

370 DONALD STREET – BELL BLOCK

Victor W. Horwood (1905); Herbert E. Matthews (1909)



The Bell Block is located at the south end of what was originally designated as Princess Street (the building's original address was #4 Princess Street, this block south of Notre Dame became Donald Street ca.1916). The lower three floors were built in 1905 at a cost of over \$26,000, the upper two floors completed 4 years later for \$12,000.

The solid brick structure measures 14.9 x 27.5 metres and rests on a stone foundation on concrete footings. Rusticated stone is used for accenting the lightly-hued clay brick superstructure. The front (east) façade starts at grade with a rusticated stone base and entrance at the north end. Large basement and ground floor windows in rectilinear openings and deeply grooved brick complete this area. Above the window openings is a metal cornice dividing this lower level from the next two storeys. These feature five bays of rectilinear openings with modest stone lug sills. Another cornice marks the level of the original 1905 roofline which is now topped by the final two floors.

These are more ornately treated, with grooved brickwork on the north and south ends, five bays of rectilinear window openings and corbelled brick leading to the complete entablature with heavy overhanging metal cornice. It is an attractive design. Many of these architectural elements continue along the south or Cumberland Avenue elevation – the stone cladding of the main façade continues for the four eastern-most bays. This elevation features ten bays in total and the third floor belt course and ornate roofline entablature of the main façade run the entire length of this façade.

The north wall was covered by the neighbouring structure and the rear (west) façade includes five bays of windows in arched openings with stone lug sills on the first three floors and rectilinear openings on the top two storeys. A metal fire escape was also present.

Changes to the exterior have been significant: modernization of the original front entrance; all original window units replaced; and metal grating was added to the basement window openings along the front and part of the south façades.

Because the building initially held the heavy machinery of a printing company, the interior support system was especially strong. Originally, the printing presses were located in the basement, with offices on the ground floor including two private offices with brick fireplaces. In 2012, work began to convert the upper floors into residential space while the basement was converted into a restaurant.

The Bell Block is located just outside the Exchange District National Historic Site at the south end of Princess Street. Historically, this area included a wide variety of structures – theatres, churches, office buildings, warehouses and factories and this has not significantly changed as the neighbourhood has evolved. It makes an important contribution to the streetscape along with its neighbouring buildings on the west side of the block.

Victor William Horwood designed the original 1905 structure and Herbert E. Matthews the 1909 addition. Both were well-known local architects whose private practices spanned many years and produced many outstanding structures. The local contracting firm Saul and Irish built the original block and day labour was used for the 1909 addition.

The original owner/tenant of this structure was the Moore Printing Company, owned by William Moore (1876-?). But the company, began ca.1900, only remained in the building a year, the property was sold to local real estate agent Frank C. Bell, who had moved to Winnipeg from Minnesota in 1901. It was Bell who financed the construction of the upper two floors and then sold the building to Dr. Donald McKay of Collingwood, Ontario. Bryce and Company, later Bryce Sales Limited, owned and occupied part of the building from 1913 into the early 1960s. Other tenants have included Brunswick Balke Collender Company, commercial merchants, Broders Limited, wholesale caps and hats and Tooke Brothers Limited, wholesale men's furnishings.

The building stood vacant for several years before its recent redevelopment into a multi-tenant residence.

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

Exterior-

- Five-storey brick and stone building with a flat roof on the west side of Donald Street near the intersection of Cumberland Avenue, its main façade facing east onto Donald Street, its south façade facing Cumberland Avenue, its north façade hidden by the neighbouring building and its rear (west) façade facing a back lane/parking lot;
- The front (east) façade with rusticated stone base wrapping around the southeast corner with large basement windows in rectilinear openings, entrance at north end, metal cornice above the main floor windows, upper storeys with windows in rectilinear openings with stone lug sills, metal cornice below the fourth floor windows and flat roofline with corbelled brick and complete entablature with heaving overhanging metal-clad cornice;
- The south façade with its ground floor stone cladding, second and fourth floor metal cornices, windows in rectilinear openings with stone lug sills and flat roofline with corbelled brick and complete entablature with heaving overhanging metal-clad cornice; and
- The rear (west) façade with its windows in arched openings on the first three floors, windows in rectilinear openings on the top two floors all with stone lug sills and an open metal fire escape.

Interior-

- Heavy timber mill structural system; and
- Ornamental tin ceilings.