600 MAIN STREET

McKERCHAR BLOCK

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
Researcher: M. Peterson
October 2015

600 MAIN STREET – McKERCHAR BLOCK

During the decades leading up to 1900, Winnipeg's Main Street was transformed from a muddy track bordered mainly by wood-frame buildings into a paved thoroughfare with imposing brick and stone structures along its walkways (Plates 1 and 2). The small premises that served as shops and residences were replaced by modern buildings, offering commercial, office and residential space for the ever-growing population and local service industry.

Development of the transcontinental railway had created an entirely new situation by connecting Winnipeg with both eastern manufacturing interests and a burgeoning population to the west. The city actively promoted itself as the middleman between eastern supply and western demand. Its success had far-reaching economic, political and social effects. It also resulted in rapid physical change in what became downtown Winnipeg.

New residential districts extended the outer boundaries of the built-up area, while new warehouse, banking halls, offices and shops popped up throughout the downtown. Three distinct sectors developed around Winnipeg's large, imposing City Hall on Main Street: a warehouse district to the west, a financial section from Portage Avenue north to Bannatyne Avenue along both sides of Main Street and a commercial/retail area running north from City Hall to Higgins Avenue and eventually beyond.

This last area was dominated by smaller firms selling everything from shoes and boots to harnesses and fruit. They generally were housed in two- or three-storey commercial blocks with retail space on the ground floor and offices, suites or storage space above. This type of combined or mixed-use structure became increasingly popular as demand grew for downtown office and residential space. It also was a perfect small-scale investment for the new group of successful businessmen inhabiting the city.

In 1903, only months after his store was destroyed by fire,[1] prosperous local grocer J.A. McKerchar was announcing the grand opening of a new store, located in his own building on Main Street, a sturdy three-storey brick and stone block that included offices and residential apartments on the upper levels.

STYLE

This block is a good example of the Romanesque Revival style, very popular in warehouse and commercial districts throughout North America from the 1880s well into the 20th century. The buildings were nearly always built of brick with a raised basement and utilized rusticated stone for accenting around windows and doors and at roof level. Other elements include towers flanking the main façade, quoins, belt courses, corbelled brick panels, chevrons and flat rooflines, with or without cornices and entablatures. The most obvious feature of these structures was the use of the arch above windows and doors. Often, straight-topped windows located on the middle storeys were grouped under large arches on the upper floors.[2] Although the style was applied to private residences and on large public buildings, in Winnipeg it was almost exclusively used in the warehouse district, where the designs were somewhat more subdued. The massiveness and sturdiness of the style appealed to wholesalers and retailers looking to promote their businesses and portray the stability of their firms through the design of the structures they occupied.

CONSTRUCTION

This structure was built on the west side of Main Street, mid-block between Alexander and Logan avenues. The building measures 9.8 x 21.4 metres and the solid brick walls of the superstructure measure 43.2 centimetres wide on the ground floor and 33.0 centimetres on the upper two levels

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1 Manitoba Free Press, December 15, 1902, p. 1, May 2, 1903, p. 8 and May 4, 1904, p. 6.

2 L. Maitland, et al., A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1992), p. 84; and Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg: Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, Historic Resources Branch, 1991), p. 14.

(see Appendix I for more construction information).[3] The building is supported by a wood frame system and an addition was completed on the rear of the building in 1911 costing $7,000.[4]

DESIGN

The design of the original ground floor is unknown at present, although it featured two plate glass display windows.[5] The ground floor would also have included an entrance, likely recessed, to the retail shop and a separate entrance at the building's north end to the upper floor offices.

At present, the recessed area of the ground floor is clad in a dark hued tile with newer windows and doors. The northern door to the upper floors is also newer, the remainder of the ground floor clad in a lighter hued tile (Plates 3 and 4). The ground floor is finished by a continuous rusticated stone band that acts as sills for the second storey windows.

The upper two floors have seen limited alteration (Plate 5). The upper floor is divided into two recessed window bays via paired and attached columns with brick bases and heads. The rectangular second storey window openings are finished with rusticated stone heads and the arched openings of the third storey feature rusticated stone lug sills. The spandrels feature modest brickwork. The flat roof is embellished with brick corbelling and stone. A wood flag pole is present.

The building's south façade is covered completely by the neighbouring structure; the plain brick wall of the north façade is only interrupted by arched window openings on the third floor (Plate 6). The rear (west) façade includes arched window openings on all floors, loading and personnel doors, an open metal fire escape and a metal chimney (Plate 7).

