# 62 PRINCESS STREET

# DEL BLOCK

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
Researcher: M. Peterson
February 2015

## 62 PRINCESS STREET – DEL BLOCK

Princess Street developed into one of the most important in Winnipeg's burgeoning warehouse district west of Main Street. Running north-south, it and King Street saw nearly three decades of development, as eastern manufacturers and local wholesalers sought to take advantage of Winnipeg's favourable freight rates by locating their warehouses in the Exchange District.

In 1904, George Ryan, a well-known boot and shoe retailer, built a small mixed-use block near the southern end of the warehouse district on Princess Street, described in the City of Winnipeg Building Permit as "stores and sample rooms" (Plate 1).[1]

### STYLE

The Del Block is a reduced example of the Two-Part Commercial Style. This form dates back to Roman times when urban structures combined a ground-floor shop or business with living quarters above. It became a remarkably popular form throughout the world, reaching the height of its acceptance in North America from the 1850s to the 1950s.[2]

As the name suggests, a two-part building is actually two structures under one roof. Its exterior design and sometimes the materials used to clad the front façade reflect the differences in use by horizontally dividing the building, most often above the first-floor retail space. The resulting façade has two sections that may be harmoniously connected or display little visual continuity.[3] Ornamentation also ranges from the modest to exuberant.

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1 City of Winnipeg Building Permit (below as BP), #959/1904.

2 M. Peterson, "546 Main Street - The Foulds Block," report prepared for the Historical Buildings Committee, October 1988, p.1.

3 Ibid., p.1.

**CONSTRUCTION**

This modest, solid brick structure rests on a surface concrete foundation, measures approximately 21.1metres wide by 18.3 metres deep by 6.4 metres high and cost $5,000 to build. Exterior walls are 33.0 centimetres wide on the ground floor and 22.9 centimetres on the second floor (see Appendix I for addition construction information).[4]

**DESIGN**

The brick wall of the main (east) façade is divided by plain brick pilasters into four bays holding identical window/door combinations in arched openings on the ground floor and paired windows in rectangular window openings on the upper floor (Plate 2). Ornamentation is limited to the arched openings on the ground floor, lug sills and modest corbelling and patterned brick at roof level (Plate 3). The north and south elevations are party walls; the rear is very plain, rectangular openings used for doors and windows on both floors, almost all boarded up or bricked in (Plate 4).

**INTERIOR**

The original ground floor was divided into four retail shops, each with its own entrance. Today, the building functions as one unit, used for storage space (Plates 5-7).

**INTEGRITY**

The building stands on its original site and appears to be in fair structural condition. The building does not appear to have suffered major exterior alteration on its front (east) façade.

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[4] BP #959/1904.

**STREETSCAPE**

This structure is located at the southern edge of the Exchange District National Historic Site (EDNHS). It has been part of the Princess Street streetscape for over 100 years (Plates 8 and 9). Because all buildings within the EDNHS are essential parts of their historic streetscapes, the Historical Buildings and Resources Committee has given them 60 points.

**ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS**

The local general contracting firm Davidson Brothers is listed as architect and contractor of this building.[5] The firm, which organized in ca.1884, was responsible for many fine buildings in the city (see Appendix II for biographical information). While several structures built by this firm have been designated, the firm has not been given point by the Historical Buildings and Resources Committee.

**PERSON/INSTITUTION**

This block was built in 1904 for George Ryan (1859-1948), the brother of Thomas Ryan (1849-1937), boot and shoe retailer/wholesaler whose business expanded to take in all of Western Canada. Ultimately, the business grew to include three of Thomas Ryan's brothers – Michael, James and George. The retail portion of the business was sold to George Ryan ca.1889.[6] G. Ryan was born in Perth, Ontario and came to Winnipeg in 1880.[7]

Ryan only owned the building for a short time, although he built an addition on its south end in 1905 that was larger than the original (Plate 10).[8] Both properties were sold in 1908 to A.G. Lumgair of Selkirk, Scotland. This family owned the building into the late 1930s when it was

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5 BP #959/1904.

6 M. Peterson, "492 Main Street – Former Macdonald Shoe Store," report for the City of Winnipeg's Historical Buildings Committee, January 1996, p. 12.

