308 FORT STREET – VENDOME HOTEL

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
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Hotels, given the nature of Winnipeg’s growth in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, were one of the most important building types throughout the ever-expanding downtown district. Winnipeg was always used as a stop off, whether by horse, steamboat or train. As the premier city of the Canadian prairies and the easternmost population centre, it became the first stop for businessmen, bankers, merchants, developers and homesteaders on their way further west. This necessitated the construction of hotels throughout what became downtown: initially along south Main Street near Upper Fort Garry (Plate 1), then near the new Canadian Pacific Railway station at Higgins Avenue (Plate 2) and finally throughout the rest of the growing downtown after 1900 (Plate 3).

Portage Avenue had usurped Main Street as the city’s commercial heart in the early 1900s when the T. Eaton Company announced plans for a major department store building on one of its blocks west of Main Street. The formal sod-turning ceremony for the massive department store that took place on July 15, 1904 and signalled the beginning of another land boom, as retailers, developers and speculators began purchasing Portage Avenue lots and older buildings. Also in 1904, the Dominion government announced plans to build a new Post Office at the corner of Portage Avenue and Garry Street, replacing the 1886 building located on the northeast corner of Main Street and McDermot Avenue.\(^1\) Although it was only a move of a few blocks south and west, it was another indication that Portage Avenue was going to lead the development of Winnipeg’s downtown in the early 20th century.

In the summer of 1898, the local papers announced the construction of another downtown hotel, this time just south of Portage Avenue on Fort Street. It was the development of a recent Ontario arrival, David Murray (1841-1920),\(^2\) and it opened before Christmas that year (Plate 4).


\(^2\) Manitoba Free Press, December 29, 1920, p. 3.
STYLE
Like theatres, hotels at the turn-of-the-century usually were not designed with a specific style – the intent was to convert passers-by into clients and often to project opulence onto the streetscape. As one owner of a continent-wide theatre chain remarked, “We sell tickets to theaters, not movies” and hotel owners often followed the same principle. This was achieved by a variety of exterior elements: broad canopy marquees and towering vertical signs. Outdoor electrical lighting had been developed by the nickelodeon theatres in the nineteenth century and this technique was used by later architects who were ‘seeking to catch the eye of potential patrons by outlining exteriors in stud lights and topping them with illuminated billboards as well as painting marquees in light.” This exterior ornamentation, often elaborate and eye-catching, normally did not adhere to any specific style but borrowed elements and detailing from a number of picturesque styles.

Although the Vendome Hotel’s front façade has changed over the years, there is still a sense of the original eye-catching design.

CONSTRUCTION
According to a contemporary account, the hotel was built at a cost of $14,000 in 1898. In 1902, the fourth floor was added to the hotel, costing $3,000 to complete. Two years later, underlining the success of the business, a large four-storey addition, approximately 13.1 x 8.8 metres, was made to the rear of the hotel to increase the available space. Final cost of this work was $6,200.

Wall thicknesses in the building range from 50.8-centimeter stone foundations walls to solid brick upper floors of 43.2 centimetres (main floor) and 33.0 centimetres on the upper three

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4 Ibid., p. 20.
5 Manitoba Free Press, October 1, 1898, p. 8.
6 City of Winnipeg Building Permit (below as BP), #791/1902.
7 Measurements approximated from aerial photographs showing roof division.
8 BP #663/1904.
floors. Ceiling heights measure 2.1 metres in the basement, 3.4 metres on the main floor and 2.9 metres on the three upper storeys (see Appendix I for more building information).  

**DESIGN**

A published rendering of the new hotel (Plate 4) shows a three storey structure with a pair of raised entrances flanked by large windows. The upper two storeys featured many window openings and the original flat roof appears to have been finished by a complete entablature. The second and third floors also feature shallow balconies accessed through doors centrally located on the façade.