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3 City of Winnipeg, Assessment Record, Roll No. 13081393100.

4 City of Winnipeg Building Permit, # 3159/1911.

5 Manitoba Free Press, May 4, 1903, p. 6.

INTERIOR

The space was originally divided into a retail shop on the ground floor and offices and apartments on the upper floors.[6] The building has stood vacant for many years.

The upper floor space is accessed via a wood-detailed staircase along the building's north wall (Plate 8). Several skylights (some still open) originally flooded both the staircase (Plate 9) and suites (Plate 10) with natural light. The long hallways are accented with dark wood and ornamental glass (Plate 11) and ornamental tin ceilings are found throughout the ground and second floors (Plate 12).

Today, the lack of heat and water infiltration has caused serious deterioration to the entire interior.

INTEGRITY

The building stands on its original site. Basement flooding has created serious issues in the floor and some of the structural elements (Plate 13). Exterior alterations have significantly affected the main façade's ground floor but left the upper two storeys unchanged.

STREETSCAPE

This building is located on one of the City's major downtown thoroughfares, in the middle of a block of several turn-of-the-century commercial buildings (Plates 14 and 15). It is an important contributor to this historic streetscape (Plate 16).

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS

The architect for the 1902 building was John Hamilton Gordon Russell (1862-1946), one of the City's most prolific designers of the early 20th century (see Appendix II for biographical

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[6] City of Winnipeg Fire Atlas, Vol. II, Sheet 208 (December 1917).

information). He has been given 20 points by the Historical Buildings and Resources Committee. The contractors for this building were Edward Cass and J.J. Vopni, two well-known Winnipeg builders.

The 1911 work was designed by Frank R. Evans (ca.1865-1949) and built by D. Neilson.[7]

PERSON/INSTITUTION

John Archibald McKerchar (Plate 17) was born in Glengarry, Canada West (Ontario) in 1862, arriving in Winnipeg in 1879, part of a family of 10.[8] In 1881, McKerchar obtained an interest in a small Main Street grocery store, Pickworth and Company. By the next year, he had full ownership and was operating it as McKerchar Grocery. This business continued from several different addresses on Main Street for nearly 40 years, ultimately relocating to 600 Main Street (Plate 18). He sold the business to A.F. Higgins in 1918 and retired from the retail sector.[9] He took up photography but also entered the public service. In 1921, he became a City alderman, holding this office until his defeat in the 1934 mayoralty race (for 12 years he was the Chairman of the Finance Committee). McKerchar was also was school trustee for 23 years. He died in 1948.[10]

The A.F. Higgins Company remained at the address for a decade (Plate 19), replaced by American-based retailer F.W. Woolworth Company by 1929 (Plate 20).[11] Other tenants of the block included Genser and Sons, furniture (1960s), the People's Opportunity Service, a social outreach program (1970s) and the Manitoba Health and Social Services Department (1970s).[12] The upper floor offices were occupied by a variety of tenants (J.A. McKerchar maintained an

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7 City of Winnipeg Building Permit (below as BP), #3159/1911.

8 Winnipeg Free Press, December 24, 1948, pp. 1 and 9.

9 Manitoba Free Press, August 20, 1918, p. 10.

10 Winnipeg Free Press, December 24, 1948, pp. 1 and 9.

11 D.M. Lyon, "North Main Walking Tour. William Avenue to the Subway," report for the Historical Buildings Committee, June 1998, p. 41. City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls, Roll No. 13-081393100, 1905-1990. The McKerchar family owned the block until the 1980s.

12 Henderson's Directory, 1920-1990.

office on the second floor into the 1940s) including the Croatian Club (1950s-1970s). Many of the suites were used as residential space. The building is listed as vacant by the early 1980s.

EVENT

There is no known significant historical event connected with this building.

CONTEXT

This block is an example of the type of development occurring throughout the downtown in the pre-World War I period. Successful local businesses took the opportunity to construct new space for their enterprises and build extra room for rental property. The ground floor retail space/upper floor office or residential space was a popular model and repeated in every commercial district in the city and along the major thoroughfares of the surrounding municipalities and towns.

LANDMARK

This block is located on a busy downtown street but its mid-block location and muted ornamentation reduces its conspicuousness.

Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
THE CITY OF WINNIPEG

APPENDIX I

CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report
Assessment Record

Building Address: 600 Main Street

Building Name: McKerchar Block

Original Use: mixed use

Current Use: mixed use

Roll No. (Old): 13081393100 (---)

RSN: 8711

Legal Description: 9/11 St. John, Plan 32065, Lot 46

Location: West side between Alexander and Logan avenues

Date of Construction: 1902

Storeys: 3 and basement

Heritage Status: **ON NOMINATED LIST**

Construction Type: Brick and stone

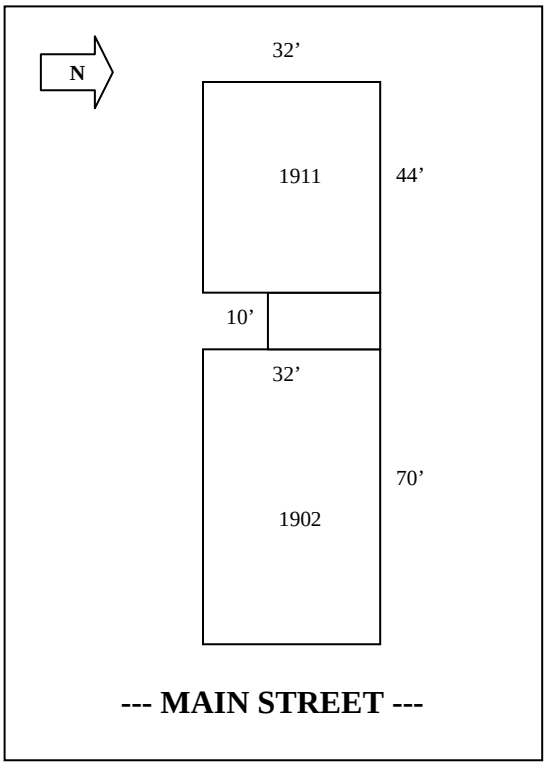
Building Permits (Plans available: **[M]** Microfilm; **[MF]** Microfiche; **[PPD]** Department Storage):
- 619/1902 $15,000 (original); 3159/1911 $10,000 (rear addition); 3947/1929 **[PPD]** N/A (interior alterations); 6911/1967 **[M-425]** $20,000 (interior alterations); 6792/1985 **[MF]** N/A (interior alterations)

Information:

- 32 x 70 x 40’

- wall thickness: 1st- 17”; 2nd & 3rd- 13” (from 1917 Fire Atlas) & 24” stone foundation wall (from Permit)

- ceilings: B- 7’6”; 1st- 14’; 2nd- 11’; 3rd- 10½’



ARCHITECT: RUSSELL, J.H.G.

CONTRACTOR: CASS, EDWARD & VOPNI, J.J.

APPENDIX II

John Hamilton Gordon Russell

J.H.G. Russell was born in Toronto, Canada West (Ontario) in 1862, the son of a dry goods dealer. After attending school in that city, he went to work for H.B. Gordon, a prominent area architect. Russell was with Gordon from 1878 until his departure for Winnipeg in 1882.[1] From 1886 to 1893, Russell travelled throughout the United States, learning civil engineering, surveying and architecture in centres such as Chicago, Illinois, Spokane and Tacoma, Washington, and Sioux City, Iowa.[2]

In 1895, two years after returning to Winnipeg, he set up his private practice, coinciding with the city's period of unbridled growth. His designs were (and are) scattered throughout the city, province and Western Canada, covering a variety of building types, sizes, prices and uses. His business continued to be steady during World War I and after, when many architects struggled to find commissions.

Russell was president of the Manitoba Association of Architects (1925) and served for three terms as the president of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (1912-15). His chairmanship of the Presbyterian Church Board of Managers[3] and his devotion to Presbyterianism partially explain the large number of churches he designed for the denomination in Winnipeg and Western Canada. Russell died in 1946.

A complete list of his designs would be lengthy indeed. Many of his earlier works have been demolished and therefore usually are no longer included in inventories of his portfolio.

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1 G. Bryce, A History of Manitoba (Toronto: The Canada History Company, 1906), p. 480.

2 Ibid., p. 480; and M. Peterson, "The Wilson House (Klinic), 545 Broadway," report to the Historical Buildings Committee, May 1990, Appendix I, n.p.

3 M. Peterson, op. cit., n.p.

Among his projects were:

Outside Manitoba-

Mount Pisgah Presbyterian Church, 207 North First Street, Roslyn, Washington, U.S.A. – 1899 (*Winnipeg Daily Tribune*, June 2, 1899, p. 6)
Knox Presbyterian - Prince Albert, Sask.
Knox Presbyterian - Kenora, Ont.
St. Andrews Church - Moose Jaw, Sask.

