



**765 MAIN STREET**

**CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY POST OFFICE  
BUILDING  
(POSTAL STATION “A”)**

City of Winnipeg  
Historical Buildings Committee  
Researcher: M. Peterson  
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Most people are familiar with an image of a long line of railway grain cars, pulled by a steam or diesel engine, travelling through the prairies or mountains or other scenic Canadian vista. It is an iconic image, one that brings to mind the creation of the country through the construction of transcontinental railways and their creation and support of the western wheat economy to increase the traffic along their lines. It is the story of Canada’s early 20<sup>th</sup> century evolution.

Beyond grain, of course, was other important cargo freighted by the railways – manufactured goods, other produce, raw materials – all criss-crossing the country and helping to fuel the growing economy in established and new population centres. And there were the people, hundreds of thousands of passengers, from immigrants to bankers to politicians and royalty.

But one of the most important roles of the railways in Canada, and one that began almost as soon as trains began operating in what is now Southern Ontario in the 1830s, was the carrying of mail.<sup>1</sup> For Canada’s first transcontinental railway, the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), the final spike driven in 1885 meant it assumed the responsibility for carrying mail of all types across the entire continent. It was a huge job and continually grew as the population expanded and more and more materials were sent by mail. Even the construction of competing lines did little to slow the dramatic growth of this facet of the railway’s operations.

Winnipeg, as the Western Canadian rail hub, was integral in the mail system that included travelling post offices, catch posts and railway mail clerks. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed, the sheer volume of mail presented problems for this system and expansion of facilities occurred. The CPR, in 1924, built a new postal station, known for many years as Postal Station “A”, to organize and facilitate mail arriving and departing from the city (Plate 1).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S.M. O’Reilly, On Track. The Railway Mail Service in Canada (Hull, PQ: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1992), p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Manitoba Free Press, June 21, 1924, p. 6.

## STYLE

The CPR Post Office Building is an industrial structure with more importance placed on the strength of its construction and materials than on purely aesthetic qualities. However, it does possess ornamental features and the design, albeit reduced, is based on the Classical Revival style, with its window detailing, attached pilasters, ordered symmetrical façades, flat surfaces and flat unadorned roofline.<sup>3</sup>

## CONSTRUCTION

This postal station is built with a structural system of reinforced concrete with mushroom capped posts on the first and second floors. The building measures approximately 63.4 metres long and 15.6 metres wide and has no basement. Originally, there were two sets of metal overhanging roofs (on the north and south sides) to protect the ground floor loading doors. Both were 41.5 metres long running from the west end of the building. The northern overhang was 3.7 metres wide, the southern element 3.1 metres (demolished).<sup>4</sup> Stairs and several sets of elevators give access to the upper storeys of the building.

One of the unique structural aspects of this building is the third floor. The concrete columns do not mushroom out as on the lower levels and the beams are wooden and cut at an angle to give the roof its low pitch. The roof is constructed of heavy wooden planks standing on end (Plate 2).

## DESIGN

Because of its original use, the building was designed with two main façades, facing north onto Point Douglas Avenue (Plate 3) and facing south to the CPR tracks. Both façades feature similar design elements: raised concrete foundation walls, dark brick superstructure with darker brick accenting above all openings, large ground floor loading doors, large square headed window openings with concrete lug sills on the upper storeys, brick ornamentation between the second and

<sup>3</sup> Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, 1991), p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> Winnipeg Fire Atlas, Volume II, Sheet 212, 1917.

third storey windows and a flat roof with concrete capping. The north side still boasts the overhanging roof on the ground floor (Plate 4), its match on the south façade was removed at an unknown date. There are also bands of metal that protect the building cladding from damage from trucks and wagons used to move the mail.

The west end of the building was, for many years, covered by the CPR's Immigration Hall Building (see Plates 5 and 6 and Appendix I), which was removed (Plate 7). The east façade includes two large loading doors, an entrance door and square headed windows on the second and third floors (Plate 8). Most of the windows include their original industrial glass with wire reinforcing that are uniquely designed with hinged centre panes (Plate 9).

## **INTERIOR**

The building's interior has not been seriously altered despite its reuse since its post office function closed. The ground floor still features the original sloped ramp at the west end of the building (Plate 10) and some of the original wood loading doors are still in tact (Plate 11). The second floor is presently vacant (Plate 12) and the third floor is partially occupied and also used for storage (Plate 13). Because of its sturdy construction, the interior finishes and materials are well preserved.

