

594 MAIN STREET – ALLMAN BLOCK
J.H.G. Russell, 1904



Clothier Daniel F. Allman was one of numerous small investors who responded to rising demand for rental space during Winnipeg's pre-World War I economic boom by erecting modest commercial buildings in the central business district.

Allman opened his retail business in 1899 in the Cheapside Block on Main Street just south of Alexander Avenue. This location was part of a commercial area between City Hall and the Canadian Pacific Railway Station that teemed with shops, hotels, billiard halls, liquor dealers, land and ticket agents, pawnbrokers, employment agencies and many other services catering to both residents and transient populations.

By 1904, Allman's financial success translated in his commissioning prominent local architect J.H.G. Russell to design a new, three-storey, mixed-use building on the west side of Main between Alexander and Logan avenues.

Numbered 592-594, this solid brick block on a stone foundation was constructed in the versatile, two-part commercial style popular during the period because it allowed owners to combine ground-floor retail space with office, residential or storage space above. The design of such buildings reflected these differences in use by horizontally dividing the front façade, usually just above the first floor. The resulting lower and upper sections of the façade could be harmoniously connected or display little visual continuity.

In the case of the Allman Block, symmetry of Russell's design remains evident on the upper floors. Each level has a set of paired windows placed within a slightly recessed part of the wall which ends under a segmental brick arch. Narrow vertical recesses in the adjacent masonry give the appearance of partial pilasters rising up the sides of the façade to the arch and to a large, classically-designed metal cornice. This latter, triangular-shaped element, which partly conceals a plain parapet, is highlighted by modillions and return eaves that are supported by two pairs of scrolled brackets.

Other façade ornamentation is provided by a large carved keystone in the arch; continuous rough-stone sills under the windows; a metal name plate; and a metal relief mounted between the second and third storeys (a second relief is now missing). Openings on all levels now feature newer windows and the ground floor has been altered by the addition of an overhead garage door to give access and light to the ground floor space.

On the interior, the main floor has been converted into a showroom and workroom with much of the original ornamental tin ceiling is still visible. A wide staircase in the southeast corner, accented in dark wood and featuring ornamental tin ceilings, leads to the second floor. This level also exhibits dark wood accenting in the hallways, including the ornate wood banister and landing, and tin ceilings. Like the second floor, the third floor is a mixture of original spaces and finishes (the staircase, wood framed skylight, some of the hallway and offices) and renovated space.

The project was one of many downtown commercial structures designed during this period by the Toronto-born Russell who began practicing architecture in Winnipeg in the mid-1890s. He was a strong influence on the visual character of the warehouse district. His impressive portfolio

also included office, church and residential buildings that today continue to be among the city's landmarks.

Early occupants of the Allman Block included Shamrock Pool Rooms; Bently Portrait Company; Max Steinkopf, solicitor; and S.C. Wilson, real estate. Allman's own business continued in the ground-floor retail space until his retirement in 1924.

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

Exterior:

- The east-facing building located mid-block on Main Street and part of an historic streetscape
- Ornate roof with metal pediment, carved keystone and signage reading "Allman Block"

Interior:

- Ornamental tin ceiling on the ground and second floors
- Entrance foyer in the southeast corner
- Main staircase including wood and tin accenting
- Original wood accenting in the hallways and offices on the second and third floors
- Period doors with original hardware and glass
- Skylight on the third floor