Manitoba-

Starbuck Presbyterian (United) - 1904
Treherne Presbyterian (United) - 1907-1908 (originally Chambers Presbyterian)
Pilot Mound Public School
Killarney Public School
Foxwarren Public School

Russell work (continued):

Winnipeg-

Churches-
Augustine Presbyterian (United), 444 River Avenue, 1903-1904 (Grade II)
Crescent-Fort Rouge Methodist (United), 525 Wardlaw Ave., 1906-1911
Westminster Presbyterian (United), 745 Westminster Avenue, 1910-1912 (Grade II)
Robertson Memorial Presbyterian (United), 648 Burrows Avenue, 1911
Robertson Memorial Presbyterian Institute, Burrows Avenue, 1911
Knox Presbyterian (United), 400 Edmonton Street, 1914-1917
Home Street Presbyterian (United), 318 Home Street, 1920
St. John's Presbyterian (United), 250 Cathedral Avenue, 1923 (Grade III)
Riverview Presbyterian (United), 360 Oakwood Avenue, 1925

Residences-
J.H.G. Russell, 237 Wellington Crescent, 1902 (demolished)
J.D. McArthur, 159 Mayfair Avenue, 1903 (Grade (III)
R.R. Wilson, 545 Broadway, 1904 (Grade III)
H. Archibald, 176 Roslyn Road, 1909
Ormsby House, 119 Campbell Street, 1910
J.H. Ashdown, 529 Wellington Crescent, 1913 (Grade II)
R.R. Wilson, 680 Wellington Crescent, 1925

Commercial-
Addition to J.H. Ashdown Warehouse, 157-179 Bannatyne Avenue, 1899-1911 (Grade II)
Lake of the Woods Building, 212 McDermot Avenue, 1901 (Grade II)
Hammond Building, 63 Albert Street, 1902 (Grade III)
Porter and Company Building, 368 Main Street, 1902-1903 (demolished)
McKerchar Block, 600-02 Main Street, 1902-1903
Additions to McClary Building, 185 Bannatyne Avenue, 1903 & 1904 (Grade III)

Russell work (continued)
Winnipeg-

Thomson Block, 499 Main Street, 1903 (demolished)
Adelman Building, 92-100 Princess Street, 1903 (Grade II)

Commercial- Bole Warehouse, 70 Princess Street, 1903
Additions to the Bright and Johnston Building, 141 Bannatyne Avenue, 1903 & 1907 (Grade III)
Silvester-Willson Building, 222 McDermot Avenue, 1904
Green and Litster Block, 235-7 Fort Street, 1904 (demolished)
Franklin Press, 168 Bannatyne Avenue, 1904 (Grade III)
Addition to Daylite Building, 296 McDermot Avenue, 1904 (Grade II)
J.H. Ashdown Store, 211 Bannatyne Avenue, 1904 (Grade III)
Allman Block, 592-4 Main Street, 1904 (List of Historical Resources)
Porter Building, 165 McDermot Avenue, 1906 (Grade III)
Child's (McArthur) Building, Portage Avenue, 1909 (demolished)
Glengarry Block, 290 McDermot Avenue, 1910 (Grade III)
Dingwall Building, 62 Albert Street, 1911 (Grade III)
Great West Permanent Loan Company Building, 356 Main Street, 1912 (demolished)
Joseph Maw Block, 280 William Avenue, 1924
Eastman Kodak Building, 287 Portage Avenue, 1930 (demolished)

Other- Gladstone School, Pembina Street, 1898 (demolished)
Casa Loma Block, 644 Portage Avenue, 1909 (Grade II)
Chatsworth Apartments, 535 McMillan Avenue, 1911
YMCA, Selkirk Avenue, 1911 (demolished)
YMCA, 301 Vaughan Street, 1911-1913, with Jackson and Rosencrans of New York (Grade II)
Guelph Apartments, 778 McMillan Avenue, 1912
Addition to Marlborough (Olympia) Hotel, 321 Smith St., 1921-1923 (Grade II)
Odd Fellows Home, 4025 Roblin Boulevard, 1922
Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Portage Avenue, 1928
Hugh John Macdonald School, William Avenue, 1929
Aurora Court Apartments, 543 Ellice Avenue, n.d.
Central Park Block, 389 Cumberland Avenue, n.d.
Johnson Apartment Block, 524 Sargent Avenue, n.d.

