



**139 MARKET AVENUE**

**STEELE BRIGGS BUILDING**

City of Winnipeg  
Historical Buildings and Resources Committee  
Researcher: Murray Peterson  
September 2014

This building embodies the following heritage values as described in the *Historical Resources By-law, 55/2014* (consolidated update July 13, 2016):

- (a) This warehouse was built in 1912, another business locating in Winnipeg's downtown warehouse district;
- (b) It was associated for many decades as the regional headquarters for the Steele Briggs Company, a Toronto-based packaged seed retailer;
- (c) It was designed by local architect Cyril W.U. Chivers, a well-known practitioner;
- (d) The warehouse is a reduced example of the Romanesque Revival style, utilizing the common mill construction method;
- (e) It is in an area of the Exchange District that includes many contemporary buildings and warehouses; and
- (f) The building's exterior has suffered little alteration.

## 139 MARKET AVENUE – STEELE BRIGGS BUILDING

Winnipeg's early warehouse district of the 1870s was dispersed throughout what is now downtown Winnipeg, some businesses locating on the east side of Main Street, taking advantage of river transport, still an important transportation route, and some west of Main Street, locating closer to City Hall. Pockets of development, including warehouses, factories and mills, were also found along the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) main line in Point Douglas by the early 1880s.<sup>1</sup> By the late 1880s, the Northern Pacific and Manitoba Railway (NP&MR) had also developed a large industrial site (present-day The Forks), including a station, offices, freight sheds, repair shops, an engine roundhouse and, at the corner of Water Avenue and Main Street, the opulent Manitoba Hotel.<sup>2</sup>

In the summer of 1889, the Winnipeg Transfer Railway (WTR) was formed to build a rail line along the Red River north from the NP&MR main line to the CPR main line, hoping to provide modern rail service via spur lines to the warehouses in the area. City Council approved the plan in October, stating "...such [a] railway is a great advantage to the public interests of the residents of the city, and will increase the business to and from all parts of the country, by providing a cheap and convenient method of transferring merchandise between the above-named railways."<sup>3</sup> It would be three years before the WTR had purchased all the necessary land, obtained all the legal agreements and settled all the court cases. But by the mid-1890s, the line was attracting some of the continent's major manufacturers to the area and plans for spur lines running west to the Main Street were started (Plates 1-3).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> L.K. Eaton, "Winnipeg: The Northern Anchor of the Wholesale Trade," Urban History Review, Vol. XI, No. 2 (October 1982), p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> This enterprise, however, did not meet with the same early success as its competitor and in 1901 was sold to the Canadian Northern Railway (CNoR), soon-to-be Canada's second transcontinental railway, in 1901. In turn, the CNoR was taken over by the federal government after World War I to form part of its Canadian National Railways.

<sup>3</sup> Manitoba Free Press, October 5, 1889.

<sup>4</sup> Manitoba Free Press, various dates. It would not be until 1901 that the more established warehouse district west of Main Street and south of the CPR track was served by a spur line, known as the Princess Street Spur.

Soon, all the streets east of Main Street north of Portage Avenue were filling with large warehouses and factories as local and Eastern Canadian firms took advantage of the city's large workforce, its geographic location and the favourable freight rates (Plates 4 and 5).

In 1912, a successful local investment company built another large downtown building as rental property, its major tenant was the Toronto-based seed retailer Steele Briggs Company.

## STYLE

The Steele Briggs Building is a classically-detailed warehouse (Plate 6); its scale, symmetry and use of rough textures make it a reduced example of the Romanesque Revival style, very popular in warehouse districts throughout North America from the 1880s well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The buildings were nearly always solid brick with a raised basement and rusticated stone accenting around windows and doors and at roof level. Other elements included 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 the style was the use of the arch above openings. Often, straight-topped windows located on the middle storeys were grouped under large arches on the upper floors.<sup>5</sup> 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 looking to promote their businesses and portray the stability of their firms through the design of the structures they occupied and there are many fine examples within the Exchange District National Historic Site.

## CONSTRUCTION

The original City of Winnipeg Building Permit for this structure calls for a five-storey building with a stone and concrete foundation and clay brick walls.<sup>6</sup> Costing \$70,000 exclusive of the lot,

<sup>5</sup> L. Maitland, et al., A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1992), p. 84; and Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg, MB: Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, Historic Resources Branch, 1991), p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> City of Winnipeg Building Permit (below as BP), #3482/1912.

this warehouse measures 23.6 x 30.2 metres and rests on 55.9-centimetre foundation walls. A total of 500,000 bricks were used in the construction.<sup>7</sup> Concrete was used as ornamentation around upper-storey windows and the main entrance on Market Avenue is framed in cut stone (see Appendix I for more technical information).

This warehouse was built using the most common construction method of the time – the mill system – a square timber beam and post support network where beams were attached to the solid brick exterior walls and covered by wood plank flooring and often a hardwood finish. This was a very popular system in warehouse districts throughout North America because of its sturdiness, the ease of adding additional storeys and its ability to suffer fire damage and not collapse. The Steele Briggs Building is one of many mill construction structures in the Exchange District.

## **DESIGN**

As originally designed, the main (south) façade was symmetrical, with a ground floor featuring a centrally located entrance set in cut stone and topped by a curved pediment (Plate 6). The ground floor was comprised of small, multi-paned basement windows, modest ground floor window openings and two large dray way openings at either end.

A concrete belt course, which doubles as a continuous sill for the second-storey windows, visually divides the ground and upper floors (Plate 7). The middle three floors contain bays of single and paired multi-paned windows, all square-headed with concrete lug sills. A second concrete belt course separates the middle section from the top floor. This area continues the rhythm of the lower windows and is topped by corbelled brick, interrupted by stylized concrete elements. The brick and metal-topped parapet is flat except for the raised central area (Plate 8). This upper portion was built as drawn in the original plans.

The east and west elevations are party walls with neighbouring buildings. The rear is plainly finished with raised loading doors on the ground floor and bays of single and paired windows of similar size and design to those on the front façade (Plate 9). A metal fire escape is also located

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<sup>7</sup> Loc. cit.

on this elevation. A portion of the rear façade (north end) was built to six storeys in height (Plate 10) creating a penthouse area.

The building's two exposed façades have seen alterations over the years. On the front, it appears from several photographs that the west dray way was actually moved to the bay beside the east dray way, the west bay of the ground floor (in 1969) contains a recessed entrance and large display window (Plate 11). This unit and the other large display windows of the ground floor have replaced the smaller openings while the door and sidelights of the main entrance have been replaced and filled with glass block, respectively (Plate 12). Most of the window openings on the rear (north) façade have been closed with concrete blocks or boarded up (Plate 13) and the raised loading doors were replaced.

## **INTERIOR**

The original plan of the building's interior showed large, walk-in vaults on several floors, two freight elevators on the rear (north) wall<sup>8</sup> and open warehouse space with minimal partitioning (Plate 14). The basement features large wood posts with steel footings and heads supporting steel I-beams (Plate 15).

In 1951, the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor was altered with the addition of acoustic tiled ceiling and partitioning,<sup>9</sup> and in 1981, fire-rated openings were created between the building and its neighbour to the west, #145 Market Avenue.<sup>10</sup>

The present building features retail space on ground floor. The upper storeys are being converted into residential condominiums and all spaces have been gutted (Plates 16 and 17).

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<sup>8</sup> The actual freight elevators were placed mid-building on the east and west walls.

<sup>9</sup> A 1950s-styled metal bannister is also found on the staircase at the second floor.

