138 PORTAGE AVENUE

KEEWAYDEN BLOCK (JACOB-CROWLEY BUILDING)

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
Researcher: M. Peterson
October 2016
Winnipeg’s early warehouse district was dispersed throughout what is now downtown Winnipeg, some businesses locating on the east side of Main Street, taking advantage of river transport (Plate 1), and some west of the Main Street. Pockets of industrial development were also found along the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) main line in Point Douglas by the early 1880s – the railway’s station, freight sheds and right-of-way developing quickly. By the late 1880s, the Northern Pacific and Manitoba Railway (NP&MR) had also developed a large industrial site, including a station, offices, freight sheds, repair shops, an engine roundhouse and, at the corner of Water Avenue and Main Street, the opulent Manitoba Hotel (Plate 2).\(^1\)

While these two developments effectively defined the north and south boundaries of the warehouse district east of Main Street, it was a third project that solidified and guaranteed the success and growth of this area. In the summer of 1889, the Winnipeg Transfer Railway (WTR) was formed to build a rail line along the Red River north from the NP&MR main line to the CPR main line, hoping to provide modern rail service via spur lines to the warehouses in the area. City Council approve the plan in October, stating “…such [a] railway is a great advantage to the public interests of the residents of the city, and will increase the business to and from all parts of the country, by providing a cheap and convenient method of transferring merchandise between the above-named railways.”\(^2\) It would be three years before the WTR had purchased all the necessary land and obtained all the legal agreements (and settled all the court cases). But by the mid-1890s, the line was attracting some of the continent’s major manufacturers to the area and plans for spur lines running west to the Main Street were started (Plate 3).\(^3\)

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\(^1\) This enterprise, however, did not meet with the same early success as its competitor and in 1901 was sold to the Canadian Northern Railway (CNoR), soon-to-be Canada’s second transcontinental railway, in 1901. In turn, the CNoR was taken over by the federal government after World War I to form part of its Canadian National Railways.

\(^2\) *Manitoba Free Press*, October 5, 1889.

\(^3\) *Manitoba Free Press*, various dates. It would not be until 1901 that the more established warehouse district west of Main Street and south of the CPR track was served by a spur line, known as the Princess Street Spur.
South of Portage Avenue, the warehouse district continued to develop outward, the area was bounded by the massive railway yards south of Water Avenue (Plate 4).

Another of the signs of the economic expansion in the city was the growth in office staff. Many local companies saw their business increase dramatically, necessitating the hiring of more staff and the need for larger headquarters. Office buildings of all description were built throughout the downtown.

In 1909, a local real estate development firm moved to supply modern office space for the growing demand from local, national and international companies clamouring to locate in Western Canada’s premier city by constructing this 7-storey, nearly 22,000-cu. m. office building just east of the famous Portage and Main intersection.

**STYLE**

This building is a modest example of the Chicago style commercial building, popularized in major centres across North America from the late 1890s to the 1920s. It was intimately connected to the development of a new support system – skeletal steel and reinforced concrete – that allowed architects to design taller structures. It led to the creation of a new building type – the skyscraper.\(^4\)

These buildings, most often commercial/office structures, were divided into three sections like a classic column: the ground floor devoted to large glass windows for displays, a central portion consisting of the bulk of the floors with window openings arranged in a grid-like pattern, and an attic or top floor finished with a heavy cornice and flat roofline. The top and bottom floors received the majority of the ornamental treatment, usually in sculpted stone or terracotta. This

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ornamentation could take many forms including Classical, Gothic, Romanesque, Renaissance, Sullivanesque or Art Nouveau.\(^5\)

In Winnipeg, there were many fine examples of the style built in the pre-1920 era, including Union Tower, 504 Main Street (built 1904), the Boyd Building, 384 Portage Avenue (1912) and the Paris Building, 259 Portage Avenue (1915-1917) – Plate 5.