600 MAIN STREET – McKERCHAR BLOCK

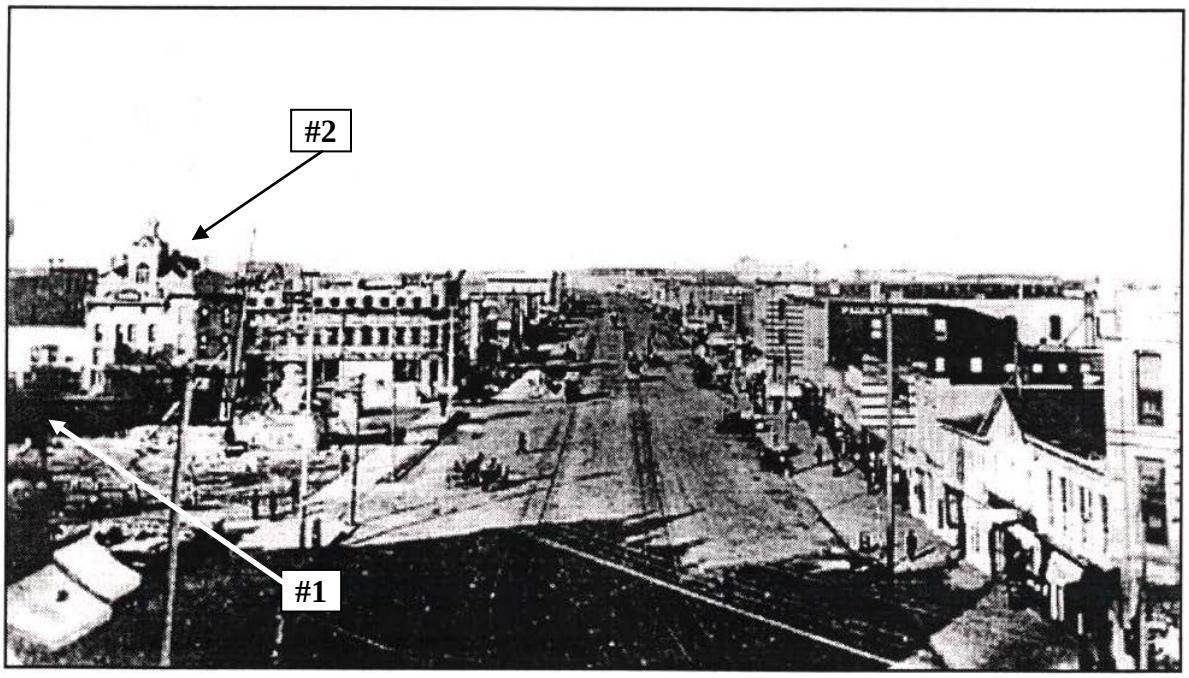

Plate 1 – Looking north on Main Street from William Avenue, 1886. Pictured here are: #1- the second City Hall; and #2- Police Courts, James Avenue. (Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg-Streets-Main, 1886-#1.)

Plate 2 – Looking north from the roof of City Hall, ca.1895, from the roof of City Hall. (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba.)

600 MAIN STREET – McKERCHAR BLOCK

Plate 3 – McKerchar Block, 600 Main Street, front (east) façade, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

