

113 MARKET AVENUE – GREAT WEST SADDLERY BUILDING
W.W. Blair, 1910 - 1911



Located at the foot of Market Avenue, the Great West Saddlery Company built this factory to complement their main warehouse across the street. By 1910, the company was a large national firm centred in Winnipeg and under the control of its founder and president Elisha F. Hutchings.

E.F. Hutchings was born in Ontario and trained as a harness-maker before coming west in 1876. He bought out a junior partner in a small local saddlery establishment and by 1885 was in full control of the business. Wholesale and retail outlets were established on Main Street to distribute saddles, harnesses, collars, whips, valises and leather bindings all manufactured by Hutchings. The high quality of the merchandise gained the company supply contracts for tack for the North West Mounted Police. To accommodate this booming business Great West Saddlery built a large warehouse at the foot of Market Avenue in 1898 and a factory across the street in 1910. Here leather bindings and tack were cut and stitched, saddles and collars stuffed

with straw and the products decorated and trimmed. This was an enormously successful enterprise, all firmly controlled by its president. By 1919, the company expanded to stock automobile accessories, shoe bindings and leather goods. After Hutching's death in 1930, the family continued the business into the 1940s with Birt's Saddlery in Winnipeg as its sole retail outlet. The company continues to exist as an equities firm.

Architect William Wallace Blair was hired to design the factory and act as general contractor, tendering the sub-trades himself and employing day labour whenever possible. Blair had trained in Belfast before immigrating to Ontario in the early 1870s. In Toronto he designed the Toronto Safeworks on Front Street in 1883, practiced in Chicago then came west in 1905. