354 PORTAGE AVENUE

CARLTON BUILDING

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee

July 2002
The evolution of Portage Avenue into Winnipeg’s primary commercial thoroughfare was a gradual process. Originally, commerce was concentrated at Upper Fort Garry, all trading taking place within its walls. Main Street was simply a trail, connecting this fort with the Hudson’s Bay Company’s other major post, Lower Fort Garry, before heading northward to the bay and ultimately to England. The real estate boom of the early 1880s led to an expansion of much of Winnipeg’s society, including its retail sector. Logically, many business owners chose Main Street to sell their wares. Business blocks of all sizes and descriptions lined both sides of the street north of the old fort, and by the beginning of the 20th century, there were few empty lots between the fort and Portage Avenue.

But the new century brought dramatic change to the city. And this was keenly felt on Portage Avenue. The Clarendon Hotel, built in 1884 on the northwest corner of Donald Street, “stood out almost alone as a landmark on the north side of the avenue”¹ as one reporter described the area. Nearly 20 years later, the hotel was still one of the only major buildings on the street. But the rumour and then the 1905 completion of the T. Eaton Company store at 320 Portage Avenue changed everything. The avenue witnessed a dramatic increase in the amount of pedestrian and vehicular traffic and businessmen were quick to take advantage. Offices, retail stores and banks began to line the street and Portage Avenue slowly began to usurp Main Street as the commercial centre of the burgeoning capital city. By 1915, the Somerset Building (1906), Bank of Nova Scotia (1908), McArthur (Childs) Building (1909), Boyd Building (1912) and Paris Building (1915) had all been added to the growing stock of magnificent Portage Avenue buildings. When the Hudson’s Bay Company completed its massive store at Vaughan Street in 1926, it marked both a symbolic and a tangible move away from Main Street for Winnipeg’s retailers.

In 1912, at the height of Winnipeg’s growth era, one of the city’s best known and prominent finance, real estate and insurance firms built a retail/office structure in the heart of the burgeoning retail centre of Winnipeg on Portage Avenue.

¹ Manitoba Free Press, September 4, 1909, p. 5.
STYLE

The Carlton Building is one of many excellent examples of the Chicago Style gracing Winnipeg’s downtown. The style takes its name from that city’s influential architects of the 1880s and 1890s. This group took the familiar Richardsonian Romanesque style and re-tooled it to complement the latest engineering technologies. The new steel framing and reinforced concrete construction methods allowed for the erection of much taller commercial buildings – the skyscraper. The new buildings featured non-load-bearing exterior walls, allowing for an increase in windows and size of openings and a corresponding decrease in the divisions between these openings.

The overall plan of the building was still firmly based in the design of the classical column. The heavily embellished base took the form of large display windows, the area often clad in stone or terra cotta and topped by an overhanging belt course. The central portion of the column, the midsection of the skyscraper, was less enthusiastically treated with numerous bays of large windows. The capital of the column was recreated by an ornate upper and/or attic floor and a heavy cornice.2

Materials used were most often brick, cut stone and terra cotta. Examples in Winnipeg are found throughout the downtown, not surprising given Winnipeg’s desire to live up to its billing as the “Chicago of the North.” The Carlton Building would be a medium-sized example of the style, similar in scale to the North West Commercial Travellers’ Association Building, 291 Garry Street (built 1908), or the former North West Trust Building, 234 Portage Avenue (1909). Larger structures would be the Confederation Life Assurance Company Building, 455 Main Street, built in 1912, the Electric Railway Chambers Building, 213 Notre Dame Avenue, built in 1913, and the Paris Building, 259 Portage Avenue, built 1915-17.

CONSTRUCTION
This three-storey retail/office building stands on the southeast corner of Portage Avenue and Carlton Street and measures approximately 26.4 x 39.7 x 15.3 metres (86½ x 130 x 50 feet). Resting on a concrete foundation, steel beams provide structural support for the wood joists and brick walls of the superstructure. Cut stone and terra cotta are used as external cladding on the two public façades (north and west).³

Sutherland Construction Company, a local firm, was responsible for the construction of the structure with a total cost of $110,000. In the course of construction, 70 cords of stone, 400,000 bricks, 7,000 square yards of plaster and 140 cubic yards of concrete were used.⁴

DESIGN
The original design of the Carlton Block called for retail space on the ground floor and office space on the upper two floors. This division was reflected in the exterior design of the structure. As originally drawn and built, the ground floor of the north (Portage Avenue) and west (Carlton Street) façades featured large display windows topped by a band of transom windows of “polished plate prism glass” (Plates 1-4).⁵ The plans called for recessed entrances on the Portage Avenue elevation for each of the four stores as well as a centrally located main entrance leading to the elevator and main staircase. On Carlton Street, three more recessed entrances were built at the south end of the building near the back lane (Plate 5). The entire ground floor was finished in a brilliantly bright terra cotta cladding in a floral motif (Plate 6).

