

344 CUMBERLAND AVENUE

NAKOMIS APARTMENTS

PREPARED BY PETERSON PROJECTS – JANUARY 2007



344 CUMBERLAND AVENUE NAKOMIS BUILDING/APARTMENTS

Date of Construction: 1912

Building Permit: 2792/1912 (Plans on file at City Archives)

Architect: Chivers, Cyril W.U.

Contractor: McDiarmid, J. Company

ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

Located on an oddly shaped corner lot, the Nakomis Building utilized all available space by the design and construction of one of the city's more unusual buildings. Built at the height of Winnipeg's pre-World War I growth phase, it joined a large number of stone and brick mixed use structures in the downtown, retail shops on the ground floor and offices on the upper floors.

Four storeys in height and located on the south side of Cumberland Avenue at the western corner of Hargrave Street, the building cost \$70,000 to construct in 1912.¹ The main (north) façade is clad in dark red brick with stone accenting. The west end of this façade is rounded; the east is cut off to produce a small flat area joining the front to the south façade. Large show windows and several entrances fill most of the ground floor. Framing all entrances are large, plain elements that flair out to meet the dentilled cornice separating the



Front (north) and east façades and northeast corner detail, 2006.

ground floor from the upper levels. These doorframes were originally less pronounced and built of light-coloured brick. They are continued up the main façade, creating pilasters that enliven the upper floors. They are finished at roof level with stylized stone accenting. The three upper floors are highlighted by banks of square headed, evenly spaced windows with stone lug sills. Originally divided horizontally into two panes, the newer replacement window units are divided vertically in half. The sills of the fourth storey windows are all continuous, creating a belt course. The most visually dominant feature, the heavy overhanging cornice, finishes the building, curving around the northwest corner as well as the northeast corner. A plain brick parapet is also present. The angled northeast corner continues the architectural language of the front façade, with a single entrance, windows with lug sills and stone accented brick pilasters. The south wall is constructed of common clay brick and is windowless except for a small light well. Painted signage is present on the top floor. The west façade, also of clay brick features doors framed by pilasters that rise to roof level and banks of small square headed windows connected between the pilasters by stone lug sills.

The building appears to be in good structural condition. Alterations to the exterior of the main façade have included changes to the ground floor retail space and the replacement of original windows. While this has altered the original design, the more important features, the colouring and the cornice, have been left unchanged.

Stylistically, the building features many classically based design elements that give it a unique appearance. It is not unlike many other mixed-use buildings in the downtown, although the confines of its location did necessitate special consideration by the architect, C.W.U. Chivers.

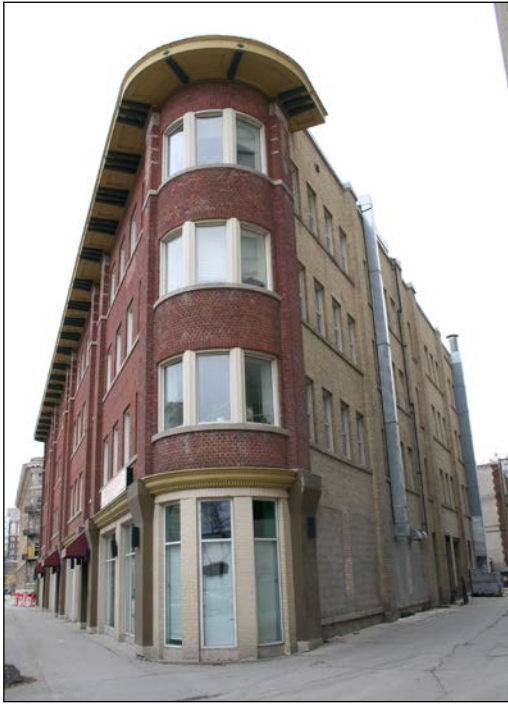


Rear (south) and east façades and east side painted signage, 2006.

Brigadier Major Cyril W.U. Chivers (1879-1969), a local architect who distinguished himself in World War I. Chivers began his career in Winnipeg in 1905, designing many fine apartment blocks, residences and warehouses including the Winnipeg Canoe Club Clubhouse in River Park (1910, demolished), Dorchester Block Apartments, 162 Lilac Street (1910), and the Hugo Apartments, 265 Wellington Crescent (1912, demolished), and. When he returned after the War, he formed a professional partnership with another veteran, Major George W. Northwood (1876-1959). This partnership lasted many years and produced a number of fine buildings including the Manitoba Cartage Building, 345 Higgins Avenue (1926), St. Ignatius Church, 255 Stafford Street (1928), the second pavilion at the Assiniboine Park and Zoo, 55 Pavilion Crescent (1929-30, Grade II), the Riverbend School for Girls Junior School, now Balmoral Hall School, 630 Westminster Avenue (ca.1930), Greater Winnipeg Gas Building, 265 Notre Dame Avenue (1930, Grade III) the Women's Tribute Memorial Lodge, 200 Woodlawn Street (1931, Grade II), the Civic Auditorium, 444 St. Mary Avenue (1932), the Bank of Toronto Branch on Academy Road (1934) and the Federal Building, 269 Main Street (1935). The partnership has been given 20 points by the Historical Buildings Committee.

HISTORICAL INTEREST:

The building was originally owned for a short time by real estate agent Armi Eggerston. From 1918-1944, the J. McDiarmid Company, contractors, owned the building.² The company, founded in the 1890s by James McDiarmid, was responsible for the construction and design of many fine buildings throughout the city. The company's ownership of the building was a common practice for the larger construction firms, often designing and



Front (north) and west façades and northwest corner detail, 2006.

building structures as rental properties, including office towers, retail stores, apartment blocks and mixed use buildings. O.E. Flanders Limited, manufacturers, owned the building from 1945 into the 1960s.³

Early office tenants of the building included the J. McDiarmid Company and the Gillis Tyndall Stone Company. Many businesses related to the printing trade also located in the Nakomis Block, including Highnell Printing (1920-1940), Driscoll and Company, typesetters (1920-1970), United Typesetting Company (1930) and Regent Press Limited (1950-1970).⁴

The building was converted into an apartment block and renamed the Nakomis Apartments in the 1980s.



Front (north) detail, 2006.

RECOMMENDATION TO HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE:

Under the Historical Buildings By-law, this building meets a number of important criteria:

- its historical importance- a good example of a more elaborate pre-World War I mixed used office/retail block built to supply demand for space in the downtown;
- its associations- its long-term connections to builder J. McDiarmid and the printing trade;
- its design- an excellent example of a classically-detailed commercial block;
- its architect- C.W.U. Chivers was a respected and important practitioner;
- its location- because of the irregularities of its lot, the building is oddly shaped and contributes greatly to its streetscape; and
- its integrity- its main façades continue to display many of their original elements and design.



Nakomis Building, 1978. Note the original brick doorframes on the ground floor.

ENDNOTES:

- 1 City of Winnipeg Building Permit, #2792/1912.
- 2 City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls, Roll No. 528300-12-2, 1912-1950.
- 3 Ibid., 1950-1970.
- 4 Henderson's Directory, 1920-1990.