The additional storey, completed in 1902, altered the roofline but does not appear to have made any other major changes to the exterior. The front (east) façade is divided into three vertical bays by pilasters that are also present at the north and south extremities of the elevation (Plate 5). These four elements are plain on the ground floor and deeply grooved on the upper floors, ending above the third storey windows in modest brick heads (original location of the roof). The two ground floor entrances (larger north opening) are accessed from a short, wide flight of stone stairs, these and the northern window include their original leaded glass transom windows in rounded openings (Plate 6). The south window was closed for a period of time (Plate 7) and then reopened without the leaded glass. A shallow canopy with attached signage separates this ground floor from the upper storeys. Floors two and three feature small windows in rounded openings with raised brick keystones connected by ornamental brick elements (Plate 8). The middle of these floors original featured balcony doors which have now been bricked in and the balconies removed (Plate 9). Ornamental brickwork above the third storey windows marks the location of the original roof; the 1902 top floor included a heavy overhanging metal cornice, arched in the middle with brackets (each holding a light bulb), dentils and festooned friezes – now removed (Plate 10). A pair of windows in arched openings is located in the centre of this floor. Above the cornice area are two windows in rectilinear openings and a flat roof with metal coping and a flagpole. The original fourth floor featured a more ornate roofline (Plate 7).

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9 City of Winnipeg Assessment Record, Roll No. 931150-12-2.
The south façade is partially covered by the neighbouring two-storey building, features a light well near the front (east) end of the building, windows in rectilinear openings with stone lug sills on all floors and patterned brickwork just below the flat roof (Plate 11). The rear (west) façade holds only a handful of window openings and a continuation of the patterned brickwork (Plate 12). The north elevation is similar to the south, faces the back lane and includes an open metal fire escape (Plate 13).

Major alterations after 1902 (all dates unknown) include the replacement of all window and door units, a new canopy, the removal of the second and third storey balconies and bricking in of their associated doors (Plate 14), removal of parapet ornamentation.

In December 2015, the metal cornice was removed because of concerns it might collapse.

**INTERIOR**

On the basis of advertisements in local papers, the Vendome Hotel offered restaurant and bar facilities when it opened along with upper floor rooms. The 1904 addition increased the number of rooms by 40.\(^{10}\) Remodelling in the early 1910s brought running water to each room and private baths to some of the rooms.\(^{11}\) Evidence in the building also suggests a wide, spacious main staircase winding up the centre of the building, although walls have now enclosed the space (Plate 15).

The small rooms (Plate 16) are located on either side of the hallway (Plate 17) and common bathroom facilities are provided on each floor. Some original ornamental tin is found on the ground floor staircases, an ornate wooden door frame is located on the north side of the bar (Plate 18) and the basement includes original urinals from the men’s washroom (Plate 19). The fourth floor has been gutted.

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\(^{10}\) *Manitoba Free Press*, December 14, 1903, p. 10.

INTEGRITY
The building stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition for its age. Alterations to the original exterior design and materials have been numerous.

STREETSCAPE
Since its construction in the late 1890s, the Vendome Hotel has been an integral part of a block of entertainment-related facilities that by World War I also included several popular theatres (both “photo play” or movie houses and live vaudeville (Plates 20-25). Most of the hotel’s contemporaries have been replaced by modern buildings (Plate 26).

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTOR
None of the contemporary accounts name an architect for the original building, but the 1902 and 1904 additions were designed by local designer Henry S. Griffith (1865-1943). British born and trained, Griffith became one of the provinces better known architects by the early 1900s (see Appendix II for biographical information). He has been given 10 points by the Historical Buildings and Resources Committee.

Small-scale local contractors John Hodgins and William Horner built the additional storey in 1902, Horner built the 1904 rear addition.  

PERSON/INSTITUTION
The Vendome Hotel was the brainchild of David Murray. Born in Esquesing Township, just west of Toronto, Upper Canada (present-day Ontario) in 1841 but he moved to Sault Ste. Marie sometime prior to 1898 when he moved to Winnipeg with his wife and five children. Upon his

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12 BP #791/1902 and 663/1904.
13 Census of Canada, 1901.
14 Manitoba Free Press, June 3, 1902, p. 3. Murray was a significant land owner in Sault Ste. Marie, he won a court case taken to the Supreme Court in 1902 over 310 lots valued at $35,000.
arrival here, he announced plans to build and operate a new downtown hotel,\textsuperscript{15} which quickly became a popular spot. Murray’s two sons, William (1873-ca.1925) and Ira Stewart (1878-1945), took over the operations sometime between 1906 and 1913 (Plate 27).\textsuperscript{16} After I.S. Stewart’s death, the hotel was sold and in 1953, it was purchased by the Reliance Securities Corporation, c/o Drewry’s Brewery.\textsuperscript{17} The ownership of downtown hotels and drinking establishments by local breweries, including Shea’s and Drewry, was a common trend seen during this period. By the early 2000s, space in the hotel was being used as office space and according to City of Winnipeg sources; the fourth floor was not being used by 2005.

