55 PRINCESS STREET

WINNIPEG HYDRO SHOWROOM

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
Researcher: M. Peterson
May 2019
This building embodies the following heritage values as described in the *Historical Resources By-law*, 55/2014 (consolidated update July 13, 2016):

(a) This structure was built in 1919, a late addition to the City’s building stock located on the southern outskirts of the warehouse district on one of its premier thoroughfares, Princess Street;

(b) It is associated with the development/expansion of Winnipeg and Manitoba’s electric power system, originally the City Light and Power Company (City Hydro) and later Winnipeg Hydro;

(c) It is an excellent example of the Two-Part Commercial style common throughout the city and was designed by noted local architects James Chisholm and his son Colin;

(d) The solid brick structure features a wealth of delicate terra cotta accenting;

(e) The building is conspicuousness in its important downtown streetscape; and

(f) Many of the building’s exterior architectural elements are unaltered.
The earliest sources of electrical power in what became the City of Winnipeg were coal burning steam plants and were mainly meant for industrial customers. In 1892, the Winnipeg Electric Street Railway Company (WESRC) was incorporated with an exclusive 35-year franchise to operate an electrical streetcar system in the city but soon, through expansion and amalgamation of smaller companies, exercised a near monopoly over gas and electric power by the start of the 20th century. In 1903, it opened a hydro-electric generating plant on the Pinawa Channel of the Winnipeg River and a year later, was renamed the Winnipeg Electric Railway Company (WERC), reaping huge profits, paying its wealthy shareholders large dividends and exercising enormous influence on the Winnipeg and Manitoba economies.

In 1906, amidst cries of unfair pricing from citizens and businesses, Winnipeg’s City Council put the question to the people of Winnipeg, with 90% voting in favour of a public electrical utility – known originally as City Light and Power – the first of its kind in Western Canada. It took nearly three years to organize the necessary capital and in 1909, tenders were let for the construction of a dam and generating system at Pointe du Bois, a set of rapids on the Winnipeg River approximately 160 kilometres northeast of the city. On October 16, 1911, the station began generating hydro-electric power, dropping prices in Winnipeg from 20¢ per kilowatt hour under the private corporation to 10¢ per kilowatt hour in the public utility, and then to 7½¢, one of the lowest rates in North America.

At the same time, a system of distribution for the electricity was also developed with three substations: in the terminal on Rover Street, on McPhillips Avenue (demolished), and at 54 King Street.

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3 Artibise, op. cit., p. 91. The City of Winnipeg already owned a waterworks system, its own quarry and an asphalting plant but none of these compared to the scale of the electrical system being proposed.
The Rover Street terminal (Plate 1) and the King Street substation (Plate 2) both originally contained business offices open to the public.\(^5\)

As World War I was coming to a close, electrification became an important movement across the globe. The rise of household appliances, especially in the kitchen, defined much of the “Roaring Twenties,” spurred on because of the rapid electrification of urban centres, thus creating a demand for more and varied residential technologies.\(^6\) As early as 1917, advertisements for electricity were trumpeting the energy as “a way for the housewife to carry out her duties, such as washing, ironing, toasting and vacuuming, in a well-lit environment with the aid of her agreeable and competent electric servants.”\(^7\) Although natural gas continued to be used extensively, the detractors— the smell, the danger of the open flame and the risk of explosion—and a well-orchestrated campaign by the electric utilities meant a major conversion to electrical appliances (Plate 3).

Advertisements for everything from stoves and washing machines to cream separators and waffle irons filled magazines and newspapers and retail outlets, often operated by the utilities themselves, began to dot the urban landscape. For the housewife, electricity promised safer and easier care of the home and family and more leisure time. For the electric companies, it was a method of offsetting the expense of expanding their domestic markets and ensuring their future profitability.\(^8\) In 1929, a list of electrical items found in the average home included: washing machine, vacuum cleaner, refrigerator, flat iron, toaster, curling iron, percolator, heating pad, corn popper, vibrator and a mangler (a device used to iron sheets).\(^9\)

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\(^9\) Ibid.
By 1928, City Light and Power’s competitor, Winnipeg Electric Company, operated an appliance sales office in the newly constructed Power Building, 428 Portage Avenue (Plate 4), but for the City’s utility, it chose to build adjoining its downtown offices on King Street. In 1919, the new City and Power Showroom was opened to the public at 55 Princess Street.

