



**319 ELGIN AVENUE**

**SCOTT FRUIT COMPANY WAREHOUSE**

City of Winnipeg  
Historical Buildings Committee

April 2004

### 319 ELGIN AVENUE – SCOTT FRUIT COMPANY WAREHOUSE

Winnipeg in the early 1890s was, although few realized it, on the verge of a spectacular era of growth, development and maturity that would almost completely change it by World War I. But this comprehensive growth was far from random. Specific districts that had been established a decade earlier provided the basic pattern for this frenzied period of growth.

The real estate boom of the early 1880s was intimately connected to the early construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), Canada's first transcontinental railway, west of Winnipeg. Land prices in the small capital city skyrocketed, the population soared and solid brick structures began replacing the small wooden shacks that dotted the mud streets and avenues. It was also the beginning of the segregation of the various sectors of the city – residential, commercial and industrial – and their specific buildings.<sup>1</sup> The huge advance in land prices was especially noticeable along Main Street north of Portage Avenue. Here the small residential properties were consolidated into larger blocks of land and replaced by increasingly massive commercial structures.

Commercial interests, both local and from Eastern Canada, were quick to locate in this area. The city rapidly assumed the role of wholesale hub for all of Western Canada. Companies like R.J. Whitla, Stobart, Eden and Company, George D. Wood and J.H. Ashdown were all organized and carrying on business prior to the CPR boom.<sup>2</sup> With this development came a maturation of the retail and wholesale sectors. The bust of 1882 did not end this development, but rather strengthened it by removing the excess and inexperienced entrepreneurs, by reducing the surplus stock and by hardening attitudes towards credit.<sup>3</sup> The area, however, was undeniably developing as the warehouse district, slowly through the 1880s and 1890s and then rapidly after 1900.

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<sup>1</sup> R.R. Rostecki, "The Growth of Winnipeg, 1870-1886," unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Manitoba, 1980, pp. 112-14.

<sup>2</sup> Manitoba Free Press, September 3, 1904, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> R.R. Rostecki, op. cit., p. 113.

The period 1900-14 was one of nearly unbridled growth for Western Canada's premier city. Winnipeg was the centre of all regional activity and was one of the fastest growing urban centres in North America. As the core of the warehouse district filled with new buildings or additions, companies purchased property and built further and further from this core.

Princess Street had always been one of the district's most important thoroughfares, both in terms of early construction and as the location of some of the largest warehouses in the area. In 1914, just as the boom was being ended by the completion of the Panama Canal and the global war, a newly formed local firm, the Scott Fruit Company, built a large warehouse just west of Princess Street on Elgin Avenue.

## **STYLE**

This warehouse features modest classical detailing around its windows and at the roofline, an example of a modest Chicago School building, a style popular in North American cities from 1905 to 1920. The style developed as an interpretation of the steel and reinforced concrete framework on which new skyscrapers were being built. Flat wall surfaces and rooflines were the norm, as were large banks of windows placed in grid-like patterns. The extent of ornamentation was varied, but was usually based on classical elements and forms and tended to heighten the vertical emphasis of the main elevations.<sup>4</sup>

The architect/contractors of this building, James and John McDiarmid, were not trained practitioners and this was reflected in their designs. Their early work included several warehouses clothed in the popular style of the period, Richardsonian Romanesque, with its familiar stone base, brick walls and arched openings. Their later work, including the Scott Fruit Company Warehouse, utilized the reinforced concrete and steel support system and reflected the new work coming out of the United States. The new McDiarmid structures were sturdily built and solid, if not artistically praiseworthy (Plate 1).

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<sup>4</sup> Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg: Manitoba Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, Historic Resources Branch, 1991), p. 22.

This Elgin Avenue warehouse would not be considered one of the more visually striking examples of the Chicago School style that can be found throughout the city.

