300 PRINCESS STREET

CANADIAN FAIRBANKS-MORSE COMPANY WAREHOUSE

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
Researcher: M. Peterson
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Winnipeg in the early 1890s was on the verge of a spectacular era of growth, development and maturity that would almost completely change the City by World War I. But this comprehensive growth followed patterns established a decade 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 and avenues. Perhaps more important, however, was the beginning of the segregation of the various sectors of the city – residential, commercial and industrial – and their specific buildings.1 The huge advance in land prices along Main Street north of Portage Avenue necessitated the replacement of the earlier residential development (Plate 1) 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. Companies like R.J. Whitla, Stobart, Eden and Company, George D. Wood 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 2).

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Princess Street, located just west of the City Hall/Market complex, developed as one of the city’s premier thoroughfares (Plate 3), supported by the construction of the CPR’s Princess Street Spur, which, beginning in 1902, ran along the west side of Princess Street from the CPR mainline to William Avenue and beyond. This line gave businesses on the north side of the street year round access to the transcontinental line, simplifying their shipping and receiving activities.

In May 1911, a local paper reported that a total of $½ million worth of building permits had been issued by the City of Winnipeg on April 27 and 28, bringing that month’s total to $1.9 million ($48 million in today’s currency).\(^2\) One of the permits was for a large reinforced concrete warehouse at Princess Street and Henry Avenue for international manufacturer Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Company (Plate 4).

**STYLE**

The bulkiness of the design, the use of arches and the minimal ornamentation make this warehouse a good example of the Romanesque Revival style, very popular in warehouse districts throughout North America from the 1880s well into the 20th century. In the 1880s, the style was influenced greatly by American architect H.H. Richardson (1838-1886) and was often referred to as Richardsonian Romanesque.\(^3\) 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.\(^4\) 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

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\(^2\) Manitoba Free Press, May 1, 1911, p. 13.


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 structure, located on the southwest corner of Princess Street and Henry Avenue, measures approximately 35.8 x 29.6 x 17.4 metres and cost $100,000 to complete in 1911 (see Appendix I for construction information).\(^5\) The solid brick exterior walls are supported by a reinforced concrete skeleton and 8.9-centimetre concrete floor slabs.\(^6\) Reinforced concrete, a relatively new support system, allowed for much stronger structures, able to carry heavier loads and support taller buildings. For Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Company, this was crucial given the heavy goods to be stored in the building.

On September 7, 1911, seven bays of the roof collapsed as workers removed the props, killing two men (Plate 5). Initial investigations, supported by a Coroner’s inquest suggested that the concrete was sub-standard, although a later report in an engineering magazine also suggested that cold weather delayed the hardening and setting process, causing the failure.\(^7\) Construction was completed without further incident.

DESIGN

According to the original 1911 plans (Plate 4), the symmetrical front (east) façade began at grade with a raised foundation wall, clad in limestone, leading to the dark red brick of the upper floors. The ground floor was filled by large arched openings – display windows in the outer bays, the ornate entrance in the centre bay. This entrance, recessed and set in a terra cotta frame, included floral elements and a panel with the company’s name – which had to be changed to add the name

\(^5\) City of Winnipeg Building Permit, #883/1911.
\(^6\) Engineering News, October 5, 1911.
\(^7\) Loc. cit.
“Morse” to the panel (Plate 6). The five bays of the ground floor were carried to the upper three floors, divided by wide brick pilasters with stone accenting at the second floor and terra cotta geometric designs above the fourth floor openings. Upper storey windows within the bays were paired, each with concrete sills (continuous on the second floor and lug on the upper two floors) and multi-paned window units. The flat roof was highlighted by the raised capitals of the pilasters and lightly-hued terra cotta capping.

It appears that the warehouse was built as designed (Plate 7). Today, this main façade has seen extensive alteration on the ground floor with the replacement of all display window units and the conversion of the south opening into an entrance (Plate 8). The upper floors now feature single pane window units (Plate 9). The terra cotta accenting still embellished the roofline (Plate 10).

The design of the other main façade, facing north onto Henry Avenue, continued the basic layout of the east façade (Plate 11). Window units on the ground floor have all been replaced, the remainder of the façade appears to be unaltered (Plate 12). Painted signage has, for many decades, been found on both sides of the northeast corner and has been repainted by the present owners.

