



54 ARTHUR STREET

ROBINSON, LITTLE & COMPANY BUILDING

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee

May 2007

54 ARTHUR STREET – ROBINSON, LITTLE & COMPANY BUILDING

Winnipeg in the early 1890s was, although few realized it, on the verge of a spectacular era of growth, development and maturity that would almost completely change it by World War I. But this comprehensive growth followed patterns established a decade earlier and resulted in specific districts within city boundaries.

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 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 (Plates 1 and 2).

¹ R.R. Rostecki, "The Growth of Winnipeg, 1870-1886," unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Manitoba, 1980, pp. 112-14.

In 1903, another large brick and stone warehouse was completed, numbered 54 Arthur Street and located just south of McDermot Avenue. A massive six-storey structure, its uniqueness lies in its design, which matched the building it abutted on the north, the Whitla Building, 70 Arthur Street, built four years previous (Plate 3).

STYLE

This building is an excellent example of the Romanesque Revival style, very popular in warehouse districts throughout North America from the 1880s well into the 20th century. 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 that could be included were towers flanking the main façade, quoins, belt courses, corbelled brick panels, chevrons and flat rooflines, with or without cornices and entablatures. The most prominent characteristic of these structures was the use of the round arch above windows and doors. Often, flat-headed windows located on the middle storeys were grouped under large arches on the upper floors.² 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 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 building measures approximately 22.7 x 30.0 x 26.8 m or over 18,000 m³ of interior space.³ The basement walls are 86.4 cm thick while the common clay brick walls of the superstructure range from 43.2 to 68.6 cm thick.⁴ Cost of original construction was \$60,000.⁵ The building

² L. Maitland, et al., *A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1992), p. 84; and *Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba* (Winnipeg: Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, Historic Resources Branch, 1991), p. 14.

³ City of Winnipeg Assessment Record, Roll No. 13060911000.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ City of Winnipeg Building Permit (below as BP), #413/1903.

utilized the mill construction system – a square timber beam-and-post support arrangement where beams were attached to the solid brick exterior walls and covered by wood plank flooring and a hardwood finish. This was a very popular system in warehouse districts throughout North America because of its sturdiness, the ease of adding additional storeys and its ability withstand fire damage and not collapse.

DESIGN

This massive six-storey warehouse is one of a handful of buildings in the Exchange District designed with two main façades (here fronting both Arthur and King streets) – Plates 4 and 5. The two main façades (east and west) match, symmetrical in layout and divided into five bays of windows, square headed on the lower levels and arched on the top floor. The Arthur Street (east) façade begins at grade with a raised rusticated stone base to the level of the first floor window sills, interrupted by square headed basement window openings. Centrally located atop a short flight of stairs is an arched entrance set in a smooth-cut stone surround (Plate 6). The ground floor window design, ornamentation and rhythm is carried out on the second to fifth floor elements as well – square headed, single openings in the outer bays, paired in the inner three bays, heavy rusticated stone heads and slightly smaller rusticated stone sills (Plate 7). The top floor differs in design; the windows are arched and linked visually by delicate brick drip moulding. A modest brick cornice completes the façade and a flagpole is located at its south end (Plate 8).

The west façade, facing King Street, replicates the design, layout and materials of the east façade (Plate 9). The main entrance has been boarded up (Plate 10).

The north wall is a party wall with the neighbouring warehouse, the R.J. Whitla & Company Building, 70 Arthur Street, built between 1899 and 1911 (Plate 11). The south wall faces an open space used for surface parking and therefore is highly visible in the area (Plate 12). It features a continuation of the rusticated stone base rising above grade and is constructed of the same common clay brick as the main façades. The ground floor also features a series of three elevated loading doors and an entrance (Plate 13). A metal fire escape with windows and doors on either

side runs the entire height of this elevation (Plate 14) that also includes painted signage at the top (Plate 15).

The building was designed to continue to the architectural language of the building to the north that was completed in 1899 (originally 4 storeys, the top two floors were added in 1911). The same architect designed both buildings, explaining the similarities between the two (Plate 16).

INTERIOR

The interior of this warehouse is a mixture of old and new materials, although the actual warehouse space has been divided into small offices on every floor (Plates 17 and 18) and most floors have been connected by an opening in the brick party walls with the building to the north, 70 Arthur Street, making a nearly 2,200 square metre floor plate, one of the largest in the Exchange District. The original pressed tin covering the high ceiling is still evident on the ground floor (Plates 19 and 20).