<sup>10</sup> City of Winnipeg Assessment Record, Roll No.700200-12-2, PC 50; and BP #128/1981 and #129/1981.

## **INTEGRITY**

The building sits on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition. Alterations to the exterior design and fabric have occurred, the most severe being the replacement of many of the windows on the ground floor of the front (south) elevation.

## **STREETSCAPE**

This building is an integral part of the streetscape at the east end of Market Avenue (Plates 18 and 19). As part of the Exchange District National Historic Site building stock, this structure receives 60 points from the Historical Buildings and Resources Committee.

## **ARCHITECT/CONTRACTOR**

English-born and -trained designer Brigadier Major Cyril W.U. Chivers (1879-1969) was the architect for this building (see Appendix II for biographical information). He has received 20 points from the Historical Buildings and Resources Committee.

Hicks Construction, a local firm that incorporated in 1911 with J.C. and C.A. Hicks its founders, built the structure. This company mostly built single-family dwellings in Fort Rouge/River Heights in the early 1910s (Plate 20) and had dissolved by World War I.<sup>11</sup> The Steele Briggs Building was the largest contract the company was awarded locally.<sup>12</sup>

## **PERSON/INSTITUTION**

The original owner of this property was the Notre Dame Investment Company that for many years operated out of its offices at 167 Notre Dame Avenue. Organized ca.1909, its early management was led by president Edward Cass (1849-1932). The Irish-born Cass came to Winnipeg as a bricklayer in 1882 and began a long career as a general contractor, building such well-known structures as: the Manitoba Hotel, Main Street (1890 – destroyed by fire); the

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<sup>11</sup> Manitoba Free Press, 1910-1920.

<sup>12</sup> City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books, 1899-1926.

Masonic Temple, 335 Donald Street (1895); the University of Manitoba, Broadway (1900 - demolished); and St. Mary's Academy, 550 Wellington Crescent (1902).<sup>13</sup> Besides the Notre Dame Investment Company, Cass was president of the Winnipeg Paint and Glass Company and the Northern Canadian Mortgage Company, and vice-president of the Western Canada Acceptance and Guarantee Insurance Company. He was a City Alderman from 1901-1911.<sup>14</sup>

Other members of the early board of the Notre Dame Investment Company included John Carr, vice-president, Robert W. Paterson (1876-1936), secretary-treasurer (who later became Brigadier-General Paterson and president of the company by 1920), and William E. Lough, manager.<sup>15</sup> Operating this and several other downtown buildings as rental property, selling insurance and loaning money, the company appears to have been quite successful. It continued to own 139 Market Avenue until the mid-1920s when the Bank of Nova Scotia took over ownership. The original tenant, Steele Briggs Seeds Limited, owned the building from 1931 until the 1980s.<sup>16</sup>

The Steele Briggs Company, a Toronto-based packaged seed retailer, had several connections with Winnipeg and Manitoba. The company was founded in 1873 by John S. and Richard Clarke Steele and Sylvester E. Briggs.<sup>17</sup> In 1876, the company received the first shipment of wheat from the Province of Manitoba, 857 bushels of Red Fife wheat to be used as seed.<sup>18</sup> The company grew, operating for many years locally out of its retail premises at 221 Market Avenue (northeast corner of King Street) – Plates 21 and 22. In 1971, the firm was purchased by Brandon, Manitoba's A.E. McKenzie Company Ltd., but so well-known was the Steele Briggs name that the new venture was called A.E. McKenzie Co. – Steele Briggs Seeds.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> M. Peterson, "212 McDermot Avenue – Lake of the Woods Building," report of the City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee, April 2003, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> "Cass, Edward," Memorable Manitobans, Manitoba Historical Society website, 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Henderson's Directory, 1910-1920.

<sup>16</sup> City of Winnipeg Assessment Roll, Roll No. 700200-12-2, 1920-1993.

<sup>17</sup> Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume XIII (1901-1910), online edition, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 1994-2014.

<sup>18</sup> University of Manitoba Archives, "Archives of the Agricultural Experience. Agriculture in the Prairie Provinces," 1998, n.p.

<sup>19</sup> Brandon University Archives, <http://www.brandonu.ca/library/archives>, no date.

Steele Briggs and then A.E. McKenzie operated out of this Market Avenue address until the 1980s when it was taken over by Athletes Wear Company, which also occupied 145 Market Avenue immediately west of the Steele Briggs Building (Plate 23).

This building, and several other nearby warehouses, was bought by the Peter Nygård International Partnership in 2005 with ambitious plans for an \$80-million “fashion village” that sought to create a mixed retail/residential space that included converting the back lane (Elgin Avenue) into a covered atrium (Plate 24).<sup>20</sup> The scheme was abandoned in 2007.

The building has been purchased by Streetside Development Corporation (part of the Qualico Group of Companies) and has begun renovating it as part of the District Condominiums scheme, which has also converted warehouses at 110 and 132 (combining 130 and 132-134) James Avenue and 133 Market Avenue and has begun the same work on 145 Market Avenue.

## **EVENT**

The back lane to the north of this building, which is actually Elgin Avenue, originally stretched from Main Street south of Bertha Street and onto what is today Waterfront Drive but was originally the right-of-way of the Winnipeg Transfer Railway. A spur line ran up the middle of this stretch of Elgin Avenue allowing for the loading and unloading of goods to the warehouses on both James Avenue and Market Avenue (Plate 25).

It was also the location of one of the most important events of the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919. It became known as “Hell’s Alley,” the site of a violent clash between strikers and mounted North West Mounted Police Officers that ended in the deaths of two strikers, 27 injuries and 94 arrests on June 21<sup>st</sup>, “Black Saturday.” The Strike Committee called an end to the strike only days later.

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<sup>20</sup> Nygård International Partnership, online, [www.corporate.nygard.com](http://www.corporate.nygard.com), 2005.

**CONTEXT**

Completed in 1912, this warehouse is an important example of the type of development common along many of the streets of Winnipeg's Exchange District. Although most of the structures were occupant-owned, there were many others that were operated for decades as rental properties by local, national and international investment firms profiting from the high demand for warehouse and office space in the area. During this boom period, dozens of like buildings, large, sparsely ornamented and utilitarian, were built to house a single tenant or a number of smaller firms and one-person operations.

**LANDMARK**

The Steele Briggs Building is located in a busy area that includes theatres, retail stores, warehouses, residential space and refurbished offices. Its relative lack of ornamentation reduces its conspicuousness to the neighbourhood level.



## APPENDIX II

### CYRIL WILLIAM UPTON CHIVERS

Brigadier Major Cyril W.U. Chivers (1879-1969) was born in Chislehurst, Kent, England and as a young man studied at the London Polytechnic Institute. Arriving in Winnipeg in 1898, he apprenticed for local designer S. Frank Peters and then for George Browne. The following year, lured by higher pay, he took a post with the Engineering Construction Department of the Canadian Pacific Railway where he designed several buildings, including the railway station at Banff, AB (he remained with the railway until 1910). Chivers was briefly associated in 1905 with W.E. Noffke and G.W. Northwood, when Northwood came to Winnipeg to open a branch – Noffke, Northwood and Chivers of Ottawa and Winnipeg. After 1905, Chivers's work consisted mainly of railway-related contracts and private work.

Chivers was a life member of the Engineers' Institute and a charter member and fellow of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada. He was also an honorary life member of the Manitoba Association of Architects and served the association as president in 1928 and 1940.

