

335 DONALD STREET - MASONIC TEMPLE
George C. Browne, 1895



For nearly 75 years, this three-storey, solid brick building in downtown Winnipeg served as permanent headquarters for the city's Freemasons. It was believed to be one of the only structures in Canada erected and owned by the fraternal society solely for members' use.

The first local Masonic group -- the Northern Light Lodge -- was organized in the Red River Settlement in late 1864. It received a charter four years later, but then disbanded during the Riel Rebellion of 1869-1870. After Manitoba formally became a Canadian province, efforts were made to re-establish the society's presence. Prince Rupert's Lodge No. 240 in Winnipeg and Lisgar Lodge No. 244 at Lower Fort Garry were consecrated in July 1871 by the Grand Lodge of Canada. A third charter followed in 1873 for the Ancient Landmark Lodge No. 288 of Winnipeg.

With a collective membership of 210 and growing, the Masons were able by 1875 to form the

Grand Lodge of Manitoba. This provincial body and its constituents occupied various rental premises, mostly on Main Street, over the next two decades. In 1888, offices and lodge rooms were consolidated in the Western Canada Loan and Savings Company Building at the northwest corner of Main Street and Portage Avenue. When this structure was severely damaged by fire in 1894, the Masons opted to erect their own building.

A site on the southeast corner of Ellice Avenue and Donald Street was chosen in early 1895. A sod turning ceremony took place in July and the Temple opened in December.

Plans for the facility were prepared by George Creeford Browne (c.1852-1919), a native of Québec who was named after his father, a prominent Montréal architect and real estate owner. Browne Jr. worked in his father's office after high school graduation, then spent three years in New York City and then to Europe. In 1879, he had moved to Manitoba and was farming land south of Holland but in 1882 moved to Winnipeg and set up his very successful architectural practice. He retired to New York State in 1904 and died there in 1919.

Among his better-known local projects are: Massey Building, 294 William Ave. (1885) – Grade II; Miller, Morse and Co. Warehouse, 86 Princess St. (1887) – Grade III; Young Men's Christian Association Building (Birk's Building), 276 Portage Ave. (1900) – Grade II; Gault Building (Artspace), 92-104 Arthur St. (1900) – Grade II; and Toronto Type Foundry Warehouse, major addition, 175 McDermot Ave. (1904) – Grade III.

The present exterior, which has not seen major alteration since construction, includes a wealth of classically-inspired elements including columns, arched openings with keystones, pediments and ornamental brick and stonework. A two-storey annex was added in 1918 that follows the basic design and materials of the original building. On the interior, the original building was beautifully finished with a library, offices, large banquet hall and meeting rooms on the second and third floors. Renovations and repurposing of the building since the departure of the Masons has resulted in today's completely gutted interior.

Elements of the building that would require approval if alterations were planned are:

Exterior-

- The three-storey brick and stone building with two-storey rear annex on the southeast corner of Donald Street and Ellice Avenue, its main façade facing west onto Donald Street, its north façade facing Ellice Avenue, its south façade facing a neighbouring building and its rear façade facing a back lane;
- The symmetrical front (west) façade with rusticated stone base, its central protruding entrance with stone columns and dentilled pediment with sunrise motif, arched and rectilinear window openings with stone and brick accenting, attached pilasters with stone bases and brick capitals, completed entablature, stone panels with the date “1895” and “MASONIC TEMPLE”, central pediment with round window and medium pitched hip roof;
- The north façade featuring a continuation of the design and materials of the front elevation, stone clad foundation, arched and round openings, brick pilasters, basket weave brick sections on the third floor and in the gable dormer;
- The windowless south façade with pilasters and plainer gable dormer;
- The rear (east) façade partially covered by a two-storey addition, the visible section features one round window, brick pilasters, a pediment and two large brick chimneys; and
- Two-storey brick annex with windows in rectilinear openings and stone accenting and metal cornice and capped brick parapet.

Interior-

- None.