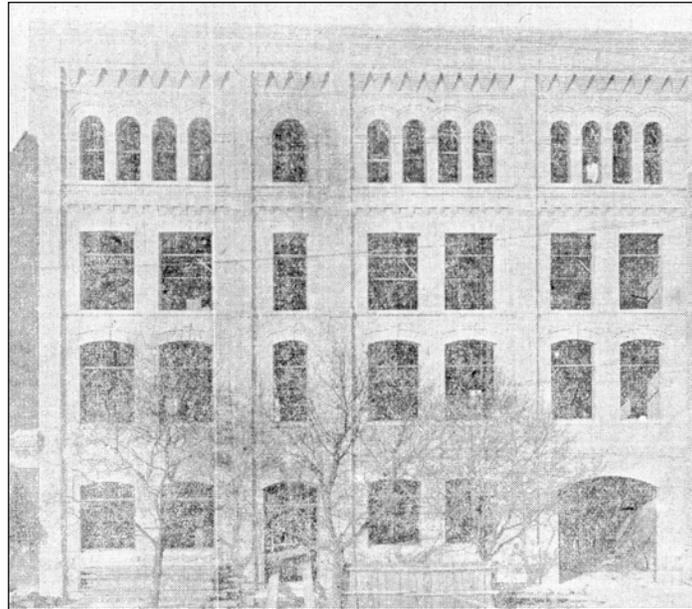


Plate 5 – 141 Bannatyne Avenue, 1907. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, from The Winnipeg Telegram, January 29, 1907, p. 1.)

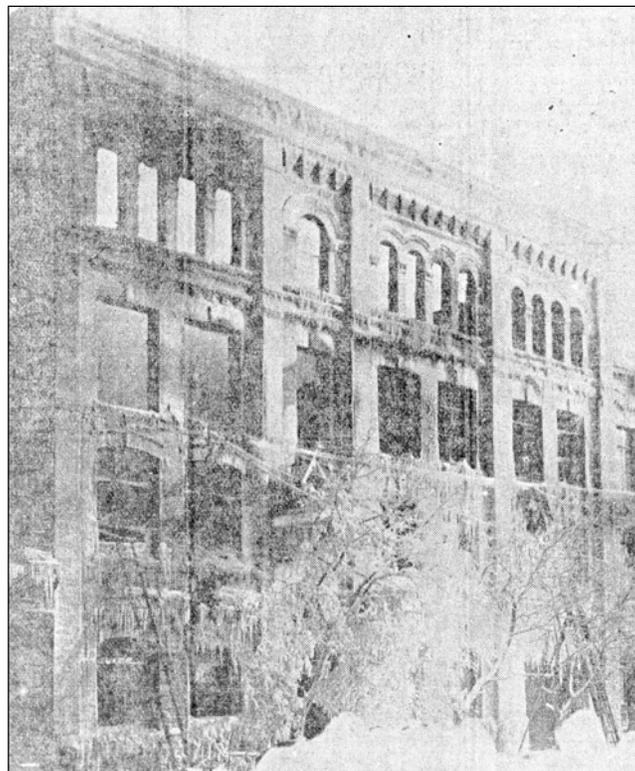


Plate 6 – 141 Bannatyne Avenue, 1907, after the January fire. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, from The Winnipeg Telegram, January 30, 1907.)