Chivers also served his country in the First World War, as a soldier in the First Canadian Mounted Rifles where he rose to the rank of Brigadier Major and was awarded the Military Cross. Following the war, he formed a second, longer partnership with another veteran and Military Cross recipient, Major G.W. Northwood (1876-1959) which resulted in the design of many fine local buildings.

He died in Winnipeg on August 9, 1969.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Manitoba Association of Architects File on C.W.U. Chivers; "Obituary Notice," Winnipeg Free Press, August 11, 1969, p. 29; and John Chivers, "A History of the Manitoba Association of Architects," (unpublished manuscript, c.1966), pp. 26-27.

A list of Chivers's designs includes:<sup>2</sup>

R.W. Paterson House, 124 Wellington Crescent (1905)  
T.L. Hartley House, Betourney Street (now Wilmot Place), 1907  
McGowan House, 127 Rupertsland Avenue (1909) – demolished  
Dorchester Apartments, 162 Lilac Street (1910)  
North Foundry and Machine Company Factory, Point Douglas (1910)  
W.J. Christie House, Wellington Crescent (1910)  
E.M. Wood House, Roslyn Road (1910)  
Winnipeg Canoe Club Clubhouse, River Park (1910) – demolished  
Steele Briggs Building, 139 Market Avenue (1912)  
Crescent Grove Apartments, 812 Grosvenor Avenue (1912)  
Alcalde Apartments, 720 Dorchester Street (1912)  
Hugo Apartments, Wellington Crescent (1913) – demolished  
R.R. Dobell House, 91 Wilmot Place (1913)

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<sup>2</sup> City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books, 1900-1910; Historical Buildings Committee files; D.M. Lyon, "Osborne Village Development Plan Area – Building Profile," report for the City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee, June 2002; and author's files.

## 139 MARKET AVENUE – STEELE BRIGGS BUILDING

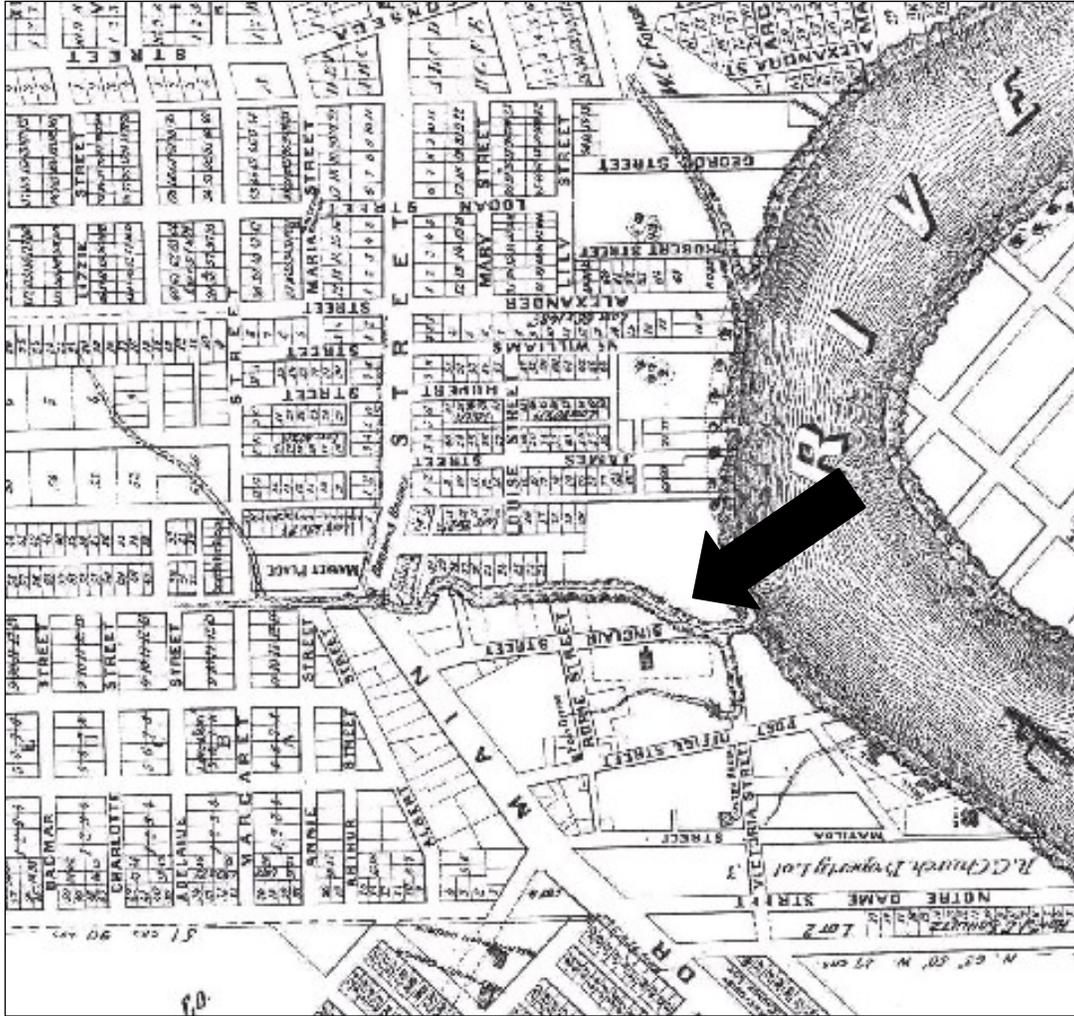


Plate 1 – Portion of J.D. Parr's Map of what would become downtown Winnipeg and the Warehouse District, 1874. Note the extensive surveying of lots on both sides of Main Street north of Brown's Creek (arrow) and the lack of surveying to the south and the creeks running into the Red River including Brown's Creek (south) and Logan's Creek (north) (City of Winnipeg.)