CONSTRUCTION
This building employs 76.2-centimetre concrete foundation walls to support the reinforced concrete slab and beam supported superstructure and brick exterior walls. Steel columns are employed on the top floor. The superstructure measures approximately 27.5 x 26.7 x 29.9 metres. Concrete rises 1.2 metres above grade on the side and rear façades with cut stone to a height of 1.9 metres on the front (north) façade. The exterior walls of the upper floors of the building are completed in clay brick with concrete accenting. Total cost of construction, according to the original City of Winnipeg Building Permit, was $70,000.\(^6\)

DESIGN
The front (north) façade (Plate 6) begins at grade with smooth-cut stone cladding rising to the sills of the large ground floor windows. The stone is interrupted by large rectilinear basement window openings. There is also a raised, centrally-located entrance that has been renovated from the original. The upper storeys are similarly designed, divided into five bays by brick pilasters, the central bay slightly wider than the outer four bays (Plate 7). On each floor, the bays are filled with large rectilinear window openings and wide concrete spandrels. The pilasters end with modest capitals at a cornice below the seventh floor windows. Finishing this façade is a completed entablature with heavy overhanging cornice and stepped parapet. The frieze includes the word “KEEWAYDEN” (Plate 8).

\(^5\) Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba, op. cit., p. 22.

\(^6\) City of Winnipeg Assessment Record, Roll No. 12093834500 (below as AR); and City of Winnipeg Building Permit, #1329/1909.
The west façade features a number of matched and unmatched rectilinear window openings on each floor (Plate 9); the east façade has four matching rectilinear window openings on each of the upper floors (Plate 10).

The rear (south) façade mimics the front in its use of pilasters to create five vertical bays, the rectilinear window openings and the wide concrete spandrels (Plate 11). There are several raised loading docks that feature original elements/hardware and the roofline is unadorned.

The exterior has not seen extensive alteration.

**INTERIOR**

This building has continuously served as office headquarters for a variety of tenants as well as a clothing manufacturing location. Alterations over the years have removed most of the original layout and materials. The massive concrete support system is evident on all floors (Plates 12-14). The basement, which includes an area that extends beyond the exterior walls below the sidewalk (Plate 15), also features original sliding metal-clad fire doors (Plate 16).

**INTEGRITY**

The structure stands on its original site, on the south side of Portage Avenue between Main and Westbrook streets. It appears to be in good structural condition for its age and while there have been numerous interior alterations as tenancy changed, the exterior has not been seriously affected by these alterations beyond the boarding of the glazing of the transom windows (Plate 17).
STREETSCAPE
This building had been an integral part of its streetscape for over 100 years and continues to contribute (Plates 18 and 19), although several of its contemporary structures have since been demolished.

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS
The architect and contractor listed for this structure was local builder James McDiarmid (1855-1934) – Plate 20. McDiarmid was a Scottish-born and trained mason who came to Manitoba in 1883 and started a contracting business shortly thereafter. By the mid-1890s he was also designing buildings (see Appendix II for biographical information).

McDiarmid has received 10 points from the Historical Buildings and Resources Committee.

PERSON/INSTITUTION
The building was originally owned by the Notre Dame Investment Company, a small-scale development firm that operated out its headquarters at 167 Notre Dame Avenue East (now Pioneer Avenue). Edward Cass, local contractor, was listed as the second owner of the building, from the mid-1920s until his death in 1931 – his estate continuing the ownership until the late 1940s when it was sold to Guardian Realty Limited.7


7 City of Winnipeg Assessment Roll, Roll No. 12-093163000, 1900-1980.
The most important of the buildings many tenants was the Jacob Crowley Company, which operating its clothing factory out of the premises from the late 1920s into the 1950s. A partnership was formed between Benjamin Jacob (1892-1975) and John H. Crowley (1879-1963) in 1914 (Plate 21) and in 1919, they formed Jacob Crowley Manufacturing Company Limited after taking over the business and equipment of the bankrupt Faultless Ladies’ Wear (whom Jacob had worked for). The company’s early goods included working clothes – shirts, pants and overalls – and it located in the Warehouse District, where the large buildings were being vacated by their owners/tenants as the local warehousing sector declined.