600 MAIN STREET – McKERCHAR BLOCK

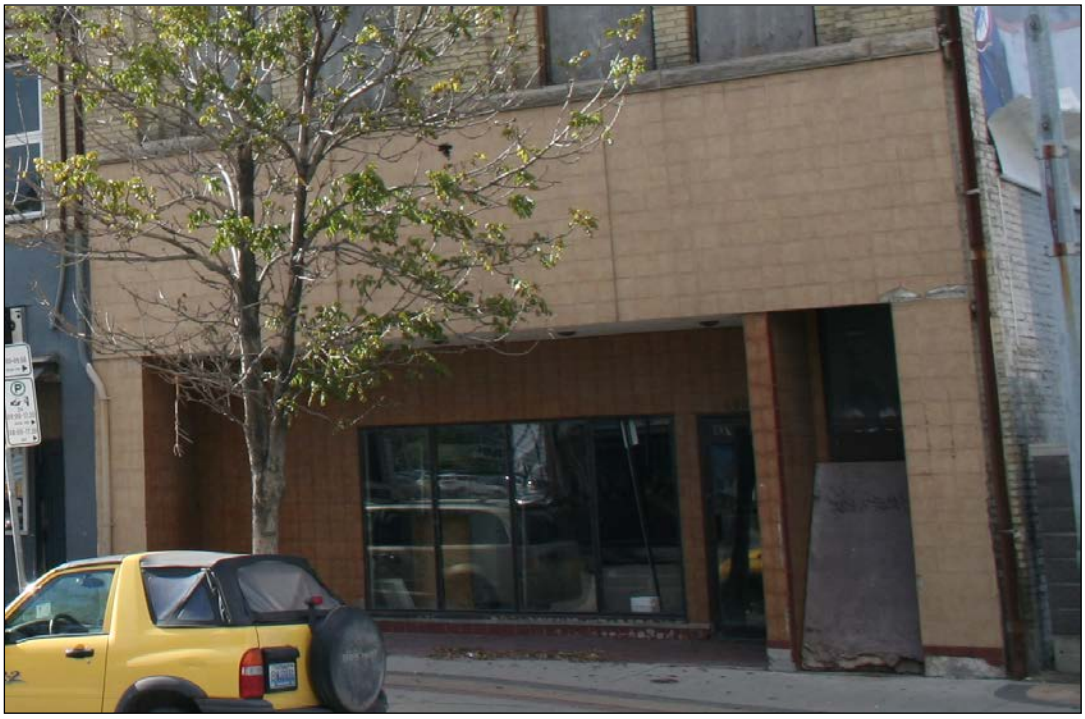

Plate 4 – McKerchar Block, 600 Main Street, front (east) façade, detail of ground floor, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

600 MAIN STREET – McKERCHAR BLOCK

Plate 5 – McKerchar Block, 600 Main Street, front (east) façade, detail of upper floors, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

600 MAIN STREET – McKERCHAR BLOCK

Plate 6 – McKerchar Block, 600 Main Street, north façade, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

600 MAIN STREET – McKERCHAR BLOCK

Plate 7 – McKerchar Block, 600 Main Street, rear (west) façade, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

600 MAIN STREET – McKERCHAR BLOCK

Plate 8 – McKerchar Block, 600 Main Street, staircase, second floor landing, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

600 MAIN STREET – McKERCHAR BLOCK

Plate 9 – McKerchar Block, 600 Main Street, skylight above stairs, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

600 MAIN STREET – McKERCHAR BLOCK

Plate 10 – McKerchar Block, 600 Main Street, skylight in third floor suite, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

600 MAIN STREET – McKERCHAR BLOCK

Plate 11 – McKerchar Block, 600 Main Street, second floor hallway, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

600 MAIN STREET – McKERCHAR BLOCK

Plate 12 – McKerchar Block, 600 Main Street, second floor ornamental tin ceiling, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

Plate 13 – McKerchar Block, 600 Main Street, basement, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

600 MAIN STREET – McKERCHAR BLOCK

Plate 14 – Main Street, west side from Alexander Avenue to Higgins Avenue, 2014. Buildings (left to right): Maycock Block, 586 Main Street, built 1885; Singer Building, 590 Main Street, built 1939; Allman Block, 594 Main Street, built 1904 (List of Historical Resources); Guest Block, 598 Main Street, built 1902-1909; McKerchar Block, 600 Main Street, built 1902. Not pictured to the north of these buildings are two empty lots (surface parking) and Royal Bank of Canada Branch, 618 Main Street, built 1946. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

