



352 DONALD STREET

CANADA BUILDING

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee
May 2003

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The economic expansion of Winnipeg during the 1900-14 period had many ramifications. One sector that saw tremendous success was the building trade. The maturation of this group occurred quickly, by 1888 the Winnipeg Builders' Association was formed to forward the interests of the growing number of contractors in the City.¹ In 1904, the Winnipeg Builders' Exchange (WBE) was formed to continue the work of the earlier organization (the WBE was renamed the Winnipeg Construction Association in 1978)².

One of the growing trends in the sector was the construction of large buildings as rental properties by many contracting firms. Apartment blocks, houses, duplexes, retail/residential structures and office buildings were all completed, often designed by the contractor/owner. The company could hold on to a property only long enough to sell it, or in other cases, it could continue to own the property for decades.

The latter was the case for the Canada Building, built in 1910 and owned for some 14 years by one of the older local construction companies.

STYLE

The Canada Building is an excellent example of the Chicago Style, which takes its name from that city's influential architects of the 1880s and 1890s. This group took the familiar Richardsonian Romanesque style and retooled it to complement the latest engineering technologies. The new steel framing and reinforced concrete construction methods allowed for the erection of much taller commercial buildings – skyscrapers. The new buildings featured non-load-bearing exterior walls, allowing for an increase in windows and size of openings and a corresponding decrease in the divisions between these openings.

¹ Canadian Architect and Builder, Vol. 1 (1888), Issue 1, p. 6.

² Information from www.wpgca.com (© Winnipeg Construction Association, 2003).

The overall plan of such buildings was still firmly based in the design of the classical column. The heavily embellished base took the form of large display windows, the area often clad in stone or terra cotta and topped by an overhanging belt course. The central portion of the column, midsection of the skyscraper, was less enthusiastically treated with numerous bays of large windows. The capital of the column was recreated by an ornate upper and/or attic floor and a heavy cornice.³

Materials used were most often brick, cut stone and terra cotta. Examples in Winnipeg are found throughout the downtown, not surprising given Winnipeg's desire to live up to its billing as the "Chicago of the North." The Confederation Life Building, 457 Main Street, built in 1912, the Electric Railway Chambers, 213 Notre Dame Avenue, built in 1913, and the Paris Building, 259 Portage Avenue, built 1915-17, are all larger, more ornate examples of the Chicago Style.

CONSTRUCTION

This building utilizes reinforced concrete to provide internal support, still a relatively new construction method at the time. Resting on a concrete foundation and footings, all columns,⁴ beams and floors are also comprised of reinforced concrete.⁵ Exterior walls are brick, with stone and concrete accenting. Because these walls are non-load-bearing, window openings are large and numerous on the front (east) façade.

Rising seven storeys, the building measures 34.0 x 36.6 x 30.5 metres (111.5 x 120 x 100 feet) and ceilings range from 2.5 metres (8'3") in the basement to 4.1 metres (13'4") on the first floor and 4.4 metres (14'6") in the seventh-floor hallway. Total cost of construction was \$80,000.

³ L. Maitland, et al., A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1992), pp. 124-131; and Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg: Manitoba Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, Historic Resources Branch, 1991), pp. 22-23.

⁴ City of Winnipeg Assessment Record, Roll No. 528050-12-2. The columns measure 71.1 centimetres (28 inches) square.

⁵ City of Winnipeg Building Permit, #143/1910.

Building material included 550,000 bricks, 835.0 square metres (1,000 square yards) of plaster and 153.0 cubic metres (2,000 cubic yards) of concrete.⁶

DESIGN

The front façade of the Canada Block is an attractive, unique elevation, classically detailed and symmetrically designed. The ground floor, which has seen numerous changes, features the large show windows of the numerous retail stores housed in the building. It is clad in smooth-cut Tyndall stone. Centrally located is the main entrance to the building, which has also been changed over time. A 1949 photograph (Plate 1) shows the original entrance featured an arch with keystone topped by an ornamental cornice. This has since been replaced; the arch covered in favour of a more squared design (Plates 2 and 3)

The front was divided into five bays by means of attached, squared concrete columns. The original windows in each of the bays consisted of a middle section of two large panes each, with a pair of smaller transom windows above and smaller single panes with single transom windows on either side of the larger panes. It appears photographs that these single panes and some of the transom windows opened to allow for air circulation.