The upper floors have seen major spatial alterations; the hardwood floors have been refinished as part of a major conversion of the warehouse into offices located on both sides of the O-shaped main hall. Most of the offices include the original high, tin clad ceilings.

In 1965, to facilitate the use of the building as an office structure, the stairwells were enclosed on each floor for fire protection and doorways cut through to allow interior passage from 54 to 70 Arthur Street.⁶

INTEGRITY

The building appears to be in fairly good structural condition and City records do not describe major alterations to the exterior. Conversion to offices and fire protection upgrading was completed in the 1960s and 1970s and have considerably altered the layout of the interior although interior finishes have been retained in many areas.

⁶ BP #264/1965.

STREETSCAPE

The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada have recognized this warehouse, as part of a larger collection along with its peers in the district, as a National Historic District. All buildings in the Exchange District are an essential part of the historic streetscape and as such, the Historical Buildings Committee has given them 60 points (Plates 21 and 22).

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTOR

James H. Cadham, Ontario born architect, designed this warehouse, as well as its neighbour, the R.J. Whitla Warehouse (Plate 23). Cadham was one of a number of self-trained designers who worked in Winnipeg in the late 19th century, Cadham being one of the most prolific (see Appendix II for biographical information and Plate 24). He has received 20 points from the Historical Buildings Committee.

The Manitoba Construction Company was the contractor that built this warehouse. Operating in Winnipeg for only the 1903 and 1904 construction seasons, this company amassed an impressive number of medium and large-scale commissions (totalling over \$1.5-million) including:⁷ Manitoba Land Titles Office, on Broadway (1903, demolished); several buildings at the Winnipeg General Hospital (now Health Sciences Centre, 1903-1904); several large buildings at the Canadian Pacific Railway Higgins Avenue yards (1903-1904); Immigration Hall, Point Douglas (1904, demolished); addition to the Canadian Bank of Commerce, 389 Main Street (1904); a building at Drewery's Brewery, Main Street at Redwood Avenue (1904, demolished); and buildings for the Winnipeg Electric Street Railway Company, Assiniboine Avenue, Pembina Highway, Gladstone Avenue and North Main locations (1903-1904, demolished).

PERSON/INSTITUTION

The original owner/tenant of the building was Greenshields Western Merchants, wholesale dry goods dealers. This ownership was short lived; Robinson, Little & Company, wholesale dry goods and floor coverings purchased the building and occupied much of the space. This

⁷ List and total amount of commissions from City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books, 1899-1926.

company was founded in 1875 in London, Ontario by Colonel John William Little (1848-?) and an uncle, Mr. Robinson. It quickly grew in Ontario and soon expanded its operations into Western Canada and ultimately British Columbia.⁸ As the company matured, its headquarters were moved to Winnipeg and it began opening department stores throughout the West. Ultimately known as the ‘big chain of little department stores,’ the company operated over 180 “Robinson Stores” in Western Canada by the 1970s. Competition, however, was fierce, even in the smaller markets where these stores operated and by the early 1980s losses were mounting. The company declared bankruptcy in March 1985, 73 of its stores were purchased by the F.W. Woolworth Company a week later.⁹

The company’s connection to the building continued until the 1960s when it became associated with the Silpit Industries Company Limited, clothing manufacturer and distributor, headquartered in the building immediately north but occupying much of the upper floor space at 54 Arthur Street. Silpit still maintains an office in the building, however its manufacturing and warehouse operations have been moved elsewhere. At present the building, which is for all intents and purposes one building with 70 Albert Street, is nearly completely leased by a range of small- to medium-sized companies. Toad Hall Toys (Plate 22) has been a long-term ground floor retail tenant of the south section of the building (54 Arthur Street).¹⁰

EVENT

There is no known significant event connected with this building.

⁸ “John William Little” and “Edgar Sydney Little,” biographical information from www.wikipedia.com.

⁹ Corporate history compiled from www.leckieca.com/jim.html; Daily News Record, January and February 1985 (located at findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb4298/is_198501/ai_n14973073); and New York Times, April 1, 1985 (located at nytimes.com).

