

214 MAIN STREET – WINNIPEG HOTEL

Unknown (1873 & 1881); W. Chesterton (1895); S. Hooper (1901)



The Winnipeg Hotel stands at the southern end of Main Street, one of the City's oldest continuously operated hotels.

The Winnipeg Hotel occupies a site on the west side of Main between York and St. Mary Avenues acquired in 1872 from the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) by Charles Garratt, operator of Garratt House. The following summer, a two-storey, L-shaped frame building with a false front was erected on the lot and operated as the Garry Saloon. Under James S. Wheeler, this business subsequently was known as Garry House (or Hotel).

The timing and location was fortuitous. It was located near the busy HBC and Dominion land offices as the 1881 construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway's (CPR's) transcontinental line sparked a major population and real estate boom. Living space was at a premium as thousands of

workers, settlers and fortune-seekers besieged the city.

Wheeler, assisted by a new partner, Thomas Montgomery, seized the opportunity to expand, re-opening his facility in early September 1881 as the Winnipeg Hotel. While available records are incomplete, the evidence suggests that this three-storey, 57-room structure likely incorporated a portion of the original building.

The otherwise plain wood frame hotel featured a brick-veneer front (east) façade composed of native brick with bands and quoins in contrasting red brick. The main floor contained an asymmetrical arrangement of openings, including two entrances and windows set in round arches. Segmental arches and flat tops marked openings along the second and third storeys, respectively. A small wooden balcony protruded over the off-centre main entrance, while a huge hotel sign surmounted the wooden cornice. The building had a well-stocked bar, modern dining room, sample rooms and three parlours.

The Wheeler-Montgomery partnership dissolved in 1883. Montgomery continued the business until 1893 when he took on one of his brothers, Oswald, as a partner. Two years later, they employed architect Walter Chesterton to direct about \$20,000 in renovations, mainly to modernize the main (east) façade.

Chesterton, an English-trained architect who practised in Ottawa before relocating to Winnipeg in 1881, used elements of the Classical Revival style to achieve a more imposing image for the hotel. New brick veneer was applied to the entire building, including Twin Cities red brick and Battle River sandstone on the front. Two large openings replaced the main floor windows, each containing English plate glass with stained and leaded transom lights. The wooden balcony was replaced by one of wrought iron, while the balcony door was set in a large rounded arch. These elements were flanked by pilasters leading up to a pedimented, galvanized iron cornice.

In 1901, the Montgomerys invested a further \$14,000 in a three-storey, solid brick rear addition on a stone foundation, increasing capacity to 80 rooms. However, plans to build another five-storey extension immediately to the north did not proceed.

The utilitarian 1901 wing was designed by Samuel Hooper, another Englishman who pursued stone carving and monument making in London, Ontario and Winnipeg before returning to the architectural profession in 1895. He served as Manitoba's first Provincial Architect from 1904 until his death in 1911.

The Montgomerys sold the Winnipeg Hotel in 1904 to Maurice Noakes, formerly of the Imperial Hotel at Main Street and Alexander Avenue. A succession of owners followed, as did several unsympathetic building alterations - most notably, covering the facade with white paint (probably in the early 1930s) and remodelling of the entrance in 1959.

After the 1881-1882 boom, many of the Winnipeg Hotel's competitors disappeared and their sites were redeveloped to other uses. As well, the entire hotel industry shifted north toward the CPR station at Main Street and Higgins Avenue. However, arrival at the Forks of the Northern Pacific and Manitoba Railway (late 1880s), followed by the Canadian Northern and Grand Trunk Pacific railways (early 1900s) brought new activity and competition such as the short-lived but elegant Manitoba Hotel at Main Street and Water Avenue and conversions of existing buildings to the Commercial and Empire hotels.

The Winnipeg Hotel is one of the city's oldest standing buildings and one of the oldest continuously operated hotels. As well, it is an integral part of the last surviving half-block of pre-1890 development on South Main.

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

Exterior-

- Three-storey brick and stone building with flat roof located midblock on the west side of Main Street south of St. Mary Avenue, its main façades facing east onto Main Street, its south façade facing a large building, its north façade facing a vacant lot/parking lot and its rear (west) façade facing a back lane;
- The front (east) façade with its centrally located, raised main entrance topped by a large arched window, second storey windows in arched openings with stone lug sills, pilasters with stone capitals at either end and a stone belt course, third storey windows in rectilinear openings with stone lug sills, the central opening framed by paired attached columns leading to bracketing for the pediment at roof level and a roofline highlighted by an ornate metal entablature with bracketing, floral embellishments and the words "THE WINNIPEG";

- The common clay brick walls with windows in rectilinear and arched openings and stone and wood sills of the south and north façades; and
- The rear (west) façade with its rusticated stone base, common clay brick wall with windows and doors in arched openings with stone lug sills.

Interior-

- Third floor leaded glass.