



## 291 GARRY STREET

# NORTH WEST COMMERCIAL TRAVELLERS' ASSOCIATION BUILDING

City of Winnipeg  
Historical Buildings Committee

March 2002

## **291 GARRY STREET – NORTH WEST COMMERCIAL TRAVELLERS’ ASSOCIATION BUILDING**

The transformation of Portage Avenue into Winnipeg’s primary commercial thoroughfare was slow. Originally, commerce was concentrated at the Hudson’s Bay Company’s Upper Fort Garry, and Main Street was simply a trail, connecting this fort with the Company’s other major post, Lower Fort Garry, before heading northward to the Bay and ultimately to England. The real estate boom of the early 1880s led to an expansion of much of Winnipeg’s society, including its retail sector. Logically, many business owners chose Main Street to sell their wares. Business blocks of all sizes and descriptions lined both sides of the street north of the old fort, and by the turn of the century there were few empty lots between it and Portage Avenue.

But the turn of the century brought dramatic change to the city – change that was perhaps nowhere more keenly felt than on Portage Avenue. The Clarendon Hotel, built in 1884 on the northwest corner of Donald Street, “stood out almost alone as a landmark on the north side of the avenue,”<sup>1</sup> as one reporter described it. Nearly 20 years later, the hotel was still one of the only major buildings on the street. But the completion in 1905 of the T. Eaton and Company store at 320 Portage Avenue changed everything. The avenue witnessed a dramatic increase in the amount of pedestrian and vehicular traffic and businessmen were quick to take advantage. Offices, retail stores and banks began to line the street and Portage Avenue began to usurp Main Street as the commercial centre of the burgeoning capital city (Plates 1 and 2). By 1915, the Somerset Building (1906), Bank of Nova Scotia (1908), McArthur (Childs) Building (1909), Boyd Building (1912) and Paris Building (1915) had all been added to the growing stock of magnificent Portage Avenue buildings. When the Hudson’s Bay Company completed its massive store at Vaughan Street in 1926, it marked both a symbolic and a tangible move away from Main Street for Winnipeg’s retailers.

In 1908, during this frenzied period of activity, many old buildings, often homes, were demolished to make way for business blocks and banks. The large, two-storey former house of

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<sup>1</sup> Manitoba Free Press, September 4, 1909, p. 5.

the Hon. D.M. Walker, Manitoba's 1880 Attorney General and later Judge of County Court, was one such structure.<sup>2</sup> In its place, a two-storey brick retail/office building was completed, adding to the growing number of similar properties on or near Portage Avenue.

## STYLE

The North West Commercial Travellers' Association (NWCTA) Building is an excellent example of 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 re-tooled it to compliment the latest engineering technologies. The new steel framing and reinforced concrete construction methods allowed for the erection of much taller commercial buildings – the skyscraper. 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.

The overall plan of the building 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, the middle floors of the skyscraper, were 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.<sup>3</sup>

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 Assurance Company Building, 455 Main Street, built in 1912, the Electric Railway Chambers Building, 213 Notre Dame Avenue, built in

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<sup>2</sup> R.R. Rostecki, "291 Garry Street," Canadian Inventory of Historic Building – Historical Building Report, 1976, Vol. III, p. 88. This house had been one of the first structures built on Garry Street, completed prior to 1876.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

1913 and the Paris Building, 259 Portage Avenue, built 1915-17 are all larger examples of the Chicago style.

## CONSTRUCTION

This small building has a complicated construction history, beginning as a one-storey brick structure intended to be a café. The original City of Winnipeg Building Permit taken out on August 31, 1908 called for a 7.8 x 19.9-m (25½ x 65-foot) brick building resting on concrete footings and a stone foundation 53.3 cm (21 in.) thick.<sup>4</sup> The brick walls were 43.2 cm (17 in.) thick. Materials used included 22 cords of stone, 62,000 bricks and 23.0 cubic metres (30 cubic yards) of concrete.<sup>5</sup>

Owner A.F. Thomas was not satisfied with his little building and applied on December 7<sup>th</sup> of that year for an additional Permit. Approximately 4.9 m (16') were added to the length of the structure, along with a second floor. The cost of the combined permits was \$10,000.<sup>6</sup> When completed, the building was an unassuming brick structure like many others in the downtown area (Plate 6).