Above the transom windows, the terra cotta was laid into a belt course, visually dividing the upper and ground floors.

The upper two storeys of the block featured large rectangular paired windows, recessed and separated by ornamental panels between the floors. The lintels of the third-floor windows were

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³ City of Winnipeg Assessment Record, Roll No. 934790-12-1. Below as AR.
⁴ City of Winnipeg Building Permit, #1399/1912.
⁵ Architect’s plan, #1399/1912, courtesy of City Archives.
arched. The terra cotta of the upper storeys was fashioned in block-like shapes to mimic stone. The roof is accented by a complete entablature, the frieze embellished with ornamental terra cotta panels and interrupted periodically by large, yet delicate paired brackets. A heavy, overhanging cornice finished the structure (Plate 7).

The east wall (Plate 8) and the south façade (facing the back lane) were finished in common clay brick with a small number of rectangular windows set in ordinary frames.

As originally designed, the Carlton Building was one of the more conspicuous structures on Portage Avenue that, by the time of its construction, had filled with a number of magnificent terra cotta office buildings.

**INTERIOR**

As mentioned previously, the Carlton Block was designed with four retail shops on the ground floor and small offices on the second and third storeys.

The basement of the building featured a large boiler room and separate storage space for each of the shops (Plate 9). The ground floor included the four shops, as well as a main entrance/elevator lobby with terrazzo flooring bordered by marble (Plate 5). Two large vaults were located behind the main staircase for use by the inside retailers. The three Carlton Street entrances led to small rooms with stairs giving access to the basement and the storage space of all four shops. A men’s washroom was located at the rear of the first floor.

The second floor was divided into 13 offices, three larger spaces facing Portage Avenue and smaller ones along Carlton Street and on the interior (Plate 10). All were serviced by a 2.1-metre (7-foot) wide central corridor. A storage vault and women’s washroom were located on this floor. The third floor duplicated the interior organization of the second floor, with a men’s rather than a women’s washroom (Plate 11).
This interior has seen drastic alterations over the years as tenants and the uses of the building have changed. The ground-floor retail space is now divided into two, a restaurant occupies the east half and a new retailer will occupy the western space. Upgrades and renovations have removed all original finishes from this level (Plate 12).

To accommodate the skywalk system, a large public corridor has been built through the second-floor of the building (Plate 13). As on the first floor, original finishes have been removed and replaced, there are now three retail spaces on each side of the corridor (Plate 14).

Renovations have begun for a new tenant for the third floor, the space is open and none of the original finishes remain (Plate 15).

**INTEGRITY**

The building stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition. The exterior has, however, suffered serious alteration on the ground floor.

On the Portage Avenue façade, the building’s main entrance has been shifted to the east opening and only two other doorways remain (Plate 16). Other drastic changes to this elevation include the removal of all detailing on the ground floor, the use of Tyndall stone and the replacement of the large display windows by smaller openings. These alterations were completed for tenant Holt Renfrew in 1942. The upper floors facing Portage Avenue have not been altered.

The Carlton Street elevation has fared little better. The most obvious alteration is the construction of the skywalk attached to the building’s second floor near its northwest corner (Plate 17). The terra cotta ornamentation is intact on the ground floor, although the transom windows have been filled in, only one of the three side entrances remains and the large display windows were replaced by much smaller units in 1942.

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6 *Winnipeg Tribune*, July 2, 1942, p. 15. Moody and Moore were the architects of these alterations.
Much of the upper part of this building remains true to the original design, but the ground floor, like so many other buildings along Portage Avenue, has suffered severe alteration due to renovations.