¹⁰ City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls, Roll No. 609110, Ward 2, 1900-1989; Henderson’s Directory, 1900-1990; and J. McKeever, regional manager, Allied Properties Management, in conversation with the author, May 14, 2007.

CONTEXT

The Robinson, Little & Company Building is an excellent example of the turn-of-the-century development of Winnipeg as Western Canada's premier wholesale and distribution hub, a development that brought the capital city to the fore of the Canadian economy until World War I. The transformation of this entire area – the Exchange District – from an early residential neighbourhood into a hectic warehouse district mirrored the growth of Winnipeg's economy. Eastern Canadian manufacturers and importers rushed to locate in the area, on both sides of Main Street, to take advantage of the spur lines that criss-crossed the area and allowed the rapid loading and unloading of railway cars full of goods destined for Western Canadian markets.

LANDMARK

Part of one of the largest warehouse complexes in the Exchange District, the Robinson, Little & Company Building is conspicuous within the area.



APPENDIX I

CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report

Assessment Record

Building Address: 54 Arthur Street

Building Name: Robinson, Little & Co. Building

Original Use: warehouse

Current Use: mixed use (retail/office)

Roll No. (Old): 609110 (10092)

R.S.N.: 147689

Municipality: 12

Ward: 2

Property or Occupancy Code: 50

Legal Description: 5/6 St. John, Plan 33006, Lot 6

Location: west side between McDermot and Notre Dame avenues

Date of Construction: 1903

Storeys: 6

Construction Type: Mill

HERITAGE STATUS: ON INVENTORY

Building Permits (Plans available: [A] Archives; [4th] 4th floor, 65 Garry Street; [M] Microfilm):

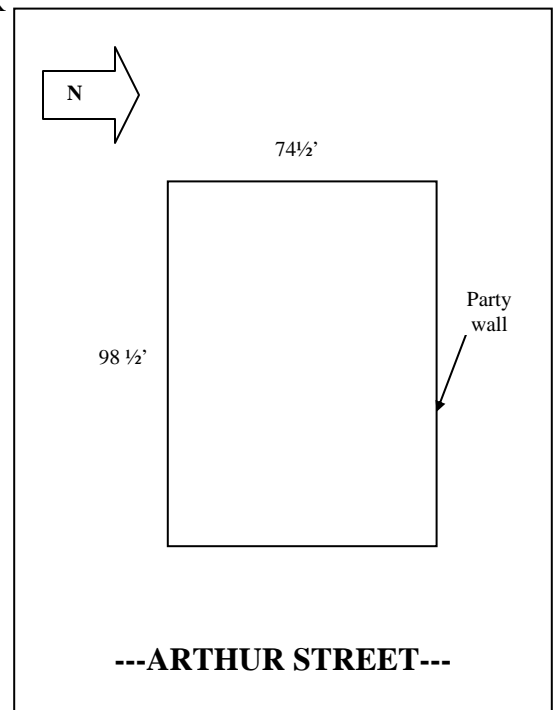
- 413/1903 \$60,000 (original -75 x 99); 9147/1950 [A] \$900 (chute); 264/1965 [M501] \$2,000 (fire escape); 1301/1965 \$2,895 (fire escape); 4707/1977 [M] (fire upgrade); 3977/1981 (alterations); 7244/1986 [4th - B08B02] \$24,500 (interior alterations); 4832/1990 \$1,700 (alterations)

Information:

- 74 ½ x 98 ½ x 88 = 645,766 cu. ft.
- Rubblestone to ground level & sills on all sides; balance clay brick
- Wall thickness 1st floor 21" E, W & S wall. N party wall - 27" (floors 2nd - 6th, 17" brick)
- Basement wall 34" rubble stone E & W walls
- 1941 - small cracks, uneven settlement; generally fairly good condition
- 1961 - no structural changes, building in good condition - mostly fluorescent lighting
- Permit 264/1965 - stairwell enclosed each floor, 2 fire door openings cut through to connect to 70 Arthur, fire door installed 5th floor
- 1966 - "Fair condition"
- Permit 4707/1977 - Fire prevention updated
- Permit 7244/1986 - Toad Hall Toys expand to basement; remainder of building occupied by Silpit

ARCHITECT - J.H. CADHAM

CONTRACTOR - MANITOBA CONSTRUCTION CO.



