

## 600 MAIN STREET – McKERCHAR BLOCK

*J.H.G. Russell (1902-1903)*



The McKerchar Block is located on the west side of Main Street near Logan Avenue, an integral part of a partial block of pre-World War I mixed use structures that provided retail space on the ground floor and offices and residential suites above since the early 1900s.

John Archibald McKerchar was born in Glengarry, Canada West (Ontario) in 1862, arriving in Winnipeg in 1879 as part of a family of 10. At the age of only 19, he acquired an interest in a grocery store business on Main Street and the next year bought it outright and renamed it McKerchar Grocery. This began nearly 40 years of business on Main Street for McKerchar, the last 15 in his own building at 600 Main Street, which he built when his former shop burned down in late 1902.

His new block was a solid brick structure, 9.8 x 21.4 metres, the solid brick walls supported by an

internal wood frame. Stone is used for accenting and for the foundation. Three storeys in height, it cost \$15,000 to complete, a large \$10,000 addition was completed at the rear of the building in 1911.

The building's rough exterior cladding and large arched third storey windows are elements of the Romanesque Revival Style, extremely popular in Winnipeg and many other North American cities' warehouse districts from the 1880s well into the 20<sup>th</sup> 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.

As originally designed, the ground floor featured a pair of large display windows and two entrances, one to the store and one at the building's north end to access the upper floors. This area has been completely renovated over time. The upper floors, however, have remained virtually unchanged, divided into two slightly recessed window bays by paired and attached columns with brick bases and heads. Window openings are rectilinear on the second floor and arched on the third and the spandrels feature modest brickwork. The flat roof is embellished with brick corbelling and stone and a flag pole completes the façade.

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. The rear (west) façade includes arched window openings on all floors, loading and entrance doors, an open metal fire escape and a metal chimney.

On the interior, the ground floor retail area is vacant and has been greatly altered over time. The upper floors are much more original, accessed by a staircase along the north side of the building finished in dark wood. Skylights originally supplied natural light to the space and the long hallways are accented with dark wood and ornamental glass. Ornamental tin ceilings are found throughout the ground and second floors. Because of the building's long-term vacancy and lack of heat and

water infiltration, much of the interior finish has deteriorated.

The designer of the block was noted local architect John Hamilton Gordon Russell (1862-1946). He was one of the busiest practitioners of the 1900-1915 period, responsible for the design of a large number of fine buildings including: Lake of the Woods Building, 212 McDermot Avenue, 1901 (Grade II); Hammond Building, 63 Albert Street, 1902 (Grade III); Adelman Building, 92-100 Princess Street, 1903 (Grade II); Augustine Presbyterian (United), 444 River Avenue, 1903-1904 (Grade II); R.R. Wilson, 545 Broadway, 1904 (Grade III); Allman Block, 592-594 Main Street, 1904 (List of Historical Resources); Casa Loma Block, 644 Portage Avenue, 1909 (Grade II); Westminster Presbyterian (United), 745 Westminster Avenue, 1910-1912 (Grade II); YMCA, 301 Vaughan Street, 1911-1913, with Jackson and Rosencrans of New York (Grade II); and J.H. Ashdown, 529 Wellington Crescent, 1913 (Grade II).

McKerchar sold the business and retired from retail in 1918 but in 1921 he became a City alderman, holding this office (and Chairman of the Finance Committee) until his defeat in the 1934 mayoralty race. McKerchar was also was school trustee for 23 years and died in 1948.

The A.F. Higgins Company, who purchased McKerchar's business, remained at the address for a decade and then replaced by American-based retailer F.W. Woolworth Company by 1929. 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). The upper floor offices were occupied by a variety of tenants including J.A. McKerchar into the 1940s.

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 south façade hidden by a neighbouring building, its north façade facing a surface parking lot and its west façade facing the back lane;
- Its main (east) façade with second storey with paired and attached columns with brick bases and heads and paired windows in rectilinear openings with continuous stone sills and stone heads, third storey windows in arched openings and stone lug

sills and the spandrels with ornamental brickwork and the flat roof with corbelled brick and stone accenting and a flagpole;

- The north façade with third storey windows in arched openings; and
- The rear (west) façade with arched window openings on all floors, loading and entrance doors and open metal fire escape.

#### Interior-

- Volume, finishes and skylight of north side staircase;
- Wood and glass finishes of central hallways; and
- Ornamental tin ceilings on ground and second floor.