## **INTEGRITY**

The Post Office Building stands on its original site and appears to be in excellent structural condition. Alterations to the exterior have included the removal of the west end addition and the removal of the overhang along the south side of the building. Some window replacement has occurred and some other alterations are now being completed by the present owner, although much of the building, including its industrial style windows, remains unchanged.

## **STREETSCAPE**

The building fits well into the surrounding industrial/warehouse nature of its neighbourhood. Its age, scale, design and finished are all compatible with nearby buildings.

## **ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS**

Well-known contracting firm Carter-Halls-Aldinger were responsible for the construction of the building, which was designed by the railway's in-house design branch.<sup>5</sup> The firm was organized in 1907 and until its dissolution in 1944, was one of the preeminent contracting companies in Western Canada with offices throughout the prairies (see Appendix II for biographical information). The firm has received 5 points from the Historical Buildings Committee.

## **PERSON/INSTITUTION**

In 1863, the Railway Postal Service Act was passed making it mandatory for railways to carry mail if requested by the Postmaster General. This was the beginning of over a century of mail on trains in Canada. As the system developed, thousands of men were hired to ride the trains back and forth across the country, sorting mail into communities, towns and cities and in some cases into the actual mail carrier routes (Plate 14). Catch posts at train stations and catch arms on the mail cars allowed sacks of mail to be picked up by the moving trains any time of the day or night and slots on the postal cars allowed citizens to mail letters directly onto the trains. The work was not easy – the cars were hot in the summer and cold in the winter, lighting was poor, hours were long and spent away from home.<sup>6</sup>

The increased dependence on the railways caused the Post Office to create a Railway Mail Service Branch in 1897 with nearly 400 employees (by 1913 this number had increased to over 1,000). Competition to the railway mail service came with the first airmail trip in 1918 and after World War

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<sup>5</sup> City of Winnipeg Building Permit, #1154/1924.

<sup>6</sup> Pay was always an issue with the clerks who had to take an annual test where they sorted 100 cards and the results could mean a raise in pay, no change, or in some cases, firing. S.M. O'Reilly, op. cit., pp. 24, 59-60.

II with the construction of highways. But trains continued to carry the bulk of Canada's mail into the 1950s,<sup>7</sup> with 1950 being the peak year with 192 railway post office cars and 1,385 clerks.<sup>8</sup> In 1965, the CPR withdrew its mail carrying facilities on its trans-Canada trains, signalling the beginning of the end. The last railway post office had its final run in 1971.<sup>9</sup>

Postal Station "A" was an important part of this nationwide system (Plate 15), mail generated in the city was brought to the building for shipping east and west. Mail brought by the trains to Winnipeg was unloaded and brought by wagon to the building as well, utilizing the tunnel underneath the railway line.

With the closure of the railway post office system, Postal Station "A" was used by a variety of tenants, including a catering business and a printer. Manitoba Telephone System occupies a small space on the third floor.

## **EVENT**

There is no known event connected with this building.

## **CONTEXT**

This structure was completed after World War I when much of the country was experiencing an economic upswing. This translated into a spike in mail, including mail order packages, newspapers and parcels. It necessitated the expansion of many mail facilities across the country and for Winnipeg, it meant the construction of a modern sorting/storage building that became Postal Station A in the local system. It continued to be an important part of this system for many decades.

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<sup>7</sup> On December 20, 1927, five freight cars completely filled with mail from England arrived in the city. Manitoba Free Press, December 21, 1927, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> S.M. O'Reilly, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 11 and 33.

**LANDMARK**

The CPR Post Office Building is set back from Main Street and is hidden on the north and east by neighbouring buildings and on the south by the raised railway tracks. It is unlikely, even though it filled a crucial role in the day-to-day lives of many Winnipeggers, that most citizens knew it existed.



