



**460 MAIN STREET  
ROYAL BANK**

Historical Buildings Committee

August 1982

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The only Carrere and Hastings-designed building in Winnipeg, and one of the few on the prairies, stands at 460 Main Street. Unique to Bankers' Row, its palazzo-style façade invites inspection of a rare Renaissance-inspired interior. This edifice represents a personal statement on banking hall architecture by one of the continent's leading practitioners.

The Royal Bank was the last major financial institution to open Winnipeg premises. In June, 1906, corporate directors leased quarters in the Forum Block at 445 Main Street – next door to the Imperial Bank. Five months later, these same officials opted for the construction of a monumental banking hall. From the estate of R.J. Whitla, the Royal Bank purchased the site and building of the Imperial Dry Goods Company for a sum of about \$200,000.<sup>1</sup> A recession intervened and construction did not begin until 1909.

A series of problems confronted bank officials in their endeavour to erect Main Street premises. Next door stood the lavish, marble-fronted Bank of Toronto. Nearby, the recently-completed Imperial Bank and Bank of British North America attracted clients with their imposing façades and opulent banking halls. The Royal Bank required a distinctive structure which would entice corporate pedestrians, yet maintain an identity with branches in other cities. The Carrere and Hastings proposal of a simple palazzo elevation met all bank requirements.

Carrere and Hastings recommended an ingenious cost-saving method of erecting the new edifice. A dividing wall was installed at the mid-point of the decade old Imperial Dry Goods Building which stretched from Main Street to Albert Street.<sup>2</sup> Contractors carefully removed the roof and main façade and underpinned the two-foot thick foundation walls. Norcross Brothers of Boston linked the remaining brick outer walls with structural steel cross-members supplied by the Hamilton Bridge Works of Hamilton, Ontario.<sup>3</sup> With an improvised structural steel frame, the completed building possessed approximately 38 feet of Main Street frontage, extended westward 125 feet, and rose four storeys in height. A reinforced concrete roof topped the building. For

employee and patron convenience, the building featured a passenger elevator, freight elevator, steam heating, and electric lighting. The Royal Bank authorized a \$190,000 expenditure for the structure.<sup>4</sup>

The main elevation successfully blended the architectural preferences of Carrere and Hastings with the Royal Bank corporate style. The two large solid bronze-grilled Romanesque windows and a similarly-clad Romanesque door constituted an integral part of the building's palazzo design and also reflected the adornment of most branches. A lowly-placed entablature complete with corporate title also appeared on other structures. Two storeys of architraval-framed windows rose above the entablature which the top floor fenestration featured scroll-shaped bracketed perimeters. Entirely rusticated like other Royal Bank façades, the front elevation was comprised of costly pink Milford granite.<sup>5</sup> Carrere and Hastings specified an unusual Spanish-style tiled roof which set the building apart from its contemporaries.

Inside the banking hall, the preferences of Carrere and Hastings predominated. Huge bronze front doors led into the vestibule. Tennessee marble floors, Hauteville marble walls and bronze-panelled glass windows graced the banking room. Through dual bronze doors custom-fabricated by Canada Foundry in Toronto and crowned by an entablature and unadorned pediment, customers entered the main financial area. Here, floors and walls boasted the same marble as in the outer area. At regular intervals, bracketed marble pilasters ascended to ceiling height. Patrons transacted business at Hauteville marble counters topped by bronze cages. Intricate marble chequing desks and a marble bench were purchased from John Williams Company of New York City. Skylights funnelled the sun's rays downward and created a cheerful appearance.<sup>6</sup>

The basement and upper floors reflected a similar concern for detail. Mississquoi marble on the floor, walls, and ceiling greeted patrons who rented basement safety deposit vaults.<sup>7</sup> A marble-treaded staircase complemented the elevator in its rise to the fourth storey offices. Leaseholders conducted their business in rooms which featured oak floors and oak wood-work. Upon completion in 1911, the Royal Bank offered leaseholders prestige offices.

