Increased freight traffic on the recently-formed Canadian National Railways (CNR) led to construction in two stages of this massive, four-storey warehouse and freight-forwarding facility in the southern half of the CNR’s East Yards.

The yards, at the confluence of the Assiniboine and Red rivers in downtown Winnipeg, were shared by Canadian Northern Railway (CNoR) and Grand Trunk Pacific Railway/National Transcontinental Railway (GTP/NTR) during the early 1900s. They were among five financially-troubled systems amalgamated into the publicly-owned CNR from 1917 to 1923.

Part of this process involved eliminating inefficient duplicate operations. In 1921, an agreement was struck with National Cartage and Storage Limited to consolidate the warehousing and hauling services carried out separately by the CNoR and the GTP/NTR. This firm, a wholly-
owned CNR subsidiary, soon required new storage space. In 1928, CNR’s architectural branch planned a new, on-site warehouse building for lease by the cartage company.

The structure was erected by Carter-Halls-Aldinger Company at an estimated cost of $134,700. A substantial addition was completed in 1930. The resulting facility, with more than 9,300 square metres of usable space, is one of the largest warehouses in Winnipeg and one of the few in Manitoba that is finished on all sides.

The free-standing warehouse features mill construction on a reinforced concrete and steel foundation.

The building rises from a concrete basement, with reinforced concrete columns supporting large timber purlins on steel beams. Buff-coloured exterior brick walls lead to a high parapet with concrete coping. The roof is designed to slope to drains. One corner of the building is angled to accommodate the turning radius of train cars that stop along the east wall.

The design is symmetrical, simple and utilitarian. Pilasters separate bays of mainly single horizontal windows, completed with stepped brick-work and a narrow cornice. The windows were of the industrial type with steel frames and single-paned wired glass. The interior was originally divided into heated and unheated storage space.

National Storage and Cartage occupied the premises until 1961. For the next 15 years, the warehouse was leased to Johnston National Cartage Company, later known as Johnston Terminals Company. The building was vacated in 1977 but reopened in 1993 as the Johnston Terminal Building, a retail/office complex in the heart of The Forks Market and The Forks National Historic Site.