

272 HOME STREET – THELMA APARTMENTS
A. Eggertson and T. Wilson, 1914



For nearly 80 years, Tudor Revival detailing has enabled the three-storey Thelma Apartments to project an English cottage look that fits well with the block's garden-like setting on the west side of Home Street across from Vimy Ridge Park.

The style dominates the building's front (east) facade where enclosed, second- and third-storey porches feature the typical smooth stucco, half-timbering, peaked gable ends, and decorative brackets that recall late medieval English architecture.

This finish is set against an otherwise red brick wall punctuated by several rectangular openings. The slightly elevated main entrance, with its double wooden-and-glass doors, is topped by a modest bracketed canopy and an arched, three-part transom window with a keystone highlight. Other windows, some of which retain their original wooden surrounds, are set in singles and pairs between flat brick arches and smooth-cut stone lug sills.

Similarly ornamented lights appear on the building's other elevations. Each side wall, built of cream-coloured, sand-lime brick, is broken by a large recess designed to provide additional natural light and ventilation to the interior. Overall, this solid brick block is rectangular in shape and stands on a smooth-cut stone foundation that rises above grade.

The Thelma overlooks a 2.43-hectare greenspace which was among the City of Winnipeg's first public parks. The site was acquired in 1894 and, in the fashion of the day, became a formally organized, passive recreation area with open lawns, curvilinear walkways, and landscaped massing of trees and shrubs. More active uses were added later. The amenity, which extends between Portage and Preston avenues, originally was known as St. James Park, but was renamed to commemorate a major Canadian victory during World War I.

It was on the eve of that conflict in 1914 that Arni Eggertson and Thomas Wilson -- the Thelma's co-owners, architects and builders -- began construction of their \$50,000 investment project. Eggertson (1873-1942) came to Winnipeg at age 14 with his Icelandic family. He subsequently established successful contracting and realty businesses, served three terms on City Council (1907, 1908, 1917), and represented Iceland in the United States during World War I. In civic affairs, Eggertson was known for his active campaigning to establish Winnipeg Hydro. No information is available on his partner, T. Wilson.

The two men designed the Thelma to attract middle-income tenants -- a strategy that was possible in Winnipeg because citizens welcomed the apartment block as a pragmatic response to the city's rapid growth, need for housing and climatic conditions. In contrast, some other North American centres resisted this residential option because of concerns about privacy, safety, health, and the integrity of single-family neighbourhoods.

The Thelma had several advantages which made it attractive to tenants of some means. It not only was near a park, but it also was situated on the periphery of the Wolseley district. This popular part of the West End adjacent to the Assiniboine River was noted for its rapid pre-war development of relatively large and expensive houses and substantial apartment blocks.

Inside the Thelma, only four suites were provided on each of the three upper floors. These units, which ran off a wide central corridor, contained a bedroom, living and dining rooms, kitchen, and bathroom. Three additional apartments were in the basement, along with a locker room, laundry area and boiler room. To enhance fire safety, brick interior walls were installed in the suites and around the boiler room.

Ownership of the Thelma Apartments was transferred in 1929 to Arni's son, E.G. Eggertson, an electrical engineer who retained the property until 1954. It has since changed hands several times. Unlike some of its contemporaries, however, the block has experienced little exterior or interior alteration affecting its basic design and character.