STREETSCAPE
The Carlton Block is located in the middle of the retail section of Portage Avenue and contributes to the historic character of the neighbourhood despite the construction of newer buildings in the area (Plates 18-20).

ARCHITECT
American-born architect John D. Atchison (Plate 21) designed the Carlton Block. Atchison began designing structures in Winnipeg shortly after 1900 and within a few years had relocated his business to the Manitoba capital. His Chicago-based educational and professional training prepared him well for his work in Canada and he quickly gained the reputation as one of the finest designers in Western Canada (biographical information at Appendix II). He has been given 20 points by the Historical Buildings Committee.

He was particularly adept at the use of terra cotta and the design of Chicago Style buildings, of which he created many of the city’s finest examples (Plate 22).

INSTITUTION
This block was built for Oldfield, Kirby and Gardner, a prominent Winnipeg real estate, finance and insurance company founded by British immigrant John Henry Oldfield (1857-1924) in 1881. Although many such firms came and went during the real estate boom of the period, Oldfield was able to survive and in 1899 was joined by another British-born real estate man, William Hicks Gardner (1873-1951), who had worked for much of the 1890s as part of the real estate
firm Nares and Gardner (ultimately becoming Nares, Robinson and Black). The newly formed Oldfield and Gardner took up office space in the Bird Block, 433 Main Street. The company grew and in 1906 took on Walter T. Kirby (1858-ca.1950) as a partner. Kirby had been an insurance agent in the city for many years as an independent agent as well as in partnership with W.R. Colgate as Kirby and Colgate. The company was active in three areas – investment, general insurance and real estate – with a concentration on attracting British investment, a task it successfully undertook for over half a century.

During the pre-World War I expansion phase, the company “played a key role in rentals, mortgages and the buying and selling of properties” as far away as Victoria, B.C. and the Northwest Territories. The investment branch dealt in bonds and loans and the insurance division, which was closely allied with the British firm Norwich Union, handled a wide range of policies. The company’s rise in stature can be seen in the relative opulence of its business headquarters. After renting space as individuals, the three-man firm moved into their own space, a modest building at 391 Main Street (between McDermot and Lombard avenues) on the east side between the Commerce and Hamilton bank buildings (Plate 23), ca. 1906-1909. Their next offices were located in a magnificent terra cotta structure at 234 Portage Avenue built in 1909 (Plate 24).

The company continued to prosper, even with the demise of its three founders. In the early 1960s, the investment section split off and subsequently dissolved. The insurance and real estate departments continued on until 1967 when they merged with other companies (although the name Oldfield, Kirby and Gardner continued to be used for real estate transactions until 1980).
The business maintained ownership of the Carlton Block until 1954, when it was sold to the Canada Trust Company. This firm owned the block until Holt Renfrew, a long-time tenant, purchased the building. It was sold to real estate giant Cadillac Fairview Limited in 1985, although the actual transfer did not occur until Holt Renfrew’s move to Portage Place in 1987.13

According to tenant lists, the Canadian Department of Agriculture was the first occupant of the block, but by 1914 there was a multitude of occupied offices, with lawyers, land surveyors, real estate agents, dentists, doctors, architects and builders on the list. The retail space on the ground floor was occupied by Story and Story, tailors, and Dr. Jaeger’s Sanitary Woolen System Company. The occupancy was similar a year later, with the western two shops occupied by The Clothes Shop. While Story and Story and Dr. Jaeger continued on into the 1920s, the west end tenant was quickly replaced by Holt Renfrew and Company, which would occupy this location on Portage Avenue for many decades to come and ultimately convert second-floor offices into retail space.14

The company was formed in Quebec City in 1837 as a hat shop by Irish merchant William S. Henderson. In 1849, Henderson’s line was expanded to include furs and it was here that it found success. It quickly gained an international reputation as a quality furrier, so much so that Queen Victoria appointed the company Furrier-in-Ordinary to her Majesty. The company would receive a Royal warrant (given to businesses supplying the Royal family for five consecutive years) for the next five generations. In Canada, the retailer soon expanded into other aspects of high fashion, including men’s and women’s clothing, accessories, jewellery and perfume. Its exclusive contracts with some of the world’s most prominent names such as Christian Dior and Yves Saint Laurent, solidified its place as one of Canada’s most exclusive department stores.15

13 Winnipeg Free Press, December 4, 1985; and City of Winnipeg Assessment Roll, Roll No. 934790-12-1.
14 Henderson’s Directories (below as HD), 1912-30.
By the late 1920s, another clothing retailer, D’Allaird’s Limited, was also occupying space in the Carlton Block, and the pair shared the building for the next 40 years. In 1975, Holt Renfrew expanded again, taking over the space occupied by D’Allaird’s. With Holt Renfrew’s relocation to Portage Place in the late 1980s, the ground floor was renovated and became a Salisbury Restaurant (#352) and a Toronto Dominion Bank branch (#354). This latter space and the third floor are presently being renovated for new tenants.

