

388 DONALD STREET – PHOENIX BLOCK

George W. Northwood, 1905



Its main façades, north and east, curving around the corner, the Phoenix Block has been occupying this location on a busy downtown intersection since its completion in 1910.

As originally designed, the east or Donald Street elevation (when built, this block of Donald was still addressed as part of Princess Street) featured two recessed shop entrances with paired doors and large windows to display merchandize at the south end. A centrally-located doorway led to the stairs to the upper floors. Windowless brick walls were found north of this entrance, the façade curved around the corner with another recessed retail entrance in the curved section. The north façade along Notre Dame Avenue was a continuation of this basic design with recessed entrances, paired doors and display windows. Modest brick pilasters with concrete heads and bases separate the ground floor elements and a plain metal cornice separated the ground and upper floors. The second and third storeys were designed with large windows in rectilinear openings set in raised brick frames and separated by plain or patterned brick panels. The area above the central entrance on the east side was more ornate – grooved brick pilasters and a fan-shaped element just below the raised parapet. Ornamental brickwork was designed above the third storey windows and

panels with the words “PHOENIX BLOCK” were placed above the central door and near the northeast corner of the third floor. The flat roof was detailed with a galvanized iron cornice, ornamental brick, another iron cornice and a brick parapet. The rear of the L-shaped building included several doors and large windows on the upper levels.

Alterations to the main façades have included: the replacement of all the original windows with single pane units; the replacement of the ground floor retail entrances at the south end of the east façade; a newer door hood over the central entrance; and general upgrading of the main floor of the north elevation (although several of the original recessed entrances appear to be in their original state).

On the interior, it was originally designed with 11 retail shops on the ground floor (6 along Notre Dame Avenue, 4 along Princess Street and one in the rounded corner). The second and third floors had a central washroom and several small offices located on both sides of a central corridor. Today, the ground floor features only two addresses on Donald Street, one in the corner space and three on Notre Dame Avenue. These spaces, like the upper floors, have seen extensive alteration and renovation. Original cast iron posts and ornamental tin ceilings are found in some ground floor spaces and a small portion of the original hallway is present as is wood detailing on the main staircase.

The structure was designed by George W. Northwood (1876-1959), a well-known and prolific architect in the city. Born in Ontario, Northwood came to Winnipeg in 1905 and soon opened his own office. After serving as a major in the First World War, he returned to the city and from 1919-1923, worked in partnership with Raymond Carey. His longest lasting and most successful partner was another World War I veteran, Brigadier Major Cyril W. U. Chivers (1879-1969). Northwood’s career also included a seat on the Board of the Manitoba Association of Architects, membership in the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, and the presidency of the Manitoba Club. He died in 1959.

Among his most notable designs were the Thomas Ryan Warehouse, 44 Princess St., with W.W. Blair (1906), Finnie & Murray Block (Western Glove Works), 321 McDermot Ave. (1912), Ralph

Connor House (University Women's Club), 54 West Gate (1913), Union Tower Annex, 500 Main St., with R. Carey (1921), Canadian Wheat Board Building, 423 Main St., with C.W.U. Chivers (1929), Assiniboine Park Pavilion, with C.W.U. Chivers (1929), Canadian General Electric Bldg., 265 Notre Dame Ave., with C.W.U. Chivers (1930) and Women's Tribute Memorial Lodge, 200 Woodlawn St., with C.W.U. Chivers (1931).

The original owner of the block was Joseph C. McGreevy (1884-1959), an Ontario-born builder and contractor who worked in Sault Ste. Marie, ON before moving to Winnipeg in 1904. A modestly successful builder and real estate agent, he would own several downtown office buildings including the Phoenix Block by the 1920s.

Original tenants of the block on the Donald/Princess street side included Wood Brothers, wall paper, John S. Mortimer, real estate, S. Frank Peters, architect, the Columbian Conservatory of Music and the Winnipeg Scenic Company. The Notre Dame Avenue shops were originally filled by Greeless Company, clothiers, H. Stone, confectionary, Muno and Company, tailors, Tessler Brothers, tailors, and August H. Stolper, proprietor of the Royal Greenhouses, which had relocated to Elmwood. Over the years, the building has seen a number of owners and short-term and long-term retail tenants.

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

Exterior-

- Three-storey brick and stone building with a flat roof located at the southwest corner of Donald Street and Notre Dame Avenue, its main façades facing east onto Donald Street and north onto Notre Dame Avenue, its south façade facing a back lane and its rear (west) façade facing a back lane/parking lot;
- The north façade with its recessed entrances, large display windows and metal-clad cornice on the ground floor and upper floors with windows in rectilinear openings with concrete lug sills, belt course and entablature with cornice;
- The rounded northeast corner with entrance door and windows in rectilinear openings on the upper floors;
- The east façade with central entrance, brick panels topped by glass block-filled openings to the north, upper floors windows in rectilinear openings with concrete lug sills, belt course, entablature with cornice and raised parapet with the words "PHOENIX BLOCK"; and

- The rear (west) façades with numerous entrances and windows in rectilinear openings on all floors.

Interior-

- Tin ceilings; and
- Wood accented main staircase.