600 MAIN STREET – McKERCHAR BLOCK

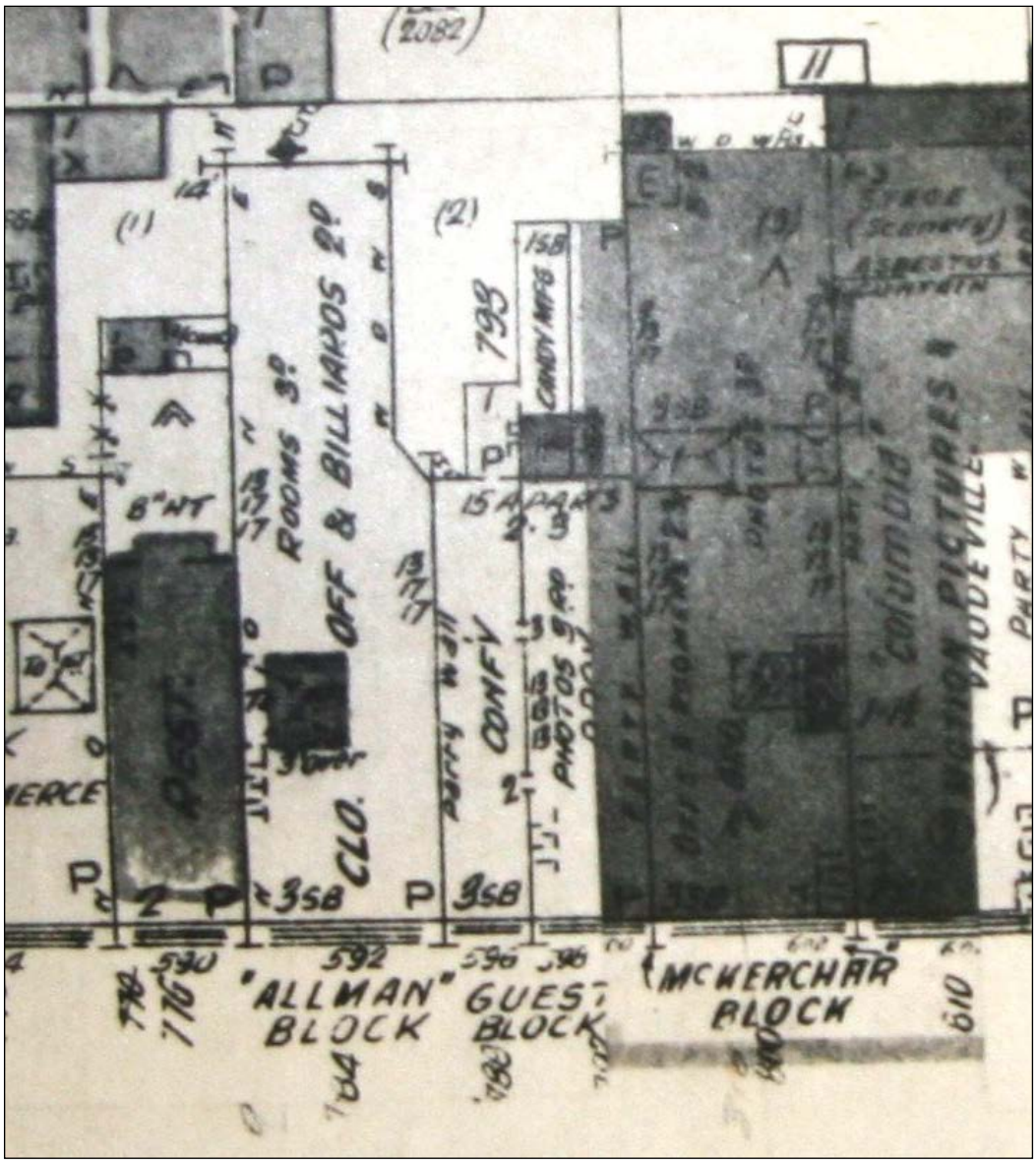

Plate 15 – City of Winnipeg Fire Atlas, Vol. II, Sheet 208 (December 1917), McKerchar Block at arrow. (City of Winnipeg.)

600 MAIN STREET – McKERCHAR BLOCK

Plate 16 –Main Street looking north past Alexander Avenue, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

Plate 17 – John Archibald McKerchar, 1930. (Archives of Manitoba, C.E. Simonite Collection No. 8 [Winnipeg City Council].)

600 MAIN STREET – McKERCHAR BLOCK

"MADE IN WINNIPEG."

J. A. McKerchar

Wholesale and Retail Grocer.
(Established 1881.)

We are in a position to fill your order with the best quality

MADE-IN-WINNIPEG GOODS,

and respectfully solicit your patronage.

OUR MOTTO:
Quality, Service and Right Price.

MAPLE LEAF STORE,
600 MAIN STREET.

Plate 18 – 1915 Advertisement for J.A. McKerchar's 600 Main Street grocery store. (Reproduced from Manitoba Free Press, June 5, 1915, p. 5.)

SERVICE BULLETIN NO. 1.

The Butter Question--It's Important

Have you provided for your supply of Butter for winter use? If you wish to do so—
THE A. F. HIGGINS CO. STORES will supply you with NO. 1 GOVERNMENT INSPECTED CREAMERY BUTTER, as required, at present prices.

They will store it for you, and deliver it to your home, in any quantity as required up to February 1st, 1919. You can arrange to have your butter delivered in 1-lb. bricks, at 1c per lb. over price of butter in boxes.

You order for a 26-lb. box will receive the same careful attention that is given to the larger orders of hundreds of pounds.

Any of our stores will be pleased to quote you prices, and fully explain our plan to take care of your future butter requirements.