The plain bases of the giant order columns were created by grooved concrete sections, designed to mimic quoins. The unadorned columns rose to the top of the sixth-floor windows, where they were embellished with ornamental concrete capitals. The seventh-floor divisions were created by paired columns of similar design to the lower elements. The original wide concrete spandrels have been covered by a less sympathetic material. The roof was finished by a complete entablature, recessed in the centre section and designed to hold a shield (originally embellished with “1910”).

The north and south elevations were plainly designed, holding numerous small, rectangular windows (Plates 4 and 5). The rear of the building was a reduced version of the front, divided

⁶ Ibid.

into five bays by heavier columns of concrete, the centre bay featuring small rectangular windows, the other four bays holding larger panes (Plate 6).

The delicate concrete embellishments stand out as one of the outstanding features of this structure.

INTERIOR

Due to the changing nature of the building's tenancy, much of the interior has been altered over the years (see Appendix I for a list of Building Permits). The ground floor is still utilized for retail space; the upper-floor offices run off central hallways (Plates 7 and 8). Renovation work on the fourth floor has removed all interior partitioning and cladding, exposing the concrete columns and floor. A unique feature of the building, a tile and brick firewall built on each side of the centre wall on each floor, has also been exposed on this level (Plates 9 and 10).

INTEGRITY

The building stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition. Renovations to the interior and exterior have been extensive, some of the changes more sensitive to the original design than others.

STREETSCAPE

This building is compatible with its surroundings and adds to the historic nature of the streetscape (Plates 11 and 12). It is one of a handful of fine buildings situated just outside the boundary of the Exchange District.

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTOR

The firm of James and John McDiarmid, long-time contractors and architects, were listed as the architects and builders of this structure. The brothers had been building in Western Canada since

the early 1880s and James McDiarmid also had extensive experience as a designer. The company was responsible for a wide variety of structures (see Appendix II for biographical information). They have been given 10 points by the Historical Buildings Committee.

PERSON

City tax records indicate that The J. McDiarmid Company owned the Canada Building until 1924 when it was sold to Allan Bronfman, Winnipeg barrister.⁷ Bronfman owned the building for the next 25 years, although he never occupied space in the structure. “Mr. Allan” as he was known, was the youngest son of Ekiel and Minnie Bronfman, who emigrated from Russia, settling in Yorkton, SA and then in Brandon, where Allan was born in 1896, and finally Winnipeg.⁸ Allan was admitted to the University of Manitoba at the age of 15 and graduated with a law degree seven years later.⁹ He would move to Montreal, PQ in 1924, the same year he purchased the Canada Building, to join with his brother Sam as the “front man”¹⁰ in the operation of a distillery which would become The Seagram Company. Although he remained the company’s senior vice-president until 1975, a rivalry between himself and brother Sam relegated him to only a minor role in the family business.¹¹ He died on March 26, 1980 and was survived by his wife and sons Edward M. and Peter F., who have together built a sizeable financial dynasty themselves.¹²

The next owner was Brian Investments Limited, also a non-occupant. This firm owned several structures in the area.

⁷ City of Winnipeg Assessment Roll, Roll No. 528050.

⁸ James H. Gray, Booze. The Impact of Whisky on the Prairie West (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1972), p. 115. In 1913, the Bronfman family purchased the Bell Hotel on Main Street adding to their string of hotels in Western Canada (several in Yorkton).

⁹ Winnipeg Free Press, March 27, 1980, p. 14; and Peter C. Newman, Bronfman Dynasty. The Rothschilds of the New World (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978), p. 241. Allan Bronfman was the only one of the eight Bronfman children to attend university.

¹⁰ Peter C. Newman, op. cit., p. 241.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 241-42.

¹² Winnipeg Free Press, March 27, 1980, p. 14.

Tenants have been varied over the years. Merchants have included watchmakers, tailors, barbers and a photographic shop. In the offices above, a wide range of small- and medium-scaled companies have rented space. Dominion Bridge Company occupied space on the top floor from the 1960s to the 1980s. The Manitoba Power Commission, James Richardson and Son (accounting department), Rainbow Stage Incorporated, the Manitoba Heart Foundation, the Manitoba Housing and Renewal Corporation, and many others have all rented space.

In the 1960s, Air Canada took over many of the upper floors and, for several years in the local listings, the building was referred to as the “Air Canada Building.”¹³

EVENT

There is no known significant event connected with this building.