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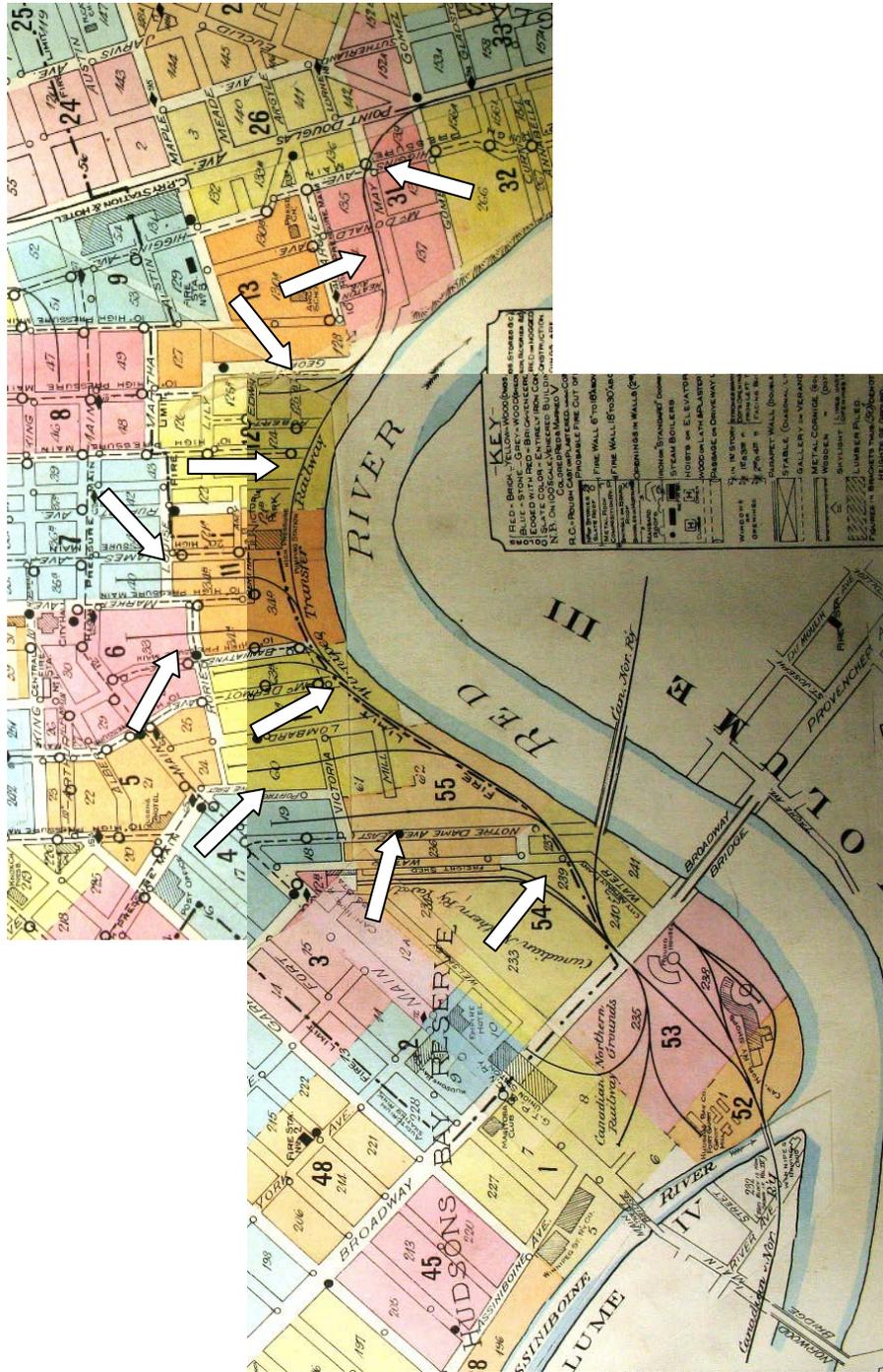


Plate 2 – City of Winnipeg Fire Atlas, Overview Map, 1906-1914. The completed Winnipeg Transfer Railway and its many north-south spur lines into the warehouse district runs from Water Avenue to Point Douglas Avenue (arrows). (City of Winnipeg.)

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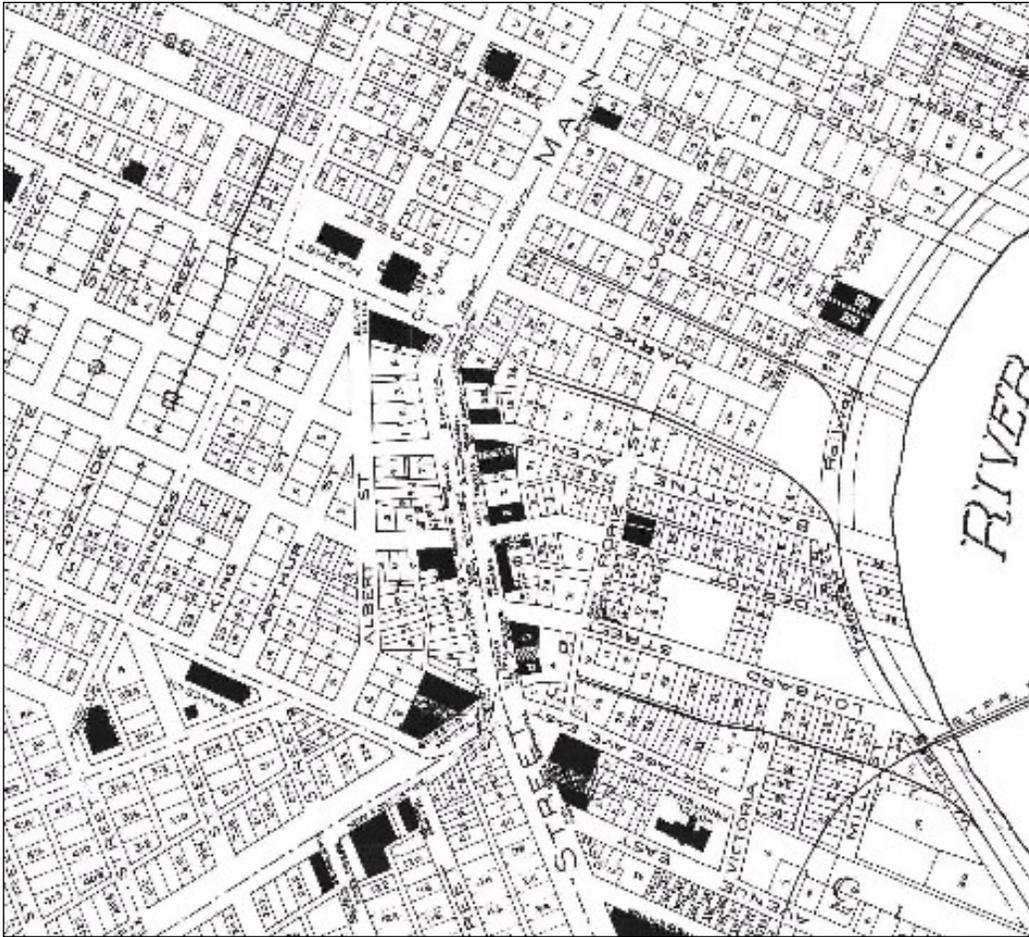


Plate 3 – Portion of McPhillip's Map of the City of Winnipeg, 1911, showing the Warehouse District and the Winnipeg Transfer Railway and spur lines running westward. (City of Winnipeg.)

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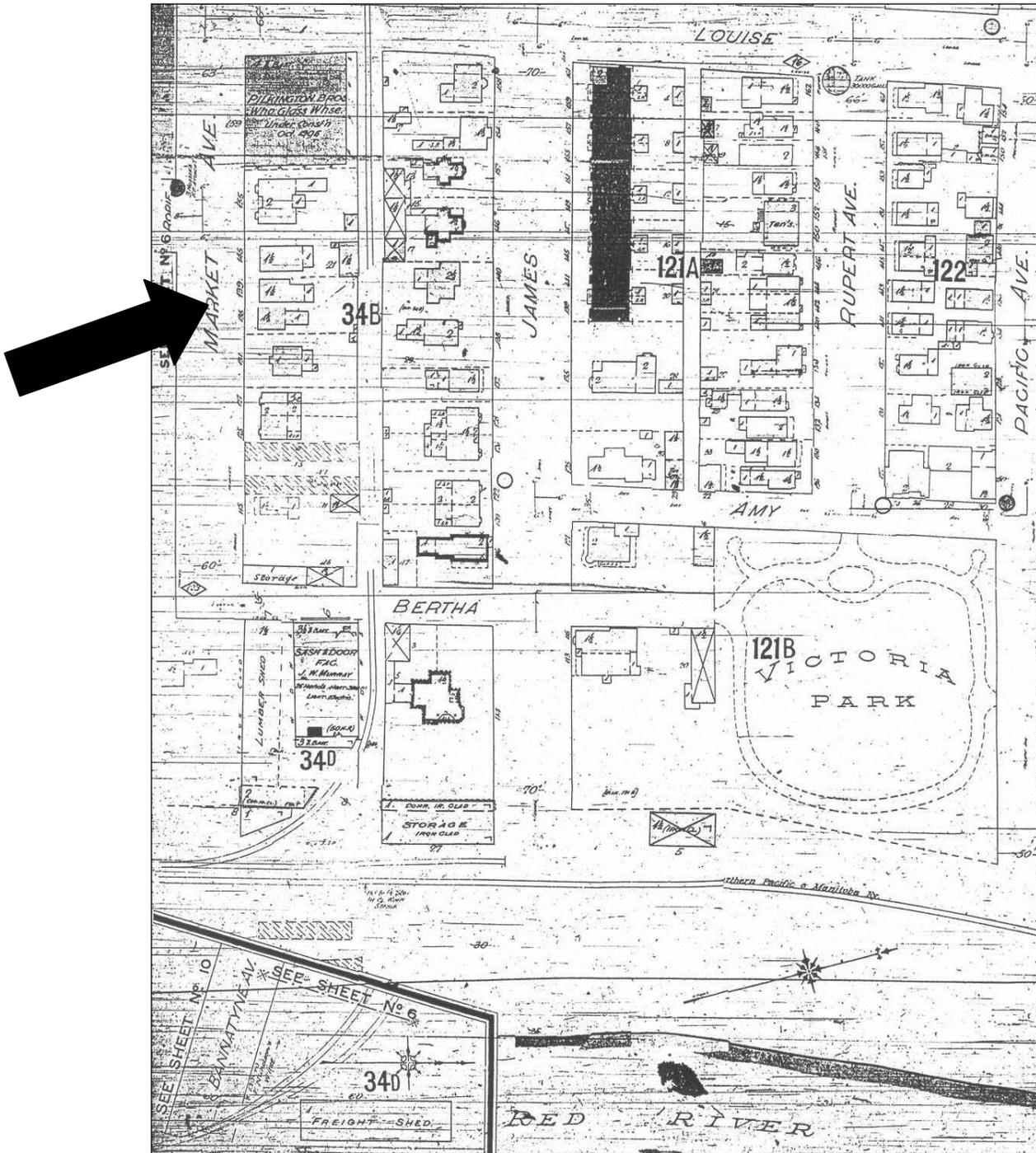