Throughout its history, this Main Street structure has received the attention of several owners.

The Royal Bank maintained the building in its original condition until the banking institution departed in 1926. Before World War I, the financial institution only operated the banking hall and leased upper floors to tenants including Credit Foncier and the German Consulate. In 1920, Henderson's Winnipeg Directory noted that the bank occupied all but the second and third storeys.<sup>8</sup> But the Royal Bank departure in 1926 had traumatic consequences – the building fell into disrepair. The City Assessor inscribed the following notation in 1941: “High class Bank Bldg. now in depressed occupancy.”<sup>9</sup> New owners would rescue the building from its plight.

Two successive corporate owners, Aronovitch and Leipsic Limited and Leon A. Brown Limited, transformed the building into the fine structure it is today. Utilizing the banking hall as office quarters during the 1950s, Aronovitch and Leipsic soon devoted their attention to the upper storeys. During the early 1950s, the building received such needed improvements as a new roof while rental offices were gradually redecorated. This owners' most dramatic change lay in erecting a banking floor mezzanine in 1959.<sup>10</sup>

Leon A. Brown followed his predecessor's footsteps. In 1971, a new elevator was installed and second storey offices were upgraded. Two years later renovations were completed and all rental floors had received new broadloom, acoustic tile ceilings, recessed fluorescent light fixtures, new woodwork, and air-conditioning.<sup>11</sup> Today the Royal Bank continues to impress pedestrians with its palazzo-style façade, while its interior provides modern office amenities.

## ROYAL BANK – ORIGINAL COST AND ALTERATIONS

(Source: City of Winnipeg. *Building Permits and Assessment Record. Bank of Toronto*).

<b>Permit</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Estimated Cost</b>	<b>Specifics</b>
402	1909	\$1,600	division wall for Imperial Dry Goods Building
871	1909	\$190,000	original permit
195	1918	unspecified	boiler room modifications
unspecified	1946	unspecified	minor renovations
unspecified	1949	unspecified	air-conditioning for main floor and glass partitions
5094	1951	unspecified	new first floor ceiling; skylight removed
unspecified	1952	unspecified	new roof
unspecified	1954	unspecified	3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> floors redecorated
1418	1959	\$8,000	main floor mezzanine added; miscellaneous repairs including flexicore floor system
5236	1971	\$75,000	new elevator, second to fourth floor renovations
9669	1977	unspecified	alterations for one office

## ORIGINAL SUPPLIERS TO ROYAL BANK

(Source: *Construction*, April, 1912)

<b>Item</b>	<b>Supplier</b>
Steel Work	Hamilton Bridge Works, Hamilton, Ontario
Marble Work	Smith Construction, Montreal
Bronze and Iron Work	Canada Foundry Company, Toronto
Plaster Work	Fernald Company, Montreal
Vault Work	J. & J. Taylor, Toronto
Heating and Plumbing	Jas. Ballantyne & Co., New York
Electric Light Fixtures	Mitchell, Vance Company, New York
Bronze Cheque Desk	John Williams, New York
Elevators	Otis-Fenson Company, Toronto

## FOOTNOTES

1. "Main Street Site is Bought by Royal Bank," **WMT**, 15 November 1906.
2. City of Winnipeg, **Building Permit 1909 – 402**. Royal Bank, 460 Main Street.
3. "The Royal Bank Building at Winnipeg," **Construction**, April 1912, p. 58.
4. City of Winnipeg. **Building Permit 1909-871**. Royal Bank, 460 Main Street
5. "The Royal Bank Building at Winnipeg," **Construction**, April, 1912, pp. 54, 58.
6. **Ibid.**
7. **Ibid.**
8. **Henderson's Winnipeg Directory**, 1912; 1920.
9. City of Winnipeg. **Assessment Record**. Code 43, Ward 1, Roll No. 608580, Royal Bank, 460 Main Street.
10. **Ibid.**
11. **Ibid.**