A major overhaul of the front (west) façade was completed in 1914 for a new owner, Inglis Realities Limited. This entailed a redesign and the application of terra cotta. A metal marquee was added to the new inset main entrance (Plate 7).<sup>7</sup> The final addition to the building was the completion in 1916 of a rear addition,<sup>8</sup> bringing the structure to its present dimensions – 7.9 x 36.9 x 11.1 m (26 x 121 x 36½').<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> City of Winnipeg Building Permit (below as BP), #1073/1908.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. (\$5,000) and BP #1521/1908 (\$5,000).

<sup>7</sup> BP #84/1914. Total cost was \$10,000.

<sup>8</sup> BP # 852/1916, \$6,000.

<sup>9</sup> City of Winnipeg Assessment Record, Roll No. 931250-12-1 (PC 40). Below as AR.

## DESIGN

The NWCTA Building, as it was redesigned in 1914, was as striking as the original façade was plain. Finished in white terra cotta, it has been described as a “fairytale façade.”<sup>10</sup> Delicate bands of intricately carved, terra cotta flowers, fruits and vegetables run up either side of the building and connect above the second-floor windows (Plate 8). Also running from street level to the top of the second-storey windows are two fluted columns with plain bases and ornate capitals.

Wide terra cotta panels divide the first and second floors. The space above the upper windows is the more ornamental, featuring a central panel with the name “INGLIS” (later altered to “N.W.C.T.A.”), framed by more terra cotta vegetation. Six lion heads with open mouths are topped by a massive shield and crest on the parapet, finished at both ends by flaming urns.

Window openings in the 1914 building were large and only the outside panes on the second level were internally divided. The façade was finished by a small metal marquee above the entrance, held in place by chains. It would have been, in 1914, one of the city’s unique elevations (Plate 9).

Changes over the years have been significant, although the terra cotta has remained virtually unchanged. The marquee was removed in 1964 and signage has changed over the years with new tenants and owners. Most significant have been the alterations to the windows (all now single panes of glass) and the remodelling of the entrance in 1946 and again in 1964 (Plate 10).<sup>11</sup> This work has had a minor affect on the original design. The massive overhanging sign is more obtrusive but none of these changes seriously detracts from the most significant element – the terra cotta – which, although aged and dirty, is still magnificent (Plate 11).

The north façade is plain, constructed of clay brick and uninterrupted by windows, and the south elevation is a party wall. The rear of the building, as designed in 1916, was brick with large

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<sup>10</sup> Historic Winnipeg plaque, 291 Garry Street.

<sup>11</sup> BP #722/1946 and #252/1964.

“factory sash” windows on both floors and small openings beside. It has not been significantly changed in the intervening years (Plate 12)<sup>12</sup>

## **INTERIOR**

Plans for the 1914 building (used as a tailor shop by the R.J. Inglis Company) show a ground floor accessed through a recessed door, framed by two large display windows. A large, 7.3-m (24-ft.)-long showroom occupied the front (west) portion of the building and was finished with wood panelling and a large fireplace on the south wall. Private and general offices and two fitting rooms were located in the area behind the showroom, on either side of a short interior hallway. The rear area was used as a workroom, as was the entire open second floor.<sup>13</sup>

The 1916 addition increased the work space at the rear on both floors and also a men’s washroom on the ground floor. The rear addition also included mezzanine floors between the first and second floors (office staff washroom and storage space) and above the second floor (women’s washroom).<sup>14</sup>

At present, the basement of the building is used entirely for storage, the ground floor as a furniture store. The second floor offices are located in the front of the space, the middle area is vacant and the rear features a large storage closet and bathroom (Plates 13 and 14).

