STOVEL BLOCK (KAY BUILDING)

245 McDERMOT AVENUE

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee

July 1998
Although Winnipeg’s dramatic growth phase did not occur until after 1900, the foundation for it had been laid decades earlier. During the Canadian Pacific Railway real estate boom of the early 1880s, much of what is now downtown was reorganized and older residential buildings were replaced by large warehouses and factories in the developing warehouse district west of Main Street. The boom also brought the city into the national spotlight. Thousands of men, women and children flocked to Winnipeg to make it their home. This rise in population required the development of a number of service industries – one of the most important of which was the publishing and printing sector.

The first printing operation in what is now the Province of Manitoba dates to 1841 at a mission near Norway House where Methodist minister James Evans’s makeshift equipment produced 100 copies of his 16-page Cree translation of hymns.¹ Eighteen years passed before the area’s first newspaper, The Nor’Wester, began publishing in the Red River Settlement. But the printing sector kept pace with the rising demand for newspapers, pamphlets, advertisements, magazines, business cards, directories, and other printed matter. These produced materials soon found their way beyond the local stage to national and international audiences.

One of the pioneer firms, the Stovel Company, was founded in 1889 by three brothers who had been involved in printing a weekly newspaper in Ontario.² In 1893, in need of larger space to keep up with the rising demand for their services, the brothers built their first Winnipeg headquarters in the heart of the warehouse district at the corner of Arthur Street and McDermot Avenue (Plate 1).

² Winnipeg Tribune, September 30, 1972, p. 10.
STYLE
This warehouse was designed in the Romanesque Revival style which became popular in warehouse districts throughout North America in the 1880s and was enthusiastically embraced in Winnipeg’s Exchange District. The style found extensive use under the tutelage of American architect H.H. Richardson (1838-86) and is often referred to as Richardsonian Romanesque.³

The style is recognizable by its use of strong, rough textures, its massiveness, the flatness of the elevations, the rhythmic placement of windows, and the use of the rounded arch. While it was used for the design of homes, commercial structures and even schools (for example, Wesley College [University of Winnipeg], 515 Portage Avenue, built 1896 – Plate 2), it came to be the style of choice in the warehouse district where its sturdy appearance portrayed stability and strength.

Period examples are numerous, one of the most similar to the Stovel Block being the Galt Building, 103 Princess Street (Plate 3), built in 1887 and designed by Charles H. Wheeler (1838-1917). Comparable features include the rounded corner and accenting at the roofline. The window design of the Galt Building – smaller upper-floor windows and more pronounced arches throughout – give it a more delicate visage than the Stovel Block. The John W. Peck and Co. Warehouse, 33 Princess Street (Plate 4), is another excellent example of the style. It was built in 1893 and also designed by Wheeler.

CONSTRUCTION
The Stovel Block is built with mill construction methods – large, squared timbers were used as beams and posts to provide support for the heavy wooden floors and brick exterior walls. This construction method was very popular in the district for a number of reasons. Firstly, it provided excellent support on all floors, a necessity for warehouses storing large quantities of heavy stock. Secondly, with the proper foundation, these buildings could be designed to take up entire city blocks and reach heights of five or six storeys, allowing owners to take full advantage of the
expensive downtown property. Finally, the large timber members burnt slowly, increasing the
fire safety of the buildings, a very important consideration for building and business owners.

The structure was built in two sections. The original building measured approximately 9.2 x
20.3 metres (30 x 66½ feet) and was two storeys on a raised foundation. Reflecting the success
of the business and, on the larger scale, the whole Winnipeg economy, a major addition was
completed in 1900. Two storeys were added to the original structure and then extended 21.3
metres (70 feet) west along McDermot Avenue (Plate 5). The 1893 section cost $8,000, while
the addition cost $22,000.

One of the unique aspects of the building is its colour. The exterior walls appear to be built of
red brick. This is not the case. Pictures into the 1910s show the original building and the large
addition were completed in light-coloured clay brick (see Plate 5). By the early 1930s, civic
records list the colour of the structure as red.

