



246-248 McDERMOT AVENUE

SURES BUILDING

HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE

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When the grocery wholesale firm of Thompson, Codville and Company opened its doors on McDermot in 1882, Winnipeg was caught in the frenzy of its most energetic boom. With the railway had arrived an army of businessmen from Eastern Canada and England who saw the potential in the prairie west and resolved to build Winnipeg into the metropolitan nucleus of this growth. Aggressive in their outlook and approach, these businessmen formed a commercial elite that directed its efforts towards rapid and sustained growth of their new city.¹ It was both a dream and a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The facts of the 1882 boom show a startling growth. Within the twelve months of that one year, Winnipeg's population doubled while over \$5,000,000 was spent in the construction of new buildings.² The number of wholesale establishments jumped from twenty-six to sixty while grocery wholesales in particular went from four to nine and their stock values nearly tripled.³

Growth was so extreme that the newspapers could not catch up on their local reporting. Many items that would be reported in detail in slower years received scant notice as the press scrambled to keep on top of the really big stories. It was all relative for a city whose ambition was to rival Toronto and Montreal within a decade.

Thompson, Codville and Company was an eastern firm that subsequently transferred its base of operations to Winnipeg. It was owned by John J. Codville and W.J. Thompson, both eastern businessmen who lived only temporarily in Winnipeg and whose sons carried out western operations. When it opened in 1882, Thompson, Codville's main competition in the wholesale supply of groceries was G.F. & J. Galt; Lyon, McKenzie and Powis and the traditional Hudson's Bay Company. With its established capital, Thompson, Codville was able to start big: besides its two local managers, there were three travelling salesmen, two clerks, one shipper, one teamster and two warehousemen for a total of eleven employees.⁴

A devastating recession followed short on the heels of the boom. So many businesses had failed by

mid-summer that there was a "dread of panic hanging over the country"⁵ for those that remained. The economy soon settled back to its regular growth pattern as settlers began to arrive in a steady stream. Those businesses that were moderate and dealt in staple goods endured and eventually prospered. Everybody needed groceries.

The Codville half of Thompson, Codville and Company bought out the partnership with the new name simply The Codville Company. By 1893, the business at 246 McDermot had grown to such an extent that new quarters were needed. Codville's opened a large warehouse on Ship Street from which they expanded operations to Saskatchewan. Codville's is presently based in the Inkster Industrial Park and continues to be a major grocery supplier in Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

The Codville Building, which is immediately adjacent to the Telegram Building, came to be occupied in 1895 by two businesses. W.G. McMahon sold Buck brand stoves at 246 McDermot while J.Y. Griffin and Company at 248 McDermot specialized in pork packing on a wholesale basis.⁶ This separation of the building into two distinct operations has lasted on and off since this time. A photograph of the building from the period c.1895 to 1900 shows two entrances while the façade itself shows a centre separation on the upper floors.

While W.G. McMahon continued to vend stoves from his portion of the building until 1909, the space in the western half was used first by the De Laval Separator Company and then by the firm of Goldie and McCulloch. This latter company was an old Winnipeg machine shop that manufactured engines and boilers, fireproof safes and vault doors.⁷ Goldie and McCulloch stayed until 1925.

In 1910, Greenshields Limited, a dry goods wholesaler, took over the space vacated by McMahon's stove dealership. Later, the Parke-Whyte company had a factory for "sanitary chemical closets" and other bathroom fixtures and supplies in the building.⁸ From ca.1919 to 1925, Nathan Chmelnitsky operated a dry goods wholesale there.

In 1925, businessman Nathan Sures took over the building to operate Sures Brothers Limited and a subsidiary, Canadian Shirt and Overall. Nathan Sures, the head of the company of brothers, was

born in Russia in 1893, coming to Canada in 1913. He learned the dry goods trade as a clerk and manager of the New York Outfitters shop on Main. Besides being president of Sures Brothers, he was a charter member of the Jewish National Fund, on the board of governors of the local YMHA and on the national executive of the Zionist organization of Canada, among his other community works. He died in 1967.⁹ Sures Brothers built up lines of headwear, sportswear and dress goods over the years through a number of companies.

Late in the 1970s, Modernage Furniture, which operates mainly in the Telegram Building, took over the Sures Building as part of their furniture retail store.

The Codville/Sures Building was erected in 1882, the same year as the Telegram Building. No direct evidence of its construction could be found, but it is possible that it was built as a speculative prospect for a local investor, J.D. McArthur.¹⁰ That year saw \$74,500 worth of construction on McDermot, a considerable sum when one considers that the Telegram Building cost only \$8,000 to erect.¹¹

The name of the architect of the building was not located. The alterations on the ground floor were undertaken by the Sures Brothers in 1932.¹² The ground floor of the three-storey brick structure had consisted of four square-headed storefront windows and two doorways, but this may date to 1895 when Colville's vacated the building. The upper two storeys feature round-headed windows in two sets of three bays each. The windows are accentuated by a voussoir trim. The fascia over the ground floor and the metal cornice are original. The cornice is supported by brackets with heavier capped brackets on either end and in the centre.

A classical style ties this building to the Telegram Building next door. In the absence of electric lighting, a Romanesque style gave the maximum sunlight in a masonry building and was also viewed as suitably dignified for the commercial trade. The new entrance and rounded windows of the present ground floor façade mimic the upper floors but were a considerable departure from the original treatment. The two buildings contrast nicely in style with the former George Wood warehouse on the other side of the Sures Building, which shows the more modern Chicago design

that typifies the second wave of warehouse construction.

The Sures Building is small but fits well onto the historic McDermot Avenue streetscape. Its design makes a perfect partner or a visual annex to the Telegram Building. It is quite possible that they were designed by the same architect. Besides its significance to the streetscape, the historic connection to Codville's and the numerous small wholesale businesses gives it importance within the warehouse district development. As an 1882 structure it can be seen as a pioneer within a district that grew around it to become the finest warehouse district on the prairies.

FOOTNOTES--

1. Alan F.J. Artibise, editor, Gateway City Documents on the City of Winnipeg 1873-1913 Volume V: The Manitoba Record Society Publications Winnipeg 1979 p. 8.
2. "1882" Manitoba Daily Free Press 30 December 1882.
3. "Winnipeg as a Wholesale Centre" The Commercial 16 January 1883 p. 308.
4. Henderson's Directory for Winnipeg and the Northwest 1890.
5. Artibise, op. cit., p. 60.
6. Henderson's, op. cit., 1898.
7. Ibid., 1910.
8. Ibid., 1912.
9. "Mr. Nathan Sures" obituary Free Press 10 May 1967.
10. "Building Record" Free Press, op. cit., 1882.
11. "The Building Boom" Winnipeg Sun 29 December 1882 p. 2.
12. City of Winnipeg Building Permit No. 2348 12 November 1932. The builder was J. Akman and the cost was \$6,000.

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Plate 1 – Sures Building, 246-48 McDermot Avenue, 1970. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Architectural Survey.)

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Plate 2 – The former Codville Building, ca.1900. In the fore on the far left is the corner of the Telegram Building. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

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Plate 3 – Looking west down McDermot Avenue from Main Street, ca.1900. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)