# APPENDIX I

## CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report Assessment Record

Building Address: 765 Main Street      Building Name: Canadian Pacific Railway Post Office Building

Original Use: Railway post office      Current Use: partial occupation (3<sup>rd</sup> floor)

Roll No.: 14000860200      RSN: 173223

Legal Description: 35 St. John, Plan 28928, Parcel A and Plan 29260 (subject to easement)

Location: east side of Main Street at the corner of Austin Street N and Point Douglas Avenue

Date of Construction: 1924      Storeys: 3 (no basement)

Heritage Status: **NONE**

Construction Type: Reinforced concrete, brick and

Building Permits (Plans available: **[M]** Microfilm; **[PPD]** Department Storage):  
- 1154/1924 \$46,000 (original); 525/1985 \$19,000 (interior alteration);  
6592/1993 \$1,500 (interior alteration)

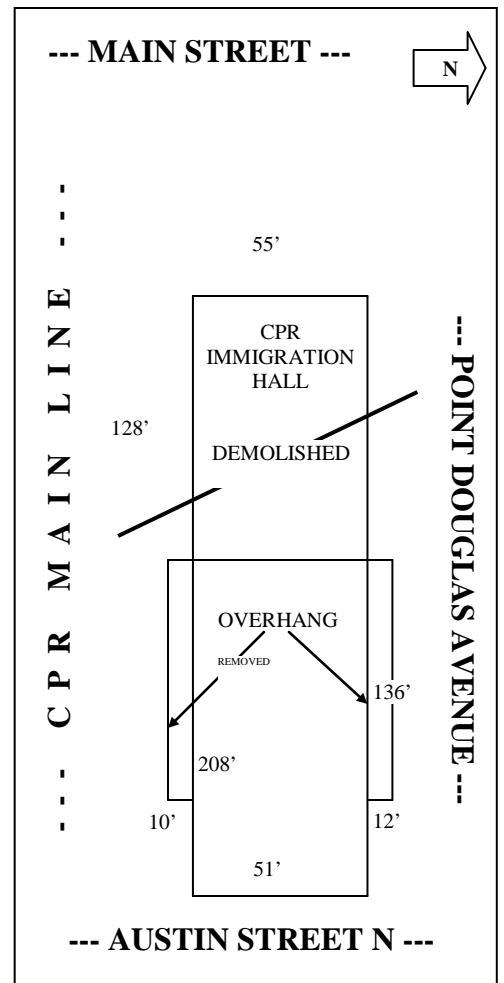
### Information:

- 208' x 51'

- Immigration Hall demolished, date unknown

**ARCHITECT: CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY (OWNER)**

**CONTRACTOR: CARTER-HALLS-ALDINGER**





## APPENDIX II

### Carter-Halls-Aldinger Company Limited<sup>1</sup>

The principals of Carter-Halls-Aldinger Company Limited (CHA) were William Henry Carter (1874-1962), a contractor; Frank Ernest Halls (1872-1950), a fire-proofing expert; and Albert Henry Aldinger (ca.1876-1942), a civil engineer. CHA had its origins with the arrival in 1903 of Carter, who was representing the William Grace Company, a Chicago contracting firm that was building the Bank of British North America, 436 Main Street. Carter worked for Grace until February 1907 when he joined with Halls and Aldinger to found the new firm. By 1915, CHA was well-known throughout Western Canada with such Winnipeg buildings to its credit as the McArthur (later Childs) Building, 211 Portage Avenue (1909); Confederation Life Association Building, 457 Main Street (1912); the Winnipeg Electric Railway Building, 213 Notre Dame Avenue (1912-13); the Manitoba Free Press Building, 300 Carlton Street (1913); the Olympia (later Marlborough) Hotel, 331 Smith Street (1913); and the Minto Armouries, 969 St. Matthews Avenue (1914). The firm also had contracts in Moose Jaw, Saskatoon, Calgary, Edmonton and Prince George, British Columbia.

Their clients included the Dominion Government, as well as the Canadian Pacific, the Grand Trunk Pacific and the Canadian Northern railways. They also worked on the new Hudson's Bay Company stores in Calgary (1912), Vancouver (1913), and Winnipeg (1926), the Banff Springs Hotel and later the Winnipeg Civic Auditorium (1933). The firm specialized in bridges, subways, railway works, steel frame and other fireproof construction, as well as heavy masonry foundations and caisson work as found in the new Hudson's Bay Company store at Winnipeg. CHA was placed in voluntary liquidation in 1944, and was reorganized as two firms, Commonwealth Construction Company Limited and the Carter Construction Company of Toronto. This latter firm relocated to Winnipeg in 1950, being managed by W.H. Carter after his retirement from the Greater Winnipeg Transit Commission in 1956. Carter Construction remained in business until 1972 as a St. Boniface firm.

