

**137 BANNATYNE AVENUE – SWISS BUILDING
(BRIGHT AND JOHNSTON BUILDING)**
Willmot and Stewart, 1882; J.H.G. Russell, 1903, 1907



Winnipeg experienced a short-lived economic and speculative boom in 1881-82, associated with arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway. The demands of railway contractors and a burgeoning population led to rapid growth in construction, industry and commerce, including the wholesale trade.

The Bright and Johnston Building, on the north side of Bannatyne between Rorie Street and the Red River in the eastern half of the warehouse district, was the first of two buildings erected in 1882-83 for Turner, McKeand and Company, a grocery wholesaler. The buildings were designed by the boom-time partnership of Mancel Willmot and George W. Stewart. Willmot left Winnipeg when the boom ended but Stewart, a civil engineer and Dominion Land Surveyor, maintained a multidisciplinary practice in the city until 1887.

The structures were identical in design. However, the three-storey building at 137 Bannatyne, erected for speculation or future expansion, was finished in light-coloured brick while its twin, 18 metres to the west, had red brick. Under the original design, 137 Bannatyne rested on a raised stone foundation. Capped pilasters divided three bays of windows. The heads of the door and the windows on the first two floors were segmented. Windows on the third storey had flat heads. The roofline was finished with a low parapet.

Completed in 1883 at a cost of \$17,500 to \$20,000, 137 Bannatyne was leased or sold to W.F. Henderson and Manlius Bull, the first wholesale commission merchants in Winnipeg. They acted as agents for suppliers of sugar and canned goods before Bull liquidated his interest in the business in 1889. The firm subsequently operated as Nicholson and Bain under new ownership at a nearby Bannatyne location.

J.Y. Griffin and Company, a pork packer, occupied 137 Bannatyne in 1890, later joining other meat packing firms in St. Boniface. In 1898, the warehouse was purchased by Bright and Johnston, founded two years earlier by Albert Johnston, a local grocer, and Kenneth J. Johnston, a grocery wholesaler and national award-winning high (penny farthing) bicycle rider. This firm imported fruits and nuts, supplied local honey, and was a commission merchant for specialty items. Johnston left the partnership in 1908 but Bright's sons joined with their father to form Bright and Sons Crockery wholesale. The company eventually was taken over in the 1920s.

To accommodate their growing trade, Bright and Johnston commissioned Winnipeg architect John H.G. Russell in 1903 to design a four-storey addition at 141 Bannatyne between Willmot and Stewart's twin structures. Russell continued their original design, enhancing it was a series of small, arched windows along the fourth storey at 141. Bright and Johnston moved into this new space upon its completion by builders S.B. Ritchie and Phillip Burnett in 1904. They leased out 137 Bannatyne. Following a 1907 fire at 141, Russell was recommissioned to extend the fourth storey across to 137, thus unifying the two façades. This project cost \$25,000. Fire again struck 141 Bannatyne in 1915 and 1926, but 137 escaped serious damage.

Both buildings were occupied by a succession of businesses. Up to the 1940s, many of these were perishable goods wholesalers attracted by the buildings' heating, refrigeration, interior tunnel sheltering loading docks, and access to a spur railway track. With the advent of centralized purchasing by foodstore chains, smaller independent wholesalers disappeared and tenants in the Bright and Johnston Building, especially at 137 Bannatyne, became more diversified.

In 1949, the warehouse at 137 became known as the J.G. Building, then later as the Swiss Building. In recent years, it was subject to vacancies and limited maintenance. However, it was purchased in 1987 by local businessman Lloyd Timlick who began converting it into three residential condominiums and ground-floor commercial space. The project has been assisted by the Winnipeg Core Area Initiative and is one of several pioneer housing conversions occurring in the warehouse district.