**STYLE**

This building features a wealth of classically-inspire detailing in its terra cotta and is an excellent example of the Two-Part Commercial Style structure, very common throughout the downtown regions of most North American cities. Especially popular after 1900, the design was used to reflect the varied activities housed in the different areas of the building. The ground floor held the retail spaces, often with recessed entrances and large display windows. A cornice or similar feature, often stone or metal, was usually used to visually separate the ground floor from the upper floors, which included banks of large windows to light the office and/or residential space. Access to this upper floor was often supplied by an ornate entrance on the front façade, which is not the case with this structure.

**CONSTRUCTION**

This two-storey building with no basement measures approximately 21.8 x 30.2 x 10.1 metres and cost $65,000 to construct (see Appendix I for more construction information). The Architect’s plans call for 33.0-centimetre brick walls throughout, accented with terra cotta.

**DESIGN**

The building’s original design was for a one-storey building (Plate 6). Its symmetrical front (west) façade featured a central entrance flanked by large plate glass display windows and smaller side windows, all square headed and all set in light terra cotta. The base of the building was accentuated with a wide band of terra cotta at grade. The terra cotta was also crafted into

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10 City of Winnipeg Assessment Record, Roll No. 600331-12-2, PC 80/82.
paired attached columns around the display windows and doorway with ornate capitals that led to
the complete entablature above. The remainder of the superstructure was clad in dark face brick
and the flat roof was highlighted by a stepped parapet with carved shields and a wide band of
terra cotta.

A second 1919 permit added the second storey, designed to continue the architecture and
material of the original design (Plate 6). It is unclear from the plans whether this second storey
was added before or after the completion of the ground floor. The upper level (which was built
as designed), featured large, square-headed window openings with ornate terra cotta frames and
lug sills on the outer two openings and continuous for the centre five windows. Dark brick
cladding led to a complete entablature of terra cotta at the roof. As built, it was one of the
downtown’s more uniquely designed exteriors (Plate 7).

The main façade today is a mixture of original and altered spaces – the most obvious being the
replacement of the main door and its terra cotta framing now wood and the covering in of the
large display windows with dark granite (Plate 8). All the windows of the west elevation have
been replaced with single pane units. Beyond these elements, the remainder of the exterior is
original the finely detailed terra cotta includes dentils, egg and dart moulding and floral motifs
(Plates 9 and 10).

The south wall now features three large overhead garage doors (Plate 11). Several windows with
lug sills are located on the second floor and a small “Packing Room” building was originally found
at the southeast corner (Plate 12). The north elevation is very similar to the south, with two
overhead garage doors and several windows (Plate 13). Several of the window openings,
however, have been bricked in. The rear elevation is a party wall.
INTERIOR
The original interior featured a revolving door entrance into the large open display area with small offices in the northwest and southwest corners and terrazzo and hardwood floors (Plate 14). Two openings in the adjacent building owned by City Light and Power (54 King Street) were cut to give access at the new building’s northeast corner. The ground floor was revised with the addition of the second floor, a staircase at the rear (east) end of the building was added (Plate 15).

The second floor featured offices and men’s and women’s locker rooms and washrooms and public space with a counter at the east end. Enclosed space ran along the north wall and the remained of the space was undivided (Plate 16).

Today, the vacant building has little original space and finishes left. The upper floor is divided into small offices (Plate 17); the ground floor was converted into an automobile garage, although the original terrazzo floor remains and examples of the ornamental moulding still exists (Plates 18-19).

INTEGRITY
The building stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition for its age. Alterations to the exterior have altered the main entrance and display windows and re-purposing has led to alterations to the building’s north and south sides. Much of the original ornamental detailing remains intact.