DESIGN

The design of this warehouse in 1893 followed many of the precedents of other area blocks, but
also had a few variations. At grade, one notices the tall, squared basement windows which reach
a height of nearly 1.8 metres (6 feet) above the sidewalk. A continuous band of rusticated stone
forms the heads of these openings on the structure’s three public façades: McDermot Avenue
(south), Arthur Street (east) and King Street (west). Above this, the next two floors of the
original Arthur Street and McDermot Avenue elevations were divided into three bays and one
bay respectively and nicely tied together by a curved corner that held the main entrance (Plate 6).
The bays, which were separated by brick pilasters, each held a pair of windows with semi-

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4 City of Winnipeg Assessment Record, Roll No. 609180-12-2 (PC 50). Below as AR.
5 Manitoba Free Press, September 16, 1893, p. 3.
6 City of Winnipeg Building Permit (below as BP), #180/1900.
7 AR.
circular arches. The arches were further highlighted by pattern brick and keystones, and the openings were finished with stone lug sills. Stylized brick string courses wrapped around these two façades. The flat roof was highlighted by rows of corbelled brick, another string course and a plain brick parapet with ornately topped projections that continued the line of the pilasters.

The large 1900 addition was planned by the same architect who designed the original structure. Therefore the language of the original is continued in the new section and around onto the new King Street façade (although this elevation is divided into four bays unlike the Arthur Street façade – Plate 7). Four more bays were added to the McDermot Avenue façade. The upper two floors provide an interesting contrast to the lower levels. The bays and pilasters continue on the upper two floors, as do the delicate string courses. The arches of the upper floors are flatter but still possess keystones and stone lug sills. The original roofline embellishments are repeated with minor changes (Plate 8). Whereas with other warehouses in the district additional floors and extensions can often detract from the original design, the Stovel Block does not look as if it was built in two stages.

**INTERIOR**

This building originally served several purposes. It housed the large machinery and other necessary equipment of the printing company, along with offices and other public space (Plate 9). The second floor was leased for a time to a weekly German newspaper, Der Nordwestern. As new machinery and techniques were developed in the printing sector, the Stovel Company continued to expand its operations, necessitating the completion of the commodious 1900 addition (space again was leased to the newspaper and other businesses). Given the activities carried on in the building, interior finishes were modest, stressing durability rather than aesthetics.

Tragedy struck on the night of May 2, 1916 when a fire completely gutted the building. The walls still intact, the company decided to rebuild the structure, although it never again occupied the space. Reconstruction did not substantially change the interior layout of the warehouse/factory.
The building’s basement and first two floors were completely renovated in 1995-96 into a nightclub (Planet X). This establishment has since closed and at present the sole tenant is the Manitoba Amateur Boxing Association which has built temporary training facilities on the second floor (Plate 10). The upper two floors remain in original condition (Plate 11). A unique feature of the ground floor is the existence of the original west wall of the 1893 structure (Plate 12).

INTEGRITY
The Stovel Block stands in its original location and appears to be in good structural condition. The aforementioned fire did not lead to significant changes, although subsequent renovations and new tenants have caused some exterior and interior changes. In 1940, the new owners of the building spent $5,000 on exterior alterations. A new metal fire escape was built on the building’s west side and two entrances (the main doors in the corner and the Arthur Street opening) were closed. The McDermot Avenue entrance was rebuilt, unsympathetically designed in the Art Deco style (Plate 13). The other major alteration, as mentioned previously, was the conversion of part of the interior into a nightclub (at a total cost of over $50,000).

The exterior of the block has suffered little alteration since its completion in 1900 and parts of the interior remain virtually unchanged since the rebuilding of 1916-17.

STREETSCAPE
The Stovel Block occupies an important corner in the heart of the warehouse district (Plate 14). As part of the nationally designated Exchange District, the building has for many years been a significant contributor to three of the area’s busiest streetscapes. The Historical Buildings Committee has awarded 60 points to other Exchange District warehouses in recognition of the importance of each building within the area.

