



425 HENRY AVENUE

FORMER TURNER-WALKER BLOCK

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee

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By 1910 Alberta and Saskatchewan had been provinces in the Dominion for five years and were building up their main centres with roads, public buildings and commercial sectors that Winnipeg had developed a decade previous. Winnipeg's early development was gained by its status as the Gateway City, providing all essential services to the mushrooming population of the Canadian Prairies for the decade following 1895. Governmental, transportation and most importantly, commercial services, all had Winnipeg as an eastern terminus during the city's heyday. As the new provinces grew, their dependence on Winnipeg lessened but Winnipeg had been firmly established by the wholesale trade, and diversification into areas such as finance and grain marketing was easily accomplished. As one author succinctly put it:

Winnipeg reached the height of its power and influence in the west by 1912. Winnipeg controlled grain marketing for the entire prairie region, wholesaling from the Great Lakes to the Rockies, its financial institutions operated throughout Canada and controlled the prairie region. The manufacturing industry was meeting demands for products in the construction industry. The railway yards and shops were crucial to the operation of the whole western network. Although other cities such as Edmonton and Calgary were beginning to develop into important western cities, Winnipeg by far was the most dominant and the prevailing attitude of its residents was one of optimism and hope for continued expansion.¹

From this optimism grew Winnipeg's last serious warehouse construction period. By World War I 'frontier settlement' ceased to be an important economic contributor and Winnipeg's role in the western and Canadian economies shifted away from the middleman role. In 1912 Winnipeg entrepreneur and former Conservative MLA for North Winnipeg, Sampson Walker, built a four-storey warehouse on the northwest corner of Henry Avenue and Ellen Street for \$65,000²

¹ T.J. Kuz, "Metropolitan Winnipeg: Inter-Urban Relationships" in T.J. Kuz (ed.), Winnipeg: 1874-1974. Progress and Prospects (Winnipeg-1974), pp. 10-11.

² City of Winnipeg Building Permit (below as BP), #1509/1912.

STYLE

The Turner-Walker Block, as it became known, is an example of a reduced neo-classical style commercial building rare to the city. Unlike the round arches of the Richardsonian Romanesque warehouses so prevalent in Winnipeg's warehouse district, these buildings display much more emphasis on the straight line. Heavy cornices are used to finish the structure and rustication is often lacking from ground level accents.

CONSTRUCTION

This four-storey brick structure with stone basement is built using the large square beam/post supports utilized in mill construction. This type of support system was extremely popular in the city due to its strength and relatively good fire resistance. The building measures 52' x 140' and is 53' high.³ The west elevation walls have thicknesses of 17", 21", 21" and 21", the east side walls measure 21", 21", 25" and 25". The middle wall which divides the interior into two halves measures 21", 21", 26" and 26".⁴ A parapet and metal cornice complete the warehouse.

DESIGN

The Turner-Walker Block has many elements not usually found in Winnipeg warehouse architecture. Ground level emphasis is created using smooth ashlar limestone rather than the usual rusticated stone base. Front and east facades have four foot ashlar bases with the balance of the elevations being red brick. The west and rear walls utilize three and half foot concrete bases, with red brick on the east wall and common clay brick on the rear. The main facade is symmetrical and offers an ornamental cut stone entrance with Tuscan order columns framing the entrance. Windows on this elevation are paired and as with the east facade, diamond-shaped ornamental stone highlights appear in spandrels. A stone belt course runs along the top of the first storey along all elevations save the rear, and these same three walls exhibit stone sills and heavy stone lintels.

³ City of Winnipeg Assessment Record, Roll No. 920770, Ward 1, PC 50.

⁴ Winnipeg Fire Insurance Plan (1917) Vol. II, pp. 240, 242.

Pilasters, two on the main facade, are also utilized somewhere on the building. East side delivery doors have radiating-brick arches with projecting ashlar keystones. The building is completed with a heavy cornice and dentil blocks and a parapet. The interior is divided into two separate parts each with an elevator for shipping and receiving.

INTERIOR

Access could not be gained but it can be surmised that some of the building has been altered to allow for manufacturing activities not included in the original plans for the building. Other portions of the structure will likely have retained their original warehouse openness.

INTEGRITY

The Turner-Walker Block occupies its original site and has suffered little alteration to its exterior elements. The structure has had some insignificant lean-to's removed but is otherwise unaltered. The structure is in excellent condition.

STREETSCAPE

The Turner-Walker Block is very much a part of the area in which it stands and acts as a boundary between residential property and the railway lines beyond.