CONTEXT

Although reinforced concrete construction was not new in 1910, it was still not widely utilized by the local building trade. Its adoption allowed for the construction of taller and taller buildings – skyscrapers – and the Canada Building is an early Winnipeg example of this new type of building.

The structure is also representative of an economic trend towards the design, construction and ownership of large buildings by local construction companies. It was an important method of getting, as some contemporary reports suggested, a safe, steady return on investment.

LANDMARK

Its unusual front façade and location on an outside curve of a very busy downtown street heighten the conspicuousness of this structure.

¹³ Henderson’s Directory, 1915-86.



APPENDIX I

CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report

Date: 16 April 2003

Assessment Record

Prepared By: M. Peterson

Building Address: 352 Donald St. (348, 350, 354) Building Name: Canada Building

Original Use: retail/offices

Current Use: retail/offices

Roll No. (Old): 528050 (9578)

RSN: 150006

Municipality: 12

Ward: 2

Property or Occupancy Code: 50

Legal Description: 1 St. John, Plan 24208, Lots 23/4 (Original: 1 St. John, Plan 129, Block 4, part Lot 85: Lots 86/7)

Location: west side between Ellice and Cumberland avenues

Date of Construction: 1910

Storeys: 7 and basement

HERITAGE STATUS: ON INVENTORY

Construction Type: reinforced concrete and brick

Building Permits (Plans available: [A] Archives; [Mi] Microfilm; [4th] 4th floor, 65 Garry Street):

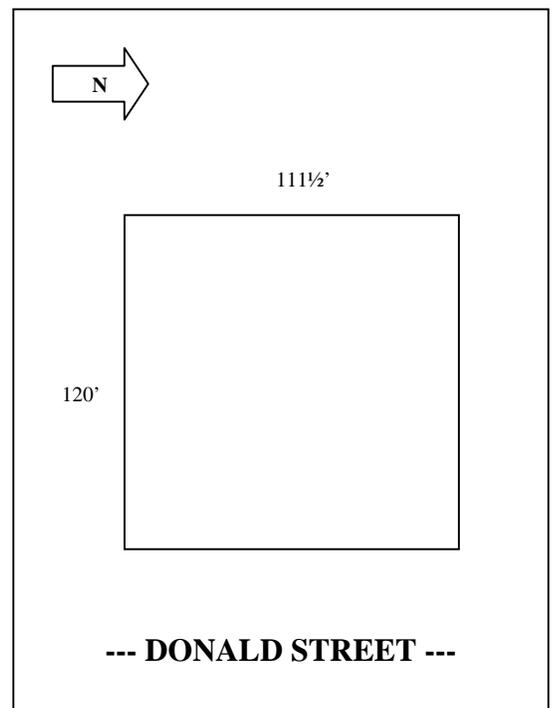
SEE NEXT PAGE

Information:

- 111½ x 120 x 100 + = 1,343,061 cu. ft.
- ceilings: B- 8'3"; 1st- 13'4"; 2nd- 12' (halls) & 11' (offices); 3rd- 11'2"; 4th-6th- 11'; 7th- 14½' (halls) & 12½' (offices)
- 28 x 28" concrete columns throughout
- north & south walls – clay brick; west wall – brick and concrete; front- Tyndall stone
- brick-enclosed freight elevator and rear stairs and 2 brick or tile walls on each side of the centre wall on each floor

ARCHITECT: J. & J. McDIARMID (OWNERS)

CONTRACTOR: J. & J. McDIARMID (OWNERS)



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CITY OF WINNIPEG BUILDING PERMITS

(Plans available: [A] Archives; [Mi] Microfilm; [4th] 4th floor, 65 Garry Street):

