



470 - 474 MAIN STREET

BIRT'S SADDLERY

(FORMER BAKER AND DUFFIN BLOCKS)

HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE

24 DECEMBER 1983

470 - 474 MAIN STREET
BIRT'SADDLERY (FORMER BAKER AND DUFFIN BLOCKS)

In 1872, a young entrepreneur hauled his fragile but cumbersome photographic equipment up to Red River and opened the first resident photography gallery in the settlement. Although new to Red River, Simon Duffin was not foreign to the art of photography. Born in Ireland in 1843, Duffin came to Ontario as a youth. Following a stint clerking in a general store, Duffin purchased a wagon, outfitted it with the tools of a photographer and toured rural Ontario, taking, processing and selling portraits as an itinerant photographer. He sold his caravan but brought all the equipment west.¹

Operating from a small shop on Main Street, Duffin built up his trade in portraits and landscape photographs. He photographed the scenery along the rail lines, Lake Winnipeg and Manitoba as well as the way of life in a Mennonite settlement. By 1882, these shots were already recognized as important visual records of a country undergoing major change.² The few surviving shots that can be confirmed as Duffin's work from a part of the early photographic record of the north-west, more significant for their history than for their artistic merit.

So successful was his photographic trade, in 1881 Simon Duffin built himself a new studio, a three-storey brick and stone building on Main at the south-west corner of Bannatyne. The ground floor of this Duffin Block measured 31 by 70 feet, described as being "one of the finest structures in Winnipeg."³ In 1888, Duffin sold the studio gallery to Steele and Wing (later Steele and Company) which was one of the City's most prominent photographic companies for many years. Thereafter, the Duffin Company concentrated on supplying photographic equipment of all kinds: cameras, developing materials, even back-drops and props for studio work. As well, he maintained developing facilities in his shop.

In 1900, one of Winnipeg's pioneer photographers, Simon Duffin, died but his brother-in-law purchased the firm, continuing the business under the same name in the Duffin Block. By 1913, the business had grown to employ 21 people. It continued to operate until Eastman Kodak bought out the photographic supply company in c.1928, after more than fifty years of operation.

The Duffin family lived in the rear portion of the shop. The building had an entrance off Main and

side doors on Bannatyne. With Steele and Company Photographers on the second floor, the Duffin residence was at the rear of the ground floor with the company shop on the third. In the stores fronting on Main were a tobacconist in the south portion and a small drug store in the north. By the turn of the century, the W.D. Davis Stationery Company had replaced the tobacconist while the drug store remained for many years.

In 1901, Winnipeg entrepreneur W.R. Baker demolished the small shops on the lost adjoining the Duffin Block to the south and erected the Baker Block. The press lauded the new building as "attractive and solid", describing it as "one of the most up to date store and office buildings in the City."⁴ The new Baker Block (now the main portion of Birt Saddlery) was built of solid brick with a façade of red pressed brick. Rising three storeys to 48 feet above grade, the building's dimensions are 45 by 70 feet, resting on a foundation of concrete.

Two storefronts, with windows of plate glass, were divided by the central entrance and stairway. Stores and offices were located on the second floor while the third floor was classed as a "tenement" with four suites of rooms for private space. These suites were never rented privately as they were immediately leased as professional office space for physicians and dentists. The floors were finished with fir and the first two storeys had pressed metal ceilings. There was neither a fire escape nor an elevator in the building.⁵

Costing \$20,000, the Baker Block was designed by British architect Hugh S. Griffith (see Appendix I at rear of report). The masons and principal contractors were the Kelly Brothers and the carpenter was J.G. Latimer. Griffith adopted a straightforward approach to the structure, keeping in mind that pedestrian traffic was the main market of the retailers and medical men in the building. The building was compatible in scale and materials with most of Main Street, evenly matched with the three storey Duffin Block next door and quietly respectable infill for the great banks which came to typify the street.

The entranceway, now altered, formerly was more inviting. The large storefront windows fed into

two separate doors which flanked the double doors leading to the offices off the stairway on the upper floors. The various doors of the front were unified with an eyebrow archway of a contrasting colour which then continued across the façade in a horizontal bank. In the same way, each window was brought out and the floors defined through a continuous lug sill beneath and lintels or voussoirs used above. A plain metal cornice above further emphasized the horizontal lines of the building. A balanced, symmetrical façade resulted.