STREETSCAPE
This structure is located in the Exchange District National Historic Site (EDNHS). It has been part of the Princess Street streetscape for over 100 years (Plates 20 and 21). Because all buildings within the EDNHS are essential parts of their historic streetscapes, the Historical Buildings and Resources Committee has given them 60 points.

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS

James Chisholm and Son (Colin C.) were the architects of this building (Plates 22 and 23). The partnership began in ca.1906, Colin Chisholm becoming the active manager in 1910 as his father’s health deteriorated. He took over the practice a short time later. The pair was responsible for a number of fine buildings in Winnipeg and has been given 20 points by the Historical Buildings and Resources Committee.

The contractor was Thomas Kelly and Sons Limited. Kelly (1855-1939) was a well-established builder by the early 1900s, having begun Kelly Brothers in the early 1880s. In 1908, he joined with sons Robert Emmett and Charles B. to create Thomas Kelly and Sons. A third son, Lawrence C., joined in 1912.

A list of the firm’s major works would include: Men's Own Shelter Mission, 181 Logan Avenue (1908); Bank of Nova Scotia, 254 Portage Avenue (1908-1910); St. John's Telephone Exchange, 405 Burrows Avenue (1911); St. Boniface Booster Pumping Station, 866 Taché Avenue (1918); Imperial Bank, 441 Main Street (interior alterations – 1919); and City Light and Power Showroom, 55 Princess Street (1929). The company was also building the massive City Light and Power generating plant at Pointe du Bois on the Winnipeg River in 1919.13

Of course, the Kelly family’s largest and most prestigious contract came in 1912 and the construction of the new Legislative Building on Broadway. As work progressed, rumours of questionable activities surfaced and when it was reported that the builder had received over $800,000 in over-payments, a Royal Commission was struck. Thomas Kelly fled to the United States to avoid prosecution. He was arrested in Chicago, IL on October 1, 1915 and extradited for “perjury, obtaining money by false pretences, larceny or embezzlement and the obtaining of money, knowing the same to have been embezzled, stolen or fraudulently obtained.”14

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12 Author’s files.
13 Manitoba Free Press, July 16, 1920, p. 3.
After a series of inquiries and court cases, a criminal trial found Thomas Kelly guilty and sentenced him to a 2½-year term in Stony Mountain Penitentiary. After his sentence, Kelly moved to the United States, settling in California. He died on March 13, 1939.\(^{15}\)

**PERSON/INSTITUTION**

The City of Winnipeg’s hydro-electric system, the City Light and Power Company, was commonly known as City Hydro, supplying Winnipeg homes and businesses with electrical power for nearly a century. In 1964, the name was changed to Winnipeg Hydro (Plate 24)\(^{16}\) and it continued to operate out of the Princess Street address until the 1970s, when it was converted into a garage by the City’s Signals Department.\(^{17}\) It is presently used by the City’s Police Service.

**EVENT**

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

**CONTEXT**

Built during the War, this structure was an important addition to the warehouse district – an ornately-treated retail space. It was also an important step for the public utility to take, identifying its need to advertise and sell the electrification of homes through appliances and everyday machinery. The new showroom became the local headquarters for this new effort by electrical companies across North America to “sell” electricity and remained part of the everyday delivery of electricity to citizens of Winnipeg for many decades.

**LANDMARK**

The structure’s unique materials and wealth of ornamentation add to its conspicuousness in the area.

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\(^{16}\) Manitoba Hydro website, no date (https://www.hydro.mb.ca/corporate/history/hep_1920.html). In 2002, Manitoba Hydro purchased Winnipeg Hydro from the City of Winnipeg.

\(^{17}\) City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls, Roll No. 600331-12-1, 1920-1980.
APPENDIX I

CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report
Assessment Record

Building Address: 55 Princess St. (48-54 King St.)  Building Name: Winnipeg Hydro Show Room

Original Use: Hydro Electric Show Room  Current Use: City of Winnipeg Signals Division

Roll No. (Old): 600331 (9700) – same Roll No. as 54 King St.