**EVENT**

There is no known significant event connected with this structure.

**CONTEXT**

This building reflects the growing need for modern office and retail space along Portage Avenue after the construction of the T. Eaton Company department store encouraged a number of major retailers to locate on Portage. Businesses sought to locate their offices there as well and new larger buildings began to replace older structures all along the thoroughfare.

The pre-1915 period also saw the success of many local real estate and financial firms and Oldfield, Kirby and Gardner was certainly one of the more prominent in Western Canada by 1912.

It is also significant that a major Canadian retailer should choose to occupy some or much of the building for 70 years, expanding and updating its space as it expanded and updated its merchandise.

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16 HD, 1920-80.
17 AR.
LANDMARK

Although it has been some time since long-time tenant Holt Renfrew has occupied the building, many Winnipeggers would still recognize this building today.
APPENDIX I

CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report

Assessment Record
Prepared By: M. Peterson

Building Address: 354 Portage Avenue (350-56) Building Name: Carlton Building (Holt Renfrew Building)

Original Use: retail/offices Current Use: retail/offices

Roll No. (Old): 934790 (17100) RSN: 141753

Municipality: 12 Ward: 1 Property or Occupancy Code: 33

Legal Description: 1 St. John, Plan 129, Block 3, Lots 499/500

Location: southeast corner Carlton Street

Date of Construction: 1912 Storeys: 3

Heritage Status: ON INVENTORY

Construction Type: stone, brick, terra cotta and concrete foundation (wood joists/steel beams)


SEE NEXT PAGE

Information:
- 86½ x 130 x 50 + = 613,548 cu. ft.
- 1967- 2nd floor taken over by Holt Renfrew and offices moved to 3rd floor
- 1975- Holt Renfrew takes over space formerly occupied by D’Allaird’s
- front- Tyndall ashlar to cornice at 2nd floor – terra cotta above

ARCHITECT: J.D. ATCHISON

CONTRACTOR: SUTHERLAND CONSTRUCTION CO.
### BUILDING PERMITS — 354 PORTAGE AVENUE

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1 Plans available: A - Archives; M - Microfilm; 4th - Fourth floor, 65 Garry Street
APPENDIX II

JOHN DANLEY ATCHISON (1870-1959)

Unquestionably one of the Winnipeg’s most talented architects, J.D. Atchison was born in Monmouth, Illinois in 1870. Educated in Chicago, he studied architecture at the Chicago Art Institute and the Chicago Manual Training School. After graduation he worked in the offices of W.G. Barfield, as well as for the firm Jenney and Mundie. William Le Baron Jenney was considered by many to be one of America’s leading architects and Atchison participated in the planning of buildings utilizing the latest technology in steel skyscraper construction.

In 1895, he opened his own practice that continued until the early 1900s. He worked on the staff of the World's Columbian Exposition and for the Chicago and Eastern Illinois Railroad. His commissions brought him to Winnipeg and by 1905, the prosperity and future prospects prompted him to relocate his business here.

A list of some of the more prominent local buildings designed by J.D. Atchison over his career includes:

Alexandria Block, 389-93 Graham Ave. (1901) – demolished
Wardlow Apartments, 544 Wardlaw Ave. (1905) – Grade II
Kennedy Building (Mitchell-Copp), 315 Portage Ave. (1906) – Grade II
Hample Building, 273½ Portage Ave. (1906)
Concordia (Bon Accord) Block, northeast corner Main St. and Logan Ave. (1906) - partially demolished
Stone Block, 650 Main St. (1907) - demolished
Nanton Stables, 61 Roslyn Cres. (1908) – converted to residence
Dennisoun House, 166 Roslyn Rd. (1908) – Grade III

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3 Compiled from City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Files; J. Wade, Manitoba Architecture to 1940 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1976); Winnipeg Telegram, September 18, 1906, p. 55; Winnipeg Tribune, December 21, 1907; and F.H. Schofield, op. cit., pp. 374-75.
Atchison also designed structures in other western provinces. He won the design competition for the Moose Jaw City Hall, c.1912-13 (not built) and planned the Moose Jaw Collegiate (1908-10), Saskatchewan Presbyterian Boys’ College and Principal's Residence (1911-12), and Hammond Building, Main St., Moose Jaw (1912).