## **CONSTRUCTION**

The warehouse measures approximately 16.8 x 33.6 x 14.0 metres (55 x 110 x 46 feet) and consists of a raised basement with three upper storeys. Resting on a reinforced concrete foundation and a steel beam and girder framework, the exterior walls are built of common clay brick (east, north and west) and face brick (south). A large one-storey addition was built in 1945.<sup>5</sup>

## **DESIGN**

The front (south) façade begins at grade with a raised concrete foundation, interrupted by small square-headed windows (Plate 2). The upper storeys are clad in dark-hued face brick and are divided into four bays by pilasters running from the concrete base to the corbelled brick area above the third-storey windows. The pilasters are embellished with concrete capitals above the first- and third-storey windows. The western-most ground-floor bay features a ca.1950s' doorway, while the other three bays contain large multi-paned windows with concrete lug sills. A fine concrete belt course acts as a continuous head for these openings.

The second and third floors are symmetrical and similarly designed, the middle pilaster replaced by brick panels. All windows on these floors feature large central panes with smaller side windows, multi-paned transoms and concrete lug sills and heads.

Above the top storey windows is a corbelled brick area leading to the brick parapet, raised at intervals to highlight the pilasters below.

The cladding and window treatment are continued a short distance on the east façade (Plate 3). The remainder of this elevation consists of a series of unadorned pilasters dividing the common

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<sup>5</sup> City of Winnipeg Assessment Record, Roll No. 718840-12-2, PC 50.

clay brick wall into six bays. The ground-floor bays are unmatched; some feature windows and/or doors, others are uninterrupted. The second and third floors feature matching rectangular, multi-paned windows with continuous concrete lug sills and wide continuous concrete heads. Corbelled brick above the uppermost window heads leads to the plain brick parapet.

The rear (north) is similar in design and layout to the eastern wall, with paired and single windows, a large loading door and concrete accents (Plates 4 and 5).

The west façade is uninterrupted save for a recessed light well near the rear of the building.

## **INTERIOR**

A concrete staircase runs up the west side of the interior with office, factory and warehouse space located to the east (Plate 6). The entrance vestibule includes marble accents and a wood and glass partition (Plate 7). The basement is used for storage, the ground floor is used for the manufacturing of gloves and for storage, the second floor as storage and light manufacturing space by a theatrical group. The third floor is vacant (Plate 8).

## **INTEGRITY**

This building has seen very limited exterior alteration in its 90-year existence. The front entrance has been replaced. However, windows, roofline detailing and even rear loading doors and hardware (Plate 9) appear to be original condition. There is considerable deterioration of exterior concrete elements on the south, north and east façades.

## **STREETSCAPE**

Originally surrounded by other warehouses of various sizes and description, this structure has been left virtually alone on its block of Elgin Street because of demolitions, new construction and vacant land. To the south stands the Red River College facility, a mixture of old and new.

Immediately east of the building originally ran a spur line, although the tracks have been removed.

### **ARCHITECT/CONTRACTOR**

The firm of James and John McDiarmid, long-time contractors and architects, was listed as the architect and builder of this structure. The brothers had been building in Western Canada since the early 1880s and James McDiarmid also had extensive experience as a designer. They were responsible for a wide variety of structures (see Appendix II for biographical information) and have been given 10 points by the Historical Buildings Committee.

### **PERSON/INSTITUTION**

Robert Ross Scott was born in Pickering, Ontario, on July 27, 1857 (see Plate 10). He came to Winnipeg at the age of 25 as a buyer and salesman for the Macpherson Fruit Company.<sup>6</sup> This Eastern Canadian venture located in Winnipeg to take advantage of the growing population in the city and in Western Canada.<sup>7</sup> By 1896, with the business firmly established, Scott was appointed general manager of the western operations, a position he held until the Macpherson Company dissolved prior to World War I.

Scott, along with partners Donald Ross Dingwall (jeweller), George Grisdale (Scott's manager), John Graham (lawyer), and Jean Matheson (nurse), then organized a new firm, incorporated as the Scott Fruit Company Limited, on July 10, 1912. The company was capitalized with \$250,000 from the five partners.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "Biographical Scrapbooks," newspaper clippings at the Legislative Library, B8, p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> See M. Peterson, "The Macpherson Block – 491 Main Street," report for the Historical Buildings Committee, April 1988, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> The Manitoba Gazette, Vol. 42, No. 27 (1912), p. 1395.

