

314 BROADWAY – PRINCETON (KENMORE) APARTMENTS
W.W. Blair, 1909



As one of only two surviving pre-1910 apartment blocks on Broadway, the stately Princeton symbolizes a time when this section of the downtown was home to several of Winnipeg's prominent families.

The area was part of a large reserve retained near Upper Fort Garry by the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) after the surrender of Rupert's Land to Canada in 1869-70. By applying large-lot subdivision, building controls and other measures, the HBC encouraged exclusive residential development in the reserve during the 1880s and 1890s. The district's status eventually was eroded by competing suburbs to the west and south. Still, tree-lined Broadway and its cross streets remained an attractive place to invest in and live during the boom years preceding World War I.

The Princeton, first called the Kenmore Apartments, was built on the south side of the avenue

between Hargrave and Donald streets. Costing some \$200,000, it was one of Winnipeg's more expensive pre-war blocks, a reflection of the owners' emphasis on high standards of comfort, safety and aesthetics.

The plans by architect William Wallace Blair employed the relatively new technology of reinforced concrete frame construction, a support system that allowed for taller and more fire-resistant buildings. Blair also made the five-storey Princeton W-shaped to increase the available surface area for windows, thus maximizing tenants' access to natural light and ventilation.

Designed in the Beaux Arts Classical Style, this block has a raised basement with a rusticated stone finish, solid brick walls, a massive stone and metal entablature, a capped parapet with some crenellation, and a flat roof. The symmetrical front (north) facade features red pressed brick, as do two narrow interior courts. The rear and side elevations consist of common clay brick.

The courts are formed by deeply recessed main entrances found near the ends of the front facing. These entrance-ways are accented by stone pediments supported by smooth Tuscan order columns and topped by stone balustrades. Above these elements, porches extend from the second to fourth floors, lit by quartets of tall, multi-paned glass and wood openings. Copper balustrades adorn the upper-level porches.

Additional detailing is provided by end bay windows set in stone surrounds, other rectangular openings with stone sills and lintels, a stone band, two belt courses, grooved brick-work that adds a rusticated effect to the main-floor finish, and long lintels with keystones above the main doors.

The rear elevation is broken by two light wells equipped with metal fire escapes. As well, metal-clad bays are found on the first to fourth floors near both corners of this wall. The west side is flat, its numerous windows, like those of the rear facing, outlined by radiating brick heads and cement lug sills. The east wall once had three light wells and several sets of windows, but is

now covered by neighbouring Centennial House.

The Princeton's interior initially was divided into 55 suites, including five in the basement along with a laundry and boiler room. Accommodations ranged from spacious two-bedroom units with dining-rooms and parlours to modest bachelor suites without bedrooms.

Developed by the Kenmore Apartment Co., the Princeton drew a variety of tenants, including managers, professionals and workers employed in nearby hotels, department stores and railway facilities. For unknown reasons, the building suffered vacancies well into the 1910s. In contrast, most other blocks quickly filled to capacity due to the period's rapid population growth and pressure on the housing stock.

Architect Blair had produced two other fine apartment designs -- the Warwick at 366 Qu'Appelle Avenue and Roslyn at 40 Osborne Street -- when he was commissioned by the Kenmore company to work on 314 Broadway.

Born in Ireland in 1852, Blair trained in Belfast and practised privately in England before emigrating to Canada. He worked in Hamilton and Toronto, then returned to Ireland as resident engineer for the Londonderry and Ballymena waterworks. He subsequently spent about 15 years as an architect in Chicago.

Soon after moving to Winnipeg in 1905, he entered a brief partnership with another recent arrival, George W. Northwood. Among their designs were buildings for Thomas Ryan and Co. and the Henderson Directory Co. Blair subsequently went solo, planning projects such as the Farmer (Victory) Building, Great West Saddlery Warehouse, Mark Fortune and A.B. Anderson houses, and Canadian Pacific Railway offices in Edmonton. Around the start of World War I, if not somewhat earlier, he relocated to Victoria.

In 1928, George Baldry, president of the Baldry Engineering and Construction Company, acquired and renamed 314 Broadway as the Princeton. His firm continued to own the property

until the late 1970s and also housed its business there during the 1930s and early 1940s.

The Princeton and Strathmore Apartments to its immediate west are the only blocks of the pre-1914 era to survive the transition of Broadway between Main and Kennedy streets to a commercial office district. The Princeton is the least altered of the two. Except on the east side, its exterior does not appear to have undergone major changes. The interior has been reorganized to include 45 bachelor suites, but most of the four- to six-room units facing Broadway are still intact.