7 Winnipeg Free Press, July 19, 1948, p. 3

8 BP # 144/1905.

sold to engineer H.S. Beetham who owned it until 1947. Harry (1902-1974)[9] and Philip Del Bigio (1908-1999)[10], electricians, purchased the building in 1950.[11] Del's Electric Motor Service Limited was founded by the brothers in 1927[12] and was first located at 48 Princess Street. The firm moved into #54 Princess Street in 1939[13] and in the late 1950s, the company expanded into this structure and continues to occupy both buildings (Plate 11).

Tenants of the building have been varied, see Table 1 below.

**TABLE 1 – TENANCY AT 58-62 PRINCESS STREET, 1906-1998**[14]

| YEAR | TENANTS |
|---|---|
| 1909 | - 58 - Holtby & Hathway, engravers, Imperial Renovations Co.; 60 - Vacant; 62 - Computing Scale Co. of Canada; 62½ - Beer Brothers, harness makers, Vermilyea Office Equippers, Advertising Specialty Co. |
| 1919 | - 56-58 – Manitoba Welding and Manufacturing; 60 - J. & J. Taylor Ltd., safe manufacturers; 62 - Vacant |
| 1925 | - 58 - Manitoba Welding and Manufacturing; 60 - J. & J. Taylor Ltd., safe manufacturers; 62 - J.S. Brandon, machinery, Thornton Machine Co. |
| 1935 | - 58 - Manitoba Welding and Manufacturing; 60 - Vacant; 62 - J.S. Brandon Machine Co., Arnold Wright, electrical contractor, 64 - Beetham Machine Works |
| 1945 | - 58 - Western Safe and Lock Co.; 60 - Western Saddlery Co.; 62 - Beetham Machine Works |
| 1955 | - 58 - Winnipeg Sewing Machine Supply Co. |
| 1959-1989 | - Del's Distributors Ltd. – electrical equipment & suppliers |
| 1998 | - Canadian Goodwill Industries (Plate 12) |

9 Winnipeg Free Press, March 16, 1974, p. 41.

10 Winnipeg Free Press, May 12, 1999, p. 39.

11 City of Winnipeg Assessment Roll, 609690-12-2, PC 33, 1905-1960.

12 Loc. cit.

13 Winnipeg Free Press, 1930-1939.

14 Henderson's Directory, 1905-2000.

**EVENT**

There is no known significant historical event connected with this building.

**CONTEXT**

This small brick retail block was built at the very beginning of Winnipeg's economic expansion phase from 1900 until World War I. While Winnipeg's primary role in the growth of all of Western Canada led to the construction of many large, ornamentally rich structures in the warehouse district, elsewhere in the downtown and throughout its suburbs, this period also so the construction of hundreds of small structures, providing modest, comfortable and modern retail, office and residential space for the growing population.

**LANDMARK**

This is a small, unassuming structure located on a busy street in downtown Winnipeg and would not be well-known.

Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
THE CITY OF WINNIPEG

# APPENDIX I

***CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report***
**Assessment Record**

Building Address: 62 Princess Street

Building Name: Del Block

Original Use: Retail

Current Use: retail

Roll No. (Old): 609690 (10125-1)

Municipality: 12 Ward: 2

Property or Occupancy Code: 33

Legal Description: 5/6 St. John, Plan 33144, Lot 44 (Original: 6/7$^{W}$ St. John, Plan 16, Block B, part E ½ Lot 2, except W 8')

Location: west side between Notre Dame & McDermot avenues

Date of Construction: 1904

Storeys: 2

Construction Type: Ordinary – Brick veneer, stone & concrete foundation

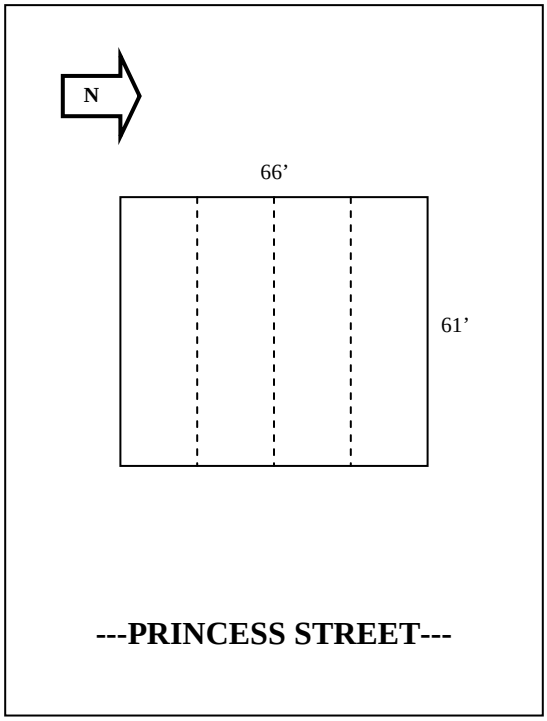
**HERITAGE STATUS: ON NOMINATED LIST**

Building Permits (Plans available: **[CS]** City Storage):
- 959/1904 $5,000 (66 x 60); 75091/1948 (addition – not found in Ledger books, 1944-1953)