Into the two storefronts went the Gundy Music Store and a jewellery shop (later, the Place Clothing Store for many years). Upstairs, most tenants were doctors or dentists along with the usual real estate offices.

In October 1904, barely three years after its completion, the Baker Block suffered fire damage from the blaze that destroyed the Ashdown Store on the other side of Bannatyne. The fire started in the Bulman Block, to the rear of the Duffin and Baker Blocks down Bannatyne. The fire jumped Bannatyne to the Ashdown Store, containing paints and kerosene, so that the whole scene exploded into an inferno. The rear of the Duffin and Baker Blocks were badly scorched while the window sills and woodwork of the Duffin Block caught fire repeatedly. Damage was estimated for the Duffin Block at \$4,000. Some tenants suffered heavy losses from water damage such as the paper stock of Davis Stationery. The Duffin business and Steel photographers also lost fragile stock to the smoke and water while the dozen pianos in Gundy's Music Store at the front of the Baker Block escaped serious damage. Bulman's and Ashdown's were levelled.⁶

In 1921, the Baker Block at 470 Main was purchased and renamed the Home Investment Building. The new owners, the Home Investment and Savings Association, contracted J.A. Guinn and Company to alter the entranceway and windows, as well as undertake some interior renovations.⁷ The building re-opened as the new home of the financial service.

The Home Investment and Savings Association was founded in 1891 by its life-long president, Manlius Bull. A biography of this man reveals the quintessential Winnipeg capitalist. He was born

in Ontario in 1849, gaining experience in both the retail and wholesale trade before coming west to Winnipeg for the big boom in 1882. He established a wholesale commission here which he sold to Nicholson and Bain in 1889. He then established the Royal Crown Soap Company, based in a factory in Winnipeg which grew to be one of the biggest toiletry suppliers in Western Canada. After expanding factories to Calgary and Vancouver, Bull eventually sold Royal Crown to Lever Brothers of England in 1911.⁸ Besides Home Investment, Bull also founded two other small loan and investment houses and a fire alarm company. Firmly entrenched in the web of interlocking directorships that typified Canadian business at the time, Bull was a director of the Union Bank, Standard Trust, Winnipeg Trust, Northern Land and Loan, Western Land and Loan, Winnipeg General Hospital and Wesley College. He reinforced these business contacts through membership in all the right social and church groups of the Winnipeg elite.⁹

From c.1911 until his death in 1929, Manlius Bull concentrated his energy on the Home Investment and Savings Association. When the company moved into the former Baker Block in 1921, the Home Bank was in the same block of Main. While this coincidence may have benefitted the investment company originally, the failure of the Home Bank a couple of years later was no doubt an embarrassment.

The company operated as a near-bank, advertising paid-up capital of a million dollars, loaning money and paying 4% on regular savings deposits. It is difficult to assess its impact on the Winnipeg economy because there were so many of these kinds of financial operations in business during the pre-war years. The fact that it endured until 1947 implies that it maintained its particular hold on the money market through some very trying times. In later years, the firm was managed by W.E. Hobson, who had been with Home Investment since 1904,¹⁰ but he never became the powerful figure Bull represented in the Winnipeg financial and commercial community.

The Home Investment Building was tenanted during these years by lawyers' offices, Maple Leaf Stamp and Stencil, clubs and manufacturers' agents. Of particular note was a cluster of Swedish-based operations such as the Swedish Consulate, Swedish American travel lines, and later the

Norwegian Glee Club and other cultural clubs. The consulate was there for nearly thirty years.¹¹

In the Duffin Block at 474 Main, the Duffin Photographic Supply Company was bought out in 1928. A cigar store moved into the old drug store space, with often a shoe store or clothing store in the other main floor space. In the early spring of 1956, a fire gutted the upper two floors of the Duffin Block and the remains were demolished, leaving only the ground floor. The Bannatyne side entrances have long been sealed and the building is now connected to Birt's main store.