The south side of the building was originally built next to a three-storey structure, the red face brick is only used above this level, common clay brick used below (Plate 13). This façade was windowless according to the original plans, but numerous arched openings on the ground floor have been bricked in (Plate 14). It might be that the openings were created to allow access to the neighbouring building.

The rear (west) façade includes several unusual features including exposed concrete giving the observer an excellent view of the structural support system of the building (Plate 15). As designed, this elevation included a raised, uncovered loading platform running the entire width of the structure to take full advantage of the CPR Princess Street Spur. In 1925, an enclosed brick building was completed on at the south end of the platform, a concrete block addition
completed at a later date (Plate 16) and demolished in 2005. This elevation also includes metal fire escapes, many newer windows in rectilinear openings and painted signage.

**INTERIOR**
The original plans for the structure detail a functional interior. The basement held the coal room and boiler, washrooms and elevator and related machinery in the northwest corner, stairs in the middle of the space going to the ground floor and open storage space in the remainder. The ground floor held the loading area at the west end, separated by the freight elevator that could be accessed from either side, a counter along the south wall, the central staircase and open display space (Plate 17). The second floor was organized with offices along the north side, vault, elevator and washrooms in the northwest corner and two sets of stairs (one centrally located and one on the south wall).

The third and fourth floors were undivided storage space.

Major changes have occurred to the building since its conversion into a social services centre in the early 2000s. The basement continues to be used for storage and mechanical (Plate 18), the first floor is used as the reception area and includes kitchen and eating areas (Plate 19), the second floor has been converted into sleeping facilities for both men and women (Plate 20), the third floor is offices (Plate 21) and the fourth floor is only partially used at present. The original freight elevator is still operable and features the original wood grill (Plate 22).

**INTEGRITY**
The building stands on its original site, appears to be in good structural condition for its age and its two main façades, beyond ground floor openings, have not suffered extensive alteration.
STREETSCAPE
This warehouse is located just north of the boundaries of the Exchange District National Historic Site, on one of the area’s busiest streets (Plates 23 and 24).

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS
Noted Montreal, PQ architects Brown and Vallance are responsible for the design of the Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Company Warehouse. The pair was listed as the architects for only four other building in the City of Winnipeg Building Permits and all were built between 1911 and 1913 (see Appendix II for biographical information).8

This is the first Brown and Vallance building evaluated by the Historical Buildings and Resources Committee.

General contractors for the building were the local firm George H. Archibald Company. Called “specialists and experts in concrete construction”9 by City’s building inspector, the company operated from 1908 to September 1915.10 It appears that Archibald, who was born in Nova Scotia in 1877,11 moved west to Alberta at this time and died in Lethbridge, AB in 1952.12

Their modest list of contracts includes:13
Maple Leaf Mill, Kenora, ON (1908)
Winnipeg Horse Show Arena and Bandstand (1909) – demolished
McLaughlin Carriage Co. Garage, 275 Maryland Street (1909) – demolished
Pryce Jones Department Store, First Street SW, Calgary, AB (1910)

8 City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books, 1899-1926.
9 Manitoba Free Press, September 11, 1911, p. 3.
11 Canada Census, 1911.
12 Lethbridge Herald, July 9, 1952, p. 10.
G.H. Archibald Company contracts, continued:

Guertin Building (John Leslie Furniture Bldg.), 270 Assiniboine Avenue (1911) – demolished
Canada Bread Company Building, 258 Burnell Street (1911)
Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Co. Warehouse, 300 Princess Street (1911)
Hedley Shaw Mill, Medicine Hat, AB (1914)
Transcona Sewage Lift Station, Plessis Road corner Kildare Avenue (1915) – demolished

PERSON/INSTITUTION

Fairbanks, Morse and Company had its beginnings in Vermont in 1823, when Thaddeus Fairbanks (1796-1886) opened a plow and heating stove factory and was joined a year later by his brother Erastus (1792-1864) to create E & T Fairbanks Company.\(^\text{14}\) Less than 10 years later, he had patented a platform scale; the modern and dependable weigh scale would be manufactured and sold worldwide by the 1860s. The company also dealt in windmills, popular on farms throughout the western United States (the first Canadian branch of the company was opened in Montreal, PQ in 1876 where a factory was later opened).\(^\text{15}\)