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<sup>1</sup> Biographical and construction information from R.R. Rostecki, "450 Portage Avenue – Hudson's Bay Company Store," report for the City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee, October 2002; and M. Peterson, personal files.

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Plate 1 – 765 Main Street, Canadian Pacific Railway Post Office Building, south and west facades, 2011. (M. Peterson, 2011.)



Plate 2 – 765 Main Street, Canadian Pacific Railway Post Office Building, third floor roof system, 2011. (M. Peterson, 2011.)

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Plate 3 – 765 Main Street, Canadian Pacific Railway Post Office Building, north and east façades, 2011. (M. Peterson, 2011.)



Plate 4 – 765 Main Street, Canadian Pacific Railway Post Office Building, north side overhang, 2011. (M. Peterson, 2011.)

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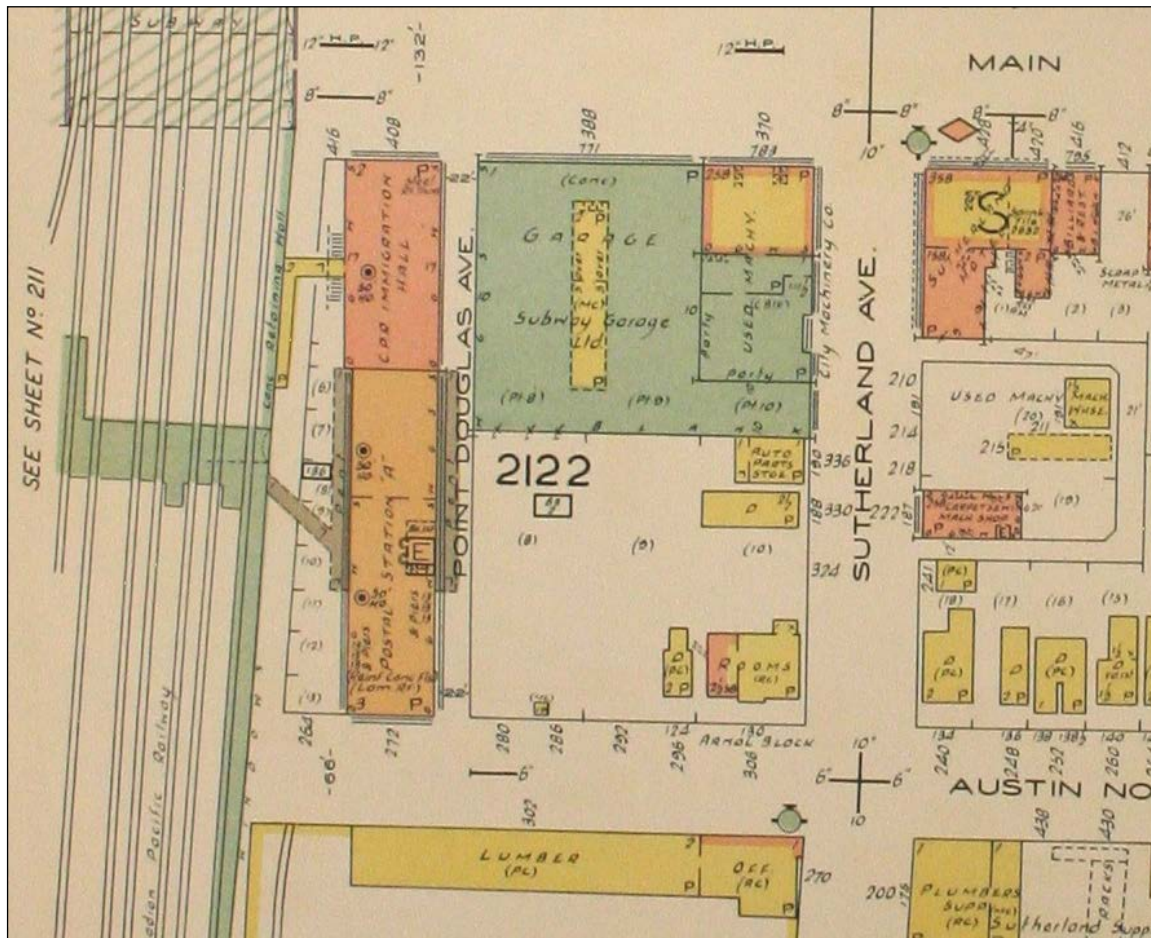


Plate 5 – Winnipeg Fire Atlas sheet, 1956, showing the Postal Station, Immigration Hall and the tunnels under the tracks connected to the postal station. (City of Winnipeg Archives, Fire Atlas Vol. II, Sheet 212.)

