

**90 ALEXANDER AVENUE – W.J. GUEST FISH COMPANY WAREHOUSE/
GREAT WEST METAL COMPANY BUILDING**

James Chisholm, 1905 & James Chisholm & Son, 1910 (west addition)



In 1905, early and successful commercial fisherman William J. Guest built this modest, four storey brick and stone warehouse at the east end of Alexander Avenue near the public docks where Guest unloaded his Lake Winnipeg catch from his fleet of sail boats, tugs and steamers. The warehouse stored the fish to be sold wholesale or at his retail store at 596-598 Main Street. In 1910, with business booming and Guest opting to abandon his retail shop in favour of the wholesale trade, he built an addition to the 1905 warehouse on its west side. This facility was used by the company into the 1930s.

The structure is an example, albeit reduced, of the Romanesque Revival style, popular throughout the City's warehouse district from the late 19th century well into the 20th century. The style's solid, sturdy appearance appealed to wholesalers as did the use of common materials

– brick and stone – and the muted ornamentation that increased longevity and decrease construction costs. Key elements of the style included rough surfaces, quoins, corbelling, raised basements, belt courses and flat rooflines, often lacking cornices or entablatures. The most common feature was the arch, used for window and door openings.

The 1905 warehouse and 1910 addition were built using the common mill construction method, where solid brick walls rested on a rubblestone foundation and internal support was given by a system of square wooden beams and posts with heavy wood plank floors. Its popularity stemmed from its ability to support additional storeys and its ability to suffer fire damage and not collapse. There are many examples throughout Winnipeg’s warehouse district.

The warehouse’s main façade (north) begins at grade with a raised basement clad in rough-cut limestone. This wall is interrupted by small basement windows in rectilinear openings (all brick in or filled with glass block) and leads to the common clay brick superstructure. The original 1905 entrance has a new door but the original stone frame still exists. Much of the remainder of the ground floor is taken by large display windows which are topped by a metal cornice.

The upper floors are divided by plain brick pilasters into four bays, the openings within these bays slightly different in the original and 1910 sections but all exhibiting rectilinear openings, stone lug sills and stone lintels. The flat roofline is embellished with patterned brickwork and a stepped brick parapet.

The interior of this pre-World War I warehouse followed the norm – public space including showrooms and business offices as well as loading and unloading areas on the ground floor, more offices on the second floor and storage space elsewhere. Stairs and freight elevators were also included in the design. One of the unique features of this building’s interior was the business offices located on the third floor, the original pressed tin ceiling and wood and glass partitioning still intact.

The building stands on its original location and has not suffered from major alteration to its main façade. Because of subsequent additions, only the upper portions of the other three original façades are visible and feature windows in arched openings.

The original building was designed by local architect James Chisholm (1840-1920), the large addition by Chisholm and his son Colin C. Chisholm (1883-1936). James Chisholm was born in Upper Canada (Ontario) and after working in the United States, settled in Winnipeg in 1900 and became one of the city's influential architects, responsible for such buildings as J.W. Harris House, 26 Edmonton Street (Grade III) and Young United (Methodist) Church, 222 Furby Street (Grade II). His son joined the firm ca.1906 and they were responsible for the Granite Curling Club, 22 (Grade III) and the Marlborough Hotel, 331 Smith Street (Grade II).

As mentioned previously, the Guest Fish Company occupied the warehouse into the 1930s. In 1939, George T. Williams relocated a recently purchased sheet metal manufacturing company into 90 Alexander Avenue. Great West Metal Limited completed several additions to the structure as the manufacturing business expanded and the company continues to use the building.

Elements of the building that would require approval if alterations were planned are:

Exterior-

- Four-storey brick and stone building located near the southwest corner of Alexander Avenue and Waterfront Drive, main façade facing north onto Alexander Avenue, its side façades partially hidden by additions and its rear façade, partially hidden by additions, facing south towards Pacific Avenue;
- The main (south) façade with its rusticated stone base with small basement windows, main floor with large rectilinear window openings and doors with smooth stone frames, a metal cornice, and upper storeys with large, multi-paned windows in rectilinear openings with stone lug sills and wide lintels separated by plain brick pilasters and corbelled brick, patterned brickwork and a plain, stepped brick parapet above the fourth floor window openings; and
- The visible portions of the east, west and rear (south) façades with painted signage, windows in arched openings with stone lug sills and open metal fire escapes on the side elevations.

Interior-

- Heavy timber mill structural system;

- Two staircases;
- Sliding metal fire doors in the 1905 and 1910 buildings; and
- Original wood and glass partitioning and tin ceiling in the 3rd floor office area.