

423 MAIN STREET – CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD BUILDING
Northwood and Chivers, 1928
Smith Carter Searle Associates, 1963



In 1928, a modern, stone-clad office building was completed on Main Street to house the regional headquarters of Western Canada's three wheat pools – Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta – as well as related organizations. Thirty years later, growth of the grain economy necessitated a large addition to house the expanding work of the Canada Wheat Board (CWB), the marketing agency of the pools that had, after 1943, been given a monopoly on wheat marketing and establishing grain prices by the federal government.

The original building and its large addition, make for one of the most unique façades on Main Street. The original building (north portion) is designed in the Modern Gothic or Late Gothic Revival Style and is a relatively rare example in the city. Elements of the style found on the building include arched windows framing the central, multi-arched entrance, vertical embellishments with floral motifs, carved coats of arms and shields, upper storey buttress-like

pilasters, wide stone spandrels and a top storey with windows in arched openings with ornamental heads, carved stone tracery panels and a stepped parapet.

The addition to the south sought to interpret the historically-based style of the original building in a more modern design, creating one of Winnipeg's finest International Style office buildings. The angular appearance, large windows and vertical emphasis are all elements of the style and are used on the addition's two main façades, west facing Main Street and south facing McDermot Avenue. A dark vertical band of polished granite makes the visual distinction between the original building and its 1960s addition.

The building and its addition operate as one structure on the interior. Between 2005 and 2010, the entire interior was gutted, mechanical systems replaced and much of the original hung ceiling removed. One usual element of the building is the interior parking garage found in the southwest corner of the building.

The architects of the original building were the local firm of George William Northwood (1876-1959) and Cyril William Upton Chivers (1879-1969), responsible for a number of fine buildings over their long partnership (1925-1956) including Gordon Bell Junior High School, 3 Borrowman Pl. (1925), St. Ignatius Catholic Church, 255 Stafford St. (1928), Assiniboine Park Pavilion (1929) and the Women's Tribute Memorial Lodge, 200 Woodlawn St. (1931).

Designers of the 1963 addition were Smith Carter Searle Associates, formed in 1947 by three recent University of Manitoba Architecture graduates. The firm was one of Winnipeg's most prolific and influential firms in the post-World War II era, responsible for such iconic structures as Rae and Jerry's Steak House, 1405 Portage Avenue (1957), Monarch Life Building, 333 Broadway (1959-1963), J.A. Russell Building (University of Manitoba Faculty of Architecture), 83 Dafoe Road (1959), Royal Bank Building, 220 Portage Avenue (1965), Pan Am Pool, 25 Poseidon Bay (1967), Richardson Building, 1 Lombard Place (1967-1969) and Manitoba Centennial Centre, 555 Main Street (1967-1972). The firm operates today as Architecture 49.

The CWB was formed in 1935 by an act of Parliament, simplifying the worldwide marketing of Canadian wheat and barley and making the Board the world's largest wheat exporter for many decades. The building on Main Street continued to headquarter the Pools and the CWB (which had purchased the building in 1947) but included other tenants such as Air Canada, the Bank of Montreal and Canadian National Railways.

By the early 2000s, however, the Board faced rising opposition from farmers and in 2012, the federal government discontinued its marketing monopoly and it became a voluntary organization. This changing role necessitated a major reduction of CWB staff and the Board occupies only a fraction of its original space in the building.

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

Exterior:

- Eight-storey stone clad office building built in two phases connected by a dark vertical band of polished granite and its main façades facing west onto Main Street and south onto McDermot Avenue;
- North section with its symmetrical main (west) façade, two large, round arched windows in openings framing the multi-arched entrance with ornate, vertical embellishments with floral motifs and carved coats of arms of Manitoba (south) and Saskatchewan (north), topped by two more carved stone shields – coat of arms of Alberta (north) and “CCWP” (south) – upper floors divided into seven bays by buttress-like pilasters with windows in square openings and the top storey with windows in arched openings and a stepped parapet;
- North section with its rear (east) brick façade with a door and windows in square-headed openings and lug sills and upper floors with windows in arched openings and lug sills;
- North section with its north brick façade;
- South section with main (west) façade with date stone in the southwest corner with “1963” and wheat sheaves engraved, ground floor openings divided into thin windows by vertical stone bands, upper floors divided by wide pilasters into five sections further divided into four window bays with wide stone panels at the top floor;
- South façade with thin windows in openings on the ground floor and banks of windows in square-headed openings on the upper floors; and
- Rear (east) of the south section with its buttress-like pilasters and bays of windows in square-headed openings.

Interior:

- High ceilings supported by faceted concrete column grid with flared capitals;
- Masonry load-bearing demising wall.