

**181 BANNATYNE AVENUE – KELLY BUILDING (KILGOUR BLOCK)**  
*C.H. Walker, 1904*



Winnipeg's building booms in the 1870s, 1880s and early 1900s gave rise to several major construction companies that became prominent across the West. Among them were firms established by brothers Thomas, Michael and Martin Kelly. From the 1880s onward, they secured important contracts for buildings and public works and also became pioneers in brick-making and asphalt paving.

Typical of the times, Thomas Kelly (1855-1939) used some of the capital he earned as a contractor to acquire revenue properties, including a six-storey warehouse which he built in 1904-05 on the north side of Bannatyne Avenue between Main and Rorie streets.

The structure was advantageously located next to a Winnipeg Transfer Railway spur line, part of a system that connected the city's fledgling warehouse district east of Main with rail yards at The Forks and along Point Douglas Avenue. Kelly's original tenants included the Kilgour Brothers, a printing and paper manufacturer; wholesale clothier Samuel D.R. Fernie; wholesale stationer W.V. Dawson; iron and brass bed manufacturer H.R. Ives and Co.; and the Souris Coal Mining Co.

The warehouse is of mill construction. It has a raised concrete and brick foundation, exterior load-bearing brick walls faced with brick and stone, and an interior framework of square timber beams and posts with heavy wooden floors. It shares party walls with warehouses to both its west and east. As well, a covered driveway extends fully along the west side.

The front (south) façade displays a reduced example of Romanesque Revival architecture noted for its textured finishes and arched openings. Rusticated stone clothes the high base. Between the main entrance at the east end and the driveway to the west are two basement windows and two larger main-floor lights. The symmetrically designed upper storeys are divided into four bays by attached columns that extend to round-headed arches on the top floor. Each bay from the second to fifth storeys contains large single squared windows with stone sills and lintels. The top-floor openings are arched and ornamented with keystones. Corbelled brickwork and a metal entablature with a modillioned cornice complete the design. The rear of the building has several segmental-arched windows with stone sills, along with two large loading bays and a platform.

Thomas Kelly built 181 Bannatyne for \$56,000. The plans were drawn by Charles Henry Walker (1855-?), an Ontarian who came to Winnipeg in c.1883 and worked in the construction industry for several years before turning to drafting and design.

Walker was associated from c.1898 to c.1904 with another contractor-turned-architect, Hugh McCowan (1841-1908). He subsequently went into partnership with Samuel Hooper (1851-1911), a prominent designer and monument-maker who also was Manitoba's first provincial architect (1904-11). Walker practised on his own in 1909-10, then moved to Victoria, British

Columbia. Among his known solo designs in addition to the Kelly Building were several modest homes throughout Winnipeg and a three-storey addition (1910; demolished) to the Brunswick Hotel at 571-77 Main Street. His work with Hooper included the Marshall-Wells Warehouse at 136 Market Avenue, an addition to the Carnegie Library on William Avenue, the Icelandic Good Templars' Lodge, Central Police Station, St. Jude's and St. Charles churches, St. Joseph's Orphanage, and the Black and Sherwin Williams warehouses.

Thomas Kelly was approaching the peak of his career when he developed 181 Bannatyne. Born in Ireland, he moved to the State of New York with his family in 1864. After training as a bricklayer, he came to Winnipeg in 1878 where he gained employment in the construction trade. In 1880, he and a brother, Michael, formed their own contracting and brick-making enterprise. Another sibling, Martin, joined Kelly Brothers and Co. four years later. The firm worked on such projects as the first Clarendon Hotel, both Grain Exchange Buildings on Princess Street, and Isbister School. After 1900, the Kellys operated as the Manitoba Construction Co., then as Kelly Brothers and Mitchell. They built the St. Andrew's Locks, the Baker and Stanley blocks, Bank of Toronto, Imperial Bank of Canada, Grain Exchange Building on Lombard Avenue, and shop facilities for the Canadian Pacific and Canadian Northern railways.

In 1908, Thomas joined with his sons Robert and Charles to create Thomas Kelly and Sons Ltd. Their projects included the main Post Office, Bank of Nova Scotia, Granite Curling Club, Laura Secord School, some of the early buildings on what today is the Fort Garry campus of the University of Manitoba, and, during the 1910s, a portion of the Winnipeg aqueduct. A third son Lawrence joined the firm in 1912, the same year the Kellys obtained the contract for a new Manitoba Legislative Building.

That project soon became embroiled in controversies about design changes, the quality of materials and workmanship, and allegations of financial overcharges and political kickbacks. The resulting scandal led to the fall of the R.P. Roblin government in 1915 and dismissal of the Kellys. Thomas fled to the United States, but was arrested and returned to Manitoba where in 1916 he was convicted on criminal charges and sentenced to 30 months at Stony Mountain Penitentiary. After completing his prison time, he went back to the U.S.

The warehouse at 181 Bannatyne continued to be owned by the Kelly family until the mid-1920s. It passed briefly to barrister Edwin Loftus, then was taken over by Kilgour Ltd., a long-time occupant. The latter became the Bell-Kilgour Division of the Domtar (Dominion Tar and Chemical) Packaging Co. in the early 1960s. It remained on site until the late 1970s. The building then stood vacant for a period before being occupied by the Knitting Mill and Rice Sportswear. More recently, plans were made to convert the premises to main-floor commercial use and upper-storey residential loft condominiums.