From 1905-1912, the Vendome was the residence of Reginald Buller (1874-1944), called one of the University of Manitoba’s “…earliest, and certainly most colourful [sic], builders” (Plate 28) and for whom the Buller Science Building, opened in 1932, was named. Buller, a specialist in the study fungi, was one of the first six professors hired by the University in 1904 and moved to the McLaren Hotel, 554 Main Street in 1913 (where he lived the rest of his life).\textsuperscript{18}

**EVENT**

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

**CONTEXT**

Winnipeg’s downtown was expanding rapidly during the first decade of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century and Portage Avenue became the centre of this expansion – banks, office buildings, retail stores and hotels. Hotels were an extremely popular building form in the downtown; nearly $4 million was

\textsuperscript{15} Manitoba Free Press, August 10, 1898, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{16} Census of Canada, 1901; Manitoba Free Press, October 8, 1906, p. 2, January 23, 1913, p. 24 and December 29, 1920, p. 3; and Winnipeg Free Press, June 22, 1945, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{17} City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls, Roll No. 12-093115000, 1898-1960.

spent building and altering these structures between 1899 and 1913. The modest Vendome took its place among the many downtown hotels.

**LANDMARK**

The Vendome Hotel would be recognizable to many citizens of Winnipeg because of its unique front façade, its public use and its location on a busy downtown street.

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19 City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books, 1899-1913.
APPENDIX I

CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report

Assessment Record

Building Address: 308 Fort Street

Building Name: Vendome Hotel

Original Use: hotel

Current Use: hotel

Roll No.: 12093115000

RSN: 134545

Municipality: 12

Ward: 2

Property or Occupancy Code: --

Legal Description: 1 St. John, Plan 24135, Lot 41

Location: west side between Portage and Graham avenues

Date of Construction: 1898

Storeys: 4 + B

Heritage Status: ON NOMINATED LIST

Construction Type: ordinary brick and stone foundation


- 791/1902 $3,000 (additional storey); 663/1904 $6,200 (rear addition); 1689/1937 [CS] $1,200 (repairs); 7480/1949 $2,000 (interior alterations); 826/1951 $1,200 (interior alterations); 3559/1956 $4,000 (interior alterations); 5377/1962 [CS] $7,000 (interior alterations); 7661/1962 [CS] $2,000 (alterations); 577/1964 [CS] $1,500 (interior alterations); 7582/1967 $12,000 (interior alterations); 681/1977 $18,000 (interior alterations); 6752/1988 $5,400 (interior alterations); 184547/2001 $15,000 (interior alterations)

Information:

- Permit 184547/2001- interior alterations to comply with Fire Safety By-Law (installing the appropriate hardware on doors and fire rating in basement, main floor lobby and 2\textsuperscript{nd} & 3\textsuperscript{rd} floors

ARCHITECT: UNKNOWN (1898); GRIFFITH, H.S. (1902 & 1904)

CONTRACTOR: UNKNOWN (1898); HODGINS, J. & HORNER, W. (1902); HORNER, W. (1904)
APPENDIX II

Henry Sandham Griffith

H.S. Griffith was one of several British architects who immigrated to Canada in the last two decades of the twentieth century and ended up practicing in Winnipeg. Griffith was born in Oxfordshire, England in 1865, the son of Reverend G. S. Griffith. Architectural training took the form of three years of service (1882-1885) to Reading, England firm of Webb and Tubbs. In 1886, Griffith trained as a draftsman with the London District Surveyor’s office.¹

He came to Winnipeg in the spring of 1887 where he found employment with the Northern Pacific Railway and later with the Land Titles Office. Both positions dealt mainly with surveying activities but, in May of 1892, Griffith opened an architectural and general drafting practice in the city.² Although this practice was relatively small, he designed several buildings across the province. He moved to Saskatoon in 1906 and Victoria in 1907. He stayed in British Columbia for the remainder of his life, designing many residential and commercial buildings. The 1918 collapse of his firm followed its rapid expansion during the 1900-1912 land boom. After several years in Victoria, designing many fine homes in some of the most exclusive neighbourhoods, he moved his practice to Vancouver where he continued to work and lived until his death on October 18, 1943.

