

177 McDERMOT AVENUE

T.W. TAYLOR BUILDING

HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE

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If one building along McDermot Avenue symbolizes that street's role in the printing trade over the years, it is the T.W. Taylor building. For 85 years, this two storey brick warehouse was the Thomas W. Taylor Company's office and printing plant. Erected by Taylor himself in 1882, the building was continuously occupied by the same company until 1967, which is a remarkable record for a small, local business.

The proprietor of the company, Thomas William Taylor, was born in England in 1852 and immigrated with his family as a child to Ontario. He came west to Winnipeg in 1877, having learned the trade of master bookbinder in Toronto.¹ He worked for a couple of years before opening his own book bindery here in c.1879. From a block on the west side of Main Street, Taylor moved his operations to this site in 1880. He purchased the 24 foot lot that contained a small frame building, and within two years, was able to finance this brick structure. It is uncertain who the architect was because the call for tenders in July 1882 directed contractors to Taylor himself.² However, the former owner of the land, David Ede was a partner with Samuel Hooper in a marbleworks company. Trained in England in stone-cutting and engineering, Hooper gradually designed more and more buildings before being appointed Provincial Architect. Edes career as an architect was similar but briefer.

Taylor's printing company had started on a small scale and grew steadily in volume and sophistication as printing technology developed. With a staff of five in the first two decades, the Taylor Company specialized in quality bookbinding and the printing of account books and blank cheques for commercial use. As well, job printing, publishing, engraving, ruling, blocking and all the other steps in the full printing process were offered. The company also printed legal forms and the various forms used by municipal offices.

We are most fortunate in having several photographs which show the interior of the T.W. Taylor Company plant and its operations in 1911, and another set from 1965. Both provide an intriguing window into the history of this long lasting enterprise. From these photographs, it became evident that alterations and an addition were made to this building. There were windows on either side of the structure originally, that were bricked over on the west side in 1898 when the Alloway Building was erected. Windows from light wells on the east were also later filled. The addition can be seen in an early interior photograph.

Over the years, small offices shared space with Taylor on a short-term basis. By and large, these were print-related firms, likely connected to the main company or possibly a retail adjunct of some specific function. Architect Victor Horwood, a son-in-law to Thomas Taylor, also kept his office in this building from c.1904 to 1911.

Thomas Taylor was an energetic individual, the kind of pioneer spirit who took an active role in the growth of the young prairie city. He was elected as alderman to City Council in 1892, re-elected as mayor in 1893 and reappointed mayor by acclamation in his second term. In 1899, Taylor was elected as a Conservative to the Manitoba Legislature where he held the seat for Winnipeg Centre until 1914. During that time, he was also the Chairperson of the City Parks Board.³ Married with ten children, Taylor also served as a president of the St. Andrew's Society, high in the echelons of free masonry and involved in various philanthropic institutions.

When he died in 1924, Taylor's son-in-law, W.C. Birt, became the manager and president of T.W. Taylor Company. Born in England in 1880, Birt came to Winnipeg as a child. He received training as an accountant, joining the Taylor firm in 1904 following his marriage to one of the Taylor's daughters. When W.C. Birt died in 1968,⁴ the firm closed. After nearly ninety years of business, the Thomas W. Taylor printing and publishing company had ceased operation.

While the Taylor Company building is one of two storey structures on the block, its design and materials make it perfectly compatible with its neighbours. Measuring 24 feet by 80 feet, the

building is solid brick on a foundation of limestone. The limestone continues upwards several feet from grade around the entrance before the brick façade commences. The windows, which have been altered, were originally much longer, with a segmented head and keystone above the transom. There was also a transom over the doorway. The outlines of these original windows can still be seen clearly on the ground floor façade. The original doorway was altered when the transom was bricked off and a flat bracketed hood added.

Despite these changes to the lower portion of the building, the upper portion has suffered no major alteration. A bank of brick ornamentation separates the two storeys and is repeated and expanded in the frieze below the cornice. A parapet crowns the structure with two side caps over the pilasters and a central cornice detail mimics the segmented heads of the windows.

The interior of the warehouse is long and narrow, lit by windows north and south. Cast iron columns support the beam through the centre of the structure. The rear of the building flares considerably in width as the street curves, permitting a loading dock to be introduced between the rear windows.

Comparing the two sets of interior photographs, it is apparent that in 1915, bookbinding was still largely a manual operation as a dozen women were employed as folders for the folios. The photograph from the 1960s contrasts this with heavy printing and binding machinery, albeit still for small-scale production.

