250 McDERMOT AVENUE
MERCHANTS BUILDING
(GEORGE D. WOOD & COMPANY BUILDING)
Winnipeg in the early 1890s was, although few realized it, on the verge of a spectacular era of growth, development and maturity that would create, by World War I, a large, modern city with all the amenities. But this comprehensive growth followed patterns established decades earlier and resulted in specific districts within city boundaries even after this frenzied period of growth.

The real estate and construction boom of the early 1880s was intimately connected to the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) around Winnipeg and onto the western prairies. Land prices in the small capital city skyrocketed, the population soared and solid brick structures began replacing the small wooden shacks that dotted the mud streets. This development led to the creation of specific districts within the city – residential, commercial and industrial – and their related building-types.¹ The huge advance in land prices along Main Street north of Portage Avenue necessitated the replacement of the earlier residential development with large commercial structures. Investors chose to locate near one of the most important buildings, City Hall, from which would come assistance in advancing both singular business interests and those of the community at large.

Commercial interests, both local and from Eastern Canada, were quick to locate in this area. The city rapidly assumed the role of wholesale hub for all of Western Canada, partially because of its central location and partially because of the preferential freight rates negotiated with the CPR that made it cheaper for manufacturers to ship their goods to Winnipeg, unload them and then send them west to the growing markets on the prairies. Companies like G.F. and J. Galt Company, Stobart, Eden and Company and J.H. Ashdown were all organized and carrying on business prior to the CPR boom. The bust of 1882, while it seriously affected some parts of the local economy, did not have a devastating effect on the wholesale sector. This was mainly as a result of the expanding regional base of the wholesalers as settlement increased on the prairies and demand for goods grew. The areas east and west of Main Street, however, were undeniably

developing as the warehouse district, slowly through the 1880s and 1890s and then rapidly after 1900 (Plate 1).

In 1898, hardware dealer George D. Wood built a new warehouse in the heart of the Exchange District at McDermot Avenue and Arthur Street, opening and running the western branch of his father’s successful Eastern Canadian company (Plate 2).

**STYLE**

This warehouse is an excellent example of the Romanesque Revival style, very popular in warehouse districts throughout North America from the 1880s well into the 20th century. The buildings were nearly always solid brick with a raised basement and featuring rusticated stone accenting around windows and doors and at roof level. Other elements included towers flanking the main façade, quoins, belt courses, corbelled brick panels, chevrons and flat rooflines, with or without cornices and entablatures. The most obvious feature of the style was the use of the arch above openings. Often, straight-topped windows located on the middle storeys were grouped under large arches on the upper floors. Although the style was applied to private residences and on large public buildings, in Winnipeg it was almost exclusively used in the warehouse district, where the designs were somewhat more subdued. The massiveness and sturdiness of the style appealed to wholesalers looking to promote their businesses and portray the stability of their firms through the design of the structures they occupied.

**CONSTRUCTION**

The original 1898 warehouse measured approximately 22.9 metres along McDermot Avenue and 30.5 metres along Arthur Street, stood four storeys (19.2 metres) tall and consisted of a base clad in

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“rock-face” ashlar and a superstructure completed in common clay brick with stone accenting. The solid brick walls measure 43.2 centimetres thick resting on a 91.4-centimetre stone foundation.³

In 1902, an addition of nearly the same size (22.0 x 30.2 metres) was added to the rear (south end) of the building and included an approximately 11.3-metre wide dray way.⁴ Construction materials for the addition were consistent with the original structure.

This warehouse was built using the most common construction method of the time – the mill system – a square timber beam and post support network where beams were attached to the solid brick exterior walls and covered by wood plank flooring and often a hardwood finish. This was a very popular system in warehouse districts throughout North America because of its sturdiness, the ease of adding additional storeys and its ability to suffer fire damage and not collapse. The George D. Wood and Company Warehouse is one of many mill construction structures in the Exchange District.