Charles Hosmer Morse (1833-1921), originally an employee of Fairbanks Company, built up his own profitable company, organized as Fairbanks, Morse & Company in 1866 and selling not only Fairbanks scales, but Eclipse windmills and Williams Steam Engines by 1890 and adding other products to his company’s “catalogue” by acquiring other manufacturers.\(^\text{16}\) Fairbanks, Morse and Company was headquartered in Chicago, Illinois and all major Canadian and American cities soon opened branches of the Company. In 1893, the company produced the first commercially successful gasoline engine and its diesel power plants of the 20\(^{\text{th}}\) century would be found in farm equipment, fishing boats, submarines, mines, railway engines and dozens of other uses. In 1916, Morse acquired control of E & T Fairbanks Company. The newly organized


company continued to be an industry leader into the 1950s when it merged to form Fairbanks-Whitney.\textsuperscript{17}

The company vacated the premises in the 1940s, for a short time the building was known as the Mackenzie Storage Building with tenants including T.S. Taylor, machinery, the fertilizer division of Canada Industries Limited, Crown Cork and Seal and Canada Laco Lamps.\textsuperscript{18} In the 1950s, the building was bought and occupied by farm implement manufacturer Massey-Harris Company.\textsuperscript{19} Over the next several decades the building has been vacant or underutilized, with parts distributors and garment industries the main tenants.

In November 2005, a local Christian humanitarian agency, Siloam Mission, took control of the building, using it to serve meals, house, clothe and supply medical and other services to Winnipeg’s homeless population. In May 2007, the second floor was opened as Hannah’s Place Emergency Shelter, offering beds for 100 people each night. A no-charge health care unit is also located in the building.\textsuperscript{20}

\textbf{EVENT}

There is no known significant historic event connected with this building.

\textbf{CONTEXT}

This building is representative of the type of development occurring in Winnipeg’s warehouse district from 1900 until World War I. Large national and international companies looked to take advantage of the city’s excellent transportation connections, railroads, and its preferential freight rates by locating their warehouses in Winnipeg. Connected to the mainlines via spur lines on both

\textsuperscript{17} FM&C website; and Fairbanks Scales website.
\textsuperscript{18} Henderson’s Directory, 1940.
\textsuperscript{19} City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls, Roll No. 13-081512000, 1920-1990.
the east and west sides of Main Street, the manufactures accessed the growing Western Canadian markets through Winnipeg and all manners of goods were unloaded here.

**LANDMARK**

This building, given its size and corner location, is recognizable within the downtown.
APPENDIX I

CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report

Assessment Record

Building Address: 300 Princess St. (300-310)  
Building Name: Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Co. Wrhse.

Original Use: warehouse  
Current Use: social service centre

Roll No. (Old): 815125 (12979)  
RSN: 155572

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

Legal: 11 & 35 St. John, Plan 32092, Lots 11/12 (Original: 11\textsuperscript{W} St. John, Plan 11, Lots 49: 50: part 51)

Location: southwest corner Henry Avenue

Date of Construction: 1911  
Storeys: 4

Heritage Status: NOMINATED LIST

Construction Type: reinforced concrete frame, brick and concrete foundation, brick and stone superstructure

- 883/1911 [CS] $100,000 (original); 255/1925 [CS] $1,400 (platform); 347/1929 $2,000 (addition);
- 1207/1936 $3,000 (alteration); 2708/1944 $1,500 (repairs); 3351/1944 $25,000 (repairs and alterations);
- 4069/1960 $5,000 (interior alterations); 1354/1961 $1,800 (add loading platform); 368/1960 $8,000 (interior alterations);
- 9100/1983 $10,000 (interior alterations); 116494/2005 $500,000 (demolish one-storey rear addition and interior alterations to basement & ground floor); 154444/2006 $1,000,000 (interior alterations – Medical clinic on main floor, dormitory on 2\textsuperscript{nd} floor & offices on 4\textsuperscript{th} floor); 123551/2008 $72,000 (concrete restoration to west façade); 168999/2011 $600 (alterations to 4\textsuperscript{th} floor); 149360/2013 $15,000 (alterations to entrance vestibule); 159160/2013 $6,720 (replace rear stairs)