The Scott Fruit Company grew quickly and would ultimately boast branches in Brandon, Regina, Saskatoon, Edmonton, Calgary, Moose Jaw, Lethbridge, and Minneapolis.<sup>9</sup> Scott's son, Stewart M., became vice-president and then president of the business. In 1924, R.R. Scott died at his home at 29 Ruskin Row (Plate 11).

Only four years after construction, the top floor of the building was rented to the Butterick Publishing Company, Standard Fashion Company and New Idea Pattern Company.<sup>10</sup> In 1926, National Trust Company became the owner of the building, then two years later sold to Provincial Paper Sales, Limited (Scott Fruit moved onto Ross Avenue). The new owner was renamed Mid West Paper Sales, Limited and continue to own and occupy the property until their move to St. James in 1956. The building was purchased and occupied (ground floor) by Perfecfit Glove Manufacturers, Limited, which also rented out space to Brown-Sharpe Limited (clothing) and National Foodland Company, food brokers. Other tenants during this period included Manson Printing Limited, Squire Manufacturing and Crown Cap. In 1984, Hart Shapiro and Gordon Lover purchased the property, the Annex at 321 Elgin Avenue having been sold in 1975 to Metro Motors. Fantasy Theatre for Children, Kimwood Enterprises, Saf-T-Heat and Fast Action Service Technicians Network were tenants during the 1980-2000 period.<sup>11</sup>

## EVENT

There is no known significant event connected with this building.

## CONTEXT

This building represents a number of broad development patterns in the city. It was completed at the end of Winnipeg's major growth phase, the period that saw the city's Exchange District become the major link between Eastern Canadian manufacturers and Western Canadian

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<sup>9</sup> "Biographical Scrapbooks," newspaper clippings at the Legislative Library, B8, p.22.

<sup>10</sup> Henderson's Directory, 1914-1920.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 1920-2003; City of Winnipeg Assessment Roll, Roll No. 718840-12-2, 1910-1997.

consumers. International, national and local companies located in the district, benefiting from the proximity to area spur lines, City Hall and the banking halls of Main Street.

The use of a reinforced concrete and steel support system, rather than the earlier mill construction of wood beams/posts and floors, is illustrative of the technological advances in the field of engineering and their use in Winnipeg and elsewhere. The system had several advantages, including strength and increased fire resistance. The designer/builder of the structure was one of the leading proponents of the material for both structural and ornamental elements.

### **LANDMARK**

Located off busy Princess Street, this structure has limited conspicuousness.





## APPENDIX I

### *City of Winnipeg - Preliminary Report – Assessment Record*

Date: 23 March 2000

Prepared By: M. Peterson

Building Address: 319 Elgin Avenue

Building Name: Scott Fruit Company Warehouse

Original Use: warehouse

Current Use: warehouse

Roll No. (Old): 718840 (12197)      Municipality: 12      Ward: 2      Property or Occupancy Code: 50

Legal Description: 8/9 St. John, Plan 32336, Lot 14 (Old: 9<sup>W</sup> St. John, Plan 1537, part Lot 173: Lot 174: part Lot 175)

Location: north side, west of Princess Street

Date of Construction: 1914

Storeys: 3 and B

**Heritage Status: NONE**

Construction Type: reinforced concrete, brick and steel

Building Permits (Plans available: [A] Archives; [M] Microfilm; [V] Vault):

- 1267/1914 \$40,000 (original); 2469/1945 \$14,285 (addition); 1235/1950 \$200 (alter main entrance); 857/1957 \$2,000 (interior alteration); 1662/1959 \$400 (add 2 washrooms for PerfectFit)

