

450 PORTAGE AVENUE – HUDSON’S BAY COMPANY STORE
George C. Browne, 1895



Few buildings in downtown Winnipeg are more iconic or conspicuous than the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) Store at the corner of Portage Avenue and Memorial Boulevard. It is truly a landmark building because of its highly public role, its design and materials and its scale.

The building is designed in a subdued Neo-Classical or Classical Revival style, elements of the style include columns with ornate bases and capitals, square-headed openings, belt courses, entablatures and parapets. This became the corporate style for the HBC for many decades after the construction of the Winnipeg store.

The six-storey building was designed with three public façades: west facing Memorial Boulevard, east facing Vaughan Street and north facing Portage Avenue. The three façades are clad in Manitoba limestone on a structural system of poured reinforced concrete. The northeast and

northwest corners are rounded and contain entrances. There are also large entrances, all clad in intricate bronze frames, on the east and west façades and centrally-located on the Portage Avenue façade. Large display windows are also located at grade on all three façades and above, banks of windows in rectilinear openings are found on all floors. The metal canopy that runs along all three of these façades were added in 1956, designed by the renowned local firm Moody and Moore.

The original rear (south) façade that is visible above the two-storey parkade is clad in common clay brick with stone accenting with windows in rectilinear openings on all floors.

The interior that greeted customers was opulent as well. Wide aisles, large Doric columns, marble and Terrazzo flooring, a mezzanine level and elliptical elevator lobbies and large painted murals were some of the elements. Behind the banks of elevators were the building's banks of paired escalators, which over time have been moved and replaced. The elegant fifth floor restaurant, the Georgian Room, was a popular destination for shoppers as well as for banquets and clubs. In 1954, the Paddlewheel Restaurant was opened on the sixth floor.

The design for the massive department store was the responsibility of Ernest Isbell Barott (1884-1966), a Montréal-based architect of high reputation whose work can be found throughout the country. This is the only Barott building known to have been built in Western Canada. Western Canadian contractor Carter, Halls, Aldinger built the structure.

On November 18, 1926, the doors were opened on the new department store building and an estimated 50,000 people visiting the new building on the first day. Like the Eaton's Store located a few blocks to the east, The Bay became a centre of retail activity— another reason to come to downtown Winnipeg.

Slowly, the maturity of the subdivisions and the growth of suburban shopping malls began to cut into the retail business of all of the downtown stores and The Bay was no different. Today, only a small amount of the interior space is utilized for shopping, much of the remaining space is empty.

Elements of the building that would require approval if alterations were planned are:

Exterior-

- Limestone clad, six-storey structure filling the north portion of the block on Portage Avenue between Memorial Boulevard and Vaughan Street, its three main façades facing west (Memorial Boulevard), east (Vaughan Street) and north (Portage Avenue) and its rear façade partially hidden by a parkade;
- Canopy running along the east, west and north façades;
- Metal base of beacon on roof; and
- Its main floors with large display windows protected by a canopy, rounded northwest and northeast corners, five bronze framed entrances, upper floors with bays created by unfluted pilasters with Corinthian capitals, windows on all levels in rectilinear openings, cornice between fifth and sixth floors and parapet with balustrade.

Interior-

- Examples of reinforced concrete structural system; and
- Examples of the curved elevator lobby.