An incomplete list includes:³

Winnipeg:
- Plans for St. John’s Park (Main Street), Assiniboine Park (River Avenue) and Victoria Park (Pacific Avenue) for City of Winnipeg Parks Board (1894)⁴
- R.E. Young House, Armstrong’s Point (alterations and addition - 1894)⁵
- G.H. Snow House (1894)

¹ “A Group of Winnipeg Architects” in Canadian Architect and Builder, January 1897, pp. 5-6.
² Manitoba Free Press, May 7, 1892, p. 2.
³ Compiled from: Ibid.; “Griffith, H.S.” (file of the Province of Manitoba, Historic Resources Branch); M. Peterson, “Ryan Block - 104 King Street,” report for the Historical Buildings Committee; and B.C. Archives. Note: Norwood Cricket Club information from The Daily Nor'-Wester, November 2, 1895, p. 1.
⁵ Manitoba Free Press, November 5, 1894, p. 6.
H.S. Griffiths Winnipeg designs, continued:
Ryan Block, 104 King Street (1895) – Grade III
Norwood Cricket Club Pavilion (1895)
House, 175 Donald Street (1895)
Rev. Andrew Stewart House, 239 Colony Street (1896)
Mitchell Building, 211 Rupert Avenue (1896)
Brookside Cemetery Chapel and Vault (1897)
Dyson, Gibson and Co. Warehouse, Cooper Street (1898) – demolished
Central Fire Hall, 110 Albert Street (1899)
Machray School No. 2, 350 Charles Street (1899) – demolished
Leckie Building, 216 McDermot Avenue (1900)
Olafson Block, 216 James Avenue (1901) – demolished
Northwest Laundry Building, 181 Main Street (1901) – demolished
Baker Block (Birt’s Saddlery), 468 Main Street (1901)
St. Boniface Normal School, 210 rue Masson (1902) – Grade II
C. Vokes House, 136 Middle Gate (1902)
Criterion Hotel, 214 McDermot Avenue (1903) – Grade II
Manitoba Bridge & Iron Works Factory workshop, 845 Logan Avenue (1903) - demolished
M. Lechtzier's Turkish and Russian Bathhouse, 216 Pacific Avenue (1903) – demolished
Wilkes Stables, McDermot Avenue (1903) - demolished
Winnipeg General Hospital Buildings, Bannatyne Avenue (1903)
Mount Royal (Wolseley) Hotel, 186 Higgins Avenue (1904)
Oxford Hotel, 216 Notre Dame Avenue (1905)
Lendrum McMeans House, 40 West Gate (1907)

Portage la Prairie:
Trinity United Church (Knox Presbyterian), 15 Tupper Street South (1897)
James Cowan Block (1897)
Pratt Opera House alteration (1898)
St. Mary la Prairie Church, 36 Second Street NW (1898-1899)
T. & W. Millar Hardware Store (1899)
A. McKillop Furniture Store (1899)
John Ferriss House (1899)
J. Fulton House (1899)
T.B. Mills Block (1899)
J.R. McDonald House (1899)
Bailey Block (1900)

Manitoba:
Stonewall – two businesses/warehouse blocks (1895)
Minnedosa – bank building (1899)
Morden - P.C. Heckels House (1900)
Westbourne – Episcopal Church (1900)
H.S. Griffiths Manitoba designs, continued:

Belmont – Belmont School No. 411 (1901) – demolished
Carberry – Carberry Methodist Church, Third Avenue (1903)
Neepawa – I.O.O.F. Building, 376 Mountain Avenue (1903)
McGregor – McGregor School No. 240 (1903) – demolished
Neepawa – Neepawa Hospital (1904)
Roland – Roland School No. 902 (1904) – demolished

British Columbia:
Alexis Martin House “Edgecliffe”, Victoria (1910)
West Lawn Building, Riverview Mental Hospital Complex, Vancouver (1910-13)
West Pender Building, Vancouver (1912)
Dominion Trust Co. Building (Coulthard-Sutherland Building), New Westminster (1913)\(^6\)
Hon. T. W. Patterson House, Victoria (1914)\(^7\)
Mining Building, Vancouver
Vancouver Board of Trade Building, Vancouver

\(^6\) Information from “Heritage Planning Files, City of New Westminster” found at flickr.com/photos/bobkh/339091100.