DESIGN
The main (north) façade facing McDermot Avenue begins at grade with a raised rough-cut stone foundation that ends at the sills of the ground floor windows (Plate 3). The entire façade is divided into five bays by plain giant order brick pilasters running from the sills of the ground floor windows to the heads of the top storey openings. On the ground floor, the second, third and fifth bays (numbered from the east) are filled with large, multi-paned wood framed window openings (square headed with rough-cut stone heads) while the eastern-most bay contains the original entrance. The fourth bay originally held another window (see Plate 2) but now holds a newer entrance. The construction date of this door is unknown but it was designed to mimic the original opening with its double wooden doors set atop a short flight of stairs and is crowned by a large rectangular transom window (Plate 4). Small basement windows still interrupt the stone cladding at sidewalk level.

³ City of Winnipeg Assessment Record, Roll No. 608985-12-2. Below as AR.
⁴ Ibid.
The upper three storeys are similarly designed with paired window openings in each bay. These openings are separated internally by delicate brick elements and joined externally by stone lug sills and heads. Brick corbelling finishes the openings on the fourth floor. The flat roof is embellished by more brickwork, designed to represent a modest bracketed cornice.

The other main façade, the west side, faces Arthur Street and is a continuation of the materials and design of the front elevation (Plate 5). The original 1898 warehouse featured six bays, the only elements different from the front façade are the raised arched loading door in the fourth bay from McDermot Avenue (Plate 6) and the metal fire escape located south of this opening.

Running further south on Arthur Street are the six bays of the 1902 addition that once again continue the materials and layout of the original structure. The large arched opening of the dray way is one of the unique features of this elevation (Plate 7). A second metal fire escape and an arched entrance door (Plate 8) are other character defining elements.

The rear (south) elevation is a mixture of original elements such as the multi-paned industrial type windows of the ground floor and newer elements – the replacement window units of the upper three floors, the metal fire escape and the painted signage in the upper west corner (Plate 9). The east façade is partially covered by a neighbouring building at the north end (Plate 10). The central and rear sections can be observed from back lanes and include the dray way (Plate 11) and an unadorned rear section (Plate 12).

**INTERIOR**
A description of the building’s interior was published in a local paper shortly after construction was completed on the original portion in 1898. Through the door in the northeast corner of the building was a long corridor leading to the main staircase. The west portion of the main floor was used for storing heavy merchandise while part of the second floor was used as office space and was designed to allow employees to see customers as they entered the building. The remainder of the second

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floor was divided into a storage area with shelving in the north section and a packaging and box area in the south. The top two floors were left as open warehouse space.

The interior of the building has seen numerous alterations that have left little of the original materials and layout unaltered today. All floors have been converted into office space, replacing the original open warehouse areas (Plate 13). Original elements still in place include wooden banisters and pressed tin ceilings accenting the main staircase (Plate 14) and hardwood flooring (Plate 15). In some areas, the original beam and post system is visible (Plate 16).

**INTEGRITY**
The building stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition. No significant changes have been made to any of the main exterior façades; the building stands much as it has for the past 100+ years (Plates 17 and 18).

**STREETSCAPE**
The George D. Wood and Company Building stands on a corner lot and as such, defines and is an integral part of two separate streetscapes – Arthur Street and McDermot Avenue (Plates 19 and 20). This warehouse, along with the other buildings in the district, has been recognized as a National Historic District by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. All buildings in the Exchange District are an essential part of the historic streetscape and as such, the Historical Buildings Committee has given them 60 points.

**ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS**
James H. Cadham (Plate 21), Ontario born architect, designed this warehouse and the 1902 addition. Cadham was one of a number of self-trained designers who worked in the city in the late 19th century, Cadham being one of the most prolific (see Appendix II for biographical information and Plate 22). He also was responsible for the design of the R.J. Whitla Warehouse, located across the
street at 70 Arthur Street (Plate 23). He has received 20 points from the Historical Buildings Committee.

The 1898 warehouse was built by Philip Burnett, a well-known local contractor who would work for Cadham on a number of other warehouses in the district including the Bedford Block, 281 McDermot Avenue (1903 – Grade III) and the Frost and Wood Warehouse, 230 Princess Street (1906 – Grade III), Plate 24.