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTOR

The architect for 425 Henry Avenue was Col. J. N. Semmens (see Appendix I for biography). Contractors were the Winnipeg firm of Carter-Hall-Aldinger Co.⁵ also responsible for the Civic Auditorium and many other Winnipeg and western Canadian structures.

⁵ BP #1509/1912.

PERSON/INSTITUTIONS

The original owner, Sampson Turner, was born in Cheddleton, England, in 1843 and arrived in Winnipeg at the age of 39 on May 2nd. He began his Winnipeg career with the C.P.R. but soon left to start his own business. In 1903 he formed the Walker Oil Company with an Elmwood plant and merged with the Canadian Oil Company shortly after. Until his 1905 retirement Walker held the position of Western Manager of this company. Politically active, he was a City Council member for Ward 6 in 1891 and a Conservative MLA for North Winnipeg from 1903 to 1905. He chose not to run in the following election.⁶ Sampson Walker had ten children, two of which died soon after their Winnipeg arrival. Walker had four remaining sons who remained in the city, Frederick J., Philip and Raymond.

Philip Walker was manager of the W. T. Grose and Co. manufacturers' agents and then a partner in the Grose and Walker firm carrying on the same activities.⁷ The two men for which 425 Henry Avenue was named were Charles G. Turner and Raymond Walker. Turner had been a clerk in the firm of Bissett (E.H.) and Loucks (E.B.). This firm dealt in hardware, waterworks supplies and cement and had a warehouse at 151 Notre Dame Avenue.⁸ Walker worked in the office of his brother's company, Grose and Walker. By 1910 Turner and Walker had formed their own manufacturers' agent business and located at 147 Bannatyne Avenue. When Raymond's father built the Henry Avenue warehouse, Turner and Walker moved in. The original list of tenants at 425 Henry Avenue included two firms that had shared space with the Turner-Walker Co. at 147 Bannatyne Avenue, Thomas McAvity and Sons Ltd., and Otto Schultz. Schultz was a dry goods wholesaler and McAvity was concerned with plumbing and steampipe supplies. The fourth tenant at 425 Henry Avenue was the William Galloway Co. of Canada Ltd. who dealt in farm machinery, engines and general merchandise. In 1917 there was a split in the Turner-Walker Co., both men were listed at the same address, 259 Stanley Street, but listed separately. Interestingly, 259 Stanley Street was yet another of Sampson Walker's holdings. By 1918 Turner was back at 147 Bannatyne

⁶ Winnipeg Free Press, March 9, 1933.

⁷ Henderson's Directory, 1900-1920.

⁸ Ibid., 1909.

Avenue and by 1921 C. S. Turner no longer had his own business and R. Walker is not listed in the City. In 1917, the T. Eaton Co. of Canada became sole tenant of the Turner-Walker Block and used the space to store everything from paper and hosiery to boots and shoes and farm implements.⁹

Eatons remained at 425 Henry Avenue until 1921 when the Manitoba Vegetable Growers became the sole tenant. They in turn left in favour of the Manitoba Government Liquor Control Commission who occupied the site until 1930. This was the year that Sampson Walker sold his Henry warehouse to the new Winnipeg branch of the Catelli Macaroni Products Corporation Ltd. Here Catelli manufactured a whole line of pasta products for close to thirty years. In 1958 Catelli's business approach changed and manufacturing activities were moved to Lethbridge, Alberta. Offices at 101 Hutchings Street are still occupied by the company.

McCormicks Ltd. (headquartered in London, Ontario) took over occupancy of 425 Henry Avenue in 1959 and manufactured biscuits on the premises for twenty years.¹⁰ During that time, the building, bought by McCormicks in 1949, was sold to the Dominion Life Assurance Co. in 1953, repurchased by McCormicks in 1967 and resold to Dominion Life in 1970.¹¹

EVENT

There is no significant event connected with this building.

CONTEXT

As mentioned earlier, this building represents Winnipeg's final phase of serious warehouse construction prior to the First World War and its associated financial downturn. It is also

⁹ Ibid.; and Winnipeg Fire Insurance Plan, op. cit.

¹⁰ Henderson's Directory, various years.

¹¹ City of Winnipeg Assessment Roll, Roll No. 920770, Ward 1.

representative of the type of financial enterprise so often entered into by Winnipeg's leading industrialists. The construction of both residential and commercial structures had begun before Winnipeg became an incorporated city and continued well beyond the limits of this study. The Turner-Walker Block also reflected the need of warehouses for a railway connection for both shipping and receiving.

LANDMARK

This four storey structure is conspicuous in the neighbourhood as a boundary between the homes in the area and the railway lines behind it.