## **INTEGRITY**

This building stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition. It has not suffered major, negative alterations.

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<sup>12</sup> Architect’s Plans, #852/1916, courtesy of the City of Winnipeg Archives. Below as AP.

<sup>13</sup> AP #84/1914.

<sup>14</sup> AP #852/1916.

## **STREETSCAPE**

This block of Garry Street has seen several changes since 1908, including the demolition of some buildings (such as the Free Press Building on Portage Avenue) and the construction of a large, multi-level parking facility. There are, however, several older structures on both sides of the street with which the NWCTA Building is compatible (Plate 15).

## **ARCHITECT/CONTRACTOR**

This building had a number of different architects and contractors during its first decade of existence. The original one-storey building of 1908 was designed by owner A.F. Thomas and built by J. McLeod. The extra storey and addition were designed by well-known local architect J.D. Atchison, with J. McLeod as the contractor. The 1916 rear addition was built by Hazelton and Walin based on plans drawn by J.D. Atchison.

The most significant work, the design and application of the terra cotta completed in 1914, was by the Montréal firm of Ross and Macdonald, with on-site supervision given by their associate, local architect H.B. Rugh.<sup>15</sup> Day labour was used for this construction. Ross and Macdonald have not been evaluated by the Historical Buildings Committee.

## **PERSON/INSTITUTION**

This building was originally owned by tailor A.F. Thomas, although he rented the space out to D. Hislop, who operated the Angelus Café. The business lasted only until 1911 when the Macey Office Equipment Company occupied the space. In 1914 both the owner and tenant changed. The property was purchased for the R.J. Inglis Company, “High Class Civil and Military Tailors” who renovated and occupied the building.<sup>16</sup> The terra cotta exterior and interior finish transformed the block into a more high-class building to suit its new owners/tenants. This company remained in the building until 1924. For the next eight years the block stood empty, and then was rented by the Army and Navy Veterans in Canada.

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<sup>15</sup> Rugh’s name appears on the City of Winnipeg Building Permit; Ross and Macdonald’s on the actual plans.

<sup>16</sup> Henderson’s Directory, 1908-1914; and City of Winnipeg Assessment Roll, Roll No. 931250-12-1.

In 1945, the NWCTA purchased the property for \$25,000 and converted the interior space into offices with a large meeting hall on the second floor, officially opened on October 12, 1946.<sup>17</sup> The ground-floor space was rented out to the Monarch Life Assurance Company between 1946 and 1964 and to Fidelity Trust from 1964 to 1976.<sup>18</sup> A & M Furniture now occupies the ground floor and part of the second floor is used as offices (the NWCTA moved to 28 Main Street in the early 1990s).

The NWCTA was founded in 1882 in Winnipeg, acting as a protective union for its members who were employed as travelling salesmen. Winnipeg was the centre of commercial activity for all of Western Canada and the headquarters and branch offices of countless businesses operated here. Salesmen fanned out from this location to every community across the Prairies selling all types of goods. The Association grew as quickly as the West and by 1906 was a national organization, over 2,000 members strong.<sup>19</sup>

In 1906, the Association built its own building on the corner of Bannatyne Avenue and King Street (Plate 16). The Travellers Building was an important addition to the Warehouse District and the NWCTA continued to operate out of the building until its move to Garry Street in 1946.

## **EVENT**

There is no known significant event connected with this building.

## **CONTEXT**

The NWCTA Building is a good example of the type of development occurring after 1900 as Portage Avenue took its place as Winnipeg's pre-eminent business and retail thoroughfare. That

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<sup>17</sup> J. McWilliams, 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary – North West Commercial Travellers' Association of Canada (Winnipeg: NWCTA, 1982), p. 121.

<sup>18</sup> Henderson's Directory, 1915-1976.