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8 BP #533/1940.
9 BP #6663/1995 ($8,900) and #925/1996 ($44,000).
ARCHITECT/CONTRACTOR

Architect Hugh McCowan (1841-1908) designed both the 1893 structure\(^{10}\) and the 1900 addition.\(^{11}\) McCowan was one of a handful of well-known architects working in the city prior to 1900 (see Appendix I for biographical information). He has been given 10 points by the Historical Buildings Committee.

The original plumbing system was installed by Charles and William Plaxton. These brothers came to the city in ca.1882 and took on a third brother, John, to form Plaxton Brothers a year later. They were responsible for the plumbing of numerous warehouses, office buildings and residences throughout the city. The company dissolved shortly after the turn of the century although John Plaxton continued to work as a plumber into the 1940s from the long-time headquarters at 244 Main Street.\(^{12}\)

The major addition of 1900 was completed by the C.H. Simpson Company\(^{13}\) and the reconstruction of 1916-17 was the work of the Sutherland Construction Company.\(^{14}\)

PERSON/INSTITUTION

The Stovel Company was founded by three brothers from Ontario – John, Augustus B. and Chester D. Stovel (Plate 15).\(^{15}\) They came to Winnipeg in 1885 from their birthplace at Mount Forest, Canada West (Ontario) where they had been involved in printing a weekly paper.\(^{16}\) John

\(^{10}\) City of Winnipeg Plumbing Permit #422/1893.
\(^{11}\) BP #180/1900.
\(^{12}\) City of Winnipeg Assessment Roll (below as ARo), Roll No. 929810 (old number 16771), Ward 1.
\(^{13}\) BP #180/1900.
\(^{14}\) BP #1011/1916.
\(^{15}\) Winnipeg Tribune, May 30, 1923, p. 1; Winnipeg Free Press, December 20, 1937, pp. 1 and 7; and “Biography Scrapbooks,” Legislative Library, B7, p. 107. The three men were very successful in many fields. John (ca.1858-1923) was a Member of the Provincial Legislature in 1921 and 1922, president of the Winnipeg Board of Trade, and managing executive of the Y.M.C.A. for a term. Chester D. (1870-1937) was a director of the Standard Trusts Company and president of Nor’West Farmers Limited and Canadian Farm Implements Limited. Augustus B. (1865-1921) was a director of the Empire Loan Company and president of the Baptist Union of Western Canada.
\(^{16}\) Winnipeg Tribune, September 30, 1972, p. 10.
began a modest printing company in Winnipeg in 1888. The next year, the brothers formed the Stovel Company, with headquarters in the Spencer Block (which was later demolished to make way for the Curry Building on Portage Avenue).\textsuperscript{17}

In 1893, the firm, which had steadily increased its business, built its grand new headquarters in the heart of the growing warehouse district. That same year, the company purchased an engraving and lithographing firm operated by H.C. and J.W. Stovel, opening new markets to the three brothers. The firm, using special plates from France, was the first in Western Canada to make colour prints.

Stovel’s incorporated as a limited stock company in 1909 but control remained within the family. The company was known for its paternalistic concern for its employees, organizing annual picnics (Plate 16) and sporting teams. The employees, in turn, were very loyal to Stovel’s, even forming a Stovel Mutual Club, a benefit society to give financial support to members in case of personal problems.\textsuperscript{18}

Growth in the business occurred rapidly into the 20\textsuperscript{th} century and in 1914, the company had ambitious plans drawn up for a six-storey factory/office structure (Plate 17 and 18) on land it had purchased in 1912 on the north side of Bannatyne Avenue from Dagmar to Ellen streets.\textsuperscript{19} The plans called for only a small portion of the larger building to be completed. The Annex, as it was known, was completed as a one-storey structure on a raised foundation measuring approximately 18.6 x 27.5 metres (61 x 90 feet).\textsuperscript{20} The new building was used for paper storage.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{17} Historical Outline of The House of Stovel (Winnipeg: Stovel Company Limited, 1931), p. 9. Below as House of Stovel.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 35; and S.C. Grover, “245 McDermot Avenue – Kay Building (Formerly Stovel Building),” report for the Historical Buildings Committee, 1981, pp. 2-3.