APPENDIX I

J. N. Semmens

Colonel J. N. Semmens was born in 1880 in Toronto, the son of a Methodist minister. He graduated from Wesley College and went on to receive an architectural degree from the University of Pennsylvania. He lived in Winnipeg for over 50 years and moved to Victoria, B.C. in 1958. Three years later he died. Semmens joined the Winnipeg Grenadiers as a lieutenant in 1910 and was raised to the rank of major in 1914. He went overseas in 1915 as Second-in-command of the 78th Battalion and became its Commanding Officer in 1917.¹ After World War I ended, he returned to Winnipeg and went back to work as an architect. Semmens became deeply impressed by the one-storey buildings being constructed at the time and this would become the model for the many schools he either designed or supervised for the School Board's Building Department. He worked closely with J. B. Mitchell, then Commissioner of School Buildings and later replaced Mitchell as Commissioner. During World War II Semmens organized the 2nd Battalion of the Grenadiers. For the remainder of the war he acted as Commandant of Camp Shilo.²

An incomplete list of Semmens' designs includes:

- RCMP Barracks (Winnipeg)
- Winnipeg Northend Library
- St. Boniface Sanatorium
- Grace Maternity Hospital (Winnipeg)
- Daniel McIntyre Collegiate Institute (Winnipeg) 1923
- Winnipeg Electric Co. Building
- School for the Feeble Minded (Portage la Prairie)
- Bank of Montreal (Portage and Main, Winnipeg) 1913
- Civic Auditorium (444 St. Mary Avenue, Winnipeg) 1932
- Isaac Newton Junior High School (Winnipeg) 1921
- West End Collegiate (Saskatoon)
- The Collegiate Building (Dauphin)
- other small and medium size schools throughout the province
- several private residences, including 611 Wellington Crescent (Taylor House) and 265 Kingsway Avenue, both of Winnipeg

¹ Winnipeg Free Press November 5, 1961.

² Ibid. and J. N. Semmens "Typical Schools of Western Canada" in Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada No. IV, November 1927 pp. 401-406.

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425 HENRY AVENUE – FORMER TURNER-WALKER BLOCK



Plate 1 – Former Turner-Walker Block, 425 Henry Avenue, 1969. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Architectural Survey.)



Plate 2 – Former Turner-Walker Block, 425 Henry Avenue, front (south) façade, 1987. (City of Winnipeg, Planning Department.)

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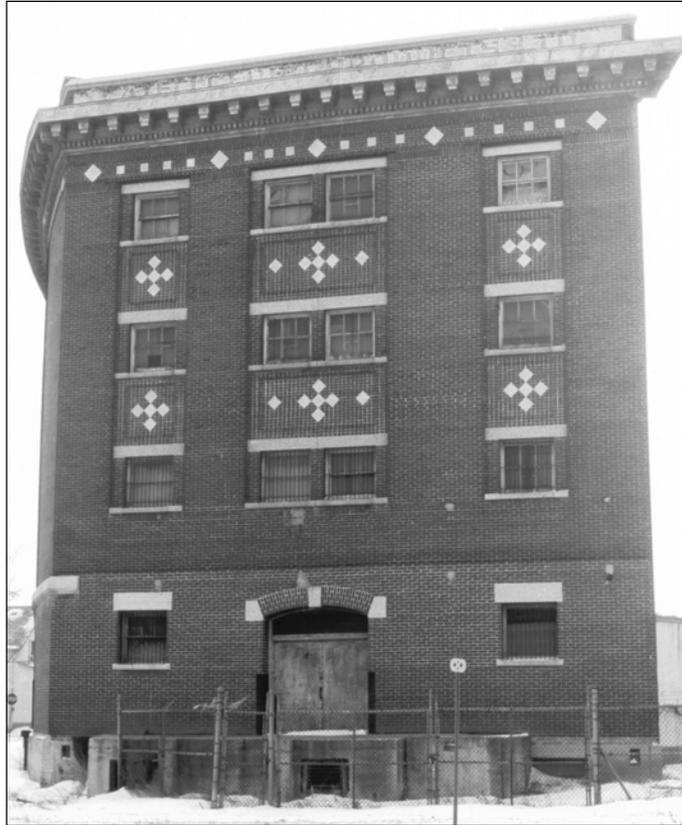


Plate 3 – Former Turner-Walker Block, 425 Henry Avenue, rear (north) façade, 1987. (City of Winnipeg, Planning Department.)



Plate 4 – Former Turner-Walker Block, 425 Henry Avenue, Ellen Street (east) façade, 1987. (City of Winnipeg, Planning Department.)

425 HENRY AVENUE – FORMER TURNER-WALKER BLOCK



Plate 5 – Former Turner-Walker Block, 425 Henry Avenue, west façade, 1987. (City of Winnipeg, Planning Department.)