Plate 4 – Charles Goad, Fire Atlas of the City of Winnipeg, 1895 (revised 1905), Sheet 11. Future location of the Steele Briggs Building (arrow) and most of the north side of Market Avenue is occupied by single family houses and duplexes. (City of Winnipeg Archives.)

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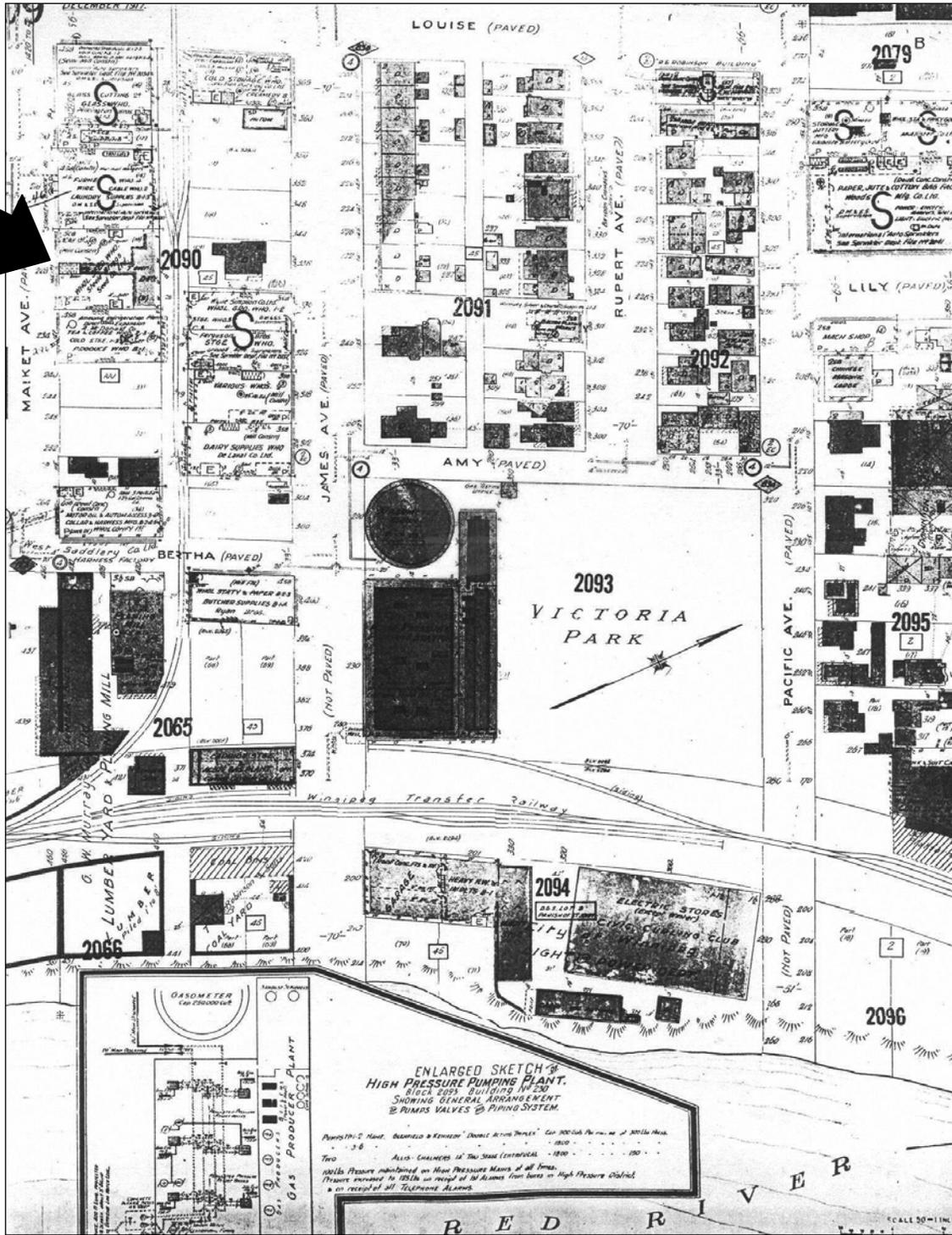


Plate 5 –Fire Atlas of the City of Winnipeg, December 1917, Vol. II, Sheet 209. Steele Briggs Building (arrow) and several other large warehouses have replaced the older residential property. (City of Winnipeg Archives.)