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Plate 6 – Canadian Pacific Railway Immigration Hall, Main Street, with the Post Office Building to the rear (east), 1969. (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba, Architectural Survey, “Main Street, 765”.)

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Plate 7 – 765 Main Street, Canadian Pacific Railway Post Office Building, west façade, 2011.  
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Plate 8 – 765 Main Street, Canadian Pacific Railway Post Office Building, east façade, 2011.  
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Plate 9 – 765 Main Street, Canadian Pacific Railway Post Office Building, second storey industrial windows with opened panes, 2011. (M. Peterson, 2011.)



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Plate 10 – 765 Main Street, Canadian Pacific Railway Post Office Building, ground floor ramp, 2011. (M. Peterson, 2011.)

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Plate 11 – 765 Main Street, Canadian Pacific Railway Post Office Building, original wood loading doors, 2011. (M. Peterson, 2011.)

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Plate 12 – 765 Main Street, Canadian Pacific Railway Post Office Building, second floor, 2011.  
(M. Peterson, 2011.)



Plate 13 – 765 Main Street, Canadian Pacific Railway Post Office Building, third floor, 2011.  
(M. Peterson, 2011.)

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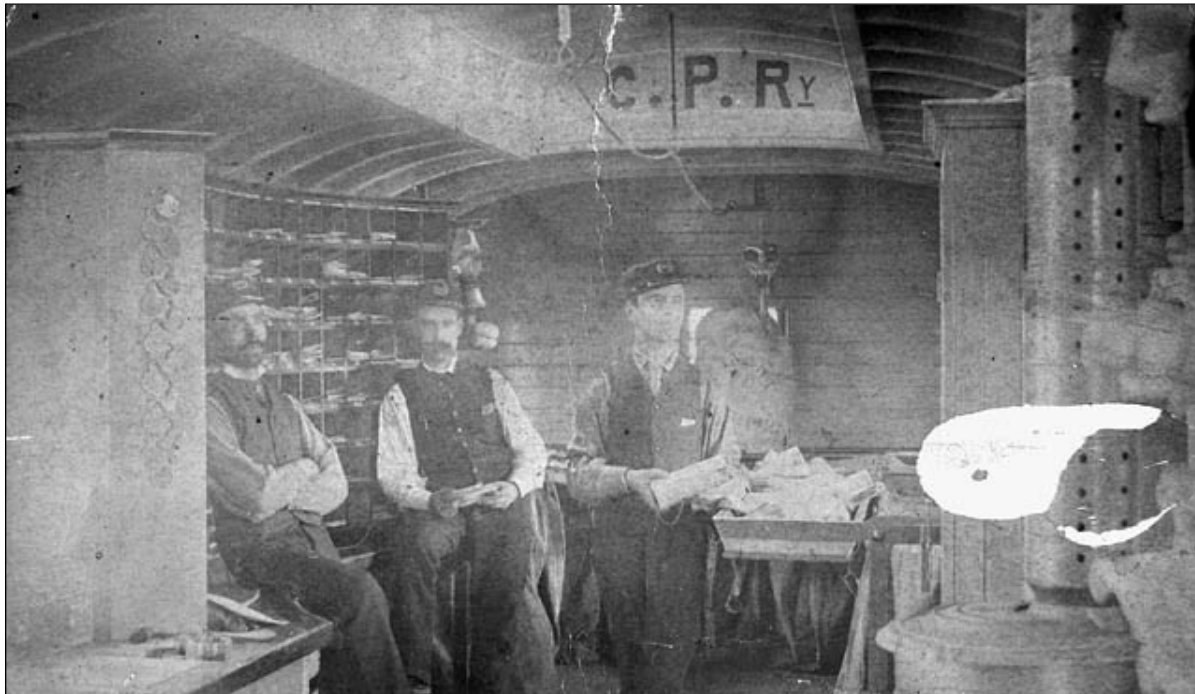


Plate 14 – Three railway postal workers in a CPR travelling post office, taken between 1885 and 1900. (Library and Archives Canada, “Personnel – Railway Mail Clerks – On Duty,” Mikan No. 2265692.)