Municipality: 12  Ward: 2  Property or Occupancy Code: 80/82

Legal Description: 5/6 St. John, Plan 33006, Lots 1 and 4; 5 St. John, Plan 13, Lots 21/22, Lot 27 (Original: 6/7 St. John, Plan 16, Block A, Lot 1; 5 St. John, Plan 13, Lots 21/22, part Lot 27, Lot

Location: east side between Notre Dame & McDermot avenues

Date of Construction: 1919  Storeys: 2/3

Construction Type: Brick – ordinary – steel columns & beams

HERITAGE STATUS: ON NOMINATED LIST

Building Permits (Plans available: [CS] City Storage):
- 892/1919 [CS] $42,000 (original – 99 x 71); 1754/1919 [CS] $23,000 (additional storey); 3343/1929 [CS] $4,200 (office); 2640/1960 [CS] $19,000 (alterations & repairs); 8053/1968 $37,626 (office & building alterations); 3330/1982 [CS] (alterations); 4181/1988 [CS] $57,000 (alterations); 10081/1989 [CS] $10,000 (alterations); 820/1990 [CS] $2,000 (alterations); 114488/2004 $18,000 (exterior alterations to north side); 336027/2004 $40,000 (interior alterations to make new office space)

Information:
- 71 ½ x 99 x 33 = 233,590 cu. ft.
- Exterior – brick; concrete pier & beam foundation
- 1958 – no basement; 1st & 2nd floors in good condition
- Permit 2460/1960 – front entrance moved, aluminum plate glass windows installed; windows in front of building bricked up
- Permit 3330/1982 – exterior renovations, some replacement of windows, & granite on exterior. New roof, 2nd floor office renovations, heating. A/C and electrical

ARCHITECT: J. CHISHOLM & SON

CONTRACTOR: THOMAS KELLY & SONS LTD.
APPENDIX II

James Chisholm and Son

James Chisholm was born in Paris, Upper Canada (Ontario) in 1840, where he attended public school. He married Elizabeth Goodfellow at Brantford on February 22, 1864 and together they had six children. The pair lived for a time on a farm in Glengarry County before moving to London where James worked for a plough manufacturer but also took up the study of architecture. After moving back to Paris, Chisholm met a family acquaintance, the Hon. John Sifton, who talked him into moving to Winnipeg for both his health and his future, which he did in the spring of 1877, leaving his wife and three children at home.18

His first job was as a timekeeper on the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway between Winnipeg and Whitemouth. He also spent one summer in Norway House, attempting to improve his poor health. Shortly thereafter, he began his architectural career in earnest, and became involved in the City Hall construction scandal when he was hired to replace C.A. Barber as the architect for the project.

The family moved to Superior, Wisconsin in 1892 and James became a naturalized citizen of the United States in 1896. He worked during this period as a preacher for the Methodist Episcopal Church, travelling great distances every week.19 In 1900, the family returned to Winnipeg, James taking his place among the growing number of talented architects practising their trade in the city and throughout western Canada. James Chisholm was a member of the Winnipeg School Board and an avid curler, being an honorary member of the Manitoba Curling Association and long-time member of the Granite Curling Club.

18 Family information courtesy of Jim Chisholm, grandson of James and son of Colin C. Chisholm.
About 1911, Chisholm and his wife began wintering in Santa Monica, California because of continued poor health and they moved there permanently in 1914. He died on October 14, 1920 in Ocean Park, California.20

Colin Campbell Chisholm was James Chisholm’s youngest child, born in Winnipeg on September 17, 1883. He moved south with the family and received his early education in Madison, Wisconsin before returning to Winnipeg. He officially joined his father’s architectural firm ca.1906, became its active manager in 1910 and eventually took over the practice.21 He shared his father’s love of curling and was a president of the Granite Curling Club. He died in Winnipeg on September 5, 1936.22

The firm was responsible for designing buildings throughout Winnipeg and Manitoba as well as in Regina, Saskatoon (Bowerman Building, 1912), and Moose Jaw (Wesley Church, n.d.), Saskatchewan, and Edmonton, Alberta.23 An incomplete list of their Winnipeg structures includes:24

James Chisholm:

- Hochman (formerly Harris) Building, 154 Princess Street (1882) – Grade III
- Grace Methodist Church, Notre Dame and Ellice avenues (1883) – demolished
- A. Wilson House, Charlotte Street (1900)
- Addition to J. Ryan Building, 678-680 Main Street (1900)
- J.H. Turnbull House, Edmonton Street (1900)
- C.N. Bell House, Carlton Street (1900)
- D. Horn House, Edmonton Street (1901)
- J. Watson House, River Avenue (1901)
- C.H. Nix Building, Ross Avenue (1901)
- Rev. J.A. McClung House, Balmoral Street (1902)
- W.G. Moyse House, Langside Street (1902)
- G.N. Jackson House, Langside Street (1902)

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20 Manitoba Free Press, October 18, 1920, p. 15.
22 Winnipeg Tribune, September 5, 1936; and Winnipeg Free Press, September 7, 1936, p. 6.
24 Compiled from Ibid., pp. 723-24; Winnipeg Tribune, September 5, 1936; Winnipeg Saturday Post, June 8, 1912, p. 39; and City of Winnipeg Building Permits, 1900-26.
James Chisholm (continued):

Waterous Engine Works Company Warehouse, Higgins Avenue (1902)
Coleclough Company Building, Logan Avenue (1902)
W.J. Guest Building, 598 Main Street (1902)
N. Page House, Spence Street (1902)
J.W. Harris House, 26 Edmonton Street (1902) – Grade III
A. McCormack House, Edmonton Street (1902)
Wright and Stewart Building, Alexander Avenue (1902)
J.D. McArthur House, Cumberland Avenue (1902)
G. Forsyth House, Carlton Street (1903)
Hotel, Notre Dame Avenue East (1903)
A. MacDonald Company Warehouse, Market Avenue (1903)
C. Lilt House, Hargrave Avenue (1903)
Dr. Clarke House, Furby Street (1903)
D.A. Stewart House, Wardlaw Avenue (1903)
C.E. Young House, Mayfair Place (1903)
Zion Methodist (then Zion Apostolic) Church, 335 Pacific Avenue (1904), destroyed by fire 1970
M. Woodlinger House, Pacific Avenue (1904)
Young Men’s Liberal Club, Notre Dame Avenue (1904)
Manitoba Cartage Company stable, Henry Avenue (1905)
W.J. Guest Fish Warehouse, 98 Alexander Avenue (1905 & 1910)
Exeter Apartments, 76 Lily Street (1905)
Shipley Block, 614-18 Portage Avenue (1906)

James Chisholm and Son:

Woods Building Company Warehouse, Robinson Avenue (1907)
W.J. Guest House, 75 Academy Road (1907)
Jobin-Marrin Warehouse, 158-62 Market Avenue (1907)
Young Methodist (United) Church, 222 Furby Street (1907, 1910) – Grade II (only tower left after fire)
Strathcona Curling Rink, Furby Place (1908) – demolished
Kipling Apartments, 534-36 Langside Street (1908-09)
J.T. Gordon House, Wellington Crescent (1909)
House for St. John’s Methodist Church, Polson Avenue (1909)
G.F. Galt House, Wellington Crescent (1910)
J. Ryan Sr. House, Central Avenue (1910)
Semmons Warehouse, 468 Ross Avenue (1910)
I.O.O.F. (Odd Fellows’) Temple, 293 Kennedy Street (1910) – Grade III (façade only remains)
Sterling Bank Building, 283 Portage Avenue (1910-11)
F.S. Parlee House, Canora Street (1911)
E.C. Marrin House, Dorchester Avenue (1911)
Gowans, Kent, Western Building, Market Avenue (1911-12)
Granite Curling Club, 22 Mostyn Place (1912) – Grade III
James Chisholm and Son (continued):