APPENDIX II

James Henry Cadham

James H. Cadham was born near London, Canada West (Ontario), on August 31, 1850, the son of Thomas and Eliza Cadham, both English-born settlers of the area. Thomas operated a sash, door and blind factory in London. J.H. Cadham left public school at the age of 16 to learn the carpenter's trade.¹¹ In 1870, Cadham answered the call to arms in Eastern Canada by the Dominion government to protect its rights in the recently ceded territory that would become the Province of Manitoba. He was a private in No. 1 Battalion under Captain Cooke, part of the 1,200-man force that included 400 British Regulars and 800 Ontario and Quebec militiamen and would become known as the Wolseley Expedition.¹²

Cadham arrived with the rest of the force in late August to find the uprising led by Louis Riel and his followers had ended. Cadham, unlike many of the other militiamen, decided to stay after his discharge on March 4, 1871 and began working as a carpenter and contractor. Little is known about his early work in the city, although he apparently had enough experience by the mid-1890s to begin practice as an architect. In this capacity, Cadham had a profound effect on Winnipeg's skyline. He was responsible for many warehouses in the district before and after 1900. So highly regarded was Cadham that builders would often consult him about a new structure even though he was not the architect of the building.¹³ He was an ardent hunter and was a Mason and a member of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. Cadham continued to work up until a few weeks before his death from pneumonia on December 10, 1907. He left a wife, three sons and two daughters.

¹¹ Biographical information on Cadham from: Manitoba Free Press, December 11, 1907, p. 5; Winnipeg Telegram, December 11, 1907, p. 11; Manitoba Library Association, Pioneers and Early Citizens of Manitoba (Winnipeg: Peguis Publishers, 1971), pp. 39-40; F.H. Schofield, The Story of Manitoba (Winnipeg: S.J. Clarke Publishing, 1913), Vol. II, pp. 331-32; and G. Bryce, A History of Manitoba (Toronto: The Canada History Company, 1906), pp. 493-94.

¹² Canadian Encyclopedia (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1988), Vol. 3, p. 1837.

¹³ Manitoba Free Press, December 11, 1907, p. 5.

A partial list of his work includes many of the Exchange District's most outstanding structures (marked with an “*”):¹⁴

McLaughlin Carriage Building, 200 Princess Street, 1893
*W.F. Alloway Building, 179 McDermot Avenue, 1898 (Grade III)
*Whitla Building, 70 Arthur Street, 1899
*G.D. Wood & Company Building (Merchants Building), 250 McDermot Avenue, 1898
*Daylite Building, 296 McDermot Avenue, 1899 (Grade II)
*Imperial Dry Goods Building, 91 Albert Street, 1900 (Grade III)
*G.F. Stephens Warehouse, 176 Market Avenue, 1901 (and additions) - demolished
Alloway & Champion Block, Portage Avenue, 1901
Moss (Kantor) House, 218 Roslyn Road, 1901
*Anne (Blue Ribbon Company) Building, 87 King Street, 1901 (Grade III)
Jerry Robinson Department Store, 49 Albert Street, 1902
Gregg Building, 52 Albert Street, 1903 (Grade III)
Elim Chapel (St. Stephens Presbyterian Church), 546 Portage Avenue, 1903
R.J. Whitla Factory, 371 Hargrave Street, 1903
Dingle and Stewart Warehouse, 263 Stanley Street, 1903
Robinson, Little & Company Building, 54 Arthur Street, 1903
Prairie Lumber Company Warehouse, foot of Henry Avenue, 1903
Rat Portage Lumber Company Warehouse, 101 Higgins Avenue, 1903
Gaylord Block (Kemp Building), 111 Lombard Avenue, 1903
Winnipeg Saddlery Block, 284 William Avenue, 1903
Galt Building Annex, 92 Arthur Street, 1903 (Grade II)
Bedford (Stobart) Building, 275 McDermot Avenue, 1903 (Grade III)
Scott Furniture Building, 274 Main Street, 1904
Stobart Company Overall Factory, 327 Cumberland Avenue, 1904
G. Velie Warehouse, 183-87 Portage Avenue E, 1904
Miller, Morse and Company Warehouse, 317 McDermot Avenue, 1904
Telfer Brothers Warehouse, 156 Lombard Avenue, 1904
Avenue Block, 261 Portage Avenue, 1904
M. Fortune and Company Block, Smith Street, 1904
G.F. and J. Galt Building, 103 Princess Street (addition), 1904
Alloway and Champion Building, 667 Main Street, 1905 (Grade III)
Genser's Furniture Building, 289 Portage Avenue, 1905
West Hotel, 786 Main Street, 1905
H. Leadley Warehouse, 298 Ross Avenue, 1905
Manitoba Medical College, Bannatyne Avenue (corner Emily Street), 1905 – demolished
Trees, Spriggs Company Warehouse, 312 Ross Avenue, 1905
Kemp Manufacturing Company Warehouse, 117 Lombard Avenue, 1906
J.H. Cadham House, 336 River Avenue, 1906
Grose and Walker Warehouse, 261 Stanley Street, 1906