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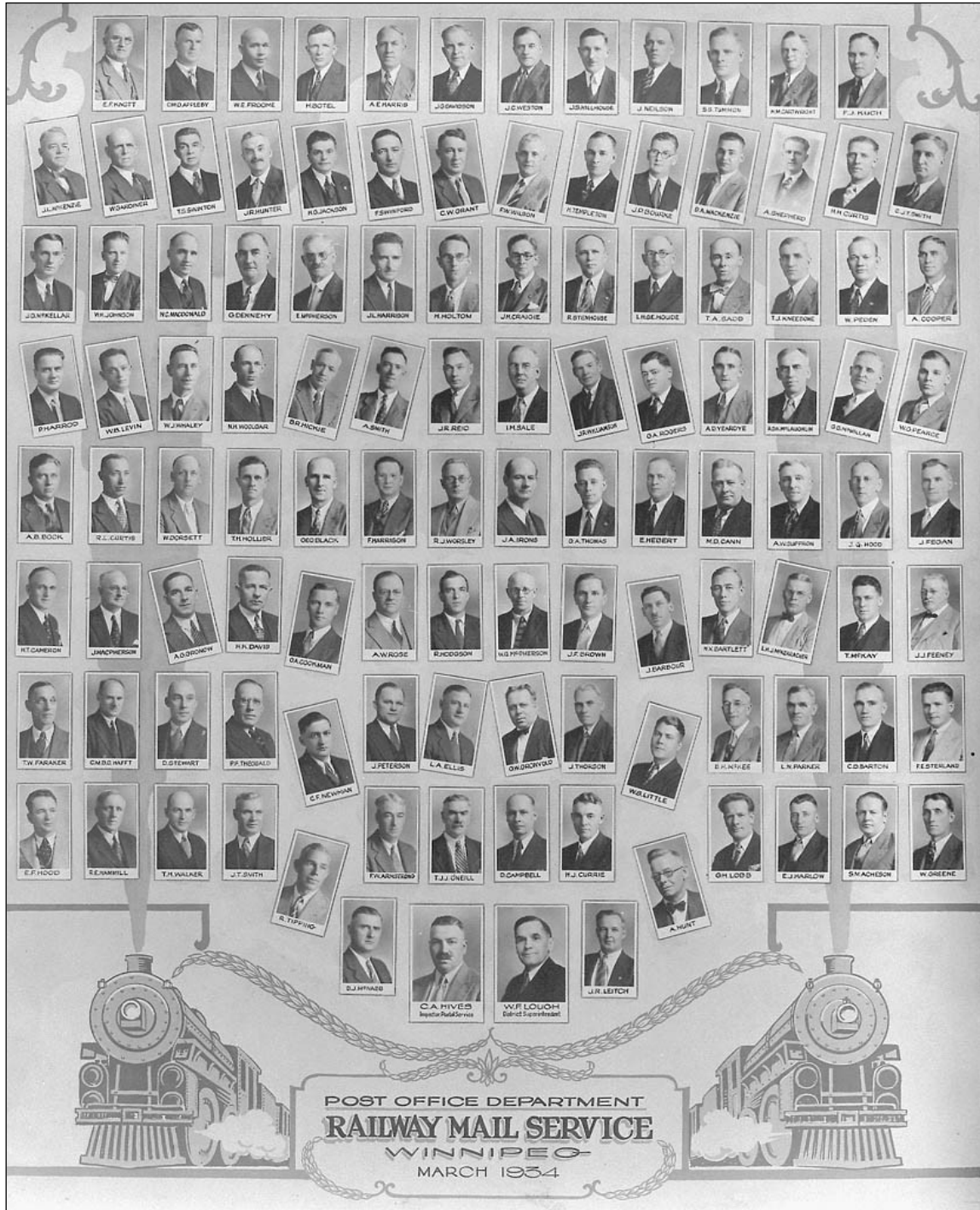


Plate 15 – “Post Office Department, Railway Mail Service, Winnipeg, March 1934”. ([Library and Archives Canada, Mikan No. 2265681.](#))