



**296 McDERMOT AVENUE**

**DAYLIGHT BUILDING**

HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE

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## 296 McDERMOT AVENUE DAYLIGHT BUILDING

Lights shining from the windows of wholesale houses and offices with rows of clerks bending over ledgers at nine or ten o'clock in the evening are indications of the immense business done by the wholesalers of Winnipeg.....Autumn 1901.<sup>1</sup>

In the last days of the nineteenth century considerable financial interest was directed to the Canadian northwest. Discoveries of gold in South Africa and in the Yukon in 1897 meant gold backing for world currencies. In turn investment expanded into railway construction, government bonds, and farm mortgages. Coincidental with a healthier financial climate was the fact that the best farmland in the United States mid-west had been taken, immigration, thus, had shifted to the Canadian prairies where several years of good crops made settlement in the north especially attractive.

It was within this historical context that railway magnate John Duncan McArthur built his warehouse at the corner of McDermot Avenue and Princess Street.<sup>2</sup> His decision to erect the “handsome brick and stone block” was no doubt, additionally, influenced by favourable freight rates offered to Winnipeg by the C.P.R. By the terms of Tariff 490 (1897-1898) Winnipeg wholesaling firms who purchased goods in the east were given the benefit of a low through tariff rate even if the

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<sup>1</sup> Cited Reuban Bellan, Winnipeg: First Century. An Economic History (1978), p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> The Commercial, 06/01/00, p. 549. During 1899 Winnipeg experienced an economic and industrial revival with a rise in prices, an increase in factory production, wholesaling and record bank clearances. Immigration was on the upswing and was reflected in a rise in the sale of farm lands and equipment. Note: John Duncan McArthur (d. 1927) was known as “Western Canada’s greatest railway builder” as well as a prominent manufacturer and dealer in lumber and building materials. He was born in Lancaster, Ontario, of Scottish parents, but came to Winnipeg in 1880. He is best remembered for his construction of the Grand Trunk railway from Thunder Bay to Winnipeg and for several buildings, in particular the Child’s Building (McArthur’s Building). See Manitoba History Scrapbook 1980-1982, p. 484, Manitoba Biography 1902-1905, p. 138, Manitoba Biography 1924-1930, p. 89 (all at Legislative Library) and Winnipeg Free Press, 11/01/27.

goods were broken and reshipped out several months later.<sup>3</sup> Using Winnipeg as a central clearing house gave eastern, as well as western, firms use of the winter months to reorganize their shipments, break bulk, and repack so that in the spring goods were sent into the western settlements efficiently and expeditiously. As settlers flowed onto prairie lands and into the mining areas of British Columbia, supplying their needs with farm and mining machinery, household items and clothing became big business. Winnipeg was soon caught in the heat of competition for this important trade. McArthur's warehouse, as others, was built to symbolize "strength and stability" in an atmosphere of rapid growth and shifting fortunes.<sup>4</sup>

The Daylight Building was constructed in 1899 of red brick and rough hewn Tyndall stone. The four-storey block was opened for joint occupancy of two independent companies, the Ames Holden Shoe Company of Montreal and the Bole Drug Company of Winnipeg. The Bole Drug Company occupied the south Princess Street section of the building in an area of 50' by 50', four storeys and basement with a floor space of 8,500 square feet. The remainder of the building, 50' frontage and 120' depth, was rented by Ames Holden who had a floor space of 12,700 square feet.<sup>5</sup> The principal entrance was on Princess Street which led into the general business offices, "roomy and well lighted" and finished in oiled B.C. cedar. Private offices, separated by partitions, were to the left of the entrance. Behind the offices, sample rooms could be found which were divided into compartments by opaque glass. There were also shipping rooms on this floor "where every facility for the rapid handling and packing of goods" had been provided. The basement was used for storing unbroken packages of goods. The upper floors, too, were used for storage, but they were also used

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<sup>3</sup> Bellan, pp. 73-74.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86. Bellan quotes from the president of one of Eastern Canada's dry goods firms who said in 1906 that western customers would not wait the length of time that it would take for orders to go to Montreal and back again — it was necessary to establish a warehouse in Winnipeg if one "wishes to increase, or even hold, our success there". Note: the population of Winnipeg in 1895 was 38,500 — in 1907 it was 115,000.