Information:

- 66 x 61 x 25 = 100,650 cu. ft.

- Front – Brick & Plaster Board
- 1944 Assessment – All very poor
- 1951 Assessment – Building not in very good condition
- 1953 – New heating, lighting. Front wall – hollow, back – rough, cracks. All occupied, 2nd level – fair shape.
- 1961 – Condition of 1st floor good except Unit 58 which is fair. #64 – poor, 2nd floor fair, no heat, use for storage. Central heat only in units 60 & 62 – other 2 units, stove heat.
- 1965 – Building in normal condition
- 1986 – Inspection: Appears building in "fair condition". 1st floor – parts & storage and sales. 2nd floor – all parts and storage. Poor/fair finish. No structural problems.




**ARCHITECT: DAVIDSON BROTHERS**

**CONTRACTOR: DAVIDSON BROTHERS**

## APPENDIX II

Davidson Brothers

The contracting firm of Davidson Brothers was founded in 1884 by Alexander Davidson (1851-1920), Albert T. Davidson (1862-?) and Frederick Harvey Davidson (1865-1935).

The brothers were all born in Brockville, ON, coming west to Winnipeg ca.1883. The firm was established in 1884 and for nearly 30 years were a major contributor to the building landscape, working for some of the city's most prolific and influential architects, including J.H.G. Russell, H. McCowan, J.D. Atchison, S.F. Peters, and H.S. Griffith. Between 1900 and 1913, their contracts totalled over $1.5 million and although much of the Davidsons' contracting work took place in the residential sector, but they also built schools, factories, warehouses, offices and retail stores.[1] Like many of their contemporaries, the company also built residential rental properties; in 1905 they owned 20 single-family dwellings and duplexes in the area north of the warehouse district.[2]

F.H. Davidson left the firm in 1908, joining the National Supply Company, becoming its president in ca.1914. He also headed the Winnipeg Builders' Exchange in 1911, amassed a substantial property portfolio and was intimately involvement with the Greater Winnipeg Water District aqueduct development.

Both F.H. and A.T. Davidson won seats on City Council; A.T. for 1906 and 1907[3] and F.H. was a councillor from 1912 to 1917 and then spent two terms as the City's mayor. He returned to Council from 1921 to 1929 and 1932-1933. He was again elected to Council in 1935 and died in office on August 27, 1935.[4]

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1 City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books, 1900-1913.

2 City of Winnipeg Assessment Roll, Ward 2, 1905.

3 M. Peterson, "470 McDermot Avenue, Albert T. Davidson House," report for the Historical Buildings Committee, 1993, p. 4.

4 Manitoba Free Press, August 28, 1935, p. 1.

By 1910, Davidson Brothers consisted of Albert T. Davidson and two of his sons, Herbert C. (1884-?) and Wellington P. (1887-?). By 1913 the firm had ceased operations, A.T. and W.P. Davidson each had their own contracting company and H.C. Davidson had formed a partnership as Grey and Davidson.[5]

A list of structures built by the Davidson Brothers firm would include:

J.A.M. Aikins House, 630 Westminster Avenue (1901) – Grade III
Western Building, 90 Albert Street (1901) – Grade III
Guest Block, 598 Main Street (1902)
Euclid Block, 865 Main Street (1903)
Dingle and Stewart Building, 263 Stanley Street (1903)
Williamson Block, 38 Kate Street (1903)
Modern Laundry Building, 309 Hargrave Street (1903)
Franklin Press Building, 168 Bannatyne Avenue (1904) – Grade II
Del Block, 62 Princess Street (1904)
Orris Block, 305 Elgin Avenue (1905) – demolished
Del Block Annex, 54 Princess Street (1905)
D.W. Elliott House, 16 Ruskin Row (1908)
Wardlaw Apartments, 544 Wardlaw Avenue (1909) – Grade II
Edmonton Block, 383 Portage Avenue (1909)
Devon Court Apartments, 376 Broadway (1909) – demolished
Cecil Rhodes School No. 1, 136 Cecil Avenue (1910)
E.L. Taylor House, 611 Wellington Crescent (1911)
Kirkwood Block, 575 Portage Avenue (1912)
J.H. Ashdown House, 529 Wellington Crescent (1912) – Grade II

[5] Henderson's Directory, 1910-1920.