In 1947, the Home Investment and Savings Company closed the doors after sixty years of business, while the affiliated Home Securities Limited continued on into the 1950s. In 1965, the Home Investment Building became the site of Birt Saddlery, an established retail outlet of tack, stock car supplies, western clothing and leather goods. Formerly at the corner of Market and Main, Birt's is known to Winnipeggers for its horses in profile on either side of the main entrance.

The Duffin Block, with its connections to the pioneer photographer Simon Duffin and to the contraction boom of 1881-82, has only its main floor and foundation extant. A storage space extends away from the foundation to under the Bannatyne sidewalk, a fairly common practice in the early years downtown. There is no known connection between this underground storage space and the police jails of the 1880s.

The Baker Block of 1901 fared better, facing major alterations only once in 1921. The upper two floors and many of the interior elements have not suffered much change. The façade is now painted. Its historical role is connected with Manlius Bull and the Home Investment and Savings Association as well as Birt's Saddlery. In the continuum of Main Street as a commercial centre, this block has played a typical role both in function and appearance. The various businesses housed in the Baker and Duffin Blocks reflects Winnipeg's evolution from a frontier community to the metropolis of the west.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Frank Schofield, The Story of Manitoba Vol. II The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company Winnipeg 1913 p. 682.
2. Steen and Boyce Winnipeg, Manitoba and Her Industries Winnipeg January 1982 p. 105.
3. Loc. cit.
4. "Winnipeg's New Buildings of 1901" Manitoba Free Press 28 November 1901 p. 9.
5. City of Winnipeg Building Permits No. 77 11 April 1901.
6. "Entire City Blocks Guttled by Fire Loss is Not Far from One Million" and "Serious Damage at Woodbine Hotel" The Winnipeg Telegram 12 October 1905.
7. Permits, op. cit., No. 2063 5 August 1921. \$30,000.
8. Schofield, op. cit., Vol. II p. 114.
9. Loc. cit.
10. "Ex-Investment Firm Executive W.E. Hobson Dies" Winnipeg Free Press 1 November 1955.
11. Henderson's Directory for Winnipeg 1924, 1931, 1938, 1947, 1952 and 1955.

APPENDIX I

H.S. GRIFFITH

Hugh S. Griffith was one of several British architects who immigrated to Canada in the last two decades of the twentieth century. Griffith was born in Oxfordshire, England in 1865, taking his architectural training from 1882 to 1885 with the firm of Webb and Tubbs. In 1886, he trained as a draftsman with the London District Surveyor.

He came to Winnipeg in the spring of 1887 where he found employment first with the Northern Pacific Railroad and later with the Land Titles Office. These were both mainly surveying jobs but in 1893, H.S. Griffith opened an architectural practice in Winnipeg. Although his practice was relatively small, he designed several buildings across the province including the Thomas Ryan Warehouse, the Criterion Hotel, the exotic Turkish and Russian Bathhouse, the Baker Block on Main, St. Mary's Anglican Church on Portage, the conversion of the original Carlton Club on Main and several fine residences.

Sources: "A Group of Winnipeg Architects" Canadian Architect and Builder January 1897 p. 5-6.

Jill Wade Manitoba Architecture to 1940 University of Manitoba Press Winnipeg 1976.

Files of P.A.M. Photograph Collection.