<sup>5</sup> Ames Holden had two factories in Quebec, one at Montreal and the other at Ste. Hyacinthe. See City of Winnipeg Assessment Roll, 1899, Ward 4, p. 50. Assessment for 1899 was \$26,000 (land 6,000 and Ames Holden property at 19,000 and Bole Drugs at 12,700).

for breaking bulk, packing, and organizing for distribution to the Winnipeg market and for points west.<sup>6</sup>

Ames Holden and Company was “the largest boot and shoe manufacturer in Canada”, and the Winnipeg warehouse carried the most extensive line of shoes in the dominion.<sup>7</sup> The warehouse was managed by A.L. Johnson, whose territory reached from Port Arthur to the Northwest Territories. Ames Holden’s speciality was a stock of “granby rubbers and overshoes”. They also wholesaled “Goodyear welt sewn shoes”, gloves, mitts, moccasins, and Arctic “sox”. Their boots and shoes in leather or felt, warmlined shoes, and skating shoes spoke to their clients who endured the harsh prairie winter.<sup>8</sup>

The Bole Drug Company was founded by D.W. Bole often called the “father of the drug business in Western Canada”.<sup>9</sup> It was a family business which grew with western expansion so that by 1906 the company served a district which extended from Fort William to Swift Current. In December 1899,

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<sup>6</sup> The Commercial, 23/12/99, p. 521.

<sup>7</sup> Winnipeg Telegram, 18/09/09, p. 60.

<sup>8</sup> The Commercial, 11/02/05, vol. xxiii, p. 91. See the Henderson Directories (1899, 1910) pp. 552, 275. To 1910 Ames Holden continued to be listed as Ames Holden Ltd. Wholesale Shoes with A.L. Johnson as manager. In 1912 (p. 421) the company was listed as Ames Holden McCreary Ltd. Wholesale Shoes and in 1917 Johnson was replaced by F.M. Morgan. From 1918 (p. 345) to 1920 (p. 280) the warehouse was listed as vacant.

<sup>9</sup> D.W. Bole (1856-1933). Bole was born in Warwick, Lambton Co., Ontario. He graduated from the Toronto College of Pharmacy in 1880. In 1888-1889 he came to Winnipeg and with a partner formed the Bole Wynne and Company. Eight years later he established a partnership with his brother, W.W. Bole and created the Bole Drug Company of Canada. By 1906, with the beginning of the National Drug and Chemical Company of Canada Ltd., Bole became president. That year the Bole Drug Company, with a capitalization of \$6,000,000, became the principal drug distributor in Western Canada. Winnipeg Telegram, 18/09/06, p. 58. D.W. Bole played an active role in the Winnipeg community. Some of his interests included being a member of the Winnipeg School Board (1896), president of the Jobbers’ Union and Winnipeg candidate to the House of Commons (1904-1908). See Vertical File, “D.W. Bole”, Legislative Library.

the Commercial did a feature article on the company. The writer described Mr. Bole as attentive to technical management as to business affairs. In every way, he wrote, the Bole warehouse was ahead of its time. For instance, sample rooms on the first floor were “unique” with new display cabinets which had drawers of graduated size offering more capacity than was thought possible in a rather cramped space. The second floor was a “sundry” room with all sorts of drug items and toilet preparations. The third floor, called the “wet room”, stored all liquid drugs. Oils and fluids were held in large galvanized iron tanks where they were pumped in and then drawn off as required. There was floor space for over fifty barrels on tap where eight employees were “constantly” putting up orders for the retail trade. The fourth floor was the “dry room” where all dry drugs such as powders, barks, herbs, roots, chemicals and pharmaceuticals were made. Here there was a room for over one hundred barrels and casks, boxes and receptacles. Bole’s interest in a modern plant was reflected in his “system of speaking tubes” with electric calls connecting all floors with each other and with the business office. Each floor, or department, was supervised by a qualified chemist. In addition to his staff of twenty-one, D.W. Bole kept two travellers on the road at all times. They brought in business directly, and indirectly they supported the mail order business.<sup>10</sup> In 1906 the Winnipeg Telegram wrote that “The Bole Drug Company is one of the best organized, best equipped and best managed in Canada.”<sup>11</sup>

The Daylight Block was built in 1899 by Winnipeg architect and contractor, James Cadham.<sup>11a</sup> It was a four storey red brick and Tyndall stone building, 50 feet by 120 feet of ordinary joint construction, with a stone foundation. The principal entrance, which was on Princess Street, was framed in arched brick work, a motif which was carried through the main floor, distinguishing the windows on the south and west facings. Windows on the second and third floors were set in twos in a conventional rectangular pattern, but the windows on the fourth floor, although considerably smaller than those on the first, were also distinctive with the same arched brickwork design. All windows were highlighted by sills of rough Tyndall stone. A band of Tyndall stone marked the top

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<sup>10</sup> The Commercial, 23/12/99, p. 521.