The 1902 addition was built by the well-known local firm of Malcom Brothers, founded in 1900 as a general contracting firm by brothers David (1871-1935), John and William. The three had begun a brickyard in their hometown of Owen Sound, Ontario along with two other brothers in the 1880s but the three moved to Winnipeg in 1892. Working as stonemasons and bricklayers, the three ultimately formed the contracting firm that would become the Malcom Construction Company. The firm was responsible for many fine Winnipeg structures as well as completing contracts in rural Manitoba, northwestern Ontario and Western Canada. In 1908, William returned to Owen Sound, and by 1918, when Malcom Construction Company Limited was incorporated, David was the principal participant. After his death in 1935, the firm was operated by his son, Wilbert Guy (Bert) Malcom (1895-1980) until his retirement in 1974. The company was still family owned and operated (by W.G. Malcom’s son David) and still active in the construction scene into the 1990s. A list of their larger local contracts includes:

Augustine Presbyterian Church, 444 River Avenue, 1903
Bole Drug Company Building, 70 Princess Street, 1903
Winnipeg Lodging and Coffee House, 175-81 Logan Avenue, 1905 (demolished)
Augustine Presbyterian School, Royal Street (now Pulford Street), 1909
Fort Rouge Methodist Church, 525 Wardlaw Avenue, 1910
R.J. Whitla and Company Building, 70 Arthur Street, large addition, 1911
Edward Brown House, Wellington Crescent, 1912 (demolished)
Wesley College (University of Winnipeg), 515 Portage Avenue, large addition, 1912
R.R. Wilson House, Wellington Crescent, 1924

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7 City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books, 1899-1926.
PERSON/INSTITUTION

George D. Wood was born in Hamilton, Ontario on July 26, 1858. His father, Andrew T. Wood, was a Member of Parliament representing Hamilton and a senator for the district. Senator Wood started a merchant hardware business in 1849 that ultimately operated branches from coast to coast (George D. Wood and Company was the Winnipeg arm of this parent company). After a public school education in Hamilton, George D. Wood entered his father's hardware business. In 1880 he moved to Winnipeg and established his own business. As sales increased, so too did Wood's need for bigger and bigger buildings. He started on Alexander Avenue but soon moved his retail store to the Foulds Block at 546 Main Street. The company's warehouse was on the CPR line, corner of Princess Street and Sutherland Avenue. The construction of the large warehouse on McDermot Avenue gave Wood display, office and large storage areas conveniently located under one roof.

Business success translated into personal success and in 1903 Wood purchased 86 West Gate (Plate 25), renaming the mansion “Helenslea,” likely after his wife Helen. The couple had six children; three of the daughters married and would also live in Armstrong's Point. George Wood died in 1907, his wife continued to live in the home until 1942.

Shortly after his death, the company reorganized as Wood Vallance Company under the direction of John C. Falls (1861-1924), long-time vice-president and general manager. The company continued to occupy space in the building until the mid-1920s. Ultimately, North American hardware giant Marshall-Wells Company (which had opened a small Winnipeg branch from its

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9 Ibid., p. 395.
13 G. Bryce, op. cit., p. 396.
15 “86 West Gate,” p. 6.
16 *City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls*, Roll No. 608985-12-2 (below as ARo), 1900-1924; and *Manitoba Free Press*, April 12, 1924, p. 4.
Duluth, Minnesota headquarters in 1894),\textsuperscript{17} acquired the Wood Vallance Company and its western branches (Regina, SA, Saskatoon, SA and Calgary AL) in 1925.\textsuperscript{18}

Beginning in the mid-1920s, the building took on a number of smaller tenants, including wholesale stationer John Gibb Company (1929), Michael Butovsky, confectioner (1939), Buffalo Cap and Neckwear (1939-1969) and Brown Fashions (1979).\textsuperscript{19} It was owned and occupied by Silpit Industries Limited from the 1970s until recently.\textsuperscript{20}

\textbf{EVENT}
There is no known event connected with this building.

