

661 MAIN STREET – CALDER (KAPLAN) BUILDING

Alexander Calder, owner (1912)



This two-storey, solid brick building faces west onto Main Street, another of the many modest, mixed use structures built in Winnipeg's downtown in the early 1900s.

Cost of construction for the 12.8 metres wide and 19.8 metres deep block was \$10,000 when completed in 1912, the solid brick walls resting on a 33.0-centimetre thick concrete foundation. Ceiling heights are 2.1 metres (basement), 4.1 metres (first floor) and 3.2 metres (second floor). In 2008, a one-storey garage was built on the rear of the building after the 1912 rear section was demolished.

The building is a good example of a Two-Part Commercial structure, very common throughout the downtown regions of most North American cities after 1900. Especially popular after 1900, the design was used to reflect the varied activities housed in the different areas of the building – retail

on the ground floor with large display windows and office space or residential suites on upper floors. The main façade was usually divided to visually separate these two areas, often through the use of cornices or belt courses. The buildings could be extravagantly designed with a wealth of ornamental detailing or plainly finished, as is the case with this block.

The original front (west) façade featured three doors, the outer entrances recessed with large adjoining display windows, the central entrance also recessed but with smaller windows and used to access the upper floors. Large transom windows topped all the ground floor openings and the rectilinear openings of the second storey were asymmetrically designed. Rusticated stone is used for accenting on the upper floor and modest brick corbelling led to the flat, unadorned roofline. The extensive alterations to this façade include a complete recladding of the ground floor, have been extensive. The ground floor of the front elevation has seen a complete redesign and recladding and window units replaced on the second floor.

The south wall and much of the north wall were and are covered by neighbouring buildings. The original rear façade included three ground floor doors and rectilinear window openings on both floors. This area has also seen significant alteration.

The original interior was divided on the main floor into two retail shops and an office; the second floor was shown on original drawings as undivided space. Today, the ground floor holds one store and the second floor has been renovated into offices.

The original owner and listed architect for the building was Scottish-born Alexander Calder (1842-1936) who immigrated to Canada at 5-months-old with his parents. As a young adult, Calder worked as a butcher and a then for a street railway company prior to coming west to Winnipeg as the agent for a carriage and wagon manufacturer. Calder is credited with opening the first retail store on what would become Portage Avenue in 1880. In 1883, he became the Canadian Pacific Railway ticket agent and labour employer with an office at 677 Main Street) before opening his own ticket agency, ultimately adding son Arthur B. Calder (1869-1938) as Alexander Calder and Son in 1912.

Calder opened the new block and immediately advertised for tenants although his own businesses originally occupied two of the spaces (#663 and #665). C.A. Hallberg, realtor, was also a long-time tenant (1912-ca.1953). Despite the death of A. Calder and his son, Calder's Ticket Office continued to operate out of this building into the 1950s. The building was renamed the Kaplan Building in the 1940s when it was purchased by J. and B. Kaplan Dry Goods and the Kaplan Manufacturing Company began operating out of the building.

The building was acquired by the City of Winnipeg through tax sale in 1982 and in 2008, Main Meats, a long-time Main Street retailer, opened its new store in the Kaplan Building.

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

Exterior-

- Two-storey brick building with flat roof located mid-block on the east side of Main Street north of Logan Avenue, its main façade facing west onto Main Street, its north and south façades hidden by neighbouring buildings and its east façade facing the back lane; and
- Second storey windows in rectilinear openings with stone heads and sills and corbelled brick above

Interior-

- None