92-100 PRINCESS STREET

ADELMAN BUILDING

(FORMERLY CAMPBELL BROTHERS & WILSON WAREHOUSE)

HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE

November 24, 1982
This large and handsome warehouse on Princess, familiar to Winnipegers as the home of Penthouse Furniture, previously housed one of western Canada’s biggest grocery wholesalers. From 1903 until 1946, Campbell Brothers and Wilson packed and shipped a variety of dry food items from this address.

Campbell Brothers and Wilson evolved from a small pioneer enterprise which paralleled the growth of Winnipeg as a distributing centre. R.J. Campbell, a native of Toronto, came to Winnipeg in 1881 as a young man. Having trained in the grocery business, Campbell entered into a small grocery partnership by the name of Campbell and Sutherland. When his partner died in 1885, R.J. Campbell restructured the business in partnership with his younger brother, W.J. In 1900, R.R. Wilson joined the firm which then became Campbell Brothers and Wilson.

R.J. Campbell retired from the company in 1912 (while retaining his position as president) and died in England in 1925. While there were two and possibly three other brothers in the firm, it was clearly R.J. Campbell who held the reins. He was chairman of the City’s Sinking Fund for several years and a trustee on the administrative board of the City of Winnipeg; he was also the head of three smaller companies. R.J. Campbell passed the presidency of the grocery wholesale to Robert R. Wilson until the latter’s death in c. 1937. Mrs. Wilson recalled moving west with her husband in 1892 to a Winnipeg that was very young and small and rustic. Campbell Brothers and Wilson grew to occupy their four storey building (later six) and expanded the operation to eight other western cities. In 1913, the company reported a gross revenue of over eight million dollars, making it one of the largest corporations of its kind in Canada.

In the days before supermarkets, smaller, independent grocery stores needed local suppliers to ensure a ready supply. Jobber firms, of which there were many in Winnipeg, bought goods in quantity, then broke them down into lots, packaged and distributed them. From Campbell
Brothers and Wilson, grocers in western Canada\textsuperscript{5} purchased teas, coffee, spices, mustards, jelly powders, extracts, dried fruits and tobacco.\textsuperscript{6} Their brand name was Royal Shield, but they offered a variety of other product names as well.

With goods coming and going on such a large scale, loading facilities and access to transportation were critical to the successful operation of a grocery wholesale business. Constructed in 1903, the new Campbell Brothers and Wilson was located on the CPR spur track that still runs behind Princess off the main line. Three large loading docks opened from the rear of the warehouse right into the railway cars. An arched driveway off Princess provided three more covered loading docks for loading horse-drawn wagons and later trucks. This driveway, offset left (south) on the front elevation, was sealed over and the space converted to a showroom.\textsuperscript{7} With a total of six loading docks, the goods were handled most efficiently.

The driveway was carried upwards with a firewall that divided the building into the north two-thirds and the south third. The south portion was not heated, which was useful for the storage of certain foodstuffs. Two freight elevators serviced the building.

A furnace room, vaults, washrooms and storage filled the basement. The offices were on the main floor near the Bannatyne side. Sample rooms and shipping space made up the rest of the space. Tea, tobacco and fruits were processed, blended and packaged on the second floor. Most of the other products were packaged and labeled on the third floor. Some of these operations involved the use of heavy machinery. The fourth floor was used for storing supplies to be processed.\textsuperscript{8}

Although the large new building was a welcome relief from the cramped older quarters, Campbell Brothers and Wilson grew at such a fast rate that the building needed a major addition within nine years.