YEAR	NO.	PLANS	AMOUNT	DESCRIPTION
1910	143		\$80,000	Superstructure
1937	35	4 th - V01C04	\$1,800	Interior alterations
1944	3194		\$1,500	Alterations
1945	1596		\$5,000	Interior alterations
1950	3654	A	\$20,000	Alter store fronts
1951	255		\$2,000	Interior alterations
1951	485	A	\$5,000	Interior alterations
1951	673		\$10,000	Interior alterations
1951	4604		\$2,500	Interior alterations
1952	64		\$1,100	Close light-well on 3 rd floor
1954	1050	A	\$20,000	Interior alterations
1955	39	4 th - V01A11	\$4,000	Enclose elevator shaft
1955	176	4 th - V01A11	\$50,000	Interior alterations
1955	362	4 th - V01C11	\$1,300	Interior alterations
1956	1963		\$3,000	Interior alterations
1956	2469		\$1,700	Interior alterations
1957	106	4 th - V01D04	\$3,000	Interior alterations
1957	563		\$1,200	Interior alterations
1958	1158	4 th - V02D10	\$2,800	Interior alterations
1960	1083		\$8,000	Interior alterations
1960	4083	4 th - V03A08		Interior alterations
1961	46	4 th - V03B08	\$3,000	Interior alterations
1961	6340		\$4,000	Interior alterations
1962	3055	4 th - V04B09	\$2,400	Interior alterations
1964	492	4 th - V04D06	\$2,800	Interior alterations
1964	2937	4 th - V04D04	\$30,000	Interior alterations
1964	7918	4 th - V05D10	\$48,300	Alterations (elevator)
1965	3961	Mi 507	\$15,000	Interior alterations
1965	5455	Mi 507	\$15,000	Interior alterations
1966	402	Mi 301	\$8,000	Interior alterations
1966	701	Mi 302	\$16,000	Interior alterations
1966	876	Mi 303	\$60,000	Alter front
1966	2121	Mi 307	\$10,000	Interior alterations
1966	3940		\$4,500	Interior alterations
1967	1443		\$25,000	Interior alterations
1967	3578	Mi 414	\$5,000	Interior alterations
1967	5602	Mi 421	\$1,000	Interior alterations
1968	1442		\$1,600	Interior alterations
1968	4071	Mi 152	\$7,000	Interior alterations
1969	5627	Mi 71	\$11,000	Alterations
1969	5766		\$1,000	Alterations
1969	5870	Mi 73	\$10,000	Alterations

YEAR	NO.	PLANS	AMOUNT	DESCRIPTION
1969	6335		\$4,000	Alterations
1969	7484	Mi 80	\$2,800	Interior alterations
1970	2363	Mi 15	\$9,000	Alter front entrance and foyer
1970	4030		\$25,000	Interior alterations
1970	4527	Mi 24	\$8,000	Alterations
1971	574		\$3,000	Interior alterations
1971	1162	Mi 91	\$53,000	Interior alterations
1971	4589		\$16,000	Interior alterations
1971	8179	Mi 130	\$8,000	Interior alterations
1974	8986	Mi 647	\$25,000	Interior alterations
1974	9161	Mi 648	\$15,000	Interior alterations
1975	6765	Mi 732	\$25,000	Interior alterations
1975	8299	Mi 741	\$7,000	Interior alterations
1977	4984		\$7,000	Interior alterations
1981	3281	4 th - M02D05	\$40,000	Interior alterations
1983	3658	4 th - M09D06	\$35,000	Interior alterations at #350 Donald St.
1986	12242		\$9,000	Wheelchair ramp at #352 Donald St.
1987	3585		\$5,000	Interior alterations
1988	4020		\$191,000	Interior alterations
1988	8114	4 th - B11A02	\$150,000	Interior and exterior alterations
1989	252	4 th - B11C10	\$13,000	Interior alterations
1990	4176	4 th - V10B03	\$250,000	Interior alterations
1990	5212	4 th - V10A03	\$63,000	Interior alterations
1990	9475	4 th - M12A01	\$119,000	Interior alterations
1991	2574	4 th - M12B02	\$45,000	Interior alterations
1994	873	4 th - B35C11	\$25,000	Interior alterations
2000	170685		\$6,000	Interior alterations

APPENDIX II

J. and J. McDiarmid-

James McDiarmid was born on March 9, 1855 in Dunkeld, Perthshire, Scotland, and his early adulthood was spent in the building trade in that country.¹ He came to Winnipeg in 1882, during the real estate boom, with two of his brothers, Peter (1857-1915) and John (1863-1943). Peter took up farming in the Poplar Point district; John and James chose to become involved in the building trade that at the time was struggling to keep up with local demand. One of their early contracts was the construction of the Broadway Drill Hall (1884-1919) on the site of the present Legislative Building. At the time, the brothers were part of the firm Murray and McDiarmid, although G.W. Murray would form his own company in the early 1890s.