<sup>19</sup> The Year Past, 1979, (Winnipeg: Historical Buildings Committee, 1980), p. 13; and J. McWilliams, op. cit., p. 100.

the building was remodelled in 1914 and added to in 1916 reflects the prosperity in the city and region.

The building has also maintained an intimate connection over the last nearly 60 years with a national organization that had its beginnings in the city and was an important institution to many of its citizens.

### **LANDMARK**

This building, because of its striking appearance and location on a busy downtown street, is conspicuous. This familiarity was tested in early 1978 when the City announced plans to purchase the building and demolish it to make way for a second exit from the new Trizec parking lot. Protests from citizens, the Manitoba Historical Society, the Manitoba Association of Architects and other groups stopped the plans.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, March 17, 1978, p. 6; and Winnipeg Free Press, February 28, 1978.

# APPENDIX I

## CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report



Date: 02 March 2001

### Assessment Record

Prepared By: M. Peterson

Building Address: 291 Garry Street

Building Name: NWCTA Building

Original Use: Offices

Current Use: retail

Roll No. (Old): 931250 (16869)

RSN: 99782

Municipality: 12

Ward: 1

Property or Occupancy Code: 40

Legal Description: 1 St. John, Plan 24135, Lot 68 (Old: 1 St. John, Plan 129, Block 3, north 265' of Lot 123)

Location: east side between Portage and Graham avenues

Date of Construction: 1908

Storeys: 2

### Heritage Status: ON INVENTORY

Construction Type: Brick, terra cotta and stone foundation

Building Permits (Plans available: [A] Archives; [M] Microfilm; [4<sup>th</sup>] 4<sup>th</sup> floor, 65 Garry Street):

- 1073/1908 \$5,000 (original, 25 x 65); 1521/1908 \$5,000 (addition, 25 x 16); 84/1914 \$10,000 [A] (alterations); 852/1916 \$6,000 [A] (alterations); 468/1945 \$1,500 [A] (alterations); 722/1946 \$5,000 (repairs); 1400/1958 \$1,500 (interior alterations); 252/1964 [4<sup>th</sup>] (alteration); 1500/1965 [M510] (interior alterations); 3937/1968 \$7,000 [M151] (interior alterations)

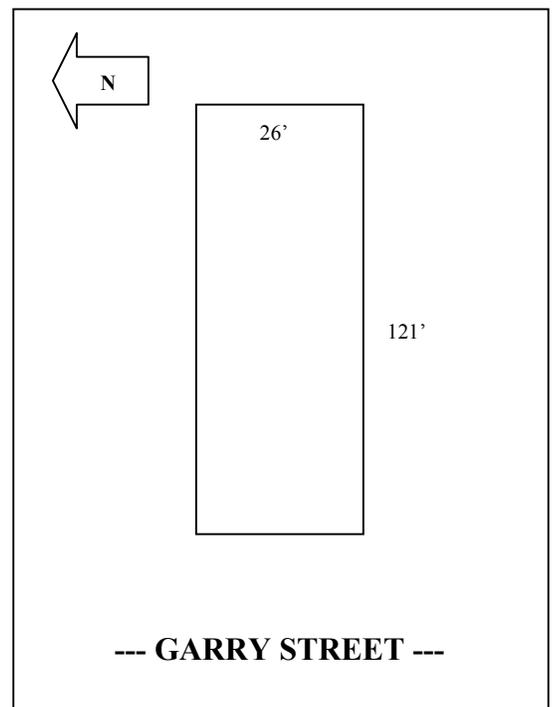
### Information:

- 26 x 121 x 36½' = 114,829 cu. ft.