\textsuperscript{19} ARo, Roll No. 611075, Ward 2 (365 Bannatyne Avenue).

\textsuperscript{20} Architect’s Plans, #2169/1914. The larger structure was to measure 60.7 x 42.9 metres (199 x 140.5 feet). The completed structure cost $43,000, was designed by Woodman and Carey and was built by the Fort Garry Construction Company.

\textsuperscript{21} House of Stovel, p. 12.
The major fire at the McDermot Avenue building in early May 1916 forced the company to push ahead with the plans for the new facility, although the war necessitated a scaling-down of the original plans. The fire destroyed machinery, melted original plates and ruined stock. The loss to the building and property was estimated at $400,000. The company moved into its Bannatyne Avenue Annex the day after the fire and newspapers carried line drawings of the new home of the Stovel Company (Plate 19). Within the year, the company was operating out of its modern factory (Plate 20).

The innovative company remained at the forefront of the printing business in Canada for many years. It was the first in Western Canada to use electricity to run their presses and to employ machines such as book-folders and automatic feeders. The art department was renowned across the country. The company also was Canada’s first printer to use a wax process to engrave maps. This process was extremely specialized and difficult and the Stovel Company received numerous contracts from the Dominion government. High-quality limited edition books were also a specialty of the firm. The company printed the early *Henderson’s Directory* in the West, published weekly and monthly journals distributed across Canada, and was the original printer of the Harlequin Romance pocketbooks.

After the deaths of the three founding brothers, other family members took control of the company. However, the firm ultimately moved into non-family management. It was renamed Stovel-Advocate Publishing ca.1953 and disappeared from city directories in 1976.

The Stovel Company owned the McDermot Avenue warehouse until 1940 although it never again occupied the building after the 1916 fire. The T. Eaton Company leased the space until 1920 as it awaited the completion of its new Mail Order Building on Donald Street. Over the

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22 *Winnipeg Tribune*, May 3, 1916, pp. 1 and 11. The fire also brought to the fore a serious problem with the city’s water supply. During the fire, pressure was inadequate due to the clogging of the intake valve of the high-pressure system. It was the second time in two years that firemen could not properly fight a major fire and ultimately led to the upgrading of the system by the city.

23 Grover, op. cit., p. 3.

next 20 years, it was occupied by a number of textile supply companies including Dominion Knitting and Manufacturing, Broadway Garments Company and Dress Fabrics Limited.\textsuperscript{25}

The new owner/occupant of the building in 1940 was Kay’s Limited, a dry goods business. Like Stovel, Kay’s was a family business, founded by Hyman Kay. He was born in Russia in 1888 and emigrated with his family to England at the age of two. In 1899, the family moved to Hirsch, Saskatchewan, farming in the area for two years. In 1901, the Kay family settled in Winnipeg and four years later, at the age of 17, Hyman Kay opened a tiny dry goods business on Selkirk Avenue.\textsuperscript{26} From this modest beginning grew a large dry goods firm (incorporated as Kay’s Limited in 1923) that by the late 1960s was one of the largest in Western Canada.\textsuperscript{27}

Kay also found success outside of the business world, being a major figure in the construction of the new Shaarey Zedek Synagogue on Wellington Crescent in 1949. He was a founder of the Jewish Welfare Fund, established the Children’s Hospital Research Fund (1958) and created perpetual bursaries at the University of Manitoba and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He died on August 19, 1969.\textsuperscript{28} Kay’s continues to operate in the city as a division of KayJet Promotions Limited with offices at 66 King Street.

\textbf{EVENT}

There is no known significant event connected with this structure.

\textbf{CONTEXT}

The Stovel Block was built just prior to the era of massive growth of the warehouse district, Winnipeg and Western Canada. Its huge addition in 1900 is reflective of the type of growth realized by so many local firms as their business stretched across the rapidly filling plains west

\textsuperscript{25} Grover, op. cit., p. 4.
\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Winnipeg Free Press}, September 13, 1967, p. 63.
of the city. Unlike many of its neighbours, the Stovel Company offered many services and goods not available anywhere else in Canada and, as such, was assured of success and contracts from within Winnipeg and without.