¹⁴ Compiled from local newspaper building lists, 1874-1908; The Exchange District. Part 1: A Property Survey (Winnipeg: City of Winnipeg, 2001); and City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books, 1900-07.

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Plate 1 – Looking south along Arthur Street from Bannatyne Avenue into the heart of Winnipeg’s Exchange District west of Main Street, ca.1905. The newly completed Robinson, Little & Company Building (arrow) is just visible behind the R.J. Whittle Building. (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg- Views c1905- 2.)

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Plate 2 – Looking south down Arthur Street, ca.1885. Small commercial and residential structures make up the majority of building stock in the area, the future site of the Robinson, Little and Company Building is seen at the arrow. (City of Winnipeg, Historical Buildings Committee.)

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Plate 3 – R.J. Whitla Building, 70 Arthur Street, ca.1900, pictured prior to the construction of its top two floors and the construction of the Robinson, Little & Company Building at the rear (south). (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba, Outsize 133/409, N3255.)

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Plate 4 – Robinson, Little & Company Building, 54 Arthur Street, east façade, 2007. (M. Peterson, 2007.)

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Plate 5 – Robinson, Little & Company Building, 54 Arthur Street, west façade, 2007. (M. Peterson, 2007.)

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Plate 6 – Robinson, Little & Company Building, 54 Arthur Street, detail of entrance (east side), 2007. (M. Peterson, 2007.)

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Plate 7 – Robinson, Little & Company Building, 54 Arthur Street, detail of east side, 2007. (M. Peterson, 2007.)

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Plate 8 – Robinson, Little & Company Building, 54 Arthur Street, detail of east side, 2007. (M. Peterson, 2007.)

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Plate 9 – Robinson, Little & Company Building, 54 Arthur Street, west side, 2007. (M. Peterson, 2007.)

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Plate 10 – Robinson, Little & Company Building, 54 Arthur Street, west side entrance, 2007.
(M. Peterson, 2007.)

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Plate 11 – Robinson, Little & Company Building, 54 Arthur Street and R.J. Whitla & Company Building, 70 Arthur Street, east sides, 2007. (M. Peterson, 2007.)



Plate 12 – Robinson, Little & Company Building, 54 Arthur Street, west and south sides, 2007. (M. Peterson, 2007.)

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Plate 13 – Robinson, Little & Company Building, 54 Arthur Street, south side detail, 2007. (M. Peterson, 2007.)

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Plate 14 – Robinson, Little & Company Building, 54 Arthur Street, west side entrance, 2007.
(M. Peterson, 2007.)

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Plate 15 – Robinson, Little & Company Building, 54 Arthur Street, south side painted signage, 2007. (M. Peterson, 2007.)



Plate 16 – Robinson, Little & Company Building, 54 Arthur Street and R.J. Whitla & Company Building, 70 Arthur Street, east side upper storey detail, 2007. Note that the upper two floors of the later building (arrows) were completed in 1904, after the construction of the Robinson, Little & Company Building. (M. Peterson, 2007.)

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Plate 17 – Robinson, Little & Company Building, 54 Arthur Street, 6th floor hallway. Similar to the other storeys, the original wood flooring has been refinished and the open warehouse space converted into offices. In almost all cases, the original high ceilings and ornamental tin cladding is unchanged. This view looks north, the two steps mark the join between the two buildings, #54 Arthur Street in the foreground and #70 Arthur Street beyond the steps. (M. Peterson, 2007.)

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Plate 18 – Robinson, Little & Company Building, 54 Arthur Street, 6th floor office space, 2007.
(M. Peterson, 2007.)

