607 MAIN STREET

MINDELL BLOCK

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
Researcher: M. Peterson
May 2019
This building embodies the following heritage values as described in the Historical Resources By-law, 55/2014 (consolidated update July 13, 2016):

(a) This modest block was completed in 1925, a later addition to the commercial streetscape of Main Street north of the downtown;

(b) It had a long association with Jewish immigrant and dry goods dealer Louis Mindell;

(c) It was designed by well-known local architect Max Z. Blankstein and built by the contracting firm Fraser and McDonald;

(d) It is designed in the Two-Part Commercial style, popular for buildings along major thoroughfares in most urban centres;

(e) It is an integral part of a significant streetscape on Main Street; and

(f) Some of the building’s exterior has not been altered.
During the decades leading up to 1900, Winnipeg's Main Street was transformed from a muddy track bordered mainly by wood-frame buildings into a paved thoroughfare with imposing brick and stone structures along its walkways (Plates 1 and 2). The small premises that served as shops and residences were replaced by modern buildings, offering commercial, office and residential space for the ever-growing population and local service industry.

Development of the transcontinental railway had created an entirely new situation by connecting Winnipeg with both eastern manufacturing interests and a burgeoning population to the west. The city actively promoted itself as the middleman between eastern supply and western demand. Its success had far-reaching economic, political and social effects. It also resulted in rapid physical change in what became downtown Winnipeg.

New residential districts extended the outer boundaries of the built-up area, while new warehouse, banking halls, offices and shops popped up throughout the downtown. Three distinct sectors developed around Winnipeg's large, imposing City Hall on Main Street: a warehouse district to the west, a financial section from Portage Avenue north to Bannatyne Avenue along both sides of Main Street and a commercial/retail area running north from City Hall to Higgins Avenue and eventually beyond.

This last area was dominated by smaller firms selling everything from shoes and boots to harnesses and fruit. They generally were housed in two- or three-storey commercial blocks with retail space on the ground floor and offices, suites or storage space above. This type of combined or mixed-use structure became increasingly popular as demand grew for downtown office and residential space. It also was a perfect small-scale investment for the new group of successful businessmen inhabiting the city.

After the economic downturn of the mid-1910s and World War I, Winnipeg’s economy made a modest rebound. Building Permit totals were approximately $7 million in 1920 decreasing to about $3 million in 1925.
A new commercial block was built on Main Street in 1925, owned and occupied by clothier Louis Mindell (Plate 3).

**STYLE**

The Mindell Block is a good example of a Two-Part Commercial structure, very common throughout the downtown regions of most North American cities. Especially popular after 1900, the design was used to reflect the varied activities housed in the different areas of the building. The ground floor held the retail spaces, often with recessed entrances and large display windows. A metal cornice or similar feature was often used to visually separate the ground floor from the upper floors, which included banks of large windows to light the office and/or residential space. Access to this upper floor was usually provided by an ornate entrance on the front façade.

Beyond this basic layout, this type of block saw a tremendous variation in materials and ornamentation. They could be small, simple wooden structures or large, multi-storey brick and stone buildings with a wealth of ornamental elements, often depending on the neighbourhood in which they were located and the amount of money available to the developer.

**CONSTRUCTION**

The building measures approximately 8.5 x 24.4 x 11.6 metres and cost $12,000 to complete in 1925.\(^1\) Resting on a reinforced concrete foundation, the building boasts solid red brick walls (see Appendix I for more construction information).

**DESIGN**

According to the original plans for the building, the main floor of the front (west) façade featured a hooded door at the south end (access to the upper floor) and a pair of large plate glass display windows framing the recessed entrance (with terrazzo flooring) to the store (Plate 3). A transom

\(^1\) City of Winnipeg Building Permit, #1149/1925.
window topped the display windows and shop entrance and a metal cornice visually separated this level from the upper floor. The second storey featured four rectilinear window openings with stone lug sills. Ornamental brickwork with inset diamond-shaped stone elements led to the sloped parapet with concrete coping and raised ends. The entire front façade is clad in red brick.

It is unknown at this time if the building was completed as drawn or whether changes, especially at the roof line, were a later alteration, although images from 2000 suggest that the transom windows were never built and that the metal cornice was placed above the display window openings (Plate 4). Today, the south entrance has been renovated, the recessed entrance and display windows are present, the modest metal cornice was removed and the roof line is flat, with a simplified concrete capped cornice and a carved stone panel holding the words “MINDELL BLOCK 1925” (Plates 5 and 6). This date stone would suggest that the original design of the roof line was replaced by this simpler version.

The north façade is a party wall; the neighbouring building covers the ground floor of the south façade and the exposed upper floor is windowless and features faded painted signage (Plate 7). The rear (east) façade included an open metal staircase to the second floor and rectilinear window openings on both floors (Plate 8). Much of this elevation is hidden behind the newer metal-clad garage (Plate 9).