**470-474 MAIN STREET – BIRT'S SADDLERY
(FORMER BAKER AND DUFFIN BLOCKS)**

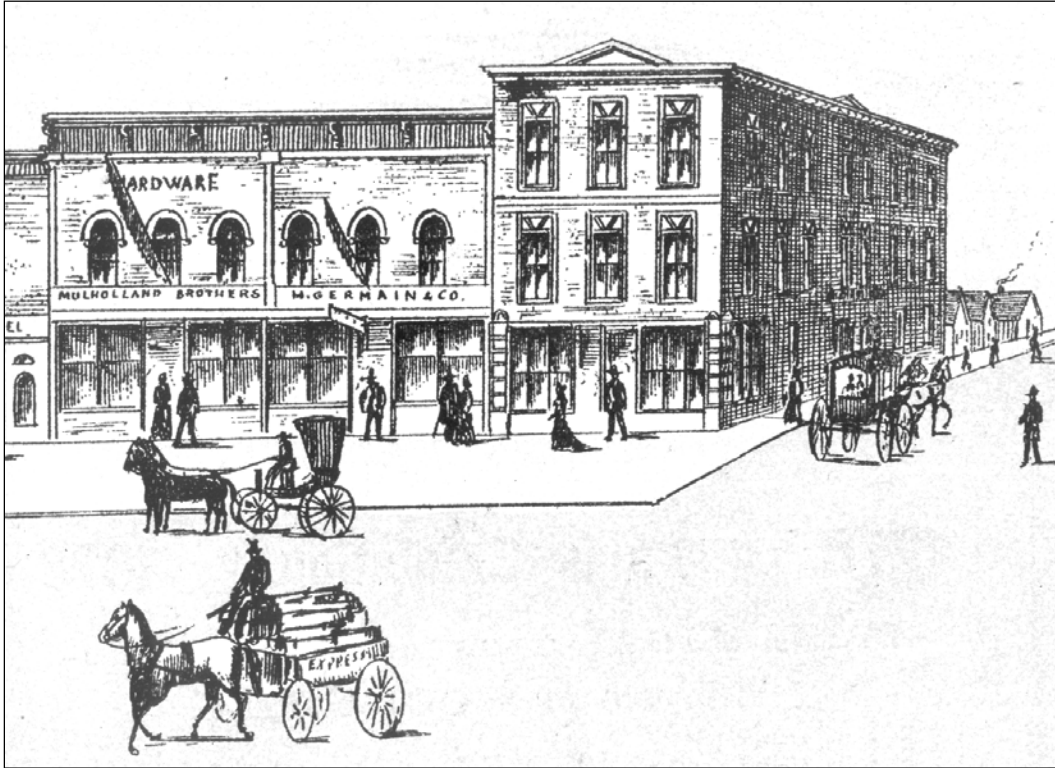


Plate 1 – Corner of Main Street and Bannatyne Avenue, 1881. The Duffin Block is three storeys with a small pediment. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

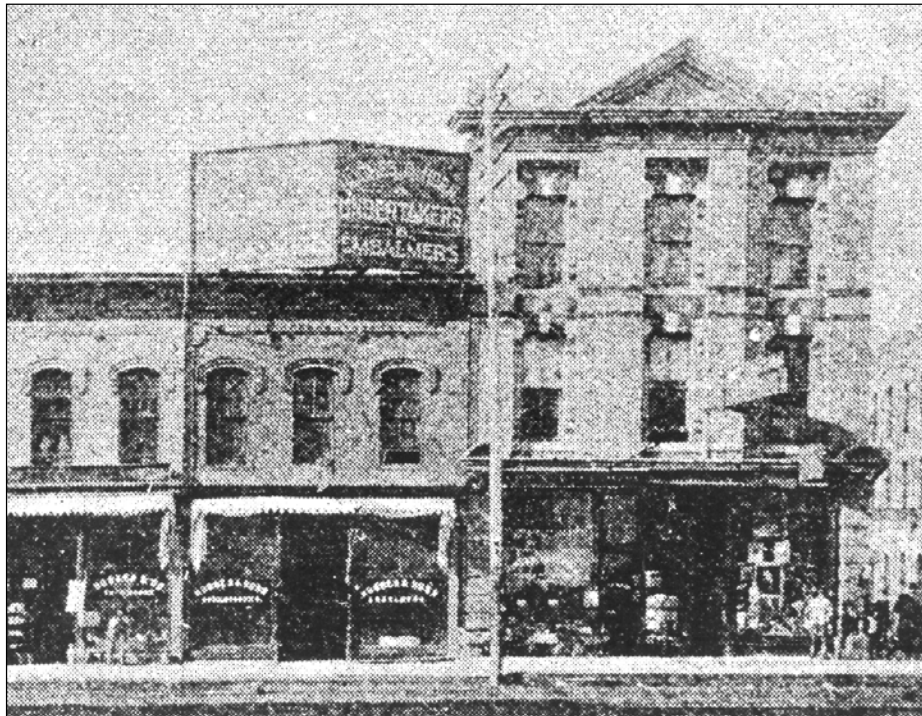


Plate 2 – Duffin Block, 1892. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