Plate 1 – West side of Main Street between York and St. Mary streets, 1892. Note the lack of empty lots as far as the eye can see north. Buildings on the left from south to north are: Dominion Lands Office; Trust and Loan Co. of Canada; Winnipeg Hotel (still standing); Dominion Hotel; Commercial Hotel (still standing) and the Fortune Block (still standing). (Archives of Manitoba, Victor Acker Collection- 2, N842.)
Plate 2 – This 1892 image shows the west side of Main Street south of Higgins Avenue, across from the Canadian Pacific Railway Station with the Scandinavian Hotel (#1) and the Tecumseh House Hotel (#2). (Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg-Streets-Main Street Views, 1892.)

Plate 3 – The Clarendon Hotel, 311 Portage Avenue (at Donald Street), one of the earlier downtown hotels, ca.1905 (demolished 2012). (M. Peterson Collection.)
Plate 4 – Rendering of the new Hotel Vendome, 1898. (Reproduced from Winnipeg Tribune, December 28, 1898, p. 2.)
Plate 5 – Vendome Hotel, 308 Fort Street, front (east) facade, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)
Plate 6 – Vendome Hotel, 308 Fort Street, front (east) façade, detail of ground floor, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 7 – Vendome Hotel, 308 Fort Street, front (east) façade, 1978. Note the closed south window on the ground floor and the ornamental treatment of the roofline. (City of Winnipeg.)
Plate 8 – Vendome Hotel, 308 Fort Street, front (east) façade, detail of upper floors, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)
Plate 9 – Vendome Hotel, 308 Fort Street, front (east) façade, detail of removed balcony area of the upper floors, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)
Plate 10 – Vendome Hotel, 308 Fort Street, front (east) façade, detail of top floor, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 11 – Vendome Hotel, 308 Fort Street, rear (west) and south façades, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 12 – Vendome Hotel, 308 Fort Street, rear (west) façade, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 13 – Vendome Hotel, 308 Fort Street, north façade, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 14 – Vendome Hotel, 308 Fort Street, interior view of closed 2nd floor balcony door, 2016.
(M. Peterson, 2016.)
Plate 15 – Vendome Hotel, 308 Fort Street, main staircase from the second floor landing, note the ornate wooden banister, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)
Plate 16 – Vendome Hotel, 308 Fort Street, typical room (2nd floor), 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)
Plate 17 – Vendome Hotel, 308 Fort Street, 2nd floor hallway, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)
Plate 18 – Vendome Hotel, 308 Fort Street, ornate doorway, main floor bar, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)
Plate 19 – Vendome Hotel, 308 Fort Street, original urinals, basement, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)
Plate 20 – Looking north down Fort Street towards Portage Avenue, 1918. This image shows the development of Fort Street and the immediate vicinity into an entertainment district with: Orpheum Theatre, 283 Fort Street (#1); National Theatre, 300 Fort Street (#2); the Vendome Hotel, 308 Fort Street (#3); and the Province Theatre, 209 Notre Dame Avenue (#4). (Archives of Manitoba, L.B. Foote Collection No. 1598.)
Plate 21 – Fort Street at night, no date, with lighted signage. (Rob McInnes Post Card Collection, WP 1201, courtesy of the Winnipeg Public Library.)
Plate 22 – Undated colour postcard showing Portage Avenue. Vendome Hotel at arrow. (Phil Wiwchar Postcard, #2838, courtesy of the Winnipeg Public Library.)
Plate 23 – Orpheum Theatre, 283 Fort Street, ca.1913. The Orpheum was opened in 1911 as one of the city’s leading vaudeville stages with luxurious seating for 2,000. It closed in 1947. (Rob McInnes Post Card Collection, WP 1146, courtesy of the Winnipeg Public Library.)
Plate 24 – National Theatre, 298 Fort Street, 1913. The National, opened as the Victoria Theatre in 1912 showing photoplays (movies) but became a vaudeville house in 1913. It reopened as the National, a movie theatre, in 1915 and closed in 1926. (Archives of Manitoba, L.B. Foote Collection No. 1622.)
Plate 25 – Province Theatre, 209 Notre Dame Avenue, 1922. The Province opened as a moving picture theatre in 1910. Its unique exterior was remodelled in 1937 and it opened as the Rio until 1950 when it was renamed the Grand. It was closed in 1961 and demolished shortly after. (Archives of Manitoba, L.B. Foote Collection No. 1621.)
Plate 26 – Fort Street looking north towards Portage Avenue, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

Plate 27 – 1913 advertisement for the Vendome Hotel, owned by the Murray Brothers. (Manitoba Free Press, August 7, 1913, p. 24.)