## 460 MAIN STREET – ROYAL BANK

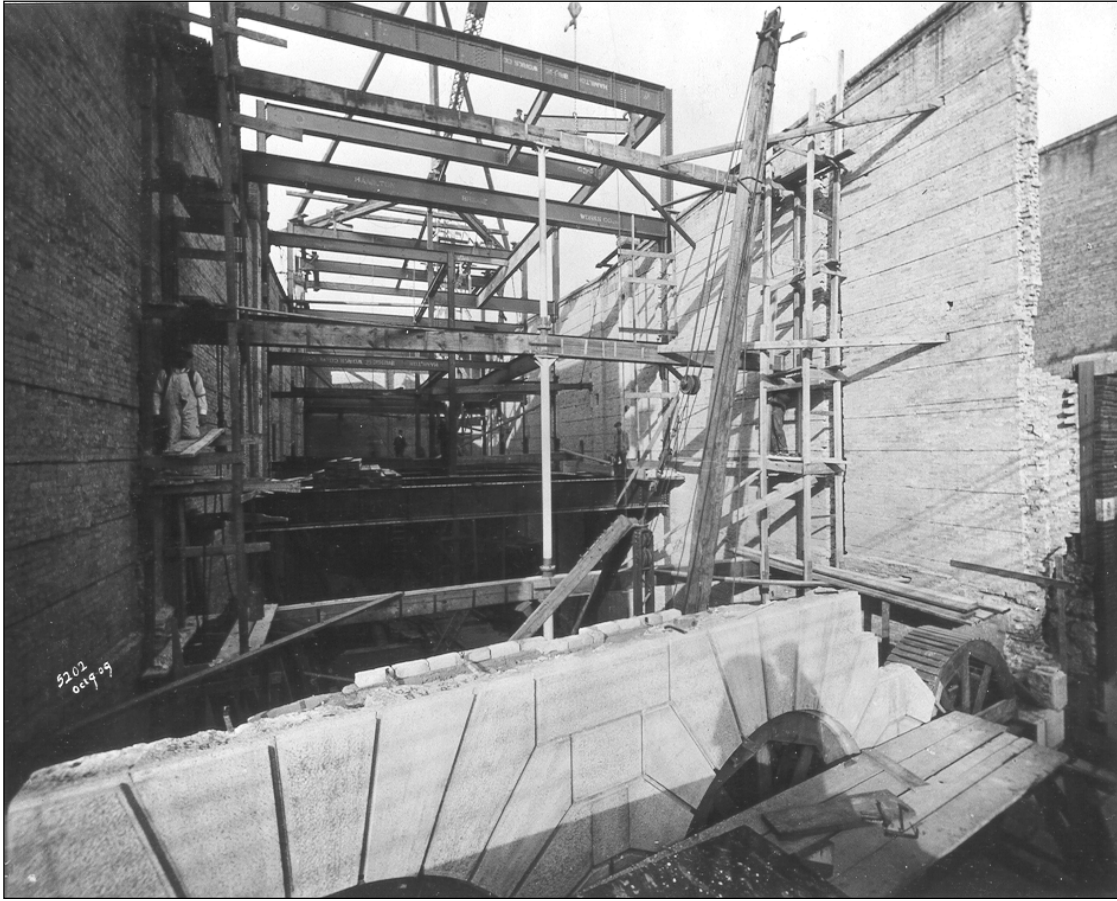


Plate 1 – Construction of the Royal Bank, 460 Main Street, October 9, 1909. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, J.H.G. Russell Collection #4.)



