



406 NOTRE DAME AVENUE

NOTRE DAME BLOCK

PREPARED BY PETERSON PROJECTS – DECEMBER 2009



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Date of Construction: 1909

Building Permit: 1761/1909 (Plans at City Storage)

Architect: Blair, William Wallace

Contractor: Stirrett, George

ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

This three-storey, stone and brick mixed-use block is a familiar sight in and around Winnipeg's downtown as many of this type of structure was completed in the 1900-1915 era to fill the demand for modern, affordable commercial and residential space.

The front (north) façade is symmetrically designed with the main entrance (to the upper suites) in the centre of the block, recessed and topped by a classical pediment with stone accenting. Framing this opening are the two recessed entrances of the commercial space with their large display windows. The first floor is visually divided from the upper floors by a metal cornice. The upper floors feature large window openings (with newer metal window units) except in the centre where a large arched opening emphasizes the central portion of the building (originally a balcony with railing). The corners and the middle bay are further emphasized by the use of brick laid to mimic quoins, ending in oversized



Front (north) and east façades, 2009

ornamental metal brackets supporting the heavy metal cornice and brick parapet that complete the structure. Part of the east wall is covered by a neighbouring building, the visible portion and the west wall are clad in common clay brick and feature several window wells to increase the amount of natural ventilation and light available to the upper storey suites. The rear (south) elevation faces the back lane, is plainly designed and includes an open metal fire escape.

The building measures approximately 19.8 x 36.6 metres and cost \$60,000 to complete in 1909.¹

The building stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition. Alterations to the exterior have been minimal.

W.W. Blair, designer of this house, was born in Ireland in 1852 and studied architecture at the Academical Institute in Belfast. After graduation, he began a private practice in Middlesbrough-on-Tees, England from 1874-76² before immigrating to Canada, settling in Toronto as well as Hamilton. In 1884 he returned to his mother country as resident engineer for the construction of the Londonderry and Ballymena waterworks systems. After five years he again returned to North America, working until 1905 in Chicago.³ That year he chose to relocate to Winnipeg, and formed a short partnership in 1906 with George W. Northwood under the name Blair and Northwood.⁴ Blair practised in Winnipeg for less than 10 years, but during that time he designed a number of outstanding buildings. The list includes:⁵ Thomas Ryan Warehouse, 44 Princess Street (1906 – designed with G.W. Northwood); Roslyn Apartments, 40 Osborne Street (1908 – Grade II); Warwick Apartments, 366 Qu'Appelle Avenue (1908-1909 – Grade II); Princeton (Kenmore) Apartments, 314 Broadway (1909 – Grade II); Great West Saddlery Building, 113 Market Avenue (1910 – Grade II); M. Fortune



Rear (south) and west façades, 2009

House, 393 Wellington Crescent (1911 – Grade III). He has been given 20 points by the Historical Buildings Committee.

The building is an example of the classically detailed Two-part Commercial style, popular throughout North America's urban centres. Buildings could use a combination of stylistic elements or include no ornamentation depending on the developer and the available capital. The most obvious feature was the visual division of the ground floor and the upper floors, reflecting the division of use of the interior – most often commercial on the ground floor and residential on the upper floor or floors. There are examples of this style throughout the city.



Front (north) façade detail, 2009

HISTORICAL INTEREST:

The original owner of the block was local developer Ontario, Manitoba and Western Land Company. It was sold to real estate agent J.A. Smith and became the property of Samuel Werier, a local businessman, in 1943 (he owned it into the 1970s). It has been home to a variety of commercial tenants and its residential suites have been filled with a variety of renters.⁶

RECOMMENDATION TO HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE:

Under the Historical Buildings By-law, this building meets a number of important criteria:

- its historical importance- a mixed-use retail/residential block built after 1900 in the growing residential/commercial district west of the Exchange District;
- its associations- N/A;
- its design- an example of the Two-part Commercial style;
- its architect- W.W. Blair was a respected and important practitioner;
- its location- contributes greatly to its historic streetscape; and
- its integrity- its main façades continue to display most of their original elements and design.



Front (north) façade, 1978

ENDNOTES:

- 1 City of Winnipeg Building Permit, #1761/1909.
- 2 C.W. Parker, Who's Who in Western Canada, Volume I (Vancouver, BC: Canadian Press Association Ltd., 1911), p. 112.
- 3 Winnipeg Saturday Post, June 8, 1912, p. 38.
- 4 D. Lyon, "Main Street," Report for the Historical Buildings Committee, Appendix D, F-58 and F-62.
- 5 Compiled from City of Winnipeg Building Permits, 1905-15; Winnipeg Saturday Post, June 8, 1912, p. 38; and Historical Buildings Committee files.
- 6 City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls, Roll No. 13096054600, 1920-1990.