

300 CARLTON STREET – FREE PRESS BUILDING
Woodman and Carey, 1911-13; A.E. Cubbidge, 1926



Known affectionately and sometimes derisively as the Old Lady of Carlton Street, the Free Press Building and its main occupant, the *Winnipeg Free Press*, have both chronicled and mirrored prairie development.

From a humble 1872 start as a weekly newspaper, the *Free Press* matured during the 1890s and early 1900s into a pre-eminent Western Canadian voice. It was not the first journalistic endeavour in pioneer Winnipeg, but it was the only one to survive that period and prosper commercially. Its early success was inspired by William F. Luxton, editor-manager and co-publisher with John A. Kenny. In 1874, Luxton turned the *Free Press* into a daily and introduced the weekly *Free Press Prairie Farmer*.

The enterprise was first housed in a clapboard building on Main Street in Point Douglas. It moved south in 1874 to a brick building on Main near St. Mary Avenue. Sustained circulation growth, coupled with the acquisition of smaller publications, forced three more moves in 1882, 1900 and 1905, first to McDermot Avenue, then to Portage Avenue at Garry Street.

Controlling interest shifted during the 1890s from Luxton to the Sifton family, principally Clifford Sifton, a Brandon lawyer and politician who was Minister of the Interior (1897-1905) in the Laurier administration. A strong advocate of European immigrant settlement, Sifton later broke ranks with the Liberals. For many years, however, his newspaper remained supportive of the party which so dominated federal politics. Those linkages, combined with the vision of John W. Dafoe, editor from 1901 to 1944, ensured that the *Free Press* was influential in regional and national affairs and that its counsel was heard outside Canada as well.

In 1913, the newspaper operation settled into yet another new facility, a six-storey office building and printing plant with attached two-storey garage on the west side of Carlton Street north of Portage Avenue.

The structure was designed in the Edwardian Classical style by John Woodman and Raymond Marwood-Elton Carey. Their partnership from 1910 to 1917 produced St. Luke's Anglican Church, the Lindsay, Paris and Union Stock Yards office buildings, and facilities for the Stovel Printing, J.B. Carter, Goldin, and Hudson's Bay companies.

Carey (1883-1975) was a British-trained architect who worked in Detroit before coming to Winnipeg in 1909. Following his association with Woodman, he practised with G.W. Northwood from 1919 to 1923. He also produced solo designs, mainly in the residential sector, before returning to Detroit in the mid-1920s.

Woodman (1860-1944) was a native of Oshawa, Ontario who came west in 1880 as a surveyor and draughtsman with the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). He later was an engineer and construction superintendent with the Northern Pacific and Manitoba Railway and chief engineer of the CPR's western division. In his private practice, which began in 1901, he was noted for efforts to introduce reinforced concrete construction in Winnipeg.

The original part of 300 Carlton was built by the Carter-Halls-Aldinger Co. for \$301,000. It has a concrete foundation, fire-resistant reinforced concrete frame, stock brick exterior walls, and

flat roof. Its symmetrical front (east) and south façades are dominated by large arches, multi-paned windows, and stone and terracotta ornamentation.

The first two floors of the front elevation are clothed with terracotta in alternating dark- and light-coloured layers. Openings include two entrances and a pair of two-storey arches set beneath a smooth belt course and five metal bison heads. The terracotta extends up the corners of the facing to the fourth floor, followed above by two-storey arches containing flat- and round-headed openings separated by moulded metal panels.

The structure's slightly recessed middle section has four bays of single rectangular openings in stone surrounds. A stone entablature and a stone and brick parapet with iron railing complete the design. Among other highlights are stone panels inscribed with the building's construction date and the name of its original owner, plus shields displaying Manitoba's coat-of-arms.

The entablature wraps around the southeast corner to run the entire length of the building's south façade. The terracotta finish also carries over to the first set of windows on this elevation. A similar treatment is found at the southwest end. Large windows with stone sills and brick heads dominate both this wall and the rear of the complex.

The original interior included a sub-basement with heating and mechanical equipment, a well, pumping machinery, and back-up electrical plant, and an upper basement containing the shipping areas and press room. Customer service, advertising and business offices were on the main and mezzanine (second) floors, while various printing, typesetting and editorial departments were on the upper levels. The front lobby and mezzanine staircase were finished with Canadian "Mississquoi" marble.

In 1926, four storeys were added on top of the garage, resulting in a symmetrical, 11-bay complex. The design by A.E. Cubbidge, once a partner of Woodman's, complemented the original plan, with some differences in materials and detailing. Subsequent north-side additions were less sympathetic, however.

In the mid-1920s, the Siftons began to expand their media holdings. The family's interests in newspapers and radio stations were divided between Clifford's two sons in 1953. *Free Press* publisher Victor Sifton went on to form Free Press Publications with the Max Bell group. By the 1970s, this was the country's highest-circulation English-language chain. FP Publications was taken over by Thomson Newspapers Ltd. in 1980.

The editorial and printing functions of the *Free Press* were converted to computer-based technologies in the 1970s. The need for even more modern equipment and a new building led the newspaper in 1991 to relocate to an industrial park in northwest Winnipeg, thus breaking a long-standing physical association with the central business district.