\textbf{CONTEXT}
The George D. Wood and Company Building is a fine example of the turn-of-the-century development of Winnipeg as Western Canada’s premier wholesale and distribution hub, a development that brought the capital city to the fore of the Canadian economy until World War I. The transformation of this entire area – the Exchange District – from an early residential neighbourhood into a hectic warehouse district mirrored the growth of Winnipeg’s economy. Eastern Canadian manufacturers and importers rushed to locate in the area, on both sides of Main Street, to take advantage of the spur lines that criss-crossed the area and allowed the rapid loading and unloading of railway cars full of goods destined for Western Canadian markets.

The building is also a perfect representation of the type of growth some early local businesses enjoyed as Western Canada’s population grew and the need for goods and materials expanded.


\textsuperscript{18} Information from http://www.d.umn.edu/lib/nemhc/guides/s3614.htm, no date.

\textsuperscript{19} The building was renamed “The Merchants Building” in the late 1940s. ARo, 1924-1990; and Henderson’s Directory, 1920-1990.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 1970-2000; and ARo, 1990-2006.
Companies locating here prior to the construction of the CPR were often at the fore of expansion after the completion of the rail line. Although the two decades after 1882 had several economic peaks and valleys, established companies in 1900 could look forward to a decade of almost unbridled expansion. George D. Wood and Company was one of these businesses and its warehouse, which was added to as business exceeded the capacity of the original structure, is an example of this.

LANDMARK
As one of the larger warehouses in the Exchange District and located at one of its busiest intersections, the George D. Wood and Company Building is conspicuous within the area.
APPENDIX I

CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report
Assessment Record

Building Address: 250 McDermot Ave. Building Name: Merchants Building (George D. Wood and Company Building)

Original Use: warehouse Current Use: offices/retail

Roll No. (Old): 608985 (10086) R.S.N.: 195461

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

Legal Description: 6 St. John, Plan 139, Lot 1, NE & W part Lot 3, Lot 9 and 5/6 St. John, Plan 33006, Lots 8 & 9 (Original: 6/7 St. John, Plan 16, N 12’ of S 66’ of W part Lot 1: 2)

Location: southeast corner Arthur Street Date of Construction: 1898 & 1902

Storeys: 4 Construction Type: Mill HERITAGE STATUS: ON INVENTORY

- 406/1902 $23,000 (72 x 99 addition); 4526/1933 [A] $350 (fire escape); 2394/1935 $20,000 (alteration to rear); 624/1936 $1,000 (alteration); 452/1945 $3,000 (elevator); 452/1949 [A] $3,000 (addition); 2270/1950 $1,500 (repairs to concrete floor in basement); 3560/1958 [4th-B17C06] $700 (oil floor); 3531/1982 $6,500 (alteration); 246890/2002 $20,000 (interior alterations);
- 7148/1989 [4th-V09D08] N/A (alteration); 246890/2002 $20,000 (interior alterations);
- 292336/2003 $20,000 (interior alterations); 135445/2004 $3,000 (interior alterations); 317306/2004 $50,000 (interior alterations); 129509/2006 $25,000 (interior alterations to main floor, #285); 153849/2006 $50,000 (interior alterations, #250)

Information:
- 75' x 100' x 63 + = 1,004,189 cu. ft.
- Exterior – rock-face ashlar to sills – common brick above
- South wall – clay brick
- Wall thickness – 17” brick; basement walls – 36” stone
- 1941 Assessment – good condition – crack in centre of firewall
- 1947 – Partitioning, new flooring, fluorescent lighting
- 1949 – new passenger elevator
- 1960 – Fire permit. Damage confined to 2nd floor, some damage to 1st floor
- 1961 – No structural changes – Sprinkler. Nearly all occupied
- 1965 – Assessment – “fair condition”
- Permit 5274/69 – some partitions removed, wiring and lighting changes
- 1978 – Building in “fair condition”

ARCHITECT: J.H. CADHAM
CONTRACTOR: P. BURNETT

--- McDERMOT AVENUE ---
APPENDIX II

James Henry Cadham

James H. Cadham was born near London, Canada West (Ontario), on August 31, 1850, the son of Thomas and Eliza Cadham, both English-born settlers of the area. Thomas operated a sash, door and blind factory in London. J.H. Cadham left public school at the age of 16 to learn the carpenter’s trade. In 1870, Cadham answered the call to arms in Eastern Canada by the Dominion government to protect its rights in the recently ceded territory that would become the Province of Manitoba. He was a private in No. 1 Battalion under Captain Cooke, part of the 1,200-man force that included 400 British Regulars and 800 Ontario and Quebec militiamen and would become known as the Wolseley Expedition.