**INTERIOR**

According to the original plans, the basement of this structure included the boiler room and coal room at the east end, a nearby dressing room, open space in the west portion and a staircase in the southeast corner (Plate 10). The ground floor was used as a retail store (Plate 10) and the second floor as a “shop” with the stairs located mid-building on the south wall (Plate 11). Ornamental tin was used on the ceiling of the ground floor (Plate 12).

The building’s interior was completely gutted in 2000 (Plate 13).
The Committee could not gain access to the interior to evaluate its present condition.

**INTEGRITY**
The building stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition for its age. Alterations, as described above, have negatively affected the main façade.

**STREETSCAPE**
This building is located on one of the City’s major downtown thoroughfares; in the middle of a block of several turn-of-the-century commercial buildings (Plate 16). It is an important contributor to this historic streetscape (Plate 17).

**ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS**
The architect of this building was Jewish immigrant Max Z. Blankstein (1877-1931, Plate 18). Blankstein was a well-known designer in the City with many of his contracts in the North End (see Appendix II for additional biographical information). He has received 10 points from the Historical Buildings and Resources Committee.

Contractors for the building were Fraser and McDonald, trained stonemasons who had worked together on various projects beginning in 1907 and formed their company in 1914, remaining active until the late 1970s. The firm was responsible for a number of fine buildings including:

- Trinity Baptist Church (Formerly Nassau Street Baptist Church), 549 Gertrude Avenue (1907-1909)
- St. John’s Library, 500 Salter Street (1914) – Grade II
- Sir John Franklin School, 386 Beaverbrook Street (1921) – demolished
- Mindell Block, 607 Main Street (1925)
- Graham Apartments, 399 Graham Avenue (1928)
- Vaughan Apartments, 219 Vaughan Avenue (1929)

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2 Historical Buildings and Resources Committee files; and R.R. Rostecki, “549 Gertrude Avenue, Trinity Baptist Church (Formerly Nassau Street Baptist Church),” report for the Historical Buildings Committee, October 1991, p. 12.
- Eastman-Kodak Building, 287 Portage Avenue (1929) – demolished
- Singer Sewing Machine Building, 424 Portage Avenue (1930)
- E.E. Hall House, 633 Wellington Crescent (Shriners’ Hospital), 1947

PERSON/INSTITUTION

Louis Mindell was a Jewish immigrant born in the Ukraine ca.1886. Coming to Canada in 1901, he moved to Winnipeg in 1905, Mindell opened a dry goods shop, ultimately operating out of a store on the east side of Main Street between James and Rupert avenues. He would remain at this location until it was destroyed by fire in 1925. Fully insured, Mindell chose to build his own facility, further north on Main Street. The company, which would also include his son William, continued to operate, expanding into boots and shoes. The company was in the headlines in the mid-1950s when it was awarded a contract to supply boots to the fire department by the City’s Public Safety Committee, only to have City Council overturn the decision because of complaints by one of the other bidders.

Louis Mindell died on September 20, 1958, his estate continued to own the building at 607 Main Street into the 1970s.

Replacing Mindell in the retail space were a number of tenants, including Central Clothing and Central Pawn Brokers (1960s) and Winnipeg Domestic Appliances (1980s and 1990s). The upper floor was originally occupied by the Gospel Hall and by the 1950s; the Communist Part of Canada used the space as the Norman Bethune Hall into the 1980s.

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3 Canada Census, 1921.
6 Winnipeg Free Press, May 19, 1955, p. 3 and June 5, 1956, pp. 1 and 2.
8 City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls, Roll No. 13-080937100, 1930-1990.
EVENT
There is no known significant historical event connected with this building.

CONTEXT
Built in the mid-1920s, this building was one of a number of post-World War I structures built to replace older commercial structures in Winnipeg’s downtown and along the “Main Streets” of the surrounding municipalities. Modest, well-built and efficient, the Mindell Block is representative of this type of popular, owner-financed development.

LANDMARK
The Mindell Block is located on a busy downtown Winnipeg street, although the lack of significant ornamentation and its scale reduce its conspicuousness.
Building Address: 607 Main Street (607-609)  Building Name: Mindell Block
Original Use: commercial  Current Use: commercial
Roll No. (Old): 13080937100 (12827-12-2)  RSN: 154169
Legal Description: 11 St. John, Plan 32440, Lot 2 (Original: 11E St. John, Plan 11, Lot 2 except southerly 38’)
Location: East side between Alexander and Logan avenues
Date of Construction: 1925  Storeys: 2 & basement
Heritage Status: ON NOMINATED LIST
Construction Type: Red and common clay brick and reinforced concrete foundation

- 1149/1925 $12,000 (original); 1832/1929 $150 (alteration to 2nd floor); 2904/1942 $500 (repairs);
  154764/2000 $30,000 (convert into single family dwelling; 168538/2000 $5,000 (construct 24 x 30 x 11.5’
detached garage with roof deck); 169487/2000 $2,000 (garage foundation)

Information:
- 28 x 80 x 38’
- wall thickness: B- 18” reinforced concrete; 1st & 2nd- 13” brick
- ceiling heights: B- 8’; 1st- 14’; 2nd- 10’
- 2000 conversion- remove and build new interior partition walls