- Permit 468/1945: new partitions on 1<sup>st</sup>, new steel stairs, acoustic ceiling on 2<sup>nd</sup>, glass brick partitions; Permit 772/1946: new entrance, new linoleum, ceiling added; Permit 252/1914: remodel front ground-floor plate glass window; Permit 1500/1965: new partitions and electrical on 1<sup>st</sup> floor; Permit 3937/1968: front 50' of 2<sup>nd</sup> floor remodelled (new ceiling, lighting and flooring)

- walls: B-21" stone; 1<sup>st</sup>-17" brick; 2<sup>nd</sup>-9-13" brick

- ceilings: B-7'; 1<sup>st</sup>-15+'; 2<sup>nd</sup>-10+'; mezzanines on both 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup>



## APPENDIX II

### ROSS AND MACDONALD

George Allen Ross (1879-1946) was born in Montréal and studied architecture at both the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Cambridge, and École des Beaux Arts, Paris. He would later work in the offices of Parker and Thomas, Boston, Massachusetts, and Carrère and Hastings, New York City (1903-04). Returning to Montréal, Ross formed a partnership with David Huron MacFarlane in 1905.<sup>21</sup>

The pair was responsible for a number of buildings throughout Montréal including the Y.M.C.A. Building, the Read Building (St. Alexandre and Lagachetiere streets), the Architects Building, and the Transportation Building. The Château Laurier (1908-12) in Ottawa, one of Canada's most famous hotels, was also designed by Ross and MacFarlane. MacFarlane resigned from the partnership in 1912 and retired from architecture shortly after.

After MacFarlane's departure, Ross formed a new partnership with Robert Henry Macdonald (1875-1942). Macdonald was born Melbourne, Australia, and after articling with a local architectural firm, he emigrated to Canada at the age of 20, joining the staff of Robert Findlay of Montréal. In 1900, he left for Europe and, after a period working in New Zealand and New York, settled permanently in Montréal in 1907. He became associated with the firm Ross and MacFarlane, and was its senior draftsman in January 1913 when he replaced MacFarlane as partner. He died on December 16, 1942.<sup>22</sup>

Ross continued to use the name Ross and Macdonald in his business affairs until the practice was formally stopped by the Québec architect's association, *L'association des architectes paysagistes du Québec*, in 1944. Ross and his son John Kenneth Ross (1915-1978) then formed Ross and

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<sup>21</sup> David A. Rose, "The Hotel Architecture of Ross and MacFarlane/Ross and Macdonald," Thesis, 1992, p. 16, courtesy of the Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montréal. Below as "Thesis."

<sup>22</sup> Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, Journal, February 1943, p. 24; and David Rose, Guide and Inventory to the Ross & Macdonald Archive (Montréal: Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1991), pp. 6, 16. Below as Guide.

Ross, which lasted until G.A. Ross died in 1946.<sup>23</sup> Ross and Macdonald were part of a group that designed Toronto's Union Station (1919-27), 65-75 Front Street West, Maple Leaf Gardens (1931), Hotel Saskatchewan, Regina (1926-27), the Hydrostone housing redevelopment in Halifax (1918-20 with planner Thomas Adams) and the T. Eaton and Company's retail stores in Calgary (1927-28) and Saskatoon (1928-29).<sup>24</sup>

Herbert B. Rugh, an American-trained architect who had practiced in Winnipeg since ca.1904, became Ross and MacFarlane's (and then Ross and Macdonald's) associate architect for Western Canada in 1912.<sup>25</sup> Although the earlier partnership was responsible for several local structures (including the Hotel Fort Garry, Broadway), Ross and Macdonald designed only a few small structures in Winnipeg other than the NWCTA Building, 291 Garry Street (1914).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Guide, pp. 9-10.

<sup>24</sup> "Thesis," pp. 16-18; additional information supplied by Marilyn Berger, Head Librarian, Blackader-Lauterman Library, McGill University, Montréal; L. Maitland, op. cit., pp. 112-13; Guide, pp. 7-8; and H. Kalman, History of Canadian Architecture (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1994), Vol. II, pp. 660, 719, 767.

<sup>25</sup> Construction, Vol. V (January 1912), p. 72; and Guide. Ross and Macdonald's work in Winnipeg included houses at 1 St. John's Avenue (1916), 184 Oxford Street (1916), and the Prudential Trust Building, Garry Street at Ellice Avenue (never built).