Cadham arrived with the rest of the force in late August to find the uprising led by Louis Riel and his followers had ended. Cadham, unlike many of the other militiamen, decided to stay after his discharge on March 4, 1871 and began working as a carpenter and contractor. Little is known about his early work in the city, although he apparently had enough experience by the mid-1890s to begin practice as an architect. In this capacity, Cadham had a profound effect on Winnipeg’s skyline. He was responsible for many warehouses in the district before and after 1900. So highly regarded was Cadham that builders would often consult him about a new structure even though he was not the architect of the building. He was an ardent hunter and was a Mason and a member of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. Cadham continued to work up until a few weeks before his death from pneumonia on December 10, 1907. He left a wife, three sons and two daughters.

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3 Manitoba Free Press, December 11, 1907, p. 5.
A partial list of his work includes many of the Exchange District’s most outstanding structures:

McLaughlin Carriage Building, 200 Princess Street, 1893
W.F. Alloway Building, 179 McDermot Avenue, 1898 (Grade III)
Whitla Building, 70 Arthur Street, 1899
G.D. Wood & Company Building (Merchants Building), 250 McDermot Avenue, 1898
Daylite Building, 296 McDermot Avenue, 1899 (Grade II)
Imperial Dry Goods Building, 91 Albert Street, 1900 (Grade III)
G.F. Stephens Warehouse, 176 Market Avenue, 1901 (and additions) - demolished
Alloway & Champion Block, Portage Avenue, 1901
Moss (Kantor) House, 218 Roslyn Road, 1901
Anne (Blue Ribbon Company) Building, 87 King Street, 1901 (Grade III)
Jerry Robinson Department Store, 49 Albert Street, 1902
Gregg Building, 52 Albert Street, 1903 (Grade III)
Elim Chapel (St. Stephens Presbyterian Church), 546 Portage Avenue, 1903
R.J. Whitla Factory, 371 Hargrave Street, 1903
Dingle and Stewart Warehouse, 263 Stanley Street, 1903
Robinson, Little Company Building, 54 Arthur Street, 1903
Prairie Lumber Company Warehouse, foot of Henry Avenue, 1903
Rat Portage Lumber Company Warehouse, 101 Higgins Avenue, 1903
Gaylord Block (Kemp Building), 111 Lombard Avenue, 1903
Winnipeg Saddlery Block, 284 William Avenue, 1903
Galt Building Annex, 92 Arthur Street, 1903 (Grade II)
Bedford (Stobart) Building, 275 McDermot Avenue, 1903 (Grade III)
Scott Furniture Building, 274 Main Street, 1904
Stobart Company Overall Factory, 327 Cumberland Avenue, 1904
G. Velie Warehouse, 183-87 Portage Avenue E, 1904
Miller, Morse and Company Warehouse, 317 McDermot Avenue, 1904
Telfer Brothers Warehouse, 156 Lombard Avenue, 1904
Avenue Block, 261 Portage Avenue, 1904
M. Fortune and Company Block, Smith Street, 1904
G.F. and J. Galt Building, 103 Princess Street (addition), 1904
Alloway and Champion Building, 667 Main Street, 1905 (Grade III)
Genser’s Furniture Building, 289 Portage Avenue, 1905
West Hotel, 786 Main Street, 1905
H. Leadley Warehouse, 298 Ross Avenue, 1905
Manitoba Medical College, Bannatyne Avenue (corner Emily Street), 1905 – demolished
Trees, Spriggs Company Warehouse, 312 Ross Avenue, 1905
Kemp Manufacturing Company Warehouse, 117 Lombard Avenue, 1906
J.H. Cadham House, 336 River Avenue, 1906
Grose and Walker Warehouse, 261 Stanley Street, 1906

