

596-598 MAIN STREET – GUEST BLOCK
J. Chisholm (1902) and G.W. Northwood (1909)



William John Guest was born in Bervie, Canada West (Ontario), near the eastern shore of Lake Huron in 1852, leaving public school at the age of 12 to pursue a career as a sailor. This connection to water would continue when he moved West in 1881. After a stint at farming near Brandon, MB, he set up a modest fishing company in the early 1890s in Winnipeg, the W.J. Guest Company, to bring fish from Lake Winnipeg south to the City for sale. Based on initial and increasing success, Guest and five Selkirk, MB men incorporated the Northern Fish Company in 1901. By 1913, the company was operating 36 sail boats, two tugs, a passenger/freight steamer, *The Wolverine*, docks and warehouses, including a large one at the foot of Alexander Avenue (90 Alexander Avenue, built in 1905).

Needing a modern retail shop for his goods, Guest chose an excellent location, Main Street in the heart of a growing area of retail shops, hotels and businesses. In 1902, he built his three-storey

brick and stone block, three bays wide, adding a one-storey section at the rear the following year. However, he did not stay in the structure long, deciding to concentrate on the wholesale side of his business, shutting down his retail shop and selling the Main Street block.

In 1909, based on the increasing demand for both residential and retail space, the new owners of the building, property agents Robinson and Black, financed the addition of two more bays on the building's south end. The completed block ran 11.3 metres along Main Street and 21.4 metres back. The brick walls of the superstructure rest on a wooden structural framework and a stone foundation.

The front (east) façade originally featured a large retail display window on the ground floor framed by two single entrance doors with large transom windows. The southern addition added another display window and a third entrance. The ground floor has been completely altered. The upper floors have not been significantly changed. Modest brick pilasters separate the rectilinear windows of the second floor and arched windows of the third floor. Second floor openings are embellished with narrow stone sills and rusticated stone heads. The spandrels between the upper-storey openings feature corbelled brick elements. The arched window openings of the third floor are highlighted by stone lug sills, brick drip moulding and rusticated stone keystones. A band of corbelled brick leads to a wide band of rusticated stone topped by more brick corbelling and a stone capped parapet raised at the ends and the horizontal locations of the pilasters.

The building's north and south façades are covered completely by the neighbouring structures and the rear (west) façade is partially covered by the 1903 one-storey addition; the visible portion of the brick wall includes a number of windows in arched openings.

The interior is a mixture of altered and original spaces, the ground floor having been completely altered. The original staircase, located on the south side of the 1902 building became a central staircase once the 1909 addition was completed and features an ornate wood bannister. The upper floors feature long, east-west running hallways. The original metal-clad fire doors used for sealing off the two sections of the building are still found on the staircase landings of the second and third floors. Skylights and interior light wells originally increased the natural light and ventilation to

suites on both floors. Because of many years of vacancy, many of the original interior elements are deteriorating significantly.

The building stands as an integral part of a downtown block of pre-World War I structures.

The architect of the original building was noted local designer James Chisholm (1840-1920). Chisholm was born in Ontario and came to Winnipeg in 1877, working as a construction timekeeper on the Canadian Pacific Railway. He began his architectural career shortly after although he worked during the 1890s in the United States. In 1900, he returned to Winnipeg and restarted his practice, which would ultimately include his son Colin C. Chisholm (1883-1936) as Chisholm and Son. James moved to California in 1914 because of poor health and died there in 1920. He was responsible for a large number of fine buildings throughout Western Canada, locally, his work included: Hochman (formerly Harris) Building (now part of the Red River College Princess Street Campus), 154 Princess Street (1882) – Grade III; J.W. Harris House, 26 Edmonton Street (1902) – Grade III; Granite Curling Club, 22 Mostyn Place, now 22 Granite Way (1912) – Grade III; and the Marlborough Hotel, 331 Smith Street (1913) – Grade II.

The 1909 addition was designed by George W. Northwood (1876-1959), who came to Winnipeg in 1905 to begin a long and distinguished architectural career that included several partnerships and an interruption during World War I that saw him rise to the rank of General. He died in Winnipeg in 1959. Among his most notable works are: Thomas Ryan Warehouse, 44 Princess Street (1906 with William Blair) – Grade III; Ralph Connor House, 54 West Gate, 1913 (Grade II); Union Tower Annex, 500 Main Street (1921 with Raymond Carey) – Grade II; the Canadian Wheat Board Building, 423 Main Street (1929 with C.W.U. Chivers) – List of Historical Resources; Assiniboine Park Pavilion, 55 Pavilion Crescent (1929 with C.W.U. Chivers) – Grade II; Canadian General Electric Building, 265 Notre Dame Avenue (1930 with C.W.U. Chivers), Grade III; and the Women’s Tribute Memorial Lodge, 200 Woodlawn Street, (1931 with C.W.U. Chivers) – Grade II.

After Guest sold and vacated the block, new commercial tenants included Moore’s Studio (photography), Innis and Company, fish dealers, Western Art Gallery (photography studio), Winnipeg Candy Kitchen, Castran’s Café and 15 residential suites. The members of the Godman

family owned the building from the 1920s into the 1940s. Other commercial tenants have included the Cameo Café (1940) and Julius Lunch Soda Bar (1950). Residents have been varied, including labourers, railway workers, clerks and waitresses.

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

Exterior-

- Three-storey common clay brick building with flat roof located mid-block on the west side of Main Street north of Alexander Avenue, its main façade facing east onto Main Street, its north and south façades hidden by neighbouring buildings and its west façade facing the back lane;
- The front (east) façade with brick pilasters on the second and third floors, second storey windows in rectilinear openings with continuous stone sills and stone heads, third storey windows in arched openings with stone lug sills and keystones and brick drip moulding, brick accenting in spandrels between second and third floor openings and corbelled brick, rusticated stone band and raised stone capped parapet at the roofline; and
- The visible portion of the rear (west) façade with windows in arched openings.

Interior-

- Volume and finishes of central staircase;
- Metal-clad sliding fire doors on the second and third floors; and
- Skylights.