Atchison was also intimately involved in promoting the concept of The Mall or Capital Approach from Portage Avenue to the Legislative Building along Memorial Boulevard. He prepared proposals for the City Planning Commission (1911) and later the Winnipeg Town Planning

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Commission (1913). He also made proposals to the Greater Winnipeg Plan Commission (1917; 1919) that he became chairman of in 1919.\(^5\)

In 1923, Atchison left Winnipeg for Pasadena, California and continued to practice there, adopting the Spanish Colonial style for his residential work. He died in 1959.\(^6\)

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\(^6\) The *Emerson Court House and Town Hall Building* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Recreation, Historic Resources Branch, 1985), pp. 8-11.
Plate 1 – Architect’s plans, “Elevation to Portage Avenue,” 1912. (Courtesy of City Archives, Plan #1399/1912.)
Plate 2 – Architect’s plans, “Elevation to Carlton Street,” 1912. (Courtesy of City Archives, Plan #1399/1912.)
Plate 3 – Architect’s plans, detail of one of the Portage Avenue entrances, 1912. (Courtesy of City Archives, Plan #1399/1912.)
Plate 4 – The Carlton Block, shortly after its opening, as it appeared in the Manitoba Free Press, December 21, 1912, p. 13. (Courtesy of the Legislative Library of Manitoba.)
Plate 5 – Architect’s plans, “First Floor Plan,” 1912. (Courtesy of City Archives, Plan #1399/1912.)
Plate 6 – Terra cotta cladding on the ground floor (Carlton Street façade). (M. Peterson, 2002.)
Plate 7 – Detail of upper storeys, northwest corner (above) and Portage Avenue (below). (M. Peterson, 2002.)
Plate 8 – East and north façades. (M. Peterson, 2002.)
Plate 9 – Architect’s plans, “Basement Plan,” 1912. (Courtesy of City Archives, Plan #1399/1912.)
Plate 10 – Architect’s plans, “Second Floor Plan,” 1912. (Courtesy of City Archives, Plan #1399/1912.)
Plate 11 – Architect’s plans, “Third Floor Plan,” 1912. (Courtesy of City Archives, Plan #1399/1912.)
Plate 12 – Portage Avenue elevator lobby, ground floor. (M. Peterson, 2002.)

Plate 13 – Skywalk corridor, second floor. (M. Peterson, 2002.)
Plate 14 – Second floor retail space in the Carlton Block. (M. Peterson, 2002.)

Plate 15 – Third floor, Carlton Block. (M. Peterson, 2002.)
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Plate 16 – Portage Avenue façade. (M. Peterson, 2002.)

Plate 17 – Carlton Street façade. (M. Peterson, 2002.)
Plate 18 – Portage Avenue looking west, ca.1915. The Carlton Block is located at the arrow. (Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

Plate 19 – Portage Avenue looking west. (M. Peterson, 2002.)
Plate 20 – Portage Avenue looking east. (M. Peterson, 2002.)

Plate 21 – J.D. Atchison (1870-1959), 1913. (Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N5240.)
Plate 22 – Some of the more prominent designs of architect J.D. Atchison: #1- N.W.C.T.A. Building, 291 Garry Street (1908); #2- Chamber of Commerce Building (Great-West Life Building), 177 Lombard Avenue (1911); #3- Boyd Building, 388 Portage Avenue (1912); #4- Union Tower, 191 Lombard Avenue (1912-13); and #5- Curry Building, 233 Portage Avenue (1915).
Plate 23 – Oldfield, Kirby and Gardner Block, Main Street, 1909. (Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

Plate 24 – Oldfield, Kirby and Gardner Building, 234 Portage Avenue, 1937. The structure was built in 1909, designed by J.D. Atchison. (Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)