Beginning with four employees, the company expanded rapidly and by the mid-1920s was looking for larger headquarters for the approximately 100 employees making women’s suits and coats. It chose to move out of the Warehouse District and into the Keewayden Block, occupying two floors of the building (Plates 22-24). From its spacious new headquarters, Jacob Crowley grew to become one of the City’s “big four” clothing manufacturers, expanding their lines to new clothing for women and competing with large Eastern Canadian firms. During World War II, the factory produced 75,000 garments for the Canadian army and navy. The company would continue to expand, necessitating a move to newly renovated space on Adelaide Street in 1954 (Plate 25).

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9 “Jacob Crowley Manufacturing Company, Ltd., 1919-1987,” Archives of Manitoba, Collection Summary, online, 2014; and “The Winnipeg Garment Industry, 1900-1955,” (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Historic Resources Branch, 1989), p. 58. Jacob, of Jewish heritage, was the accountant, while Irish-born Crowley was in charge of the day-to-day operation of the factory.


11 “A Stitch in Time – The Factories,” Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada Inc. website, http://www.jhcwc.org/exhibitions/a-stitch-in-time/display,theme/1/the-factories, 2015. This article estimated that the garment industry would ultimately occupy 90% of the warehouse space in the district.

12 Loc. cit., p. 58.

13 Manitoba Free Press, May 14, 1927, p. 26. An article in this paper announced that the company had purchased land behind the Boyd Building, 384 Portage Avenue with the intent of building a new factory building, although this plan was never realized.


15 “The Winnipeg Garment Industry, 1900-1955,” p. 58. The others in the group were Shia Feldman and Nathan Stall.

16 Ibid., p. 29.

17 Winnipeg Free Press, July 31, 1954, p. 3.
occupying the building until the company, which had continued to remain in family control, shut down in 1988.\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{EVENT}

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

\textbf{CONTEXT}

This office structure was built in the midst of Winnipeg’s economic boom of the pre-World War I period that resulted in the expansion of its downtown and the construction of dozens of large, modern office buildings necessary for housing the new and expanding companies headquartered in the city. It has, to the present, continued this role.

\textbf{LANDMARK}

The structure is conspicuous in the downtown.

\textsuperscript{18} “Jacob Crowley Manufacturing Company, Ltd., 1919-1987,” op. cit.
APPENDIX I

CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report

Building Address: 138 Portage Avenue  Building Name: Keewayden Block (Jacob-Crowley Building)

Original Use: Offices  Current Use: Offices

Roll No. (Old): 938345 (17329)  RSN: 141827

Municipality: 12  Ward: 1  Property or Occupancy Code: 40

Legal Description: 3/4 St. John, Plan 6096, Lots 9/10 and 17 (Original: 3 St. John, Plan 86, Block 2, Part)

Location: south side between Main and Westbrook streets

Date of Construction: 1909  Storeys: 7 and basement

Heritage Status: NOMINATED LIST

Construction Type: reinforced concrete (beam and slab), clay brick


SEE NEXT PAGE

Information:

-90 x 87 x 98 = 771,750 cu. ft.

- ceilings: B-9½’, 1-13’, 2 & 3-11’, 4 & 5-10’9”, 6-10½”, 7-13½’

- 31” concrete foundation

- West, south & east walls- concrete to 4’, balance clay brick

- North (front)- cut stone 74”, balance clay brick

ARCHITECT: J. McDIARMID

CONTRACTOR: J. McDIARMID

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APPENDIX II

James McDiarmid

James McDiarmid was born March 9, 1855 at Dunkeld, Perthshire, Scotland and trained with his father in carpentry and stone masonry.\(^1\) At the age of 28, he immigrated with his 22-year-old brother John (1861-1943)\(^2\) in April 1883 to join their older brother Donald and his family in Poplar Point, Manitoba (who had been farming there since 1880).\(^3\)

In 1884, James and John moved into Winnipeg, first forming the partnership Murray and McDiarmid with established builder and lumberman George W. Murray. This business lasted until June 1892 and was responsible for the construction of a number of rural railway stations, several Federal Government contracts and several Winnipeg homes. James McDiarmid also began designing buildings by the mid-1890s.

