



THE GARRY BLOCK

290 GARRY STREET

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee

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Growth in the early history of Winnipeg took on a plethora of avenues. Along with the steady growth in professional endeavours came the unpredictable though usually tremendous growth of wholesale, agricultural and real estate ventures. As Winnipeg's economic base widened and diversified by century's turn, it was becoming obvious that the need for quality office space far exceeded its availability. Many of the city's entrepreneurs and business establishments, never ones to miss such an opportunity, realized this positive shift in supply and demand and endeavoured to rectify the situation through office building construction. One such building, created for the Mortgage Company of Canada, was the Garry Block (formerly the Belgica Block) constructed on the west side of Garry Street between Portage Avenue and Graham Avenue in 1911 for \$72,000.¹

STYLE

The Garry Block at 290 Garry Street is based on the Classical revival style that became popular throughout the city.

CONSTRUCTION

This four-storey office building measures 40' x 100' and is 64' in height. It is of concrete-steel construction² that became popular as the fire resistant building type in Winnipeg by 1910.

¹ City of Winnipeg Building Permit (below as BP), 1911/1043.

² City of Winnipeg Assessment Records 1, Code 40, Roll No. 932221 (below as AR); and Winnipeg Fire Plan, 1917.

DESIGN

This building was designed by the Winnipeg firm of Pratt and Ross using Kelly-Simpson Construction Company as contractors. The front façade is symmetrically designed and is based on a classical architectural order, i.e., pedestal, column and entablature. In this case, pedestal takes the form of tyndal ashlar stone to the second storey sills and the three large round-headed arches with carved keystones and projecting cartouches. Above this base and the complete entablature present at this level is the column or three-storey body of the Pratt and Ross design. This includes the three bay rhythms begun on the ground floor (including the separation of each window into three parts). The design also includes four two-storey stone pilasters (two fluted and two plain) finished with doric capitals and panelled brick spandrels. The final element, the entablature (the building's second) is complete with dentil blocks, a metal cornice and a stone parapet above.³ The outer three elevations use plain windows and brick.

INTERIOR

The interior has seen several alterations to all floors. In 1963 the third and fourth floors were redone at a cost of \$8,000,⁴ in 1973 the main floor and entrance was reworked for \$5,000,⁵ and in 1981 the Winnipeg Sun had the third floor altered for \$5000.⁶ One element left untouched was the marble wainscotting and staircase.

INTEGRITY

1. Occupies original site; 2. Has suffered little exterior alteration; and 3. Building in excellent structural condition.

³ AR.

⁴ BP, #1963/870.

⁵ BP, #1973/8472.

⁶ BP, #1981/5101.

STREETSCAPE

The Garry Block contributes to the existing character of the area, being adjacent to the Comcheq Building and across Garry Street from several of its contemporaries.

ARCHITECT

The architects responsible were Winnipeg resident Ralph Benjamin Pratt (1878-1950) and Winnipeg born Donald A. Ross (1877-1956). See Appendix I for biographies.

PERSON

This building was originally owned by the Mortgage Company of Canada. This firm was one of many such Canadian ventures involved in real estate transactions. By 1900 mortgage companies became the largest financial institutions in Canada next to banks. This was a result of bank charters that prohibited real estate lending. Banks were, in fact, simply not suited for the risky, often volatile real estate market.⁷ In Ontario these mortgage firms profited from the relatively stable land conditions but in the west the boom/bust cycles of land prices kept the companies from reaching such proportions. The Mortgage Company of Canada remained at this address until 1955 but the company's decline can easily be seen within the pages of the Henderson's Directory. What began with numerous, bold-faced ads under several headings and a subscribed capital of \$4-million in its early years slowly dwindled to small insignificant listings and finally an end in 1955. Included in the tenants of 290 Garry Street was the Belgian Consulate from 1923 to 1955. The balance of tenants throughout the building's history consisted of financial institutes, real estate companies and agents, insurance companies and several lawyers.⁸ Present owners of the building are two doctors, P.R. Walton, an oral surgeon, and R.C. Grafton, a plastic surgeon. They have hired the architectural firm of Haid Marshall and Associates to oversee approximately \$½-million of renovations. These include gutting the structure (save the elaborate

⁷ M. Bliss, Northern Enterprises (Toronto 1987) pp. 268-70.

⁸ Henderson's Directory 1910-1986.

staircase), replacing heating, wiring and windows and creating new office space. Both owners will have extensive medical facilities on the premises included in their offices.

EVENT

There is no significant event connected with this structure.

CONTEXT

This building is witness to one of the final areas of expansion in Winnipeg, that being the office building. Technological advances in support systems allowed for the ability to build higher and space limitations paved the way for the perfection of this design. By the time the Garry Block was completed, Winnipeg was well into this phase of growth.