#### Information:

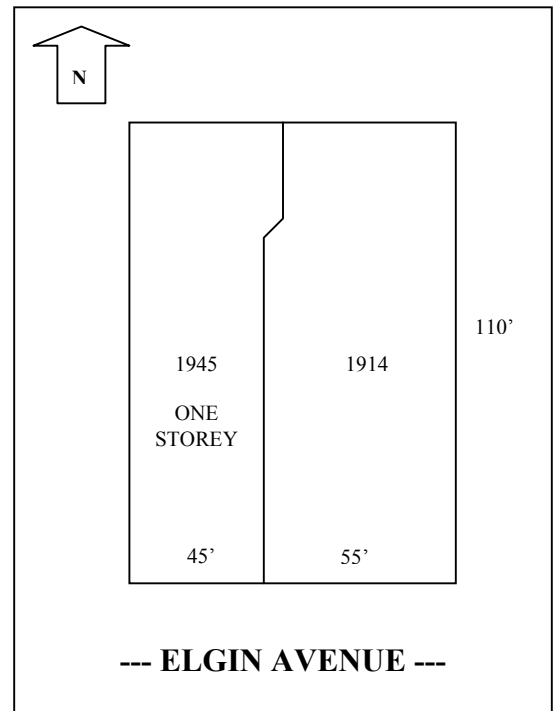
- 55 x 110 x 46 + = 290,996 cu. ft.

- normal condition in 1978, poor in 1996

- 1945 brick and steel one-storey addition, #321 Elgin Ave.  
(reinforced concrete foundation, 45 x 110 x 20 + =  
101,116 cu. ft.)

**ARCHITECT: J. McDIARMID CO.**

**CONTRACTOR: J. McDIARMID CO**



## APPENDIX II

### James McDiarmid

James McDiarmid was born on March 9, 1855 in Dunkeld, Perthshire, Scotland, and his early adulthood was spent in the building trade in that country.<sup>12</sup> He came to Winnipeg in 1882, during the real estate boom, with two of his brothers, Peter (1857-1915) and John (1863-1943). Peter took up farming in the Poplar Point district; John and James chose to become involved in the building trade that at the time was struggling to keep up with local demand. One of their early contracts was the construction of the Broadway Drill Hall (1884-1919) on the site of the present Legislative Building. At the time, the brothers were part of the firm Murray and McDiarmid, although G.W. Murray would form his own company in the early 1890s.

During the 1890s, James McDiarmid began designing as well as building structures. St. Andrew's Presbyterian (United) Church, corner Elgin Avenue and Ellen Street, built in 1894, was one of his earliest works as an architect. The J. McDiarmid Company Limited incorporated in 1906 and went on to build many outstanding Western Canadian structures. James was also known as the "Father of Municipal Golf in Winnipeg," having assisted in the establishment of the Kildonan Golf Course. He was an avid art collector and for many years was closely involved with the Winnipeg Art Gallery. He died on February 24, 1934.

Buildings which James designed and James and John McDiarmid built (unless otherwise noted) include:<sup>13</sup>

Penrose (Bell) House, 444 Logan Avenue, originally 232 Bell Avenue, 1894 (Grade III)  
Donald H. Bain Building (The Brokerage), 115 Bannatyne Avenue, 1899 (Grade II)  
Merrick-Anderson Warehouse, 119 Bannatyne Avenue (1899-1900)  
Marshall-Wells Warehouse, 123 Bannatyne Avenue, 1900 (Grade II)  
Cleland Block, 705 Main Street, 1901 (demolished)  
Thomas Scott Memorial Orange Hall, 216 Princess Street (1902), built by T. Sharpe and Company  
Manitoba Hall, 295 Portage Avenue (1903), built by Fischer and Company (demolished)

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<sup>12</sup> R.R. Rostecki, "Manitoba Hall – 291½-295 Portage Avenue," report for the Historical Buildings Committee, April 1991, p. 24.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.; and author's files.