ARCHITECT: M.Z. BLANKSTEIN
CONTRACTOR: FRASER & McDONALD
APPENDIX II

Max Zev Blankstein (1877-1931)

M.Z. Blankstein was born in Odessa, Russia on August 23, 1877¹ and took his early education and architectural training there; following in the footsteps of his father Meyer Blankstein, a stonemason and contractor by trade.² He came to Winnipeg in 1904, part of a large contingent of Jewish immigrants who made the city their home. He took up his profession soon after his arrival, making him one of the earliest Jewish architects in Canada.³

He was active in his community, supporting many of its charitable organizations. He died at his home at 131 Machray Avenue on December 31, 1931 after an appendicitis operation. He left a wife, two daughters and four sons. Two of the sons, Cecil N. and Morley, and a daughter, Evelyn, would also become architects in the city, Cecil as a founding partner of Green, Blankstein and Russell Associates (later GBR Architects Ltd. and today known as Stantec Inc.), Morley in Blankstein Coop Gillmor Hanna (now Number Ten Architectural Group) and Evelyn, who first worked in her brother Cecil’s office and then for Hobbs Glass (later Canadian Pittsburgh Industries).⁴

A partial list of major buildings designed by M.Z. Blankstein includes:⁵

- Aikins Court Apartments, 167 Aikins St. (1907)
- Minuk Block, 254-60 Dufferin Ave. (1909) – demolished
- Glesby Stables, 468 Aberdeen Ave. (1910)
- Chechik, Gold and Kernham Cold Storage Warehouse, 422 Jarvis Ave. (1910)
- Northern Block Apartments, 94 McGregor St. (1910) – demolished
- Winnipeg Hebrew Free School, 121 Charles St. (1912)
- Palace Theatre, 501 Selkirk Ave. (1912)
- Merchant’s Hotel, 541 Selkirk Ave. (1913)
- Brandon Court Apartments, 377 Brandon Ave. (1913)
- Zimmerman Block, 669 Main St. (1913) – Grade III

⁵ Compiled from author’s files; City of Winnipeg Building Permits, 1900-1926; and Western Canada Contractor and Builder, Vol. 29, No. 1 (January 1932), p. 9.
M.Z. Blankstein work (continued):

Jessie Block Apartments, 626 Jessie Ave. (1914)
North Panama Apartments, 229 Machray Ave. (1914)
European Block, 588 Manitoba Ave. (1914)
Globe Bedding Co. Warehouse, 274 Jarvis Ave. (1918)
Film Exchange Building, 361 Hargrave St. (1922) – Grade III
Mindell Block, 607 Main Street (1925)
Tory’s Academy Auto Service Garage, 155 Fort St. (1928)
Roxy Theatre, 385 Henderson Hwy. (1929)
Tivoli Theatre, 115 Maryland Ave. (1927) – converted into grocery store (1959)
Uptown Theatre, 394 Academy Rd. (1930) – Grade III
Theatres in Regina and Prince Albert, Saskatchewan
Plate 1 – Looking north on Main Street from William Avenue, 1886. Pictured here are: #1- the second City Hall; and #2- Police Courts, James Avenue. (Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg-Streets-Main, 1886-#1.)

Plate 2 – Looking north from the roof of City Hall, ca.1895, from the roof of City Hall. (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba.)
Plate 3 – Architect’s plans, “Front Elevation”, Mindell Block, 607 Main Street, Plan No. 1149/1925. (City of Winnipeg.)
Plate 4 – Mindell Block, 607 Main Street, front (west) façade, 2000. (M. Peterson, 2000.)
Plate 5 – Mindell Block, 607 Main Street, front (west) façade, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)
Plate 6 – Mindell Block, 607 Main Street, front (west) façade, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)

Plate 7 – Mindell Block, 607 Main Street, rear (east) and south façades, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)
Plate 8 – Mindell Block, 607 Main Street, rear (east) façade, 2000. (M. Peterson, 2000.)
Plate 9 – Mindell Block, 607 Main Street, rear (east) façade, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)
Plate 10 – Architect’s plans, “Basement Plan” (left) and “Ground Floor Plan” (right), Mindell Block, 607 Main Street, Plan No. 1149/1925. (City of Winnipeg.)
Plate 11 – Architect’s plans, “Second Floor Plan”, Mindell Block, 607 Main Street, Plan No. 1149/1925. (City of Winnipeg.)
Plate 12 – Mindell Block, 607 Main Street, ground floor, 2000. (M. Peterson, 2000.)

Plate 13 – Plate 8 – Mindell Block, 607 Main Street, second floor renovation, 2000. (M. Peterson, 2000.)
Plate 14 – East side of Main Street north of the Disraeli Freeway, Mindell Block, 607 Main Street (arrow), 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)
Plate 15 – Main Street looking north from Alexander Avenue/Disraeli Freeway, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)

Plate 16 – M.Z. Blankstein, no date. (Courtesy of the Blankstein Family.)