Information:
- 117½ x 97 x 57 + = 649,658 cu. ft.
- front (east)- soft salmon brick spandrel wall
- ceilings: B- 9’; 1\textsuperscript{st}- 13’+; 2\textsuperscript{nd}- 11’+; 3\textsuperscript{rd}- 9’+; 4\textsuperscript{th}- 10’+
- east wall: 1\textsuperscript{st}- 21” brick, 2\textsuperscript{nd} to 4\textsuperscript{th}- 13” brick; west wall: 1\textsuperscript{st} to 4\textsuperscript{th}- 13” brick; north wall: 1\textsuperscript{st}- 21” brick, 2\textsuperscript{nd} to 4\textsuperscript{th}- 17” brick
- tar and gravel roof
- Permit 4069/1960- convert 3\textsuperscript{rd} floor into sewing factory

ARCHITECT: BROWN & VALLANCE
CONTRACTOR: GEORGE H. ARCHIBALD & CO.
APPENDIX II

Brown and Vallance

This Montréal, PQ-based partnership was formed in 1907. David Robertson Brown was born in Montréal in 1869 and trained and worked as a draughtsman in a number of local architectural firms beginning in 1885.1 He also worked in Boston, MA and studied at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) before returning to Montréal to set up his own practice in 1892, one of his earliest works is Taylor Presbyterian Church, 1640 Papineau Avenue (1893-1894) and the Board of Trade Building, 300 du Saint-Sacrement Street (1901-1903).2

It was likely at MIT that Brown met Hugh Vallance, who was born in Hamilton, ON in 1866.3 Vallance apprenticed in his home town before continuing his studies in Paris, France at the École des Beaux-Arts and then at MIT. He also found work in Boston before moving to Montréal to partner with D.R. Brown. The pair built an impressive practice, designing a wide range of acclaimed buildings in and around Montréal, in Nova Scotia, Ontario and Alberta and a number of major contracts in Saskatchewan, including the planning and designing of the University of Saskatchewan campus in Saskatoon, SA.4

In Winnipeg, the pair is named on only five permits between 1907 and 1919:5

Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Company Warehouse, 300 Princess Street (1911)
119 Norquay Street, repairs to dwelling (1911)
824 Grosvenor Avenue, E. Victor Vallance House (1912)
Sheridan Apartments, 33 Balmoral Street (1912) – Plate 25
Quebec Bank Building (Montreal Trust Building), 216-218 Portage Avenue (1913) – demolished ca.1963

4 Loc. cit.
5 City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books, 1899-1926.
The partnership was dissolved in 1919, the pair continuing with their own private practices. In 1922, Vallance designed the Crane LTD Building, 1170 Square Phillips in Montréal, considered one of that City’s finest 1920s modern structures. One of Brown’s larger post-partnership structures was the 12-floor Acadia Apartment Block, 1227 Sherbrooke Street West in Montréal, completed in 1925.

Both men died in Montréal, Brown in 1946 and Vallance a year later.

A list of their more notable designs would include:6

- Montréal Children’s Memorial Hospital, Cedar Avenue, Montréal, PQ (1908-1909)
- University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, SA – master plan and 14 major buildings (1909-1930) including: Administration Building (1910-1912); Saskatchewan Hall Student Residence (1910-1912); Engineering Building (1910-1912); Barn and Stock Pavilion (1910-1912); Emmanuel College (1910-1912); Faculty Club (1911-1912); President's Residence (1911-1913); Qu'Appelle Hall Student Residence (1914-1916); and Physics Building (1919-1921)
- Bleury Building, Montréal, PQ (1910)
- Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Warehouse, Saskatoon, SA (1911) – Plate 26
- Strathcona Medical Building, 3640 University Street, McGill University, Montréal, PQ (1911)
- Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Warehouse, 300 Princess Street, Winnipeg, MB (1911)
- Sydney Post Office, Dorchester Street, Sydney, NS (1911) – demolished
- Diocese of Qu’Appelle Building, 1501 College Avenue, Regina, SA (1912)
- Knox United (Presbyterian) Church, 838 Spadina Crescent E, Saskatoon, SA (1912-1914)
- Calgary Herald Building, 130 – 7th Avenue SW, Calgary, AB (1913)
- Montréal Herald Building, 415 Saint-Antoine Street W, Montréal, PQ (1913)
- Qu’Appelle Diocesan School for Girls (St. Chad’s College), 1601 College Avenue, Regina, SA (1913)
- Sherwood Department Store, 2006 Albert Street, Regina, SA (1913)
- Whalen Building, 34 Cumberland Street N, Port Arthur (Thunder Bay), ON (1913)
- Canada Life Assurance Building, 2201 – 11th Avenue, Regina, SA (1914)
- Southam Building, 1070 Bleury Street, Montréal, PQ (1916)
- Crane Limited Building, 3800 Saint-Patrick Street, Montréal, PQ (1919)

