

611 MAIN STREET – CORBETT BLOCK
James McDiarmid, 1901



This modest, mixed-use block has been an important part of its North Main streetscape for over 100 years.

The block was built by Dr. Samuel C. Corbett (1846-1915), an Ontario-born and trained physician who moved to Manitoba in 1882 and ran his practice out of office space at 521 Main Street. Dr. Corbett served on the council of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba in the late 1890s and was its president in 1891. He was also hired as an examiner of arriving immigrants and was appointed Dominion Health Officer from 1901-1911.

Dr. Corbett's estate continued to own the building into the 1930s before selling to clothier Louis Mindell, who owned and ran his business from the neighbouring building, 607-609 Main Street.

Tenancy in the block has been varied, the longest commercial tenants being City Meat and Sausage and Norman's Meats. Residential tenants were varied but include a number renters identified only

as “Chinese” in a 1920s directory – reflecting the growth the Winnipeg’s Chinese community during that time.

The two-storey solid red brick building cost \$15,000 to complete in 1901 and measures approximately 20.1 x 18.3 metres. It was designed by well-known local builder James McDiarmid (1855-1934) who’s J. McDiarmid Company Limited was responsible for the construction of fine buildings across Western Canada.

In 1948, a 13.1 x 11.0-metre addition was built at the rear as additional space for the butchers shop in front. Stylistically, the building is a good example of a Two-Part Commercial structure, very common throughout the downtown regions of most North American cities after 1900. The ground floor held the retail spaces, often with recessed entrances and large display windows and the upper floors offices or residential suites, with the main façade divided to visually separate the two sections. Ornamentation ranged from minimal, like this structure, to extensive.

The front (west) façade included two sets of paired recessed entrances flanked by large show windows to give access to the retail shops. A fifth, centrally-placed entrance gives access to the upper floor. The ground floor, including all the entrances, was modernized in the late 1940s, the new cladding including stucco, Vitrolite and stainless metal. Today, a wide band of metal cladding holding signage blocks part of the ground floor and visually separates the ground and second floors. Above, the brick walls of the second storey are interrupted by rectilinear window opening with sandstone lug sills, radiating brick heads and keystones. Brick is used ornamentally as pilasters and corbelling and a date stone is centrally located at the roofline that is otherwise unadorned.

The south wall is a party wall, the north was originally a party wall prior to the demolition of the neighbouring building but is now exposed, the brick has been stuccoed and there are three small windows on the second floor. The rear of the building includes the 1948 brick-clad addition which had a metal-clad third storey added in 2005. The south end of the original rear wall is exposed and features the original brick cladding and rectilinear window openings.

The original interior was designed with four retail shops on the main floor and residential suites on the second floor. In 1950, the second floor space was divided into six suites (2 @ 2-room and 4 @ 1-room) each with a sink with a central washroom and three offices at the rear of the original building were converted into two suites with sinks. In 1957, the layout of the 14 suites on the second floor of the original building was changed, enlarging the suites and reducing their number to 7. Today the ground floor features two shops, with some of the butcher space and equipment still found in the shop in the north part of the building.

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

Exterior-

- Two-storey brick and stone building with a flat roof located mid-block on the east side of Main Street between Logan Avenue and Disraeli Freeway, its main façade facing west onto Main Street, its south façade hidden by the neighbouring building, its north façade facing an empty lot (surface parking) and the rear (east) façade facing onto a back lane;
- The red brick front (west) with recessed ground floor entrances flanked by large display windows in rectilinear openings and a centrally-located entrance to the upper floor, second storey windows in rectilinear openings with sandstone lug sills, radiating brick heads, brick pilasters that finish with ornamental heads above the roofline finished with corbelled brick and a sandstone date stone; and
- Exposed portion of the original rear (east) façade (south end) with its windows and doors in arched and rectilinear openings.

Interior-

- None