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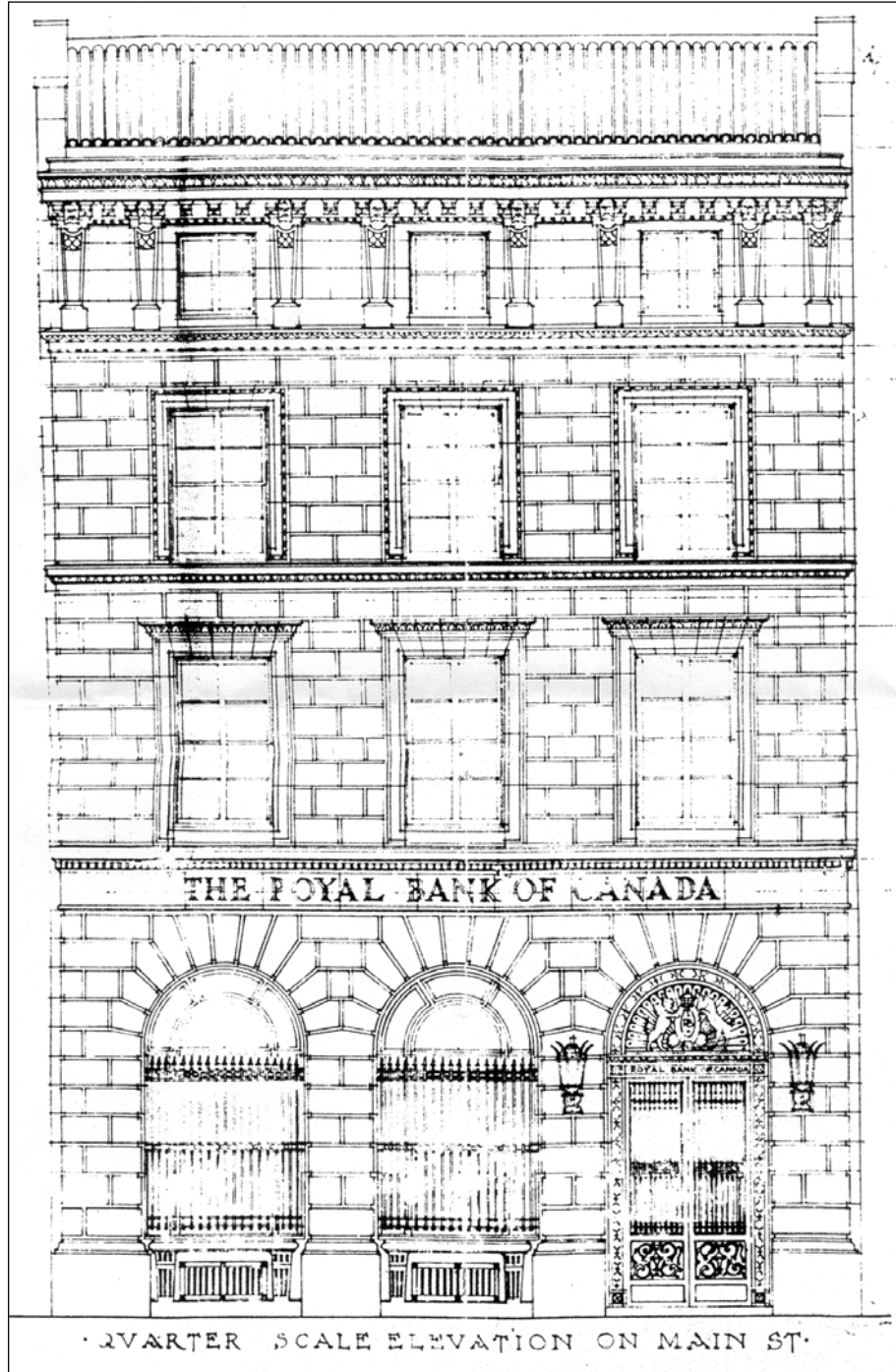


Plate 2 – Architecture’s plans, “Quarter Scale Elevation on Main St.,” 1909. (City of Winnipeg Archives, Plan #402/1909.)

**460 MAIN STREET – ROYAL BANK**



Plate 3 – Royal Bank, 460 Main Street, front façade, 1970. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Architectural Survey.)

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Plate 4 – Royal Bank, 460 Main Street, main entrance, no date. (City of Winnipeg, Planning Department.)