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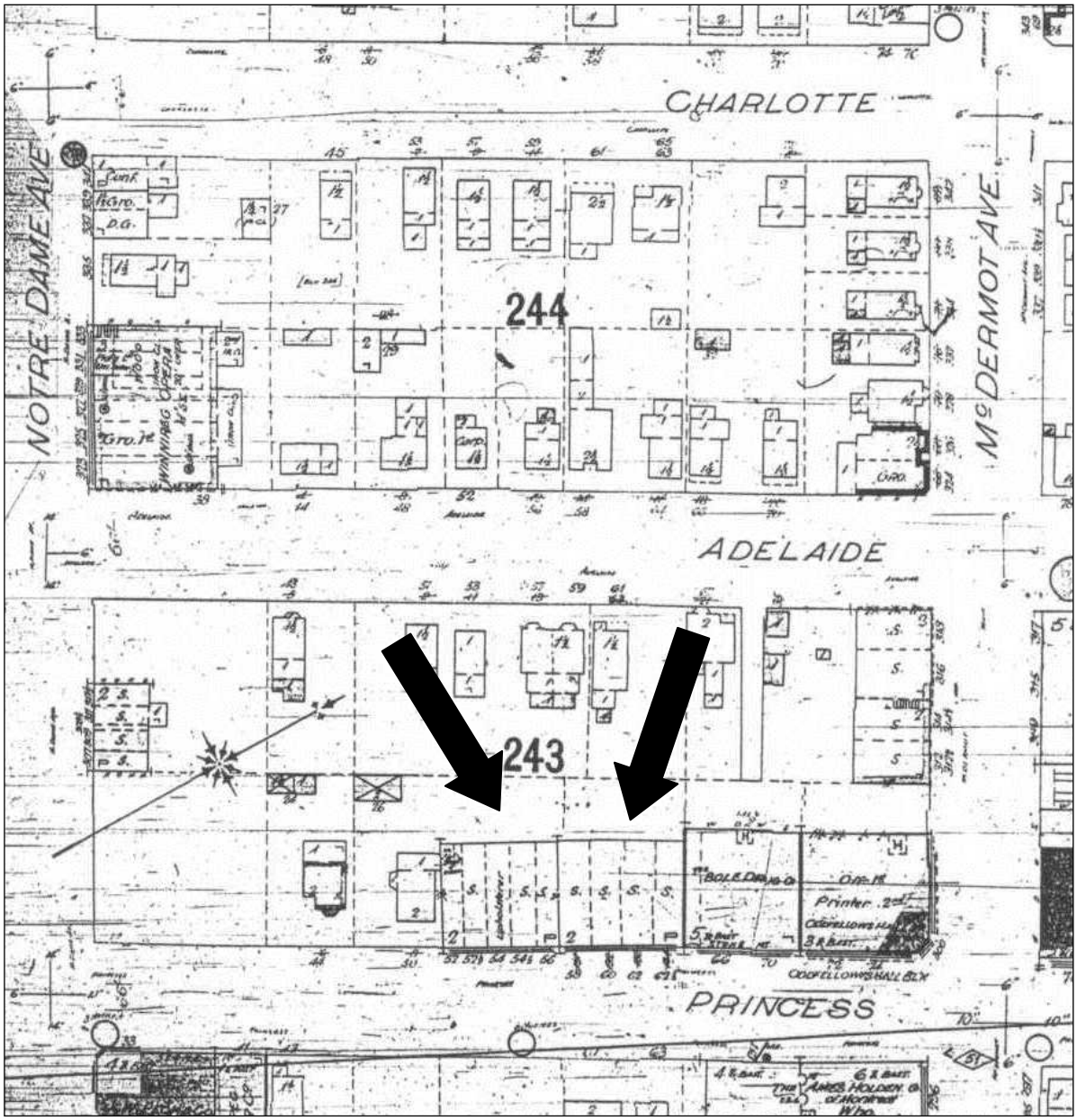


Plate 1 – Charles Goad, Fire Atlas of the City of Winnipeg, 1895 (revised 1905), Sheet 14. The Del Block, 58-62½ Princess Street (right arrow) and the Annex, 52-56 Princess Street (left arrow) have just been completed. Note that much of the surrounding property is still single family residential. (City of Winnipeg Archives.)

