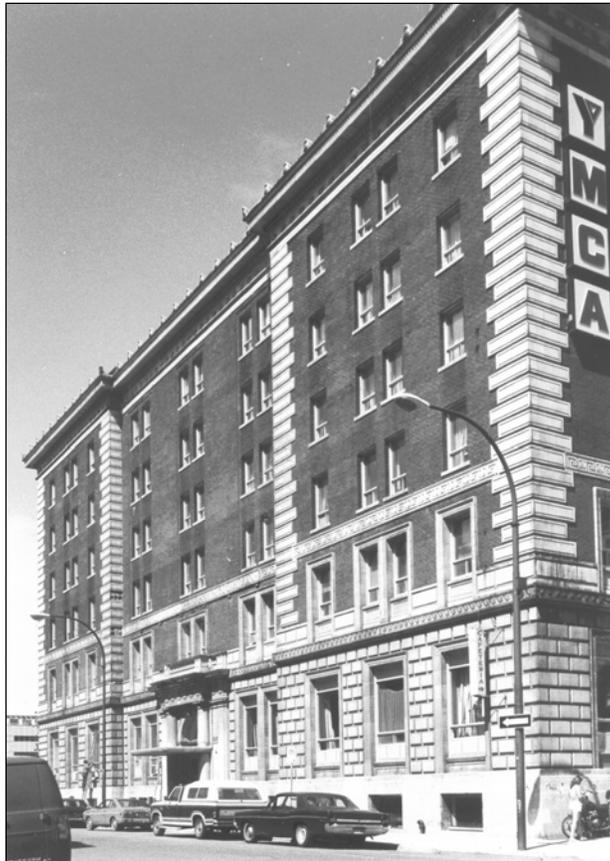


301 VAUGHAN STREET – Y.M.C.A. BUILDING
Jackson and Rosencrans (New York), J.H.G. Russell 1911-13



The Young Men's Christian Association (Y.M.C.A.), founded in London, England in 1844, by Sir George Williams, sought to provide a proper influence on a society that Williams felt was disintegrating because of rapid industrialization. Based on a distinctly religious foundation, the association also provided for the physical, social and educational needs necessary for the complete development of a maturing individual. The movement grew quickly, coming to North America in 1851 with the creation of a Montreal Y.M.C.A. In 1879, two individuals with "Y" experience in Toronto, J.A.M. Aikins (later the Lieutenant-Governor) and R.D. Richardson, opened a reading and meeting room in frontier Winnipeg.

By the 1890s membership had grown to over 300 and a building fund was started. In 1898, local architect George Browne was commissioned to design a permanent facility for the Association on Portage Avenue and Smith Street. In January, 1900, plans were finally approved for a four storey structure that included an indoor swimming pool and a full gymnasium. The structure still remains, but has been greatly altered, as Birk's retail store.

Within a brief period the Y.M.C.A. felt that their facilities were too small and in July, 1909, the Association purchased a site on Vaughan Street, just north of Portage Avenue. To raise the necessary capital for building, a massive civic campaign was launched. In seven days, 250 canvassers collected \$354,000. The money was to build and equip the new "Y" on Vaughan Street; build a second, North End "Y" on Selkirk Avenue; provide proper facilities for its summer campers; and, purchase an athletic field.

While the Selkirk "Y" opened in June, 1911, the central "Y" was delayed when test borings hit quicksand, setting back construction and adding an unforeseen \$10,000 to the cost. J.H. Ashdown laid the cornerstone in August, 1911, with the formal opening of the new building occurring on 4 May 1913.

Both new "Y" buildings were designed by Jackson and Rosencrans of New York, an architectural firm with extensive experience in planning Y.M.C.A. facilities (they also designed the Montreal "Y" built in 1912). Local architect J.H.G. Russell worked as an associate on both Winnipeg "Y" structures.

The Vaughan Street "Y" was designed as two inter-connecting blocks. The larger six storey portion was the main part of the building while the three storey section contained the pool and gymnasium. The ground floor of the symmetrical façade is faced with Tyndall limestone while the quoins, window surrounds, string courses and entablature are expressed in terra cotta that incorporates classic Greek motifs. A massive projecting cornice, or cornicione, provides a feeling of grandeur. The main entranceway features paired unfluted Roman Doric columns with a full entablature, a standard detail for "Y" buildings at this time.

The main entrance leads up a flight of stairs to a large reception room with a fireplace and inglenook. The ground floor also contained several offices, a board room, a music room and a large assembly room. At the rear of the main floor was the pool, lockers and a dining room. The upper three floors were divided into 160 bedrooms. Each room had a small window that faced an interior courtyard covered with a skylight.

In the late 1960s, an extensive renovation program was started which included a \$550,000 addition built above the pool wing to house five racquetball courts. The Y.M.C.A. is currently planning a major expansion and renovation of its building to link it with the new retail mall planned by the North Portage Development Corporation. The Y.M.C.A. must be commended for recognizing the historical importance of their building and ensuring that future additions and renovations are appropriate to the existing architectural character of the structure.