

667 MAIN STREET – ALLOWAY AND CHAMPION BUILDING
J.H. Cadham, 1905



Located in the hub of an early commercial district catering to recent immigrants, the Alloway and Champion Building reflects the innovative spirit of an 1879 partnership which became one of the largest private banks and foreign exchange dealers in Western Canada.

William Forbes Alloway and Henry Thompson Champion came to Manitoba with Wolseley's 1870 Red River Expedition. Champion remained with a local bank while Alloway went into retailing and freight hauling. He also began a loan business which grew into the partnership with Champion; Alloway's younger brother, Charles, became a junior partner. They eventually established a head office at 362 Main Street in the heart of the city's financial district.

Their unchartered bank was for risk-takers. It could offer a wider range of services without the encumbrances or security demanded by national standards for chartered banks. Yet, the partners took care to maintain their depositors' confidence, and were astute in capitalizing on market opportunities. In the 1880s and 1890s, this included the now-discredited practice of purchasing native and Métis land claims (scrip), reselling the property to settlers. In the early 1900s, it meant offering specialty services to accommodate the needs of new immigrants.

The partners established their second bank in 1905-06 on the east side of Main between Logan and Henry avenues, one block south of the Canadian Pacific Railway Station. The area bustled with European immigrants and small commercial outlets, often with Jewish proprietors who could speak various languages and were willing to sell merchandise under arrangements familiar to the new arrivals.

Alloway and Champion incorporated their firm in 1912. Alloway sold the business to the Canadian Bank of Commerce in 1919, three years after Champion's death. However, the two branches continued to function separately under Alloway's presidency until his death in 1930. One of his legacies is the Winnipeg Foundation which he and his wife endowed in 1921 for philanthropic endeavours.

Alloway and Champion chose Winnipeg architect James H. Cadham, a fellow member of Wolseley's expedition, to design their branch at 667 Main. Cadham worked as a contractor for many years before turning exclusively to architecture in 1895. He was responsible for several major projects in the warehouse district.

Cadham adopted a restrained neo-classical design common to bank buildings during the period. His plain columns and muted classical detailing were intended to portray confidence and security. A large storefront window enabled passers-by to observe the bank's operations. The three-storey building has brick masonry walls, with a rubble stone foundation on concrete footings and a limestone façade. A large stone band over the entrance contained the firm's name carved in plain letters. Modern electric lighting, steam heat, and water and sewer connections were installed. Built by Imperial Plumbing and Building Company, 667 Main cost \$13,000.

Steinkopf and Bruce, later Steinkopf and Lawrence, occupied the second floor upon the building's completion. Residential suites were on the third level. Max Steinkopf was Winnipeg's Jewish lawyer, called to the bar in 1905. His firm specialized in corporate law, but also encompassed the legal concerns of the city's young and struggling Jewish community. Steinkopf remained in the building until the late 1920s, then the space was converted to suites.

The Canadian Bank of Commerce continued to operate a branch at 667 Main until the mid 1930s. The space subsequently was used by the New Fox Café, later Kay's Café. It functioned until the late 1970s, then was replaced by a furniture store.

The commercial strip south of the CPR Station gradually deteriorated as business shifted to Selkirk Avenue and other North End locations. The Alloway and Champion Building has undergone alterations but remains substantially unchanged. It recently was cleaned with assistance from the Winnipeg Core Area Initiative but stands unoccupied.