**62 PRINCESS STREET – DEL BLOCK**

Plate 2 – Del Block, 62 Princess Street, front (east) façade, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

Plate 3 – Del Block, 62 Princess Street, detail of front (east) roofline, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

**62 PRINCESS STREET – DEL BLOCK**

Plate 4 – Del Block, 62 Princess Street, rear (west) façade, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

Plate 5 – Del Block, 62 Princess Street, ground floor warehouse space, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

**62 PRINCESS STREET – DEL BLOCK**

Plate 6 – Del Block, 62 Princess Street, second floor space, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

Plate 7 – Del Block, 62 Princess Street, second floor, original wood panelling and window framing, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

**62 PRINCESS STREET – DEL BLOCK**

Plate 8 – Princess Street looking north from Notre Dame Avenue, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

Plate 9 – Princess Street looking south from McDermot Avenue, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

**62 PRINCESS STREET – DEL BLOCK**

Plate 10 – Del Block Annex, 54 Princess Street (1905), left arrow, and Del Block, 62 Princess Street (1904), front (east) façades, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

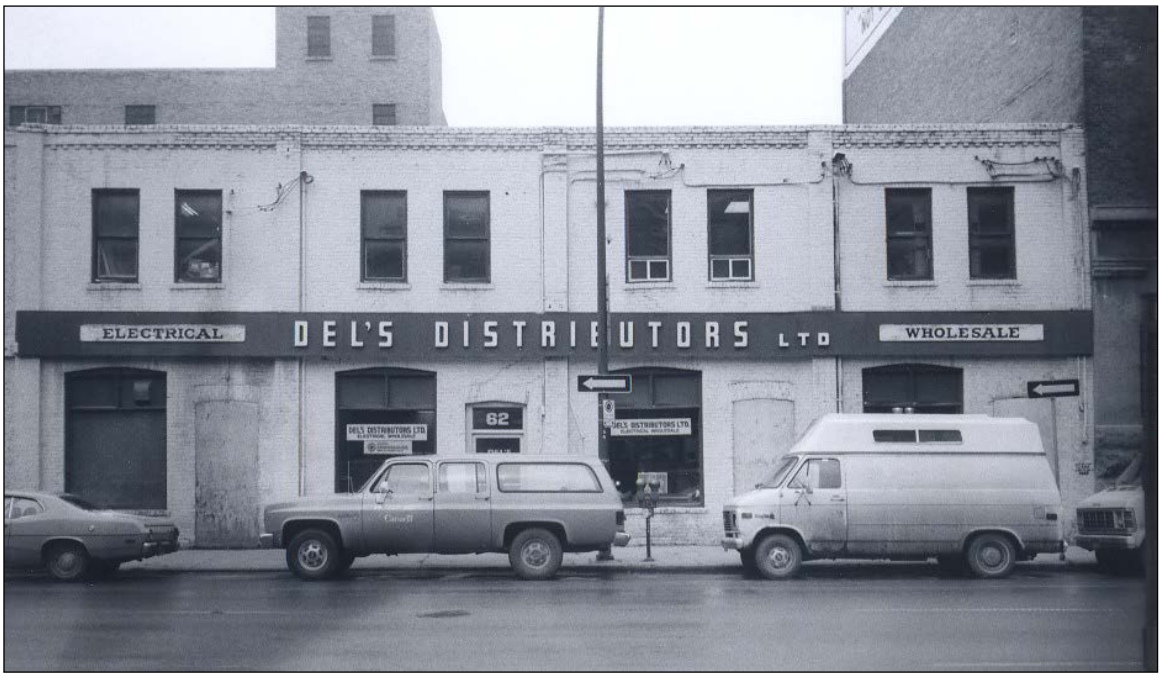


Plate 11 – Del Block, 62 Princess Street, 1978. (City of Winnipeg.)

**62 PRINCESS STREET – DEL BLOCK**

Plate 12 – Del Block, 62 Princess Street, 1994. (City of Winnipeg.)