J & J McDiarmid Company was formed in 1892, first concentrating on building homes for clients and as speculative property and a few larger commissions. After 1900, however, their business increased dramatically, both in terms of number of contracts and scale of buildings. Reflective of the increase in business, J. McDiarmid Company Limited was incorporated in 1906\(^4\) with James McDiarmid and Edward Cass (1849-1932), another long-time local contractor, as equal majority shareholders. Minority shareholders included: Peter Muir (civil engineer); J. M. McFarlane (accountant); Thomas Borgford (bricklayer/contractor); Peter McDiarmid (stone mason/contractor); and John McDiarmid (carpenter/contractor).

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\(^3\) A fourth brother, Peter (1857-1915), moved to Poplar Point with his family in 1887.

The newly formed company grew quickly on the strength of numerous large contracts with Canadian Pacific Railway for shop facilities and related structures from Fort William, ON to Vancouver, B.C. The provincial government hired the company in 1915 to complete the Legislative and Law Courts buildings after the original contractor, Thomas Kelly, was dismissed. The McDiarmids also participated in one of the consortia that built the Winnipeg aqueduct.

James McDiarmid was also a co-founder, board member and/or officer of the Winnipeg Building Society (1895), Winnipeg Machinery and Supply Co. (1901), Winnipeg Paint and Glass Co. (1902), Calgary Paint and Glass Co., Edmonton Paint and Glass Co., Winnipeg Construction Co. (1904), and the Marble and Tile Company of Canada (1912).

Among his other activities, McDiarmid was active in curling circles as a bonspiel competitor, a founder and president of the Granite Curling Club, and a president of the Manitoba Curling Association. He collected art, did some amateur painting, and supported the establishment of the Winnipeg Art Gallery (1912) and Winnipeg School of Art (1913). He also was a long-time member of the Winnipeg Public Parks Board and the Playgrounds Commission, the powers of which were transferred to the Parks Board in 1919. During his terms, which extended from the 1910s to 1931, McDiarmid was particularly noted for his work on the development of Kildonan Golf Course that opened in 1921 as a public facility. His contributions were recognized through honorary life memberships in both the Winnipeg Art Gallery and Parks Board.

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5 M. Baker, op. cit., pp. 78 and 97.
8 City of Winnipeg, City Clerk, Municipal Manual, 1920, p. 32.
9 Ibid., 1918-21, 1927, 1929, 1931. McDiarmid served at least two terms as Parks Board chairman (1919 and 1920) and one as Playgrounds Commission chairman (1920).
10 Winnipeg Free Press, February 26, 1934, p. 15.
11 City of Winnipeg, City Clerk, Municipal Manual, 1932, p. 43.
James McDiarmid died in 1934 and after the 1943 death of his brother John, steps were initiated to dissolve The J. McDiarmid Co. The firm subsequently gave notice in late 1946 that it intended to surrender its charter.

