



**456 MAIN STREET
THE BANK OF TORONTO**

Historical Buildings Committee

August 1982

456 MAIN STREET
THE BANK OF TORONTO

On the west side of Bankers' Row between McDermot Avenue and Bannatyne Avenue stands the seemingly typical Bank of Toronto. Closer examination, however, reveals that this building possessed Winnipeg's first marble bank façade, and perhaps one of the few in Canada. One newspaper remarked that "as far as is known (,) this building will be the only structure in Canada in which white marble has been used for the exterior finish."¹ Set behind this lavish building material lies a window treatment resplendent in its equally costly ornamental cast iron surroundings.

The Bank of Toronto was a latecomer to the Winnipeg financial scene. In March, 1905, this institution opened temporary Main Street premises in the Grundy Block.² One employee described these quarters as resembling "a bowling alley (more) than a bank. There was said to be a heating system somewhere under the building, but it never seemed to operate on any regular schedule, and positively never worked overtime at all."³ The bank occupied these facilities briefly. In the same year, the Bank of Toronto purchased a Main Street lot from a local land speculator for \$66,000. Several ramshackle structures which formerly housed a jeweller, milliner, and clothing store were demolished to make way for architect H.C. Stone's new banking hall.⁴

The Bank of Toronto had selected an ideal site along Bankers' Row. However, longer established Winnipeg branches such as the Banks of British North America and Commerce already operated from monumental banking halls nearby. To attract clients, the newcomer opted for an exercise in architectural conservatism. The new rendition would stand as a typical neo-classical bank, but it would impress businessmen with the city's most lavish façade. The strategy succeeded magnificently as the bank remained in its Main Street quarters until 1953, before making way for a trust company.⁵ H.C. Stone's Bank of Toronto typified early twentieth century structural design. Contractors Kelly Brothers and Mitchell erected a building measuring

44 feet along Main Street and extending 104 feet deep. Over a concrete foundation with concrete footings, workmen assembled a structural steel frame. Basement walls 26 inches thick ensured structural solidity while the presence of steam heating, electric lighting, and a passenger elevator maximized patron and employee convenience and comfort.⁶

The choice of building materials singles out the Bank of Toronto's façade for attention. Stylistically, the building is indistinguishable from countless others in Canada's major cities. Four Corinthian columns rise from shoulder-high bases and are capped by a fourth storey entablature, cornice, and balustrade. But the white marble composition of these neo-classical components is unusual for Winnipeg. For an expenditure of \$36,240, bank directors purchased a solid marble colonnade, entablature and balustrade from the Blue Ridge Quarries in Georgia.⁷ To reduce weight, individual columns arrived in six sections which totalled forty tons when hoisted into place.⁸ Costly fenestration and ornamental cast-ironworks lay behind the colonnade and provided a vivid contrast to the white marble. Intricate iron designs for window perimeters added \$22,400 to the building's already substantial cost.⁹ Knowledgeable passersby were awed by the building's finery.

A typical banking hall interior awaited clients who passed under the towering colonnade. The familiar manager's office stood adjacent to the main entrance. Panelled walls and columns finished in white Italian marble ascended to a second storey skylit ceiling. At the rear of the hall lay a separate savings account enclosure and the bank's vaults. Two unusual features, private loan consultation rooms for businessmen and a ladies' sitting room adjacent to the savings department, completed the arrangement.³⁰

The other storeys reflected a similar concern for detail. Visitors could reach third and fourth offices by elevator or ascend a marble-treaded staircase. Oak-panelled offices awaited the inspection of potential lessees. The presence of washrooms for both men and women on both upper storeys indicate the respect both architect and bank held for female patrons. The usual basement boilers, book vaults, lockers and staff lavatories ensured that the banking hall above would function efficiently.¹¹

Three owners added their respective corporate touches to this Main Street banking hall. The Bank of Toronto occupied the premises until 1954 and maintained the structure in its original condition. Until the financial institution expanded its Winnipeg operation after World War I, all upper floors were leased to affluent business concerns. In 1910, for instance, second floor lessees included a realtor and insurance company, while John D. Atchison, Winnipeg's most prestigious architect, rented third floor offices.¹² By 1920, the Bank of Toronto had expropriated part of the second storey for its own use, while a decade later, only a few fourth floor rental offices were available. Although the Bank of Toronto sold the structure to Credit Foncier in 1946, the bank retained its offices for seven additional years.¹³