In 1918, the warehouse building at 179 McDermot Avenue, which shares a party wall on the west side of this warehouse, had a bad fire. Firefighters smothered the flames with gallons of water, which seeped into the basement of this building and flooded the stock of the Taylor Company. Only smoke damage was sustained by upper floors.⁵

With Richardson's redevelopment of McDermot Avenue in the early 1970s, the Taylor Building became the home of Trend Interiors and an art studio for a few years. Recently it has been the

home of Act Two Restaurant and Pierrot Modelling Academy and Fitness Studio. The original interior, which remained faithfully intact until 1968, has been altered extensively to accommodate these changes in the function of the warehouse. Despite this, and the painting of the exterior, the outside of the structure has retained its character and a measure of its integrity. The sheer stability of its long time function as a book bindery has saved it from several decades of alteration.

FOOTNOTES:

- ¹ “Thomas William Taylor” in Frank Schofield The Story of Manitoba Vol. III, The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, Winnipeg 1913, p. 165.
- ² “Tenders” MFP 7, July 1882, p. 4.
- ³ The Canadian Parliamentary Guide 1914, The Mortimer Company, Ottawa, 1914, p. 473.
- ⁴ “William Chandler Birt” obituary, Winnipeg Free Press, 9 May 1968.
- ⁵ “Disastrous Fire on McDermot East”, MFP, 17 December 1918, p. 7.

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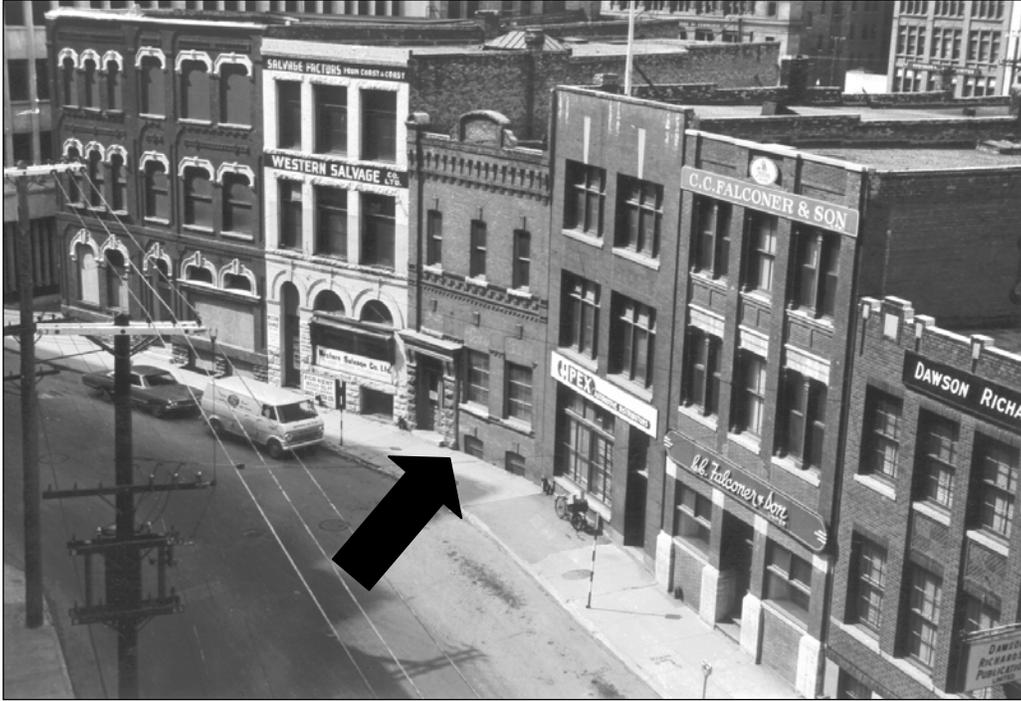


Plate 2 – North side of McDermot Avenue, 1969. 177 McDermot Avenue is at arrow. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Architectural Survey.)