LANDMARK

The Garry Block, located near Winnipeg's busiest thoroughfare, is highly visible to the average citizen. Future plans for the space add to this conspicuousness.

APPENDIX I

Pratt and Ross

Ralph Benjamin Pratt was born in London, England, on August 8, 1878 and trained as an architect at the South Kensington School of Art. After completing his education he emigrated to Canada and by 1892 was working in Winnipeg. Within the year he became an architect for the CPR and in 1901 became a top architect for the fledgling Canadian Northern Railway. In this capacity, Pratt designed many stations and shops for the new transcontinental line. In 1906, while still a CNR architect, he formed a partnership with Winnipegger Donald A. Ross.¹ Together they were responsible for numerous buildings. Pratt was also President of the Manitoba Association of Architects from 1917-1919. He died March 14th 1950.²

Donald Aynsley Ross was born in Winnipeg in 1877 and died here in April 1956. Ross attended Upper Canada College (Toronto) and Toronto University from where he graduated with a BA in 1898. He received his engineering degree from the School of Practical Science in Toronto and then became a mining engineer in B.C. In 1901 he became locating engineer for the CNR and by 1905 was terminal engineer for the line. It was at this position that Ross oversaw the construction of the Pinawa Channel Dam on the Winnipeg River and he supervised several stations for the RCAF in WWII. He also supervised construction of the Union Station in Winnipeg.³

¹ Winnipeg Telegram September 12, 1906, p. 53.

² Neepawa Walking Tour and Schofield, The Story of Manitoba, Vol. III, pp. 538-41.

³ Ibid., pp. 538-40.

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The Pratt and Ross firms were responsible for buildings all across the west. The list includes:

Prince Albert - Belgo-Canadian Realty Co. office building

Brandon - CNR's Prince Edward Hotel 1912 (demolished)

Vancouver - CNR Terminal Building 1917-1919

New Dauphin, Manitoba - CNR Station

Winnipeg - Horse Show Amphitheatre 1909 (largest of its type in North America at the time (demolished)
Rosemount Apartments
Hugh Sutherland residence
Electric Railway Chambers 1913, 213 Notre Dame Avenue
Stanley Mineral Springs and Brewing Company (St. Boniface)
Sir Daniel H. McMillan residence
Deer Lodge Hotel
Breen Motor Company building Main Street
Leonard-McLaughlin Motors building Portage Avenue
Structural Engineers and Mechanical Equipment Supervisors for the Winnipeg Civic Auditorium⁴

⁴ Western Canada Contractor and Building: "New Breen Building Costs More Than \$150,000", XX, January 1923, pp. 32-4; "Winnipeg's Finest Auto Show Rooms" XXIV, April 1927, p. 25; and "Winnipeg's \$1,000,000 Auditorium is Complete", XXIX, October 1932, pp. 4-6, 9.

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Western Canada Contractor and Builder

Winnipeg, City of. Assessment Rolls

Winnipeg, City of. Building Permits

Winnipeg Fire Insurance Plans 1917

Winnipeg Telegram

Winnipeg Tribune

The Year Past. Annual Report of the City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee

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Plate 1 – Garry Block, 290 Garry Street, front (east) façade, ca.1990. Beside is the Comcheq Building (formerly the Canada Permanent Building, 296-98 Garry Street, built in 1909). (City of Winnipeg, Planning Department.)

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Plate 2 – Garry Block, rear (west) façade, ca.1990. (City of Winnipeg, Planning Department.)

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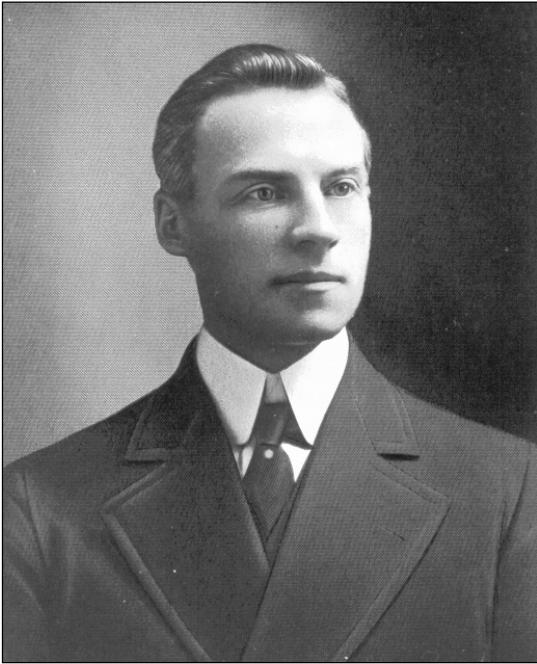


Plate 3 – Left: Ralph B. Pratt (1878-1950); Right: Donald A. Ross (1877-1956), ca.1913.
(Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N9440.)