A partial inventory of James McDiarmid’s work includes (*-denotes projects for which McDiarmid was named both architect and contractor):

**Winnipeg**

- Broadway Drill Hall, 1884 (demolished)
- St. George’s Church, Isabel Street & Bannatyne Avenue, 1894 (demolished)
- * James Penrose House, 232 Bell Avenue (now 444 Logan Avenue), 1894, Grade III
- * St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, 425 Elgin Avenue, 1894-1895 (burned 1968)
- Great-West Saddlery Factory/Warehouse, 112-114 Market Avenue, 1898, Grade III
- Merrick-Anderson Building & adjoining Donald H. Bain Building, 115 Bannatyne Avenue, 1899-1900, Grade II
- Marshall-Wells Warehouse, 123 Bannatyne Avenue, 1900, Grade II
- Scott Memorial Orange Hall, 216-218 Princess Street (original design attributed to McDiarmid; final design to Samuel Hooper), 1900-1902
- Corbett Block, 611-617 Main Street, 1901
- * Cleland Block, 705-707 Main Street, 1901 (demolished)
- * Taylor Block, 241-245 Main Street, repairs, 1901 (demolished)
- Weston Shops, Canadian Pacific Railway, 1903+
- Manitoba Hall, 291½-295 Portage Avenue, 1903 (demolished)
- Winnipeg Paint and Glass Co. Building, 179 Pioneer Avenue, 1903 (burned 1907)
- Sandison Block, 302-306 Main Street, 1904 (demolished)
- * Manitoba Builders Supply Co. Storehouse, Point Douglas Avenue, 1904
- Point Douglas Church, 95 Macdonald Avenue, 1905
- Customs Examining Warehouse, 145 McDermot Avenue, 1908
- Winnipeg Paint and Glass Co. Building, 179 Pioneer Avenue, 1908 (demolished)
- * Keewayden Block (Jacob-Crowley Building), 138 Portage Avenue East, 1909
- St. Stephen’s Presbyterian Church (Elim Chapel), 546 Portage Avenue, 1910
- Canada Building, 352 Donald Street, 1910, Grade III
- Swift Canadian Co. Building, 312 William Avenue, 1911
- Somerset Block, 294 Portage Avenue, addition of upper storeys, 1911

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12 Province of Manitoba, *The Manitoba Gazette* 74, 10 (March 10, 1945), p. 248.
14 Drawn from the files of the City of Winnipeg’s Heritage Planner; the City’s Record of Building Permits; biographical material on James McDiarmid by sources previously quoted; and items in local newspapers and trade journals (i.e., Construction and Western Canada Contractor and Builder).
James McDiarmid work (continued):
* St. Stephen’s House (annex to St. Stephen’s Presbyterian Church), 299 Young St., 1911-1912
Cumberland (Nokomis) Block, 344 Cumberland Avenue, 1912
Bank of Ottawa, 363 Main Street, addition, 1912 (demolished)
* Winnipeg Industrial Bureau Exhibition Building, 267 Main Street, addition, 1912-1913
  (demolished)
Notre Dame Investment (Commercial) Building, 169 Pioneer Avenue, 1912-1913 (demolished)
Pantages (Playhouse) Theatre, 180 Market Avenue, 1913-1914, Grade II
Dr. C.W. Gordon House, 54 West Gate, 1913, Grade II
Knox Presbyterian (United) Church, 400 Edmonton Street, 1914-1917
Completion of the Manitoba Legislative & Law Courts buildings, Broadway, 1915-1920
Public Press Building, 290 Vaughan Street, 1917, Grade III
Gardener’s Cottage, for R.A. Rogers, 64 Nassau Street, 1922 (demolished)
Manitoba Telephone System Building, 166 Portage Avenue East, 1930-1931
Science Building, University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus, 1931-1932

