

**405 BURROWS AVENUE – MANITOBA TELEPHONE SYSTEM-
ST. JOHN'S EXCHANGE**

Samuel Hooper, 1910 & Northwood & Chivers, 1946 (east addition)



For many years after its introduction to Winnipeg, the telephone remained the preserve of businesses and relatively affluent citizens who could afford the annual rental fee. Demand for the service nonetheless expanded, spurred by the city's rapid growth prior to World War I.

The St. John's Telephone Exchange at the northeast corner of Burrows Avenue and Salter Street was the fifth such facility built in Winnipeg and the third constructed by the recently established Manitoba Government Telephones.

Winnipeggers were initially exposed to this communications technology in 1877 when Horace F. McDougall installed two sets in the telegraph office. His franchise underwent modest development before being acquired by the Bell Telephone Company of Canada in 1881. "The Bell" subsequently opened the city's first telephone exchange in rented quarters on Main Street, then in 1896 relocated

to its own building at 166 Thistle Street (now Portage Avenue East). This Main Exchange was twice expanded (1900, 1904-1905) before the firm set up its first suburban satellite in Fort Rouge (1907-1909). Property also was obtained for future development on Burrows Avenue in the North End.

The Manitoba government purchased the Bell interests in 1908 as part of plans to consolidate all telephone services in the province under one public monopoly. To relieve the over-worked Main Exchange, utility managers soon added three new facilities - the downtown Garry Exchange, the Sherbrook Exchange in the West End, and St. John's.

All were designed by Provincial Architect Samuel Hooper and built by the James M. and John J. Kelly Co. St. John's, which was cut into service in November 1911, was the least imposing and ornamental of the three. Nonetheless, this \$39,778 building was a visually distinctive addition to an otherwise lower-middle class residential neighbourhood.

Hooper (1851-1911) studied with his architect-uncle in England before immigrating to London, Ontario in 1869 where he worked as a hair-dresser and stonemason. After a return sojourn overseas, he relocated to Emerson, Manitoba in 1880 and Winnipeg in 1881. He joined monument-maker David Ede, later assumed sole management of this business and then in 1895 began an architectural practice. He was appointed Provincial Architect in 1904, the first position of its type in western Canada. He subsequently oversaw an ambitious public building program across southern Manitoba, while also retaining a private practice with three successive partners, including son Samuel Lawrence Hooper.

Contractors James Michael and John Joseph Kelly formed their company in ca.1907, possibly as a subsidiary of the prominent Kelly Brothers and Mitchell (later Thomas Kelly and Sons) begun in 1880 by their uncle Thomas and father Michael Kelly. In 1910, Michael retired from this association and a year later co-founded the Kelly-Simpson Construction Co., later National Construction, with James and John. This firm undertook the provincial Law Courts and Central Power House projects in 1913-1916 and then passed out of existence. In the process, it managed to

avoid the 1915-1916 Legislative Building scandal which brought down Thomas's business empire and caused him to serve a jail term.

The St. John's Telephone Exchange is a two-storey, reinforced concrete and wood frame hybrid structure executed in a stripped Classical Revival style. Its load-bearing red brick walls rest on concrete footings and a raised, bush-hammered stone foundation. They extend up to a galvanized sheet metal cornice with modillions, a brick parapet outlined by stone coping, and a galvanized metal roof. Detailing is provided by belt courses, emphasized second-storey window surrounds, and other three-dimensional wall effects. Twelve steps lead from street level to the consoled, deep-set, stone entrance with carved provincial crest and name plate, and double-glazed glass doors topped by a transom.

The original interior was utilitarian in organization and finish. The first floor was divided into a vestibule and lobby, large terminal room, public rotunda and business office, retiring rooms for supervisors and switchboard operators, a buffet, kitchen and washrooms. Oak and spiral metal staircases led to a large, horseshoe-shaped switchboard on the second floor. The basement contained telephone and mechanical equipment.

In 1922, St. John's was one of the first two Winnipeg telephone exchanges converted to automatic user dialing. Some \$9,000 were expended at 405 Burrows for associated first-floor alterations and development of a two-storey addition to accommodate a new stairway and arched entrance with prominent keystone on the building's west (Salter) side. Although the addition somewhat disturbed the structure's initial symmetry, architect John Manuel's overall design faithfully followed Hooper's original. J. and J. McDiarmid Co. was the contractor.

During World War II, training classrooms were established at St. John's for employees returning from active service. Then in 1946-1947, a sympathetic, one-bay-wide, two-storey addition was attached to the structure's east side and substantial alterations were made to the interior to accommodate more central office equipment. A skylight, the original staircases and remaining switchboards were removed, and new fixed, double-glazed windows were installed. George W.

Northwood and Cyril W.U. Chivers were architects of this \$63,000 project; Malcom Construction Co. was the contractor.

Prosperity and physical expansion in the post-war period reversed the soft consumer demand for telephone service that had occurred during the Great Depression and early 1940s. In 1954-1955, the Edison Exchange was built at 1935 Main Street to take over St. John's former territory in West and Old Kildonan. Other new North Winnipeg exchanges followed, including one built across from St. John's on Salter Street in 1989-1990.

In 1995, the building was converted with 14 residential suites on the upper two floors.

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

Exterior-

- Two-storey red Menominee brick and stone building with flat roof on the northeast corner of Burrows Avenue and Salter Street, its south side facing Burrows Avenue, its north facade facing a back lane, its east facade facing a neighbouring building and its west facade facing Salter Street;
- Its main (south) facade with its central bay protruding slightly and holding a raised cut stone entrance with wide stairs, low stone walls at either end with volutes, oversized brackets with floral motifs, a complete entablature with the carved words "GOVERNMENT TELEPHONES" in the frieze, egg and dart molding and a carved Provincial shield supported by volutes;
- The remainder of the symmetrical south facade with its tooled stone base and rectilinear basement window openings, deeply grooved ground floor brick walls, windows in rectilinear openings, two bands of corbelled brick leading to the top floor with rectilinear window openings embellished with raised brick surrounds and a metal cornice and stone capped brick parapet;
- The west facade continuing the materials and design of the front facade and a projecting staircase section with arched doorway (now closed) and keystone;
- The west facade continuing the materials and design of the front facade; and
- The rear (north) facade with rectilinear openings on all floors.

Interior-

- None