Take advantage of the service that these stores, with their large buying power, are ready to give you—

A. F. Higgins Co., Limited

City Stores at:—

600 MAIN STREET (Succeeding J. A. McKerchar) — Phones: Garry 3170-3171.

811 PORTAGE AVENUE — Phones: Sher. 325-3220.

723 OSBORNE STREET. Phone: Ft. Rouge 541.

Grocery Licenses: 8-5361, 8-5362, 8-5363, 8-5364, 8-5365.

Plate 19 – Advertisement for the newly organized A.F. Higgins Co., Limited grocery store, 600 Main Street, 1918. (Reproduced from Manitoba Free Press, August 23, 1918, p. 31.)

600 MAIN STREET – McKERCHAR BLOCK

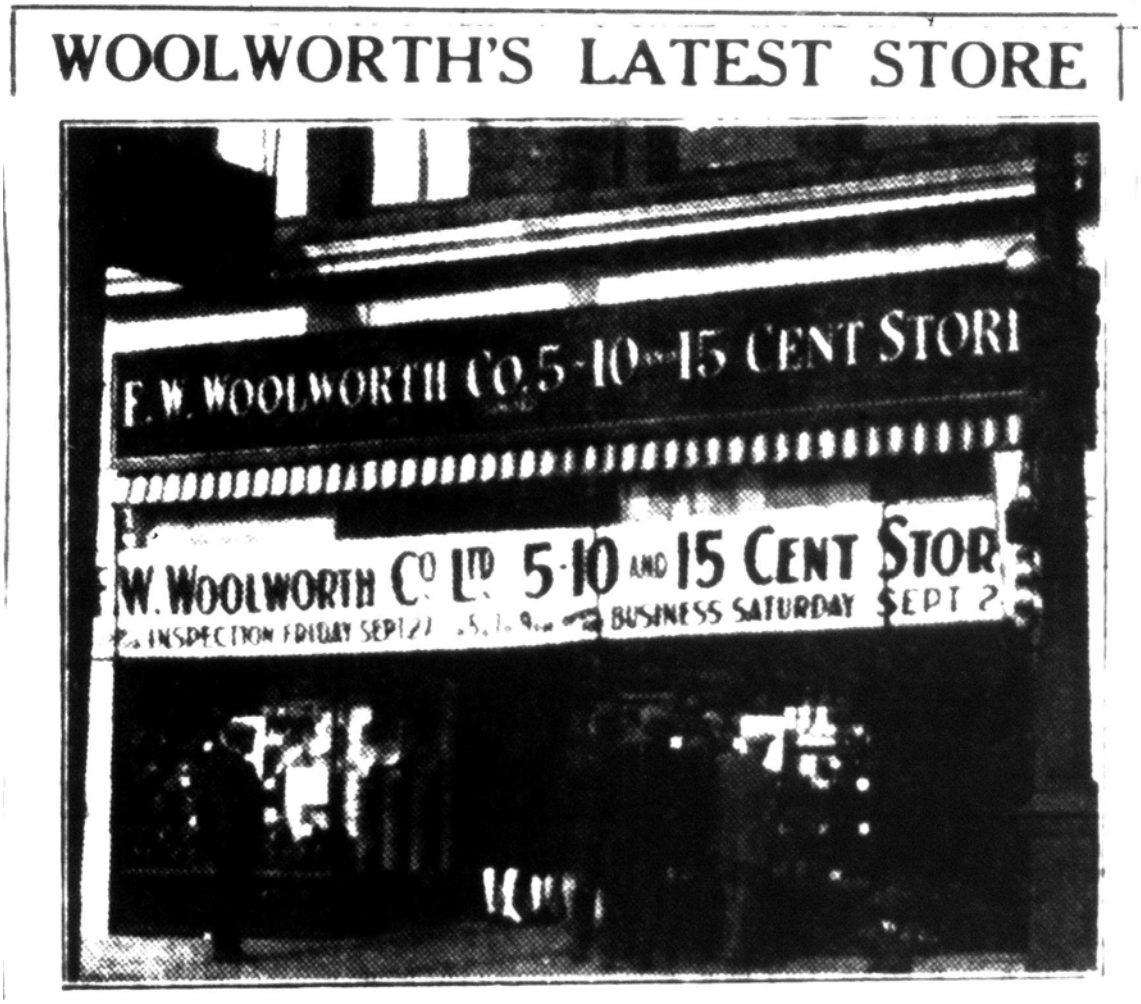

Plate 20 – Grand opening of W.F. Woolworth, 600 Main Street, 1919. (Reproduced from the Winnipeg Tribune, September 26, 1929, p.3.)