One of Manitoba’s leading architects, J.H.G. Russell, designed the warehouse. His biography appears in Appendix I at the rear of this report. Russell’s ledgers of all his projects survive in the Manitoba Archives, providing interesting details of construction. The warehouse was
originally four storeys high, 132 by 86 feet, and made of brick. It rests on a foundation of limestone that is 26 inches thick and rests on concrete footings.9

The masonry was contracted to George Alsip, who may be a brother of William, the founder of Alsip Brick, Tile and Lumber. The carpentry was contracted to S.B. Ritchie, a contractor and developer active in Winnipeg for forty years. Ritchie, trained as a carpenter, came to Winnipeg in 1879 and built up a contracting business. He was a big builder and developer in Winnipeg Beach, and built many houses within city. Reported to be a master of his trade, Ritchie possessed “a fine appreciation of architectural values.”10 His major achievements include the John Thompson and Kemp’s Manufacturing buildings, the J.H. Ashdown warehouse, nine city schools, six city fire halls, the Isolation Hospital, the Opera House and Broadway Methodist Church.11 For S.B. Ritchie’s services, Campbell Brothers and Wilson paid $18,874.

Standard Plumbing and Heating installed the mechanical system for $3,138. Otis installed two freight elevators for $1,725 and J.W. Morley contracted to paint and glaze the structure for $1,676. The roofing, electrical system, metal works and excavation brought the total to $62,467.12

In 1912, J.H.G. Russell teamed with Shepley Construction Company to add two storeys to the warehouse. At this time, a sprinkler system was installed throughout the building. The total cost of this addition, which was finished in March 1913 was $34,000.13 These alterations left the building basically with its present appearance.

Russell made no attempt to match the new storeys with the 1903 structure. Although he retained the same bays and something of the original rhythm of the design, Russell deliberately followed the varied composition found in the warehouses of Chicago, where buildings were articulated into identifiable layers to emphasize scale. From the heavy limestone base, the upper three storeys of 1903 terminate with rounded windows. The brick voussoir trim continues downwards on either side of the windows to contain the lower windows, all of which have sills and lintels of stone. The broad bands of the main floor and the cornice brickwork all contribute to the building’s impact. Before the arched driveway was removed, there were three arched entrances
on the Princess side that also contributed to the effect. Recently, part of the façade was painted to the great detriment of the building, but it has since been cleaned and returned to a uniform original colour.
FOOTNOTES

1  “R.J. Campbell, Head of Local Firm, is Dead,” Winnipeg Evening Tribune, 15 April 1925.


4  Loc. cit.

5  As Campbell Brothers and Wilson opened warehouses throughout the west, these smaller operations supplied local retailers. Winnipeg remained the head office and bulk distribution centre.


8  This interior description is from The Commercial, op. cit.

9  City of Winnipeg Building Permits No. 335, March 1903.


11 Loc. cit.


14 The interior driveway was beneath the segmental-headed windows on the fourth bay of the Princess elevation.
John Hamilton Gordon Russell

One of Winnipeg’s best known architects, J.H.G. Russell was born and educated in Toronto before his family moved to Winnipeg in 1882. From 1886 until 1893, he travelled and worked in the United States, learning the trades of civil engineering and surveying, as well as architecture. Russell returned to Winnipeg in 1893, where he established his practice as an architect.

Russell was especially active in the Presbyterian and later the United Church, for which he designed several fine churches including Knox, Westminster, Augustine and Riverview United. Many fine residences remain in the city as examples of his versatility, but he also designed many prominent commercial structures. The McArthur (Child’s) Building, Great West Permanent, the Y.M.C.A., the Ashdown Building and the Lake of the Woods Building are just some of his designs.

Besides church work, J.H.G. Russell served twice as president of the Manitoba Association of Architects and one term as president of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada. He was a very active Mason. He died in 1946.

Plate 1 – Campbell Brothers and Wilson Warehouse, Princess Street, 1903. (Reproduced from The Commercial, December 12, 1903, p. 292.)

Plate 2 – Campbell Brothers and Wilson Warehouse, ca.1910. The shield on the corner was the trademark of the company. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)
Plate 3 - Sutherland and Campbell, forerunner of Campbell Brothers and Wilson, on Princess Street, 1885. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba N1066.)

Plate 4 – Adelman Building (Penthouse Furniture) before the building was sandblasted, 1970. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Architectural Survey.)