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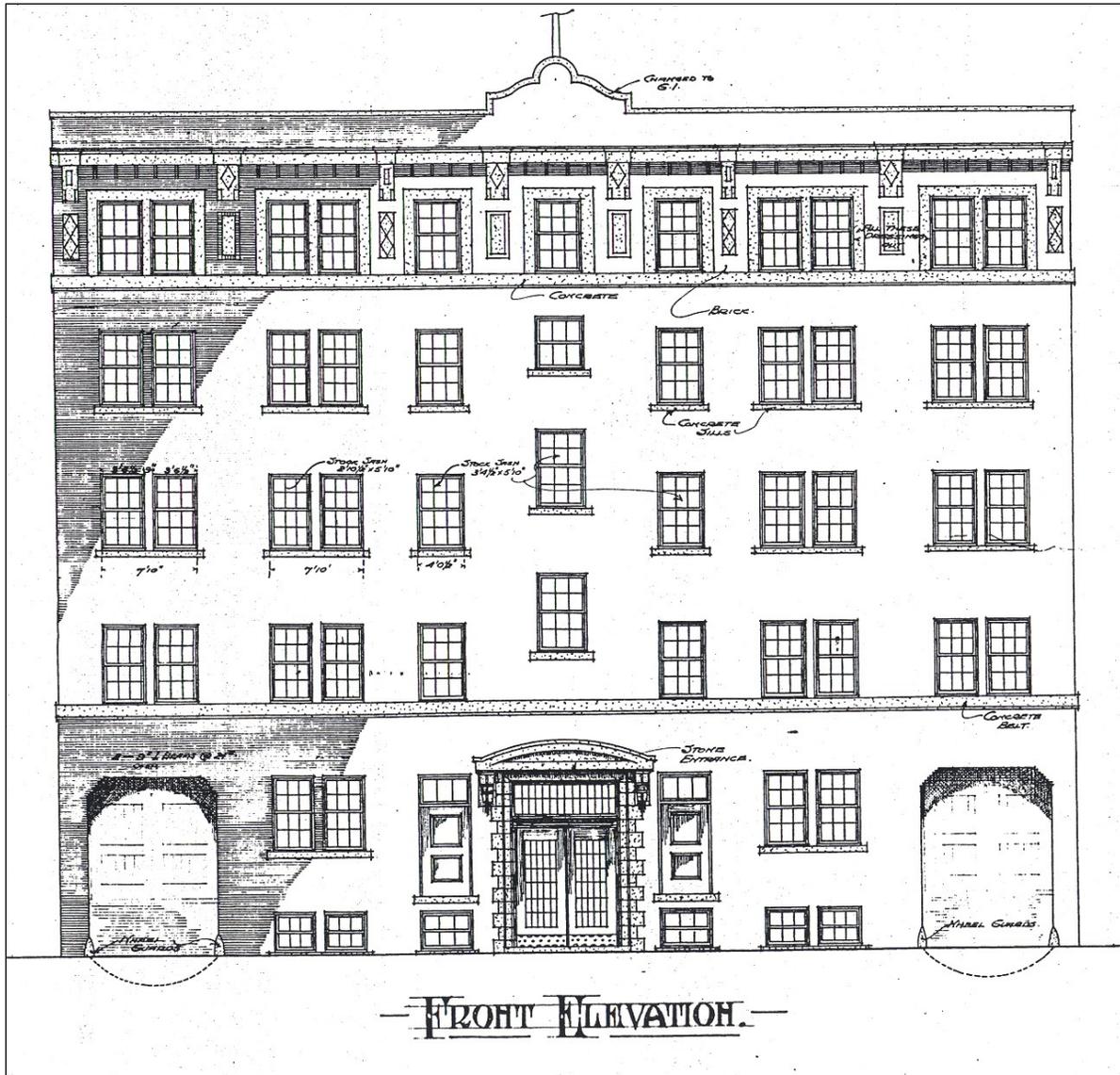


Plate 6 – Architect’s plans, #3482/1912, “Front Elevation”. Note that there were plans for a second dray way at the west end of the building and the fenestration framing the entrance was slightly different than built. (Courtesy of the City of Winnipeg Archives.)

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Plate 7 – Steele Briggs Building, 139 Market Avenue, front (south) façade, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 8 – Steele Briggs Building, 139 Market Avenue, detail of front (south) façade (top) and view of parapet from the roof (bottom), 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 9 – Steele Briggs Building, 139 Market Avenue, rear (north) façade, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

139 MARKET AVENUE – STEELE BRIGGS BUILDING

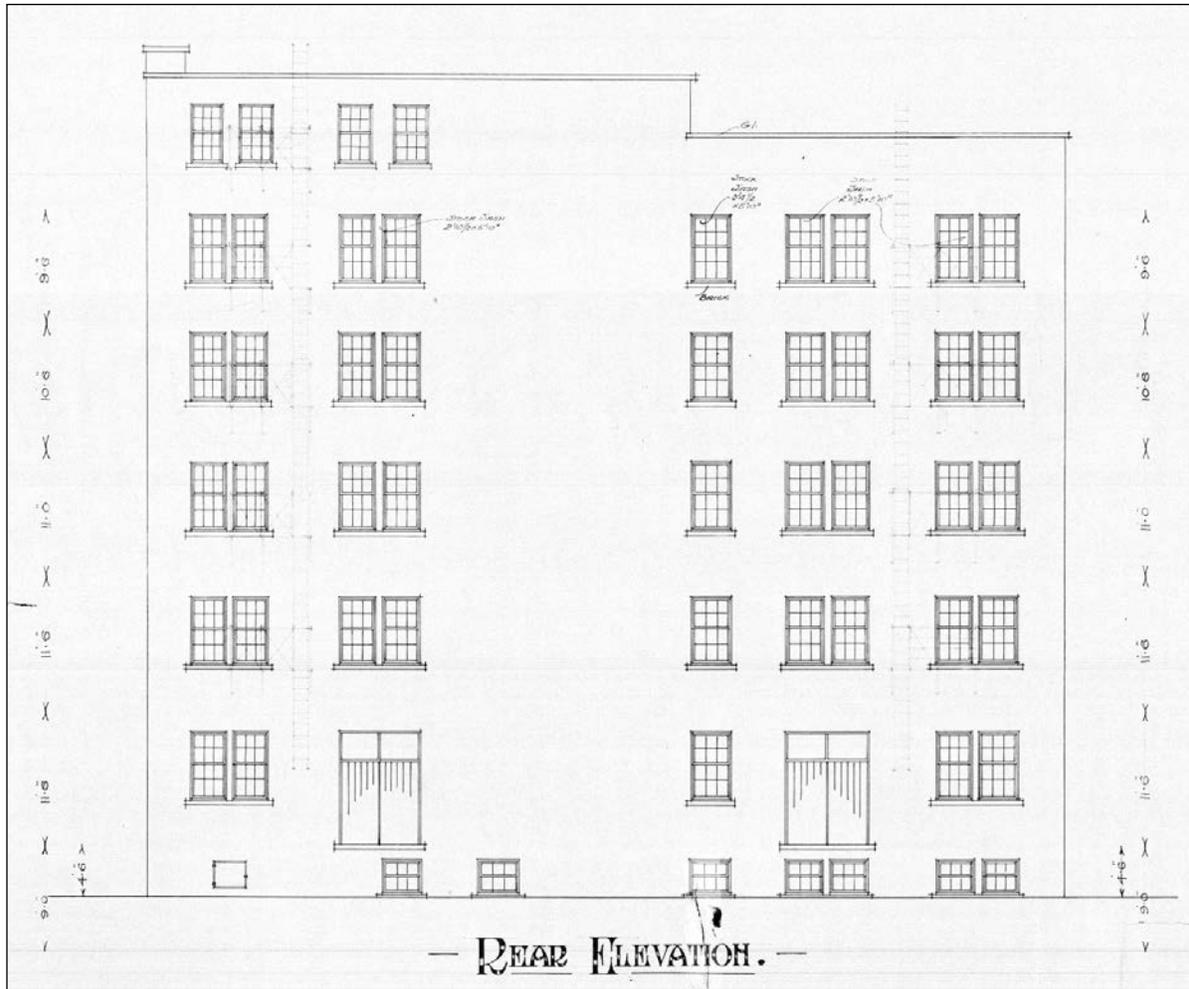


Plate 10 – Architect’s plans, #3482/1912, “Rear Elevation.” (Courtesy of the City of Winnipeg Archives.)

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Plate 11 – Steele Briggs Building, 139 Market Avenue, front (south) façade, 1969. (Archives of Manitoba, Architectural Survey, “Market Ave., 139,” 1969.)