<sup>11</sup> Winnipeg Telegram, 18/09/06, p. 58.

of the first floor. From here rose raised brick pilasters to support the decorative cornice with brackets and overhanging eaves. The building was heated by steam heat and was lit by electric light. There were two electric freight elevators, which were fitted on all floors with an automatic safety door device which made it impossible for anyone to fall into the shaft or “meet with any of the accidents so common to freight elevators”.<sup>12</sup>

In 1904 Ames Holden and Company, then owners of the block, commissioned Winnipeg architect John Hamilton Gordon Russell and builder S.G. Browne to expand the floor space to 42,000 square feet by adding two storeys to the existing structure.<sup>13</sup> The walls of the addition were 13” x 9” brick laid in cement and mortar to match the original facing. The flat roof of felt and tar was outlined by a parapet which encased the building on three sides. No particular effort was made at this time, nor had there been with the original structure, to fireproof the building. There was no an iron fire escape nor was there an automatic sprinkler system. There was an effective but sub-standard fire door.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11a</sup> James Cadham (1850-1907). From 1895 J. Cadham practised architecture in the City of Winnipeg. In addition to the Ames-Holden building, he built among others, the Rat Portage Lumber Co., the Champion Building and the G.F. Stephen’s & Co. Warehouse. See Manitoba Free Press, 21/06/99, p. 2 - Tenders, Winnipeg Telegram, 28/09/99, p. 8 and F.H. Schofield, The Story of Manitoba, Vol. II, p. 331. See also obituaries — Manitoba Free Press, 01/12/07, Winnipeg Telegram, 11/01/07, and Winnipeg Telegram, 11/01/07.

<sup>12</sup> The Commercial, 23/12/99, p. 521. See also S. Carrington, “Canadian Inventory of Historic Buildings”, (1975), pp. 77-82. The south facing of the building is almost solid brick with only five windows. Loading docks are in evidence on the first floor.

<sup>13</sup> Winnipeg Building Permit #1449, 28/09/04. Note thickness of existing building walls — basement 26”; north and west walls, 21.22” and 21.17”; east and south walls, 17.17” and 13.13”, with a party wall through the centre. Bole Drugs moved to new premises in 1903 at 70 Princess Street. City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls, 1905 — total assessed value (land 10,000 — building 26,000), p. 55 and assessed value in 1910, p. 52 (land 37,500 — building 35,500). This is a good indication of the rise in the value of real estate in the decade under discussion.

<sup>14</sup> Fire Insurance Plans of the City of Winnipeg, December 1918, Vol. II, 201.

Today the Daylight Building serves as a mixed warehouse and factory.<sup>15</sup> Little change has occurred to the façade of the building with the exception of a shift in the main entrance. The Princess Street doorway is now boarded up and the entrance on McDermot has been built into one of the original window alcoves. Smooth stone (concrete painted blocks) outline an inset of glass bricks (ca.1930-1940) which frame the doorway. The interior of the building on the lower floors has been finished in plaster and beaver board. The maple floors have been covered with linoleum, the ceilings have been lowered with acoustic tiles. Generally, however, it would appear that the building has been kept up in good condition.

With its arched window alcoves, red brick and rough hewn Tyndall stone façade, the Daylight Building stands on the corner of Princess Street and McDermot Avenue as a reminder of the hey day of the wholesaling trade in Winnipeg. With its present function as factory cum warehouse it offers a continuity to that illustrious past.

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<sup>15</sup> Two of the present day tenants in the Daylight Building are Roddy Uniforms Ltd. and Shagal Jeans Ltd.

**296 McDERMOT AVENUE – DAYLITE BUILDING**



Plate 1 – Daylite Building, 296 McDermot Avenue, 1969. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Architectural Survey.)