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Plate 19 – Robinson, Little & Company Building, 54 Arthur Street, Toad Hall Toys interior. Note the original wood floors and ornamental tin ceiling. (Historical Buildings Committee, 2003.)

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Plate 20 – Robinson, Little & Company Building, 54 Arthur Street, Toad Hall Toys interior.
(Historical Buildings Committee, 2003.)

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Plate 21 – Looking north along Arthur Street, Robinson, Little & Company Building to the left, no date. (Courtesy of Historyworks.)



Plate 22 – The same view of Arthur Street, 2007. (M. Peterson, 2007.)

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Plate 23 – J.H. Cadham, ca.1907. (Winnipeg Telegram, December 11, 1907, p. 11.)

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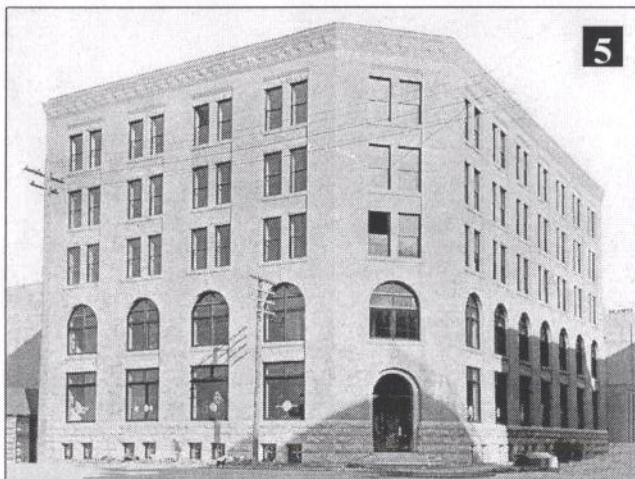
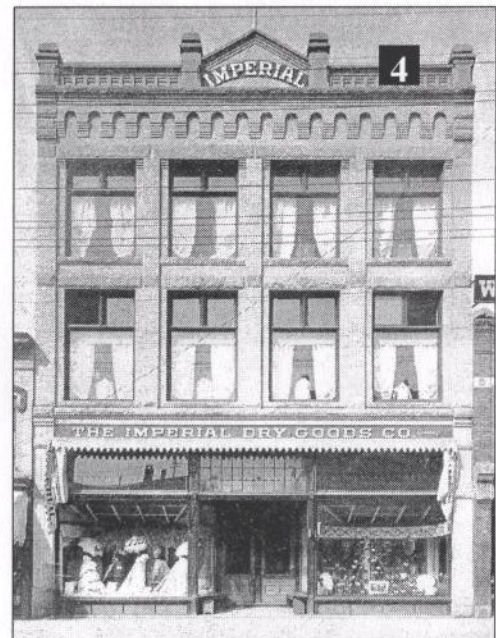
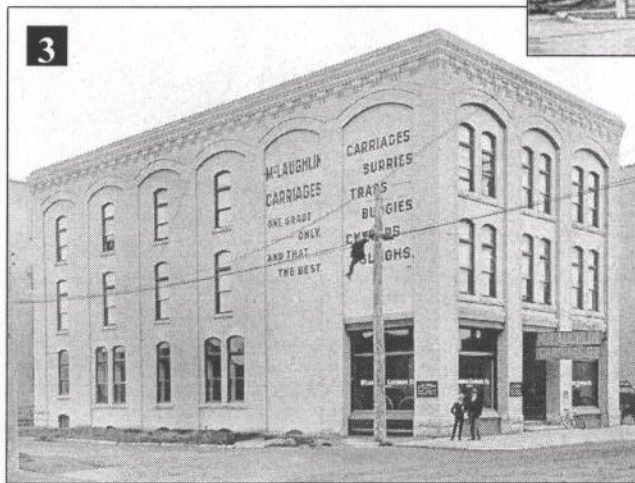


Plate 24 – Some of J.H. Cadham’s designs, ca.1905: 1. G. Velie Wholesale Wines and Liquors, 183-187 Portage Ave. E (1904); 2. Manitoba Medical College, Bannatyne Ave. (1905); 3. McLaughlin Carriage Company Building, 204 Princess St. (1902); 4. Imperial Dry Goods Building, 91 Albert St. (1899); and 5. Stobart Building, 275 McDermot Ave. (1903). (M. Peterson Collection.)