<sup>26</sup> City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Book, 1913-21.

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Plate 1 – Looking west up Portage Avenue from Main Street, 1901. (City of Winnipeg.)

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Plate 2 – Looking west up Portage Avenue from Main Street, 1919. Note the dramatic increase in traffic, especially pedestrian and a similar increase in building density and scale. (City of Winnipeg.)

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Plate 3 – Confederation Life Assurance Company Building, 455 Main Street, built 1912, designed by J.W. Gray (Toronto). (M. Peterson Collection.)

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Plate 4 – Electric Railway Chambers Building, 213 Notre Dame Avenue, built 1913, designed by Pratt and Ross (Winnipeg) and C.S. Frost (Chicago). (M. Peterson Collection.)

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Plate 5 – Paris Building, 259 Portage Avenue, built 1915-17, designed by Woodman and Carey.  
(Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

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Plate 6 – Garry Street looking north, ca.1910, including A.F. Thomas’s block (arrow). (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

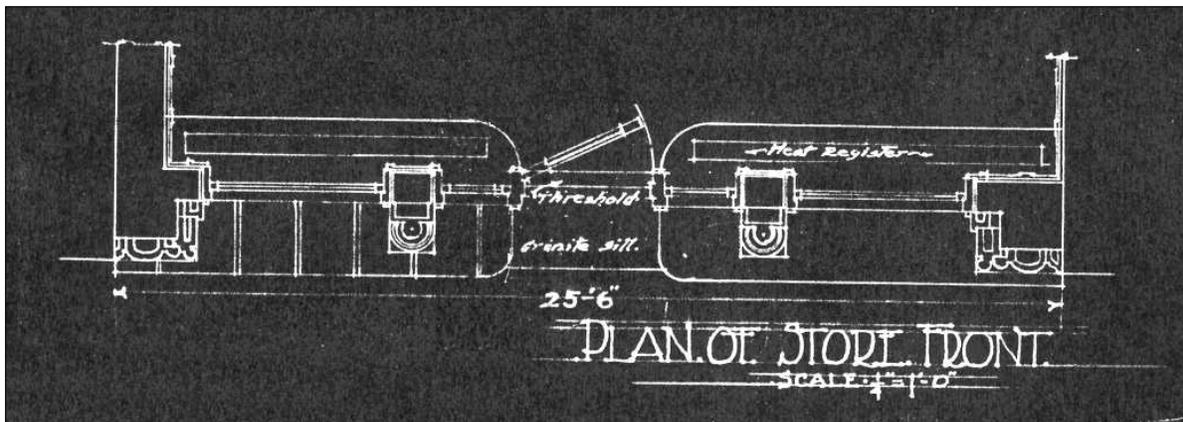


Plate 7 – Architect’s plan for the newly designed store entrance for owner R.J. Inglis, 1914. (City of Winnipeg, Plan #84/1914.)