The building’s two long-time owners/tenants were both family-run operations, an example of the long-term success that many of the businesses operating in the Exchange District before, during and after the 1900-14 era enjoyed.

**LANDMARK**

Its colour and prime location make the Stovel Block a conspicuous structure in the district.
CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report

Assessment Record

Date: June 1998
Prepared By: M. Peterson

Building Address: 245 McDermot Avenue  Building Name: Stovel Block (Kay Building)

Original Use: factory/offices  Current Use: vacant

Roll No. (Old): 609180 (10094)

Municipality: 12  Ward: 2  Property or Occupancy Code: 50

Legal Description: 6 St. John (6/7W, Plan 16, Lot 5)

Location: northwest corner of Arthur Street

Date of Construction: 1893  Storeys: 4 and basement

Construction Type: brick and stone foundation (mill)

- 180/1900 $22,000 (4 storey addition, 70 x 66½ feet); 565/1916 $3,000 (new roof); 1011/1916 [A] $26,200 (fire repair); 114/1925 [A] $15,000 (sprinkler system); 533/1940 [A] $5,000 (alterations); 3710/1956 $300 (new entrance); 7047/1970 $1,000 (new shipping door); 3460/1978 [V11B04] $15,000 (freight elevator); 6663/1995 [V-M18C07] $8,900 (interior alterations); 925/1996 [V-M18C07] $44,000 (interior alterations)

Information:
- 70 x 66 x 68 + = 451,072 cu. ft.
- Permit 3710/1956- entrance moved ~3 feet from sidewalk
- Permit 533/1940- new fire escape on west side, close 2 entrances, make new one, new elevator, vault & manager’s office, general redecoration and cleaning
- 1990- convert to gas boiler from city steam plant
- 1996- basement, 1st and 2nd converted into nightclub (Planet X), 3rd and 4th left in original condition (not occupied)
HUGH McCOWAN

Hugh McCowan was born in Wardsville (near St. Thomas), Canada West (Ontario) in 1841. He learned the trade of carpentry in his hometown and moved to Flint, Michigan to further his architectural training. Due to failing health, McCowan moved to Winnipeg in the 1870s in hopes of making a recovery. He worked as a contractor for the first ten years, but by the early 1880s had opened an architectural office.1

McCowan continued to work throughout the province for the next 27 years, designing a variety of structures. He is listed in a local paper in 1906 as the senior partner in the firm McCowan and Davies (Robert E.). Davies was born and trained as an architect in Nottingham, England and came to Winnipeg and worked for several years as McCowan’s assistant. He became a partner in 19052 and would later work in the City of Winnipeg Building Department into the 1920s.3 McCowan died after a sudden illness on April 8, 1908. He had never married and had no relatives in Western Canada.4

An incomplete list of buildings designed by McCowan includes:5

Henderson Block, 142 Princess Street (1881)
Independent Order of Odd Fellows Hall, 72-4 Princess Street (1883) – Grade III
Collegiate Institute, Bannatyne Avenue (1892)

1 Winnipeg Telegram, September 18, 1906, p. 55; Manitoba Free Press, April 9, 1908, p. 7; and D. Lyon, "Main Street," report for the Historical Buildings Committee, Appendix D.
2 Winnipeg Telegram, September 18, 1906, p. 55. This reference to the partnership in the newspaper is unsubstantiated. City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books between 1905 and 1908 do not show any work credited to this firm.
3 D. Lyon, op. cit.
4 Canadian Architect and Builder, Vol. XXII (April 1908), p. 11; and Manitoba Free Press, April 9, 1908, p. 7.
5 Compiled from City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books, 1899-08; various newspaper articles, 1880-1908; and files of the Heritage Planner and author.
H. McCowan designs (continued):

