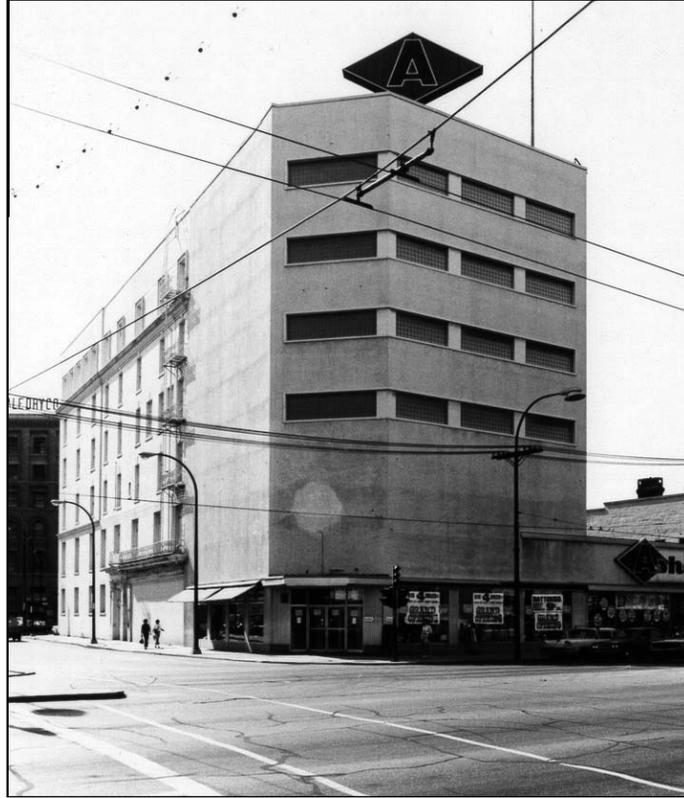


**211 BANNATYNE AVENUE (FORMERLY 476 MAIN ST.)  
BIG 4 SALES (J.H. ASHDOWN HARDWARE STORE)  
*J.H.G. Russell, 1904, 1905; Moody and Moore, 1959***



Behind the relatively modern façade of 476 Main Street at Bannatyne Avenue is a 1904 building once owned by James H. Ashdown, civic leader and hardware merchant who built a retail-whole-sale empire in Western Canada.

The English-born Ashdown arrived in the Red River Settlement via Ontario in 1868. He purchased a tinsmith shop in the following year, then relocated his business to Main and Bannatyne in 1871. The Ashdown interests continued to occupy this site for 100 years.

Ashdown capitalized on the prairie settlement boom and innovative marketing to establish stores and warehouses in the four western provinces; distribute wholesale products to other retailers; operate a wholesale catalogue business; and develop his own Diamond A Brand products. In

addition to hardware, his firm diversified into sporting goods, electrical and automotive supplies, house wares, and household appliances.

Ashdown's entrepreneurship and success in real estate speculation made him a millionaire. As a member of the city's elite, he was at the centre of many local initiatives. He led a citizens' group which pressed in 1873 for Winnipeg's incorporation. He was an alderman in 1874 and 1879, and mayor in 1907-08. A charter member of the Winnipeg Board of Trade, he participated as its president in 1887 in a successful fight against the Canadian Pacific Railway monopoly. He held corporate directorships; was a founder and governor of Wesley College; and sat on the boards of several municipal and community agencies.

As business expanded, so did Ashdown's physical presence on Bannatyne. The original 1871 frame structure gave way to a brick store and head office in 1875, with additions in 1880 and 1885. A warehouse was built further east on Bannatyne in 1895.

In 1904, architect John H.G. Russell designed a new concrete foundation for the store. Malcolm Brothers installed the foundation without disrupting business. However, fire destroyed the building a few months later. Retaining the foundation, Ashdown and Russell quickly had two replacement storeys erected in time to service the Christmas trade. An additional four storeys were built in 1905. The American contractor, William Grace and Company, and a Winnipeg partnership including Davidson Brothers, were responsible for construction which cost \$110,000 in total.

Russell, an Ontarian, moved to Winnipeg in 1893 after practising architecture in Washington and Chicago. He opened his firm in 1895 and quickly established himself as a prolific designer of houses, churches, warehouses and commercial buildings, including the Ashdown house (1912) on Wellington Crescent and additions to the Ashdown warehouse (1899-1911).

At 476 Main, Russell chose a simple style for his impatient client. Walls of solid red brick rose plainly between square-headed, double sash windows, enclosing steel girders and cast-iron columns. The structure rounded the Main and Bannatyne corner to provide an entrance and

windows facing the intersection. The ground floor, trimmed with limestone, featured large, plate-glass windows wrapped around the storefront to side doors on Bannatyne and topped by an iron cornice. Terra cotta was used to trim the upper five storeys. A light stone band ran above the second storey but most ornamentation was reserved for the top floor, with its wide fascia, and the bracketed metal cornice. A large marquis was featured on the Main Street exposure.

A one-storey northern addition, designed by Winnipeg architects Moody and Moore, and substantial changes to the fact of the old building, were undertaken in 1959. The brick was plastered over; windows were covered on the front half of the Bannatyne elevation; the segmented corner was made more angular; front windows were reworked into broad, horizontal frames filled with glass blocks; most other windows were painted over; and the cornice was removed. Only some detailing and residual pieces of cornice and fascia now indicate the building's historic lines.

Ashdown dies in 1924. His son, Harry, continued the business until his death in 1970. The building was sold to Big 4 Sales and Ashdown's soon ceased operations.