**470-474 MAIN STREET – BIRT'S SADDLERY
(FORMER BAKER AND DUFFIN BLOCKS)**



Plate 3 – Duffin's portrait of a young Indian woman, 1878. The company was then known as Duffin and Caswell. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

**470-474 MAIN STREET – BIRT'S SADDLERY
(FORMER BAKER AND DUFFIN BLOCKS)**

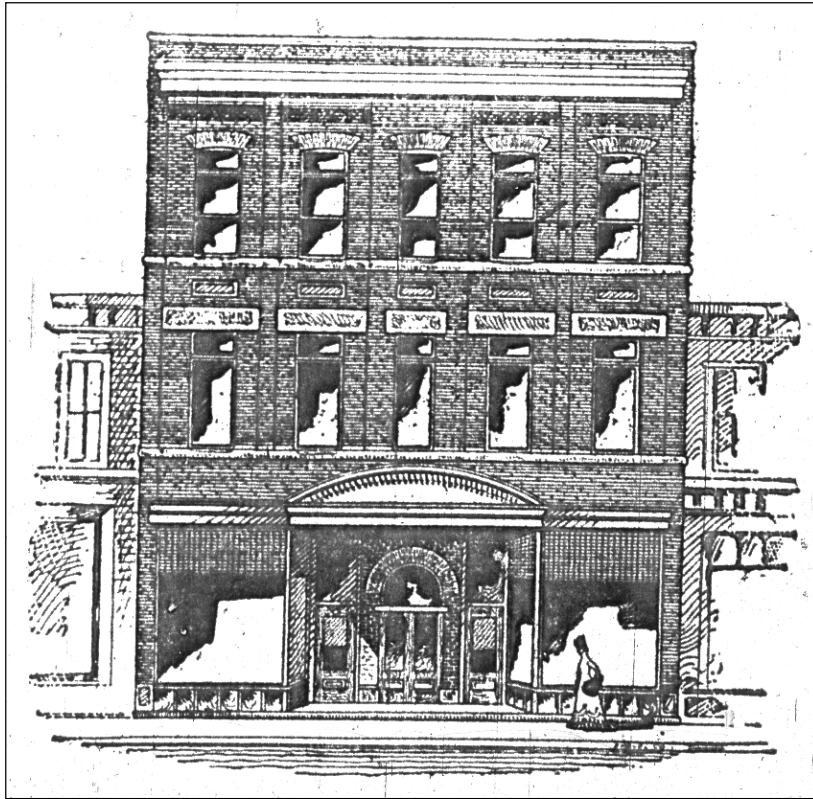


Plate 4 – Drawing of the new Baker Block, 1901. (Reproduced from the Manitoba Free Press, 28 November 1901, p. 9.)



Plate 5 – The Duffin Block on the far right, with the Baker Block beside it, ca. 1903. Steele and Company Photographs took the shot. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

**470-474 MAIN STREET – BIRT’S SADDLERY
(FORMER BAKER AND DUFFIN BLOCKS)**



Plate 6 – Circus parade on Main Street, ca.1903. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)



Plate 7 – Main Street at Bannatyne Avenue, ca.1907. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

**470-474 MAIN STREET – BIRT’S SADDLERY
(FORMER BAKER AND DUFFIN BLOCKS)**



Plate 8 – West side of Main north of McDermot Avenue, ca.1910. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)



Plate 9 – Main Street north of McDermot Avenue, ca.1930. The pediment over the Duffin Block has been removed. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

470-474 MAIN STREET – BIRT'S SADDLERY
(FORMER BAKER AND DUFFIN BLOCKS)