Stovel Company Building, 245 McDermot Street (1893 and 1900 addition)
First Baptist Church, Hargrave Street at Cumberland Avenue (1893) – local supervisor, designed by Toronto firm Langely and Burke
J.Y. Griffin Meat Packing Plant, St. Boniface [near Louise Bridge] (1893)
Christie/Broughall Block, 536-42 Main Street (1895) - DEMOLISHED
Scandinavian Baptist Church, 405 Logan Avenue (1897)
Scandinavian Mission Church, 268 Ellen Street (1897) – Grade III
Victoria/Central School No. 1 (addition), Ellen Street (1899)
Baptist College, Brandon, MB (1900)
Seymour House (addition and alteration to hotel), 277 Market Avenue (1900)
R. Strang House, 82 Broadway (1900)
Captain J.B. Allan House, Roslyn Road (1900)
Strang Block, 449 Main Street (1900)
James Ryan House, 383 Carlton Street (1900)
German Baptist Church, Pacific Avenue (1900)
Winnipeg School Board Offices, Ellen Street at William Avenue (1900)
Albert School (addition), Gertie Street (1901)
Glamour Apartments (terrace), 367 Kennedy Street (1902)
House for J. Baird, Kennedy Street (1903)
- architect for the Board of Directors of Winnipeg General Hospital
- architect for the Morden School Board
Plate 1 – Stovel Block, 245 McDermot Avenue. (City of Winnipeg, no date.)
Plate 2 – Wesley College (University of Winnipeg), 515 Portage Avenue; built in 1896, designed by S.Frank Peters and George Browne; 1900. (Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

Plate 3 – Galt Building, 103 Princess Street; built 1887, designed by Charles H. Wheeler; ca.1904. (M. Peterson Collection.)
Plate 4 – John W. Peck and Co. Warehouse, 33 Princess Street; built in 1893, designed by Charles H. Wheeler; ca.1904. The construction of additional storeys to this warehouse had a negative effect on the original design. (M. Peterson Collection.)

Plate 5 – Stovel Block, ca.1904, showing the light-coloured clay brick walls. (M. Peterson Collection.)
Plate 6 – Stovel Block, shortly after construction, 1893. (Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

Plate 7 – 245 McDermot Avenue, west and south façades. (M. Peterson, 1998.)
245 McDermot Avenue – Stovel Block (Kay Building)

Plate 8 – 245 McDermot Avenue, east and south façades. (M. Peterson, 1998.)

Plate 9 – The photo engraving department of the Stovel Company, 245 McDermot Avenue, 1899. (Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)
Plate 10 – Second-floor nightclub space renovated into boxing club. (M. Peterson, 1998.)

Plate 11 – Part of window arch of 1893 exterior wall, now interior partition. (M. Peterson, 1998.)
Plate 12 – Fourth-floor warehouse space. (M. Peterson, 1998.)

Plate 13 – McDermot Avenue entrance built in 1940. (City of Winnipeg, no date.)
Plate 14 – McDermot Avenue, looking west from Albert Street. (M. Peterson, 1998.)
Plate 15 – The Stovel family involved in the printing company including the three founders (John, Chester D. and Augustus B.) and E. Carlton (son of John Stovel) and Gordon A. (son of A.B. Stovel), who were elected to their positions after the deaths of A.B. (March 26, 1921) and John (May 30, 1925). (Reproduced from Historical Outline of The House of Stovel, Stovel Company Limited, Winnipeg, 1931, n.p.,)
Plate 16 – Stovel Company employees and their families pictured at an early annual picnic. This event was held at various locations throughout Manitoba for many years. (Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)
Plate 17 – Proposed new Stovel Company facility, Bannatyne Avenue, 1914. Arrows indicate actual structure built 1914-15. (Reproduced from Architect’s Plans, #2169/1914, City of Winnipeg Archives.)
Plate 18 – Dagmar Street elevation of the Stovel Company Annex. (Reproduced from Architect’s Plans, #2169/1914, City of Winnipeg Archives.)
Plate 19 – Architect’s drawing of the new Stovel Building, Bannatyne Avenue, 1916. Note it is similar but not exactly the same as the 1914 plans and very different from the actual structure. (Reproduced from Manitoba Free Press, May 3, 1916, p. 8.)

Plate 20 – Stovel Building, 365 Bannatyne Avenue; built in 1916, designed by Woodman and Carey; contractor, Fort Garry Construction Company. (M. Peterson, 1992.)