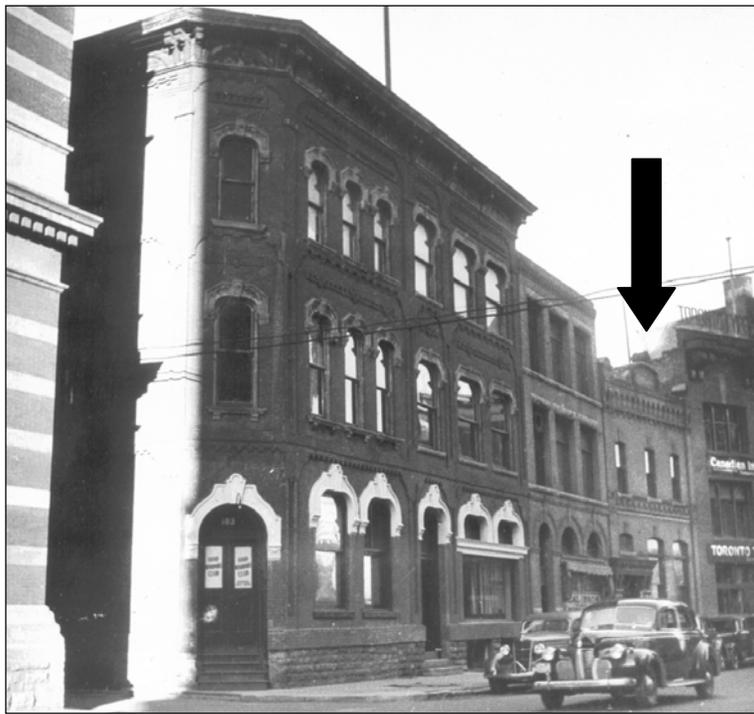


Plate 2 – McDermot Avenue looking east from Main Street, ca.1945, 177 McDermot Avenue at arrow. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N732.)

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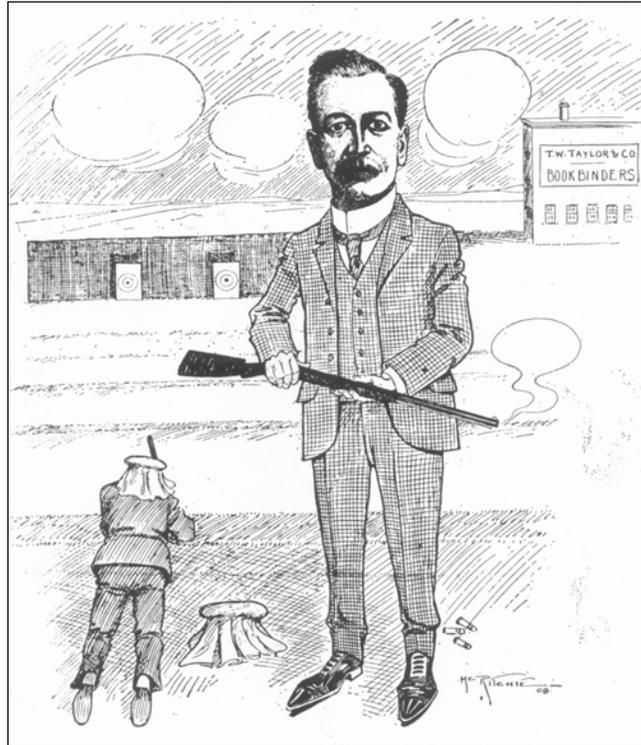


Plate 3 – Caricature of T.W. Taylor, ca.1908. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N343.)