During the 1890s, James McDiarmid began designing as well as building structures. St. Andrew's Presbyterian (United) Church, corner Elgin Avenue and Ellen Street, built in 1894, was one of his earliest works as an architect (Plate 13). The J. McDiarmid Company Limited incorporated in 1906 and went on to build many outstanding Western Canadian structures. James was also known as the "Father of Municipal Golf in Winnipeg," having assisted in the establishment of the Kildonan Golf Course. He was an avid art collector and for many years was closely involved with the Winnipeg Art Gallery. He died on February 24, 1934.

Buildings which James designed and James and John McDiarmid built (unless otherwise noted) include:²

Penrose (Bell) House, 444 Logan Avenue, originally 232 Bell Avenue, 1894 (Grade III)
Donald H. Bain Building (The Brokerage), 115 Bannatyne Avenue, 1899 (Grade II)
Merrick-Anderson Warehouse, 119 Bannatyne Avenue (1899-1900)
Marshall-Wells Warehouse, 123 Bannatyne Avenue, 1900 (Grade II)
Cleland Block, 705 Main Street, 1901 (demolished)
Thomas Scott Memorial Orange Hall, 216 Princess Street (1902), built by T. Sharpe and
Company
Manitoba Hall, 295 Portage Avenue (1903), built by Fischer and Company (demolished)

¹ R.R. Rostecki, "Manitoba Hall – 291½-295 Portage Avenue," report for the Historical Buildings Committee, April 1991, p. 24.

² Ibid.; and author's files.

J. & J. McDiarmid designs, continued:

Winnipeg Paint and Glass Building, 179 Pioneer Avenue, 1908 (demolished)
Jacob Crowley Building, 138 Portage Avenue (1909)
St. Stephen's Church (Elim Chapel), 546 Portage Avenue (1910)
Canada Building, 352 Donald Street (1910)
Scott Fruit Company Warehouse, 312 Elgin Avenue (1914)
Club Houses at the Kildonan and Windsor golf courses

Construction work included:

C.P.R. Weston Shops (1904-05)
Postal Station "B," 1048 Main Street (1907)
Customs Examining Warehouse, 145 McDermot Avenue (1908)
Williams Machinery Company Warehouse, 260 Princess Street (1909)
Revillon Building, Edmonton, AB (ca.1910)
Swift's Canada Building, 312 William Avenue (1911)
Pantages (Playhouse) Theatre, 180 Market Avenue, 1913 (Grade II)
Customs House, Calgary, AB (1913-14)
R.R. Scott House, 29 Ruskin Row, 1914 (Grade II)
Knox United (Presbyterian) Church, 400 Edmonton Street, 1914-17
Completion of the Legislative Building, Broadway (1916-20)
Robinson Building (Public Press Building), 290 Vaughan Street, 1917 (Grade III)
Science Building, University of Manitoba (1932)

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Plate 1 – Canada Building, 1949. (Courtesy of the Western Canada Pictorial Index, Negative #A0830-24824.)

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Plate 2 – Canada Building, 1972. (Courtesy of the Western Canada Pictorial Index, Negative #A0179-5612.)

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Plate 3 – Canada Building, front (east) and north sides. (M. Peterson, 2003.)



Plate 4 – Canada Building, front (east) and north sides. (M. Peterson, 2003.)

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Plate 5 – Canada Building, front (east) and south sides. (M. Peterson, 2003.)



Plate 6 – Canada Building, rear (west) and south sides. (M. Peterson, 2003.)

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Plate 7 – Canada Building, third-floor hallway. (M. Peterson, 2003.)



Plate 8 – Canada Building, floor, sixth-floor hallway. (M. Peterson, 2003.)

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Plate 9 – Canada Building, fourth floor. (M. Peterson, 2003.)



Plate 10 – Canada Building, fourth floor. (M. Peterson, 2003.)

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Plate 11 – A sewer backup on Donald Street, October 1960, with the Canada Building in the background. (University of Manitoba Archives, Winnipeg Tribune Collection, No. PC18/7233/18-6257-025.)



Plate 12 – Looking southwest along Donald Street towards Cumberland and Ellice avenues. (M. Peterson, 2003.)

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Plate 13 – The destruction of St. Andrew's United Church, November 12, 1968. (University of Manitoba Archives, Winnipeg Tribune Collection, PC18/3025/18-2314-066.)