Sparling Methodist Church, Elgin Avenue (1912)
Thistle Curling Club, McDonald Avenue (1912)
Grandstand for Stampede Amusement Company, Sinclair Street (1913)
B. Shragge Warehouse, Sutherland Avenue (1913)
Marlborough Hotel, 331 Smith Street (1913) – Grade II
La Salle Hotel, 346 Nairn Avenue (1914)
City Light and Power, additional storey to power house, 54 King Street (1915)
City Light and Power, additions to terminal station, McFarlane Street (1918)
City Light and Power, show room, rear of 54 King Street (1919)
City of Winnipeg garage, Elgin Avenue (1919)
Walter Woods Warehouse, Sutherland Avenue (1920)
Clarendon Hotel, 311 Portage Avenue (1920) and fire repairs (1923) – demolished

C.C. Chisholm:

Clarendon Hotel, 311 Portage Avenue, fire repairs (1923) – demolished
Filling station for M. Bergstrom, Maryland Street (1924)
Calvary Evangelical Church, Alverstone Street (1925)
Royal Oak Court, 277 River Avenue (1928)
Addition, Winnipeg Police Court, Rupert Avenue (1930) – demolished
Plate 1 – Winnipeg Hydro Terminal, Rover Avenue at Annabella Street, 1962. (City of Winnipeg.)

Plate 2 – Winnipeg Hydro Sub-station No. 1, 48-54 King Street, ca.1935. (City of Winnipeg.)
Plate 3 – A view of the ‘modern’ kitchen of the 1930s. (Reproduced from http://swankola.com/md/fridge/newart06.jpg.)
Plate 4 – The Power Building, 428 Portage Avenue, shortly after construction in 1928. Much of the ground floor was used as an appliance showroom. (M. Peterson Collection.)
Plate 5 – Architect’s plans, “Front Elevation,” 1919. (Courtesy of City of Winnipeg, Plan No. 892/1919.)
Plate 6 – Architect’s plans, “Front Elevation,” 1919. (Courtesy of City of Winnipeg, Plan No. 1754/1919.)
Plate 7 – Winnipeg Hydro Showroom, 55 Princess Street, 1924. (University of Manitoba Archives, Souvenirs of Winnipeg’s Jubilee, 1874-1924 [RBR FC 3396.3.S68, p. 233.)

Plate 8 – Winnipeg Hydro Showroom, 55 Princess Street, front (west) façade, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)
Plate 9 – Winnipeg Hydro Showroom, 55 Princess Street, detail of front (west) façade, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)
Plate 10 – Winnipeg Hydro Showroom, 55 Princess Street, detail of front (west) façade, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)
Plate 11 – Winnipeg Hydro Showroom, 55 Princess Street, south façade, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)
Plate 12 – Architect’s plans, “South Elevation,” 1919. (Courtesy of City of Winnipeg, Plan No. 892/1919.)
Plate 13 – Winnipeg Hydro Showroom, 55 Princess Street, north façade, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)
Plate 14 – Architect’s plans, “Ground Floor Plan,” 1919. (Courtesy of City of Winnipeg, Plan No. 892/1919.)
Plate 15 – Architect’s plans, “Revised Ground Floor Plan,” 1919. (Courtesy of City of Winnipeg, Plan No. 1754/1919.)
Plate 16 – Architect’s plans, “Second Floor Plan,” 1919. (Courtesy of City of Winnipeg, Plan No. 1754/1919.)
Plate 17 – Winnipeg Hydro Showroom, 55 Princess Street, second floor, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)
Plate 18 – Winnipeg Hydro Showroom, 55 Princess Street, main floor, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)
Plate 19 – Winnipeg Hydro Showroom, 55 Princess Street, decorative moulding, 2016.  (M. Peterson, 2016.)

Plate 20 – Princess Street looking north from Notre Dame Avenue, 2019.  (M. Peterson, 2019.)
Plate 21 – Princess Street looking south from McDermot Avenue, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)

Plate 22 – James Chisholm, no date. (M. Peterson Collection.)
Plate 23 – Colin Campbell Chisholm, no date. (M. Peterson Collection.)
Plate 24 – Winnipeg Hydro Showroom, 55 Princess Street, no date. Note the overhead signage attached to the second floor. (Reproduced from the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg Tribune Collection, PC18/7324/18-6324-009.)
Plate 25 – City of Winnipeg Signals Department, 55 Princess Street, 1978. (City of Winnipeg.)