Built in 1881-1882 at the south-east corner of Main and York, the Cauchon Block was one of Winnipeg’s most impressive structures. It was designed by architect Louis Arsene Désy for Joseph-Édouard Cauchon (1816-1885), journalist, politician, businessman, and Manitoba’s first francophone Lieutenant-Governor.

Officially opened in February 1883 as a commercial building, the Cauchon Block could house eight businesses on the ground level and approximately fifty offices in its three upper storeys. Particularly striking and rare in Western Canada were the building’s façades, designed in the Victorian Italianate Style and constructed of cast-iron columns, galvanized pressed metal and zinc, produced entirely by local manufacturers.

A declining economy forced the sale of the property to the Québec firm of Dunn and Price which converted the Cauchon Block in 1884 into residential apartments, the first in Winnipeg.
1885 to 1897, the building was severely damaged by three fires. In 1904-1905, it regained its prestige when it was purchased by the McLaren Brothers and restored into a first-class hotel and named The Empire. This distinction was short-lived however, with the arrival of competing hotels.

Before the Empire was demolished in 1982, its metal façades were retrieved for safekeeping as objects of historical and architectural significance. Several of the bays were restored and installed in the Centre Culturel Franco-Manitobain, 340 Provencher Boulevard.