During its 1946-1958 proprietorship, Credit Foncier upgraded the building. In 1954, the second floor received a new linoleum floor, fluorescent lighting and wall redecoration. Four years later, unspecified partitions were undertaken for new tenants.¹⁴ Credit Foncier viewed its acquisition as an investment. While the corporation occupied the banking hall during 1953 to 1963, it leased all upper floor offices.¹⁵

In 1958 the Ukrainian Canadian Committee purchased the structure for \$81,000 and the most extensive upgrading in the building's history began. When Credit Foncier moved to new premises in 1963, the new owners began renovations in earnest. The banking hall was altered. In 1963 the City Assessor reported that this room had been transformed into a library, museum and art gallery. Two years later, new basement clubrooms, washrooms, and floors were erected.¹⁶

Today passersby can still admire Winnipeg's first white marble colonnade, entablature, and balustrade.

BANK OF TORONTO – ORIGINAL COST AND ALTERATIONS

(Source: City of Winnipeg. **Building Permits and Assessment Record**. Code 43, Ward 2, Roll No. 608600, Bank of Toronto).

Permit	Year	Estimated Cost	Specifics
1905 – 2436	1905	\$160,000 (underestimate)	original permit
unspecified	1942	Unspecified	new doors
1954 – 7053	1954	\$2,790	second storey renovations
1958 – 944	1958	Unspecified	partitions – second floor
Unspecified	1963	Unspecified	banking hall renovations
1965 – 5271	1965	Unspecified	basement renovations

ORIGINAL COST OF BANK OF TORONTO IN 1905-1906

(Source: City of Winnipeg. **Assessment Record**. Code 43, Ward 2, Roll No. 608600, Bank of Toronto)

Contractor: Kelly Brothers & Mitchell
Architect: H.C. Stone

ITEMS

COST

Marble & Stonecutting & Setting	\$ 36,240.00	
Plaster	6,850.00	
Fire Proofing	4,700.00	
Brick & Concrete	30,850.00	
Carpenter & Painter	28,016.00	
Glass & Glazing	3,000.00	
Sheet Metal (copper)	1,584.00	
Ornamental Iron Work	22,400.00	
Interior Marble	19,500.00	
Structural Steel	10,500.00	
	Sub-Total	\$163,640.00

Architects' Fees	\$ 8,400.00	
Electric Wiring	3,868.07	
Plumbing	12,146.84	
Vaults	9,700.00	
Elevators	5,961.70	
Windows	1,815.00	
Glass	813.00	
Painting	132.85	
Iron Work	637.80	
Prism Lights	35.00	
Fire Escape	155.25	
	TOTAL COST	\$206,503.64

FOOTNOTES

- 1 “Banks Noted for Integrity and Conservatism,” WMT Special, 18 September 1906, p. 43.
- 2 “Bank of Toronto Secures a Lease,” WMT, 21 March 1905, p. 12.
- 3 Joseph Schull, 100 Years of Banking in Canada – A History of the Toronto-Dominion Bank, p. 102.
- 4 The property’s previous owner, Duncan McDonald held the lot for only four years. He purchased the property for \$900 per foot and sold it to the Bank of Toronto for \$1500 per foot. “Big Deal in City Real Estate,” WMT, 15 March 1905, p. 2.
- 5 In 1953, Credit Foncier commenced operations from the banking hall. Henderson’s Winnipeg Directory, 1953.
- 6 City of Winnipeg Building Permit, #2436/1905. Bank of Toronto, 456 Main Street.
- 7 “Our Increasing Financial Facilities,” Manitoba Free Press, 6 December 1906, p. 32.
- 8 “Georgian Pillars Arrive,” WMT, 10 August 1906, p. 9.
- 9 City of Winnipeg Assessment Record. Code 43, Ward 2, Roll No. 608600, Bank of Toronto, 456 Main Street. Below as AR.
- 10 “Our Increasing Financial Facilities,” Manitoba Free Press, 6 December 1906, p. 32.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Henderson’s Winnipeg Directory, 1910.
- 13 See *ibid.*, 1920-1955.
- 14 AR.
- 15 See Henderson’s Winnipeg Directory, 1946-1963.
- 16 AR.

456 MAIN STREET – THE BANK OF TORONTO



Plate 1 – West side of Main Street looking north from McDermot Avenue, ca.1907. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

456 MAIN STREET – THE BANK OF TORONTO



Plate 2 – Bank of Toronto, 456 Main Street, ca.1908. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

456 MAIN STREET – THE BANK OF TORONTO



Plate 3 – Details of the exterior ornamentation, no date. (City of Winnipeg.)