J. & J. McDiarmid designs, continued:

Winnipeg Paint and Glass Building, 179 Pioneer Avenue (1908) – demolished  
Jacob-Crowley Building, 138 Portage Avenue (1909)  
St. Stephen's Church (Elim Chapel), 546 Portage Avenue (1910)  
Canada Building, 352 Donald Street (1910)  
Scott Fruit Company Warehouse, 319 Elgin Avenue (1914)  
Club Houses at the Kildonan and Windsor golf courses

Construction work included:

CPR Weston Shops (1904-05)  
Postal Station "B," 1048 Main Street (1907)  
Customs Examining Warehouse, 145 McDermot Avenue (1908)  
Williams Machinery Company Warehouse, 260 Princess Street (1909)  
Revillon Building, Edmonton, AB (ca.1910)  
Swift's Canada Building, 312 William Avenue (1911)  
CPR Station, Souris, Manitoba (1911-12) – demolished  
Pantages (Playhouse) Theatre, 180 Market Avenue, 1913 (Grade II)  
Customs House, Calgary, AB (1913-14)  
R.R. Scott House, 29 Ruskin Row, 1914 (Grade II)  
Knox Presbyterian (United) Church, 400 Edmonton Street (1914-17)  
Completion of the Legislative Building, Broadway (1916-20)  
Robinson Building (Public Press Building), 290 Vaughan Street, 1917 (Grade III)  
Science Building, University of Manitoba (1932)

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Plate 1 – Some examples of J. and J. McDiarmid designs including: #1- 115 Bannatyne Avenue, Donald H. Bain Building, 1899; #2- 123 Bannatyne Avenue, Marshall-Wells Building, 1900; #3- 138 Portage Avenue, Jacob-Crowley Building, 1909; and #4- Canada Building, 352 Donald Street, 1910. (M. Peterson, various dates.)

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Plate 2 – 319 Elgin Street, Scott Fruit Company Warehouse, front (south) façade, 2004. (M. Peterson, 2004.)



Plate 3 – East façade, 2004. (M. Peterson, 2004.)



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Plate 4 – North and east façades, 2004. (M. Peterson, 2004.)



Plate 5 – North and west façades, 2004. (M. Peterson, 2004.)

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Plate 6 – Stairwell, 2004. (M. Peterson, 2004.)



Plate 7 – Ground-floor foyer, 2004. (M. Peterson, 2004.)

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Plate 8 – #1- basement, #2- ground floor, #3- second floor and #4- third floor, 2004. (M. Peterson, 2004.)



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Plate 9 – Metal-clad loading door, north façade, 2004. (M. Peterson, 2004.)

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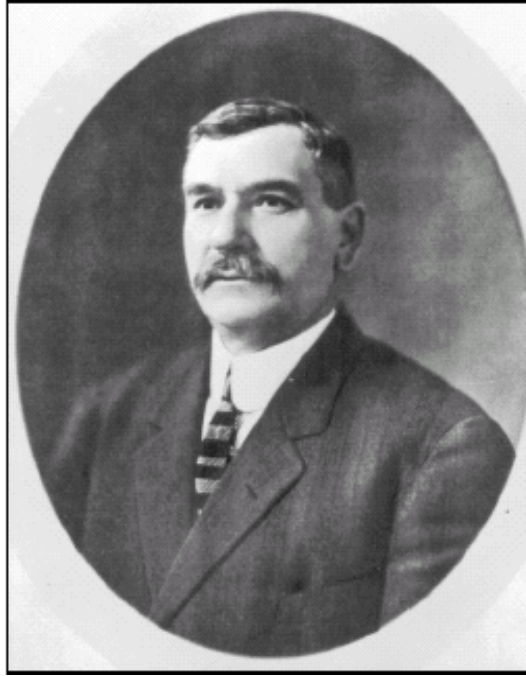


Plate 10 – Robert R. Scott, ca. 1914. (Courtesy of Archives of Manitoba, N11970.)



Plate 11 – R.R. Scott House, 29 Ruskin Row; built 1914, designed by J.N. Semmens, built by J. McDiarmid Co.; 1991. (M. Peterson, 1991.)