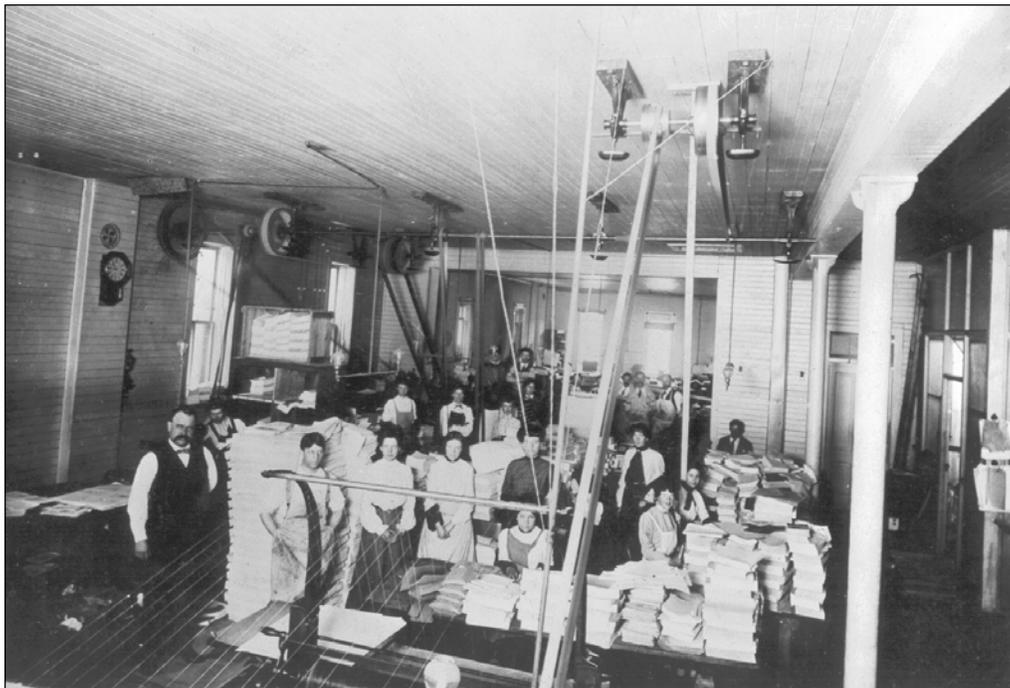


Plate 4 – Interior of T.W. Taylor Company printing factory, ca.1915. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

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Plate 5 – Interior of T.W. Taylor Company printing factory, ca.1915. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)



Plate 6 – Interior of T.W. Taylor Company printing factory, ca.1915. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

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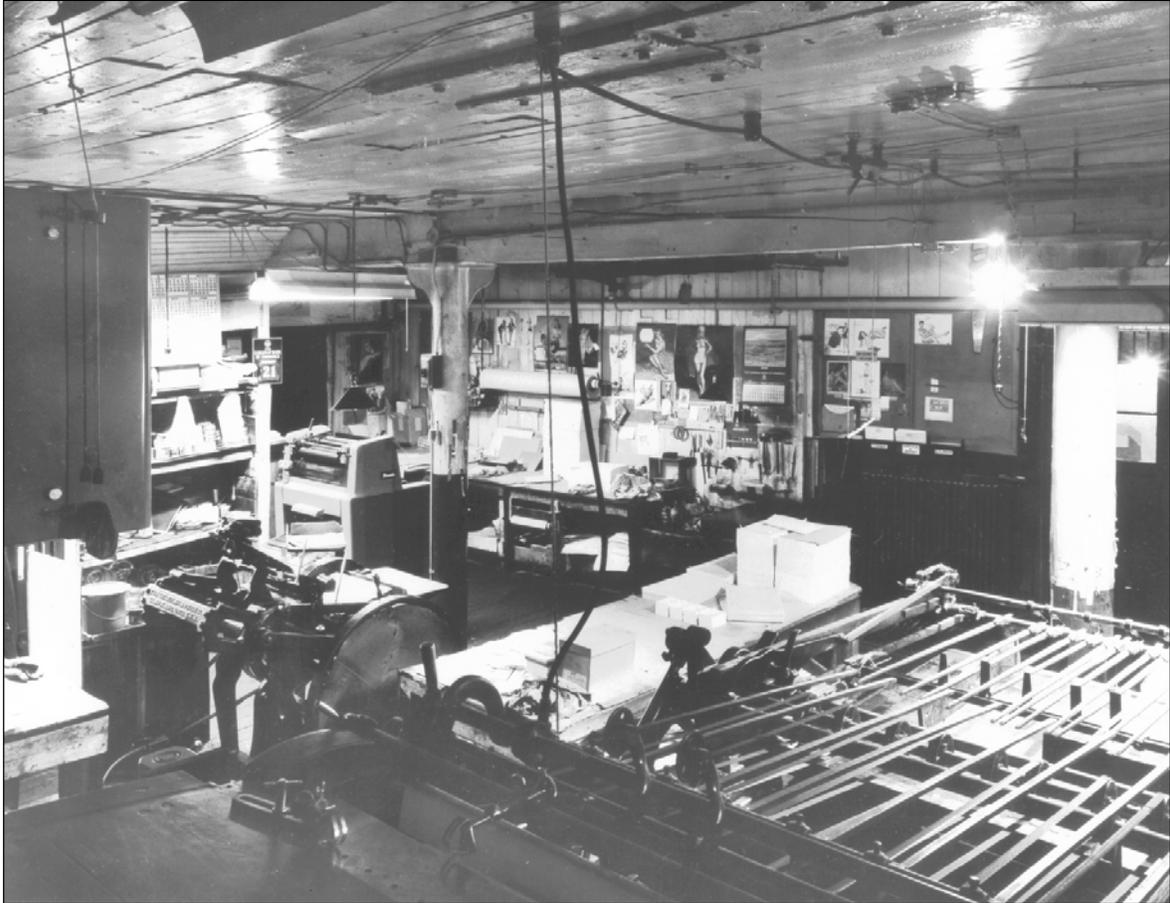


Plate 7 – Interior of T.W. Taylor Company printing factory, ca.1965. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)