Compiled from local newspaper building lists, 1874-1908; The Exchange District. Part 1: A Property Survey (Winnipeg: City of Winnipeg, 2001); and City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books, 1900-07.
Plate 1 – Looking south along Arthur Street from Bannatyne Avenue into the heart of Winnipeg’s Exchange District west of Main Street, ca.1905, including the George D. Wood & Company Building (arrow). (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg-Views c1905-2.)
Plate 2 – Looking west along McDermot Avenue from Albert Street, ca.1900. The recently-completed George D. Wood & Company Building is seen at the arrow with its roof signage. (Courtesy of Historyworks.)
Plate 3 – Merchants Building, 250 McDermot Avenue, front (north) façade. (M. Peterson, 2007.)
Plate 4 – Merchants Building, 250 McDermot Avenue, original entrance, northeast corner, exterior (left) and interior (right) views. (M. Peterson, 2007.)
Plate 5 – Merchants Building, 250 McDermot Avenue, west façade. (M. Peterson, 2007.)

Plate 6 – Merchants Building, 250 McDermot Avenue, west façade loading doors. (M. Peterson, 2007.)
Plate 7 – Merchants Building, 250 McDermot Avenue, dray way entrance, west side. (M. Peterson, 2007.)
Plate 8 – Merchants Building, 250 McDermot Avenue, west façade entrance door. (M. Peterson, 2007.)
250 McDermot Avenue – Merchants Building
(George D. Wood & Company Building)

Plate 9 – Merchants Building, 250 McDermot Avenue, rear (south) façade. (M. Peterson, 2007.)

Plate 10 – Merchants Building, 250 McDermot Avenue, northeast corner. (M. Peterson, 2007.)
Plate 11 – Merchants Building, 250 McDermot Avenue, dray way from the east side. (M. Peterson, 2007.)
Plate 12 – Merchants Building, 250 McDermot Avenue, east façade, south end. (M. Peterson, 2007.)
Plate 13 – Merchants Building, 250 McDermot Avenue, 4th floor hallway. (M. Peterson, 2007.)
Plate 14 – Merchants Building, 250 McDermot Avenue, staircase with banister and tin ceiling. (M. Peterson, 2007.)
Plate 15 – Merchants Building, 250 McDermot Avenue, 3\textsuperscript{rd} floor hallway. (M. Peterson, 2007.)
Plate 16 – Merchants Building, 250 McDermot Avenue, beam and post system, 2nd floor. (M. Peterson, 2007.)
Plate 17 – Engraving of the design of the new George D. Wood and Company Warehouse, McDermot Avenue, 1898. (Archives of Manitoba, Manitoba Free Press, July 13, 1898, p. 7.)
Plate 18 – George D. Wood and Company Warehouse, McDermot Avenue, ca.1905. (Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg Views 133/285, N1580.)
250 McDermot Avenue – Merchants Building
(George D. Wood & Company Building)

Plate 19 – Looking west along McDermot Avenue from Albert Street, 2007. (M. Peterson, 2007.)

Plate 20 – Looking south along Arthur Street from McDermot Ave., 2007. (M. Peterson, 2007.)
Plate 21 – J.H. Cadham, ca.1907. (Winnipeg Telegram, December 11, 1907, p. 11.)
250 McDermot Avenue – Merchants Building
(George D. Wood & Company Building)

Plate 24 – Top: Bedford Block, 281 McDermot Avenue (1903 – Grade III); and Bottom: Frost and Wood Warehouse, 230 Princess Street (1906 – Grade III). (M. Peterson, 2004.)
Plate 25 – Garden party and open house at the convent of the Sacred Heart, former G.D. Wood House, 86 West Gate, June 1951. The building’s interior and exterior were drastically altered when it became Westgate Mennonite Collegiate in the 1960s and was torn down in April 1989. (Courtesy of the Western Canada Pictorial Index.)