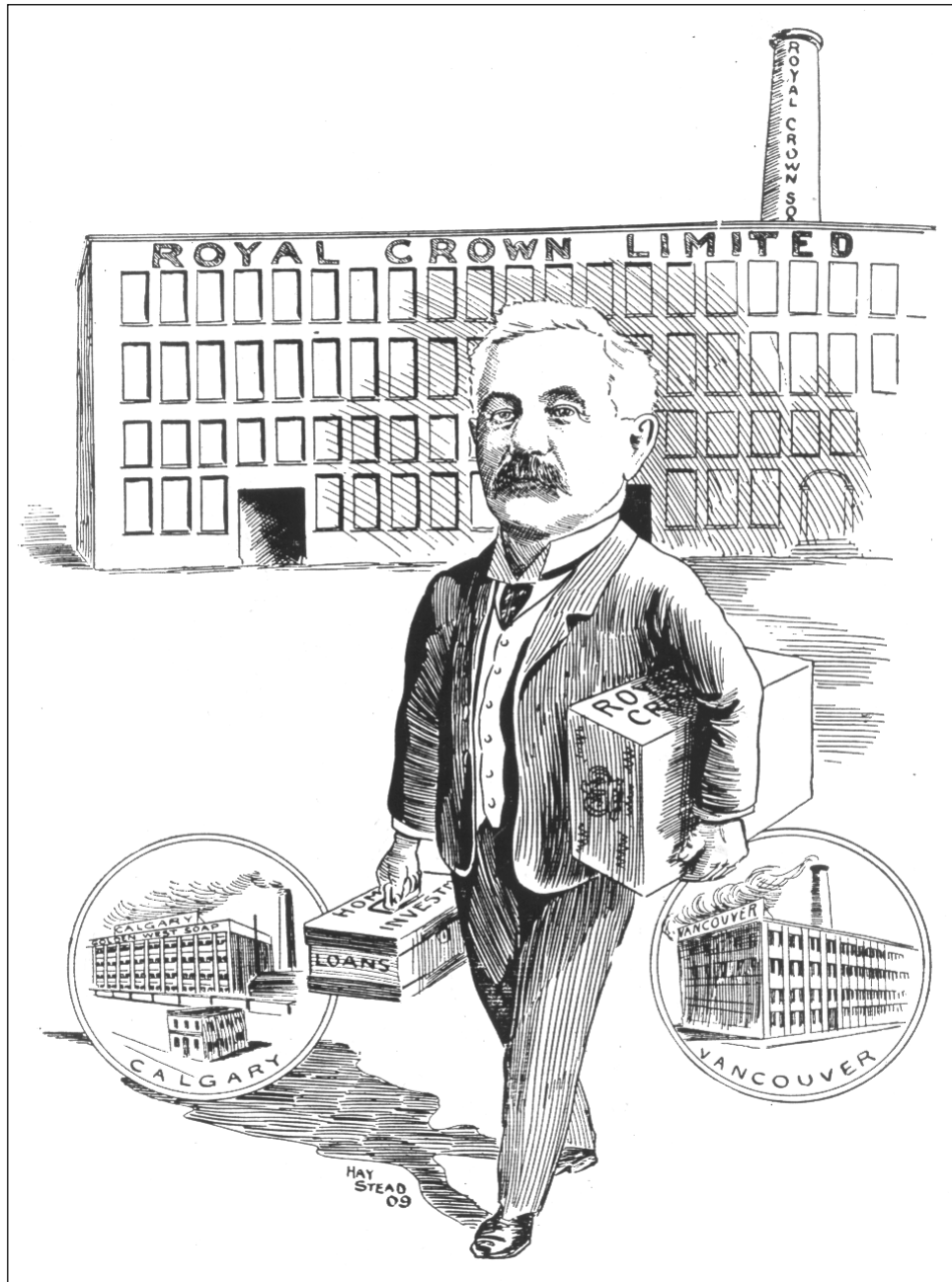


Plate 10 – Manlius Bull in caricature by artist Hay Stead, 1909. In his right hand, he holds a strong box labelled "Home Investment Loans" and in his left a box of Royal Crown Soap. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

**470-474 MAIN STREET – BIRT’S SADDLERY
(FORMER BAKER AND DUFFIN BLOCKS)**



Plate 11 – Birt Saddlery Building, 1970. The former Baker Block remains intact while only the ground floor of the 1881 Duffin Block remains. ([Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Architectural Survey.](#))