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6 Compilation from various biographical dictionaries, archival collections and websites.
Plate 1 – McDermot Avenue looking west from Main Street, ca.1883. (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba.)

Plate 2 – Warehouse District, ca.1905, showing the scale of development over the previous 20 years. (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba.)
Plate 3 – Princess Street looking south from Ross Avenue, ca.1903, the street filled with horse-drawn vehicles. (M. Peterson Collection.)
Plate 4 – Architect’s drawing, “Elevation to Princess Street,” Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Company Warehouse, 300 Princess Street, Plan No. 883/1911. (City of Winnipeg.)
Plate 5 – Picture of a portion of the collapsed roof of the Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Company Warehouse, 300 Princess Street, 1911. (Reproduced from Engineering News, October 5, 1911.)
Plate 6 – Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Company Warehouse, 300 Princess Street, detail of front (east) entrance, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 7 – Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Company Warehouse, 300 Princess Street, front (east) façade, 1978. (City of Winnipeg.)
Plate 8 – Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Company Warehouse, 300 Princess Street, front (east) façade, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

Plate 9 – Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Company Warehouse, 300 Princess Street, detail of upper floors of front (east) façade, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 10 – Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Company Warehouse, 300 Princess Street, detail of roofline of front (east) façade, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 11 – Architect’s drawing, “Elevation to Henry Street [sic],” Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Company Warehouse, 300 Princess Street, Plan No. 883/1911. (City of Winnipeg.)
Plate 12 – Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Company Warehouse, 300 Princess Street, front (east) and north façades, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

Plate 13 – Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Company Warehouse, 300 Princess Street, front (east) and south façades, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 14 – Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Company Warehouse, 300 Princess Street, detail of south façade, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 15 – Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Company Warehouse, 300 Princess Street, north and rear (west) façades, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 16 – Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Company Warehouse, 300 Princess Street, rear (west) façade, 2003. The 1925 brick addition is in the foreground, the concrete block addition behind. The remnants of the CPR Princess Street Spur can be seen in the lower left corner of the building. (M. Peterson, 2003.)
Plate 17 – Architect’s drawing, “Plan of Ground Floor,” Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Company Warehouse, 300 Princess Street, Plan No. 883/1911. (City of Winnipeg.)
Plate 18 – Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Company Warehouse, 300 Princess Street, basement, 2015. (R. Ricci, 2015.)

Plate 19 – Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Company Warehouse, 300 Princess Street, ground floor kitchen space, 2015. (R. Ricci, 2015.)
Plate 20 – Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Company Warehouse, 300 Princess Street, second floor sleeping area, 2015. (R. Ricci, 2015.)

Plate 21 – Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Company Warehouse, 300 Princess Street, third floor, 2015. (R. Ricci, 2015.)
Plate 22 – Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Company Warehouse, 300 Princess Street, freight elevator, 2015. (R. Ricci, 2015.)

Plate 23 – Princess Street looking south from Higgins Avenue, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 24 – Princess Street looking north from Logan Avenue, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

Plate 25 – Sheridan Apartments, 33 Balmoral Avenue; built 1912, designed by Brown and Vallance, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 26 – Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Building, 12 – 23rd Street E, Saskatoon, SA, ca.1912; built 1911, Brown and Vallance, architects. (Reproduced from Saskatoon Public Library, Local History Room, online catalogue, ID Number LH-803.)