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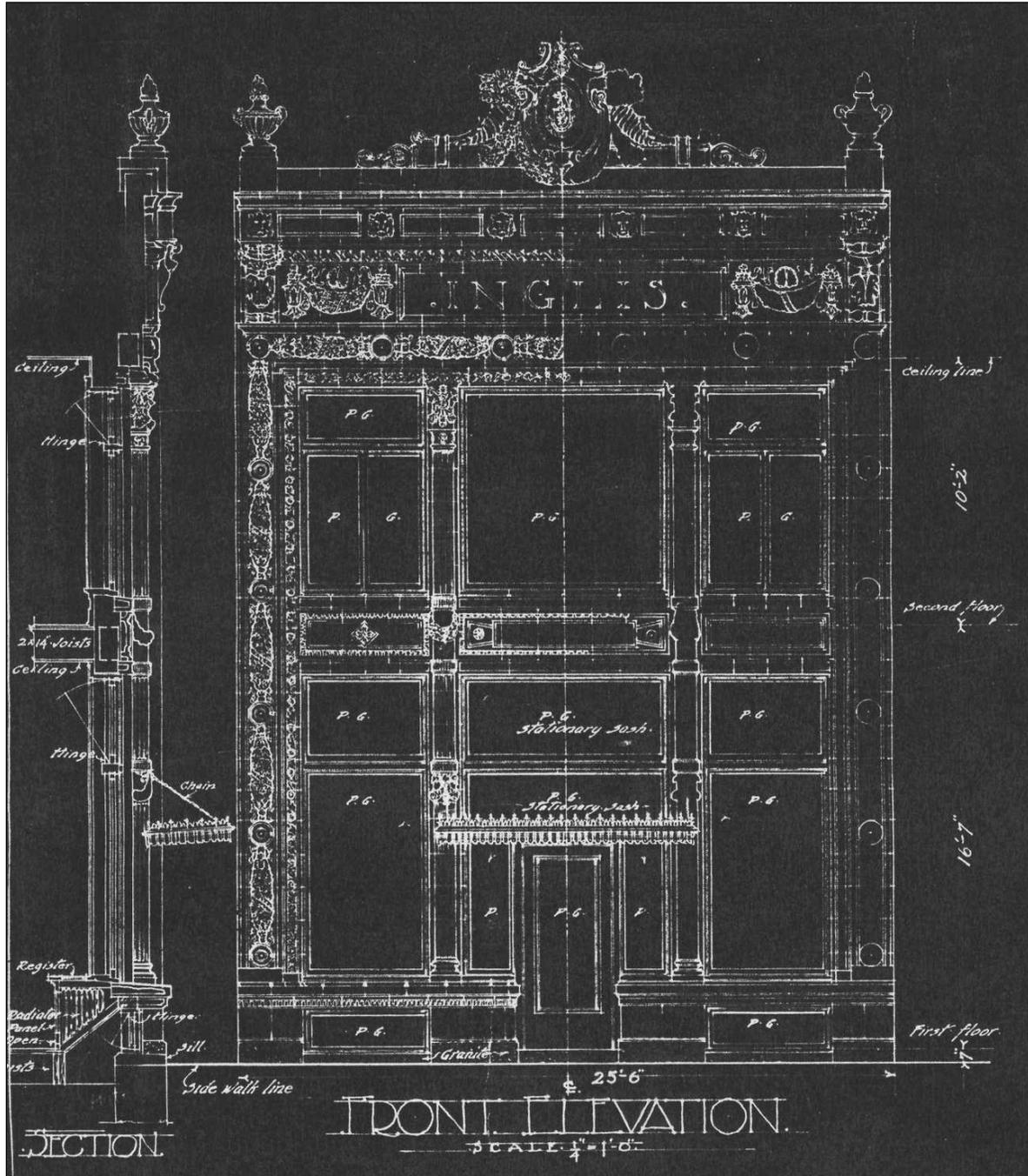


Plate 8 – Architect’s plans, 1914, “Front Elevation” and “Section.” (City of Winnipeg, Plan #84/1914.)

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Plate 9 – Garry Street looking south, 1916. The NWCTA Building, then the Inglis Building, with its metal marquee is seen at the arrow. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

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Plate 10 – NWCTA Building, 1969. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Architectural Survey.)

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Plate 11 – NWCTA Building, front (west) façade. (M. Peterson, 2001.)



Plate 12 – NWCTA Building, rear (east) façade. (M. Peterson, 2001.)

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Plate 13 – NWCTA Building, interior, ground floor. (M. Peterson, 2001.)



Plate 14 – NWCTA Building, interior, second floor. (M. Peterson, 2001.)

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Plate 15 – Garry Street looking north. (M. Peterson, 2001.)



Plate 16 – 283 Bannatyne Avenue, Travellers Building (Townsite), 1970. (Courtesy of the  
Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Architectural Survey.)