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Plate 12 – Steele Briggs Building, 139 Market Avenue, detail of front (south) entrance, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)



Plate 13 – Steele Briggs Building, 139 Market Avenue, rear (north) façade, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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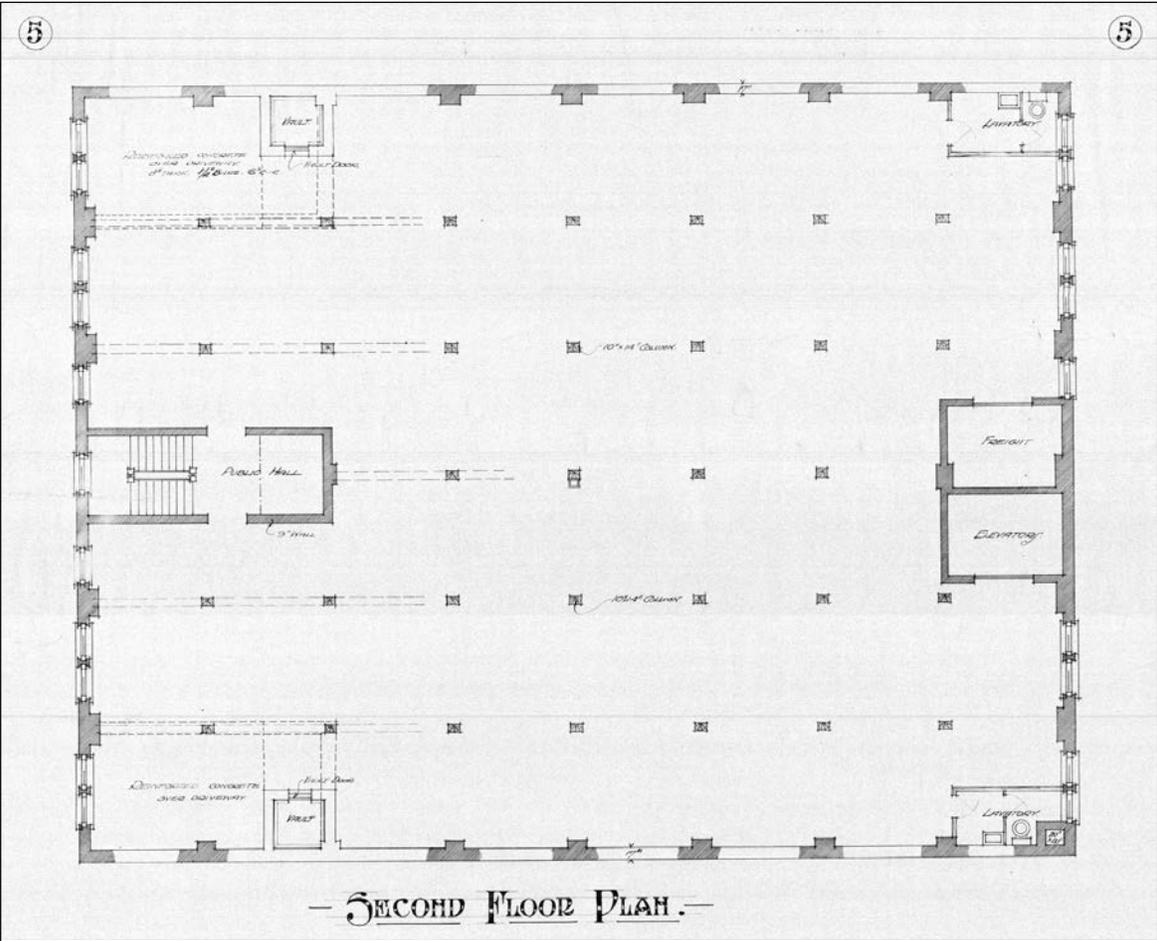


Plate 14 – Architect’s plans, #3482/1912, “Second Floor Plan.” (Courtesy of the City of Winnipeg Archives.)

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Plate 15 – Steele Briggs Building, 139 Market Avenue, basement wood and steel support system, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 16 – Steele Briggs Building, 139 Market Avenue, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor warehouse space, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)



Plate 17 – Steele Briggs Building, 139 Market Avenue, 4<sup>th</sup> floor warehouse space, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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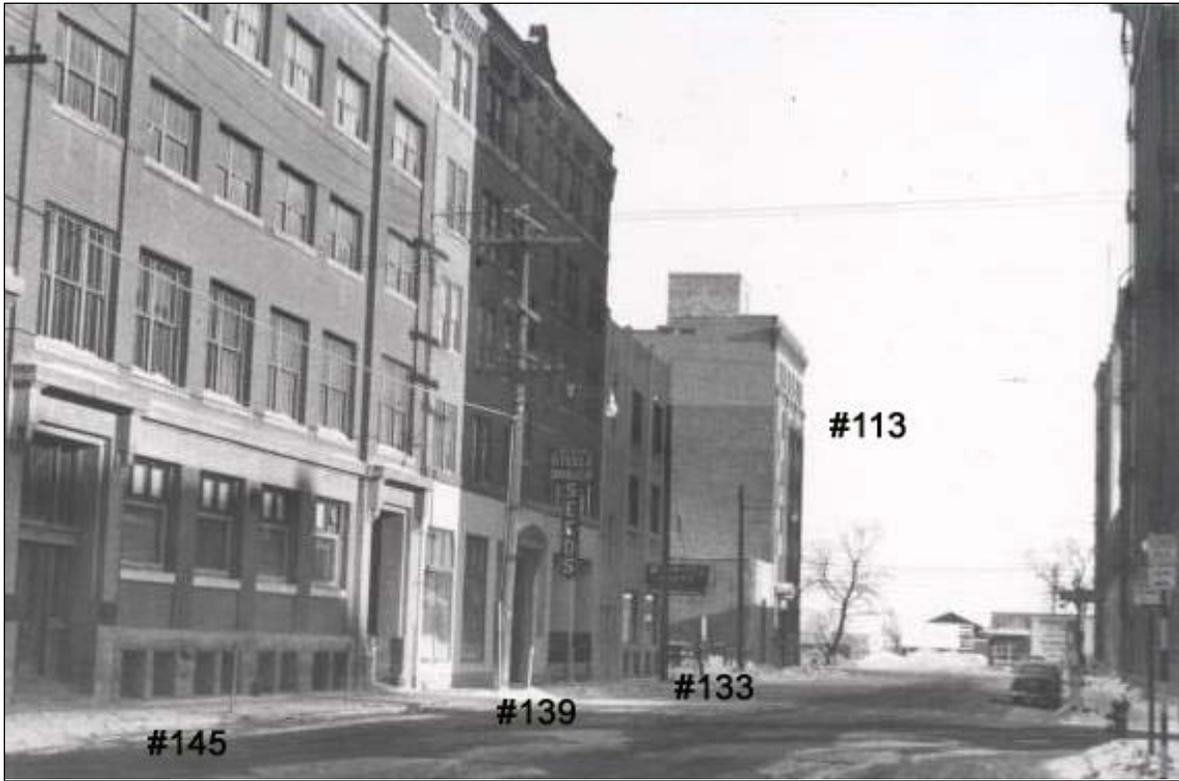


Plate 18 – Market Avenue, north side, 1962. (City of Winnipeg.)

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Plate 19 –Market Avenue looking west, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

***Houses For Sale***  
McMillan Avenue, Corydon Avenue, Jesse Avenue, Rosser  
Avenue, Mulvey Avenue,  
**ON EASY TERMS.**  
Apply  
***Owners, Hicks Construction Co.***  
763 Corydon Avenue. Phone F. B. 2579.

Plate 20 – Hicks Construction Company advertisement. (Reproduced from the Manitoba Free Press, May 31, 1913, p. 3.)

