828 PRESTON AVENUE – ROTHESAY APARTMENTS
H.E. Matthews, 1905

Although Winnipeg's boundaries were extended west from Maryland Street to St. James Street in 1882, it was the turn of the century before development began in earnest in various West End districts.

By 1912, the pace of activity was hectic. In that year alone, 266 buildings valued at $2,000 or more were erected in the Wolseley area south of Portage Avenue between Maryland and Omand's Creek. The structures, costing nearly $1.72 million in total, included five apartment blocks, a church, two schools and 258 houses.

Wolseley's proximity to the Assiniboine River and the exclusive neighbourhood of Armstrong's Point attracted middle-to-upper-income residents. While building lots generally were small, the area's houses tended to be large and more expensive than the average 1912 home. Similarly, blocks such as the Rothesay were designed for tenants who demanded and could afford more amenities than

were offered in contemporary efficiency apartments.

Located at the southeast corner of Preston Avenue and Home Street, the Rothesay had the additional advantage of overlooking St. James (now Vimy Ridge) Park. This formally designed greenspace, with landscaped groups of trees and shrubs, curvilinear walkways and open lawns, was one of eight sites acquired in 1894 to become the City's first designated parks.

The Rothesay reflects several design imperatives from its era. Its three-storey plan was a common, economical response to a Winnipeg by-law which required taller blocks to be constructed solely of fireproof materials. Its H-shape maximized access to natural lighting and ventilation, while its numerous external stairways and entrances were used to enhance tenants privacy.

Built and owned by local contractors Peter Smith and George H. Kirkpatrick, the structure has a raised and rusticated stone foundation, solid brick walls, street facades in two tones of St. Louis brown brick, and rich detailing.

The symmetrical front (north) facade is dominated by pairs of three-storey balconies which rise from stone piers to a full entablature, including bracketed metal cornice, and a balustrade at the roof-line. The enclosed balconies have decorative wooden panels and glazing set in wooden surrounds.

The recessed main entrance is highlighted by Tyndall stone steps, a stone landing and railing, and carved door surrounds, including the block's name in raised letters. Bevelled glass is found in the entrance's round transom and sidelights, while two central upper-storey windows feature both stained and bevelled glass. Other ornamentation includes a smooth stone belt between the basement and first floor; stone lug sills beneath single rectangular openings; quoins and window heads in dark brown brick; and a metal-trimmed brick parapet.

The finished facade wraps around to the building's West (Home Street) side and portions of its rear and east walls. The remainder of the structure displays plain, sand-lime brick and windows with cement sills and radiating brick heads. Recessed wooden staircases, providing exterior service

entrances to most suites, punctuate the sides and rear.

The interior includes a marble-lined foyer with painted ceiling and small circular wall scenes, an oak staircase partially lit by a skylight, and suites that run off a common hallway on each floor.

The Rothesay was designed by Herbert E. Matthews who opened a Winnipeg practice in 1905, later formed a brief partnership (1910-11) with Fred F. LeMaistre, and eventually served as an architect in the Dominion Department of Public Works from 1921 until his retirement in 1938. His commissions included several residential structures; St. James Park and St. Matthews Episcopal churches in the West End; a drill hall on Machray Avenue; and several stables, warehouses and commercial buildings.

One of the Rothesay's co-owners, George Kirkpatrick, lived in the block until the mid-1940s. Other original tenants included a railway superintendent, T. Eaton Company manager, and other business owners/executives. By the mid-1930s, occupants tended to be more modest clerks, salesmen and bank employees. The building was sold in 1946 to Benjamin Cohen, retired owner of the Manitoba Upholstering Company. It remained in his estate until the later 1970s when it was again sold to local interests.