

232 MAIN STREET – FORTUNE BLOCK

C.M. Willmot and G.W. Stewart (1882)



Mark Fortune (1847-1912) was one of many land speculators who took advantage of Winnipeg's 1881-1882 real estate boom to amass a large personal fortune. Unlike many of his contemporaries, however, his wealth did not vanish with the collapse of property values after 1882. Over the next three decades, Fortune's influence in the city would grow; he was an alderman on City Council (1879-1881) and was considered a member of Winnipeg's elite when he and his 19-year-old son died on the *Titanic* on April 10, 1912 (his wife and three of his daughters survived). In 1882, however, Fortune joined a growing list of investors by using some of his profits to construct a commercial block, at the southwest corner of Main Street and St. Mary Avenue, and then selling it.

The three-storey solid brick Fortune Block features two similarly designed main façades, east and north. Originally, the ground floor of the east elevation was designed with large display windows and multi-pane transoms, set in either cast iron or wood frames wrapping around the northeast

corner of the building and running a short distance along the St. Mary Avenue façade. Above the windows was an ornamental cornice, likely tin, with protrusions along its length (removed by 1926). Numerous renovations have been made to this area of the building as new tenants renovated to suit their needs. Much more original are the second and third floors: the polychromatic brickwork of the upper storeys; the brick pilasters; the round-headed windows with some paired openings under larger segmental brick arches on the second floor; and the pointed headed windows, either singles or triples, with layered brick arches on the top floor. An unadorned brick parapet has replaced the original metal cornice that finished the building above a corbelled brick band. Many of these elements are also found on the north façade. The plainer west façade has been partially covered by a one-storey addition completed in 1957.

Fortune sold the block shortly after its construction to Scottish-born wholesale grocer Alexander Macdonald who then built a nearly identical building at the south end of the Fortune Block. The Fortune Block and its southern twin were designed in the exuberant High Victorian Italianate style, the architects were Charles Mancel Willmot and George W. Stewart, Ontarians who produced several major edifices during their brief partnership from 1882-c.1884. Their projects included the Richardson, Carruthers and Stobart blocks, Winnipeg General Hospital and Mark Fortune residence on Broadway, all now demolished. Willmot subsequently returned to Ontario, while Stewart remained in Winnipeg until 1887, then moved to the United States where he practised in Dallas, Texas, Atlanta, Georgia and St. Petersburg, Florida.

The block was used as a mixed retail and office/residential facility for many years; long-term tenants included Holman Brothers butchers and grocer Thomas Jobin. The upper floors, which continue to feature some original woodwork around doors and windows, original door hardware and the magnificent main staircase along the building's south wall, has been vacant since the late 1970s.

Although alterations over the years have upset the exterior unity of the Macdonald and Fortune buildings, the Fortune Block and its twin, along with the two buildings to the south, form a rare intact pre-1890 streetscape.

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

Exterior-

- Three-storey brick building with flat roof located on the southwest corner of Main Street and St. Mary Avenue, its main facades facing east onto Main Street and north onto St. Mary Avenue, its south façade hidden by the neighbouring buildings and its west façade facing a back lane;
- Its main facades (east and north) with entrance and display windows along the east façade and wrapping around the northeast corner, the upper floors with their windows in round-headed openings (some paired) under larger segmental brick arches on the second floor and pointed headed, either single or triple openings, with layered brick arches on the top floor, polychromatic brick accenting, raised brick pilasters, metal fire escape (north) and an unadorned brick parapet;
- The small paired windows on the ground floor of the north façade; and
- Its rear (west) façade partially covered by a one-storey addition with metal fire escape.

Interior-

- Ornamental tin ceiling;
- Coffered ceiling of third floor skylight;
- Primary staircase on the south side from the ground floor to the third floor; and
- Ornamental moulding in hallways and around windows and doors.