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Plate 21 – A ca.1904 view of the west side of Main Street from William Avenue, showing City Hall and the north side of Market Avenue to King Street. The Steele and Briggs Company space is located at the arrow. (Archives of Manitoba, “Winnipeg-Streets-Main-Market 5”.)



Plate 22 – 1905 front cover of the Steele Briggs Seed Company catalogue. (Reproduced from [Toronto Public Library website at http://ve.torontopubliclibrary.ca/garden\\_city/business.html](http://ve.torontopubliclibrary.ca/garden_city/business.html).)

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Plate 23 – Market Avenue looking east from Lily Street. Athletes Wear occupies both 145 (foreground) and 139 Market Avenue, 1991. (City of Winnipeg, 1991.)

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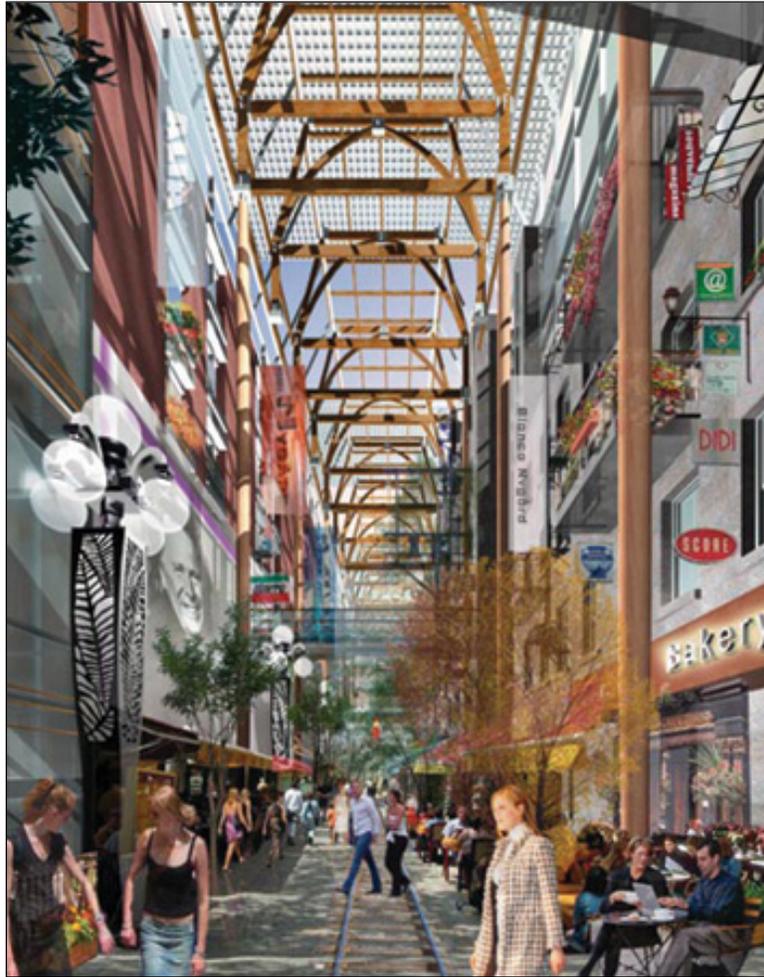


Plate 24 – Artist's rendition of Nygård Village with the atrium over what was the back lane (Elgin Avenue) between the buildings on the north side of Market Avenue and the south side of James Avenue, 2005. (Reproduced from Nygård International Partnership, online, <http://corporate.nygard.com/scf/News.aspx?id=305>, 2005.)

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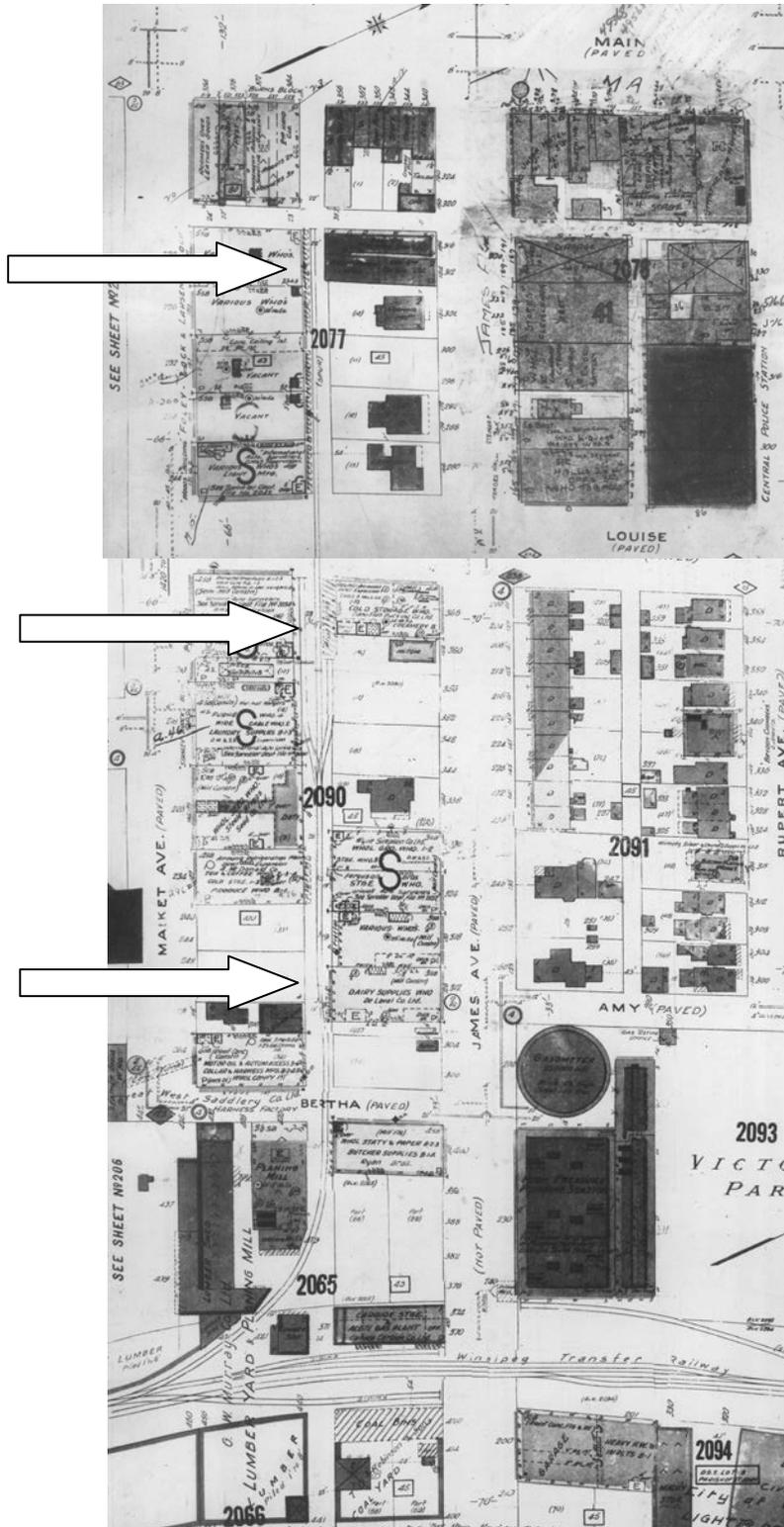


Plate 25 –Fire Atlas of the City of Winnipeg, December 1917, Vol. II, Sheets 207 and 209. Elgin Avenue is at arrows. (City of Winnipeg Archives.)