

**468 MAIN STREET – BAKER BLOCK
(BIRT SADDLERY)
*H.S. Griffith, 1901***



In 1901, local entrepreneur W.R. Baker demolished the small hardware stores on the lot adjoining the Duffin Block, to the south on Main Street, and erected the Baker Block. The press hailed the new building as “attractive and solid,” describing it as “one of the most up-to-date store and office buildings in the City.” The new Baker Block (now the main portion of Birt Saddlery) was built of solid brick with a façade of red pressed brick.

It was designed by architect Hugh S. Griffith, who had trained in Great Britain and had come to Winnipeg in 1887. He was first employed as a surveyor with the Northern Pacific Railroad and later with the Land Titles Office. In 1893 Griffith opened his own architectural practice, designing various warehouses and residences. Among his notable works are the Criterion Hotel (c. 1903) on McDermot Avenue and the Central Fire Hall (1898) in Market Square (now demolished).

The symmetrical façade of the building contained two large display windows, on the main level, that were separated by a central arched approach. The recessed entrance featured double doors leading to a stairway for the upper floors as well as separate entry doors to the two shops. The façade of the upper floors of the building was given a vertical emphasis through the use of projecting brick pilasters that were balanced by stone sills and exaggerated stone lintels on the second floor. A simple metal cornice finished off the decoration of the building.

For its first two decades, the Baker Block contained the offices of dentists, doctors and real estate agents, while the Gundy Music Store and a jewelry shop were located on the main floor.

In 1921, the building was purchased and renamed the Home Investment Building. Founded in 1891 by Manlius Bull, the Home Investment and Savings Association loaned money and paid interest on regular savings deposits. Bull was typical of the businessmen that built up early Winnipeg, being Ontario born, aggressive and firmly entrenched in the web of interlocking directorships that typified the city's early business community.

As the new home of the financial service, alterations were made to the entranceway and windows on the main floor along with some interior renovations. Various tenants during this period included lawyers, manufacturers agents, the Swedish consulate, Swedish-American travel lines and the Norwegian Glee Club.

In 1947, the Home Investment and Savings Company closed their doors. Birt Saddlery, an established retail outlet of tack, stock care supplies, western clothing and leather goods, took over the building in 1965. The company continues the early retail tradition of this city block and is notable for its eye-catching window displays.