Outside Winnipeg
Participation in construction of the Winnipeg (Shoal Lake) aqueduct in a consortium with J.P.
  and J.H. Tremblay and Edward Cass, 1914-1919
Dominion Government Customs House, Calgary, pre-1916
Provincial Court House, Port Arthur, 1923
T. Eaton Co. Department Store, Calgary, 1928-1929
Canadian Pacific Railway roundhouses, machine shops and other facilities, Western Canada
Revilleon Building, Edmonton, date unknown
Georgia-Harris Viaduct, Vancouver, date unknown
Plate 1 – Portion of J.D. Parr’s Map of what would become downtown Winnipeg and the Warehouse District, 1874. Note the extensive surveying of lots on both sides of Main Street north of Brown’s Creek (bottom arrow) and the lack of surveying to the south and the creeks running into the Red River including Brown’s Creek (south) and Logan’s Creek (north – top arrow) (City of Winnipeg.)
Plate 2 – Main Street, looking south from Portage Avenue, 1897. The massive Manitoba Hotel, built in the early 1890s, dominated the skyline until its destruction by fire in February 1899. (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba.)
Plate 3 – City of Winnipeg Fire Atlas, Overview Map, 1906-1914. The completed Winnipeg Transfer Railway and its many north-south spur lines into the warehouse district runs from Water Avenue to Point Douglas Avenue (arrows). (City of Winnipeg.)
Plate 4 – This 1970 image shows the extent of the railway yards south of Pioneer Avenue at what is today, The Forks National Historic Site. The Federal Building, 269 Main Street is in the front right corner of the picture. (City of Winnipeg.)
Plate 5 – Some examples of Winnipeg’s Chicago Style commercial buildings: Union Tower, 504 Main Street, built 1904 (top left); Boyd Building, 384 Portage Avenue, built 1912 (top right); and the Paris Building, 259 Portage Avenue, 1915-1917 (bottom). (M. Peterson.)
Plate 6 – Keewayden Block (Jacob-Crowley Building), 138 Portage Avenue, front (north) façade, 2015 (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 7 – Keewayden Block (Jacob-Crowley Building), 138 Portage Avenue, detail of front (north) façade, 2015 (M. Peterson, 2015.)

Plate 8 – Keewayden Block (Jacob-Crowley Building), 138 Portage Avenue, detail of roofline on front (north) façade, 2015 (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 9 – Keewayden Block (Jacob-Crowley Building), 138 Portage Avenue, west façade, 2015 (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 10 – Keewayden Block (Jacob-Crowley Building), 138 Portage Avenue, front & east façades, 2015 (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 11 – Keewayden Block (Jacob-Crowley Building), 138 Portage Avenue, rear (south) façade, 2015 (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 12 – Keewayden Block (Jacob-Crowley Building), 138 Portage Avenue, first floor concrete columns, 2016 (M. Peterson, 2016.)

Plate 13 – Keewayden Block (Jacob-Crowley Building), 138 Portage Avenue, third floor, 2016 (M. Peterson, 2016.)
Plate 14 – Keewayden Block (Jacob-Crowley Building), 138 Portage Avenue, sixth floor, 2016 (M. Peterson, 2016.)

Plate 15 – Keewayden Block (Jacob-Crowley Building), 138 Portage Avenue, basement section extending past exterior wall, 2016 (M. Peterson, 2016.)
Plate 16 – Keewayden Block (Jacob-Crowley Building), 138 Portage Avenue, original basement fire door, 2016 (M. Peterson, 2016.)
Plate 17 – Keewayden Block, 138 Portage Avenue, front (north) façade, 1978, showing the glazed transom windows. (City of Winnipeg.)
Plate 18 – Portage Avenue looking west from Westbrook Street, 2015 (M. Peterson, 2015.)

Plate 19 – Portage Avenue looking east from Main Street, 2015 (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 20 – James McDiarmid (1855-1934), ca.1908. (Reproduced from Manitoban As We See ‘Em, 1908 and 1909 [Winnipeg, MB: Newspaper Cartoonists’ Association of Manitoba, ca.1909], online edition.)
Plate 21 – Benjamin Jacob (left) and John H. Crowley (right), no date. (Manitoba Museum, 63, in “The Winnipeg Garment Industry, 1900-1955,” [Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Historic Resources Branch, 1989], p. 160.)
Plate 23 – Jacob Crowley Company sewing machine room, 138 Portage Avenue, ca.1940.  
Plate 25 – City Dairy Stable Building, 49 Adelaide Street, 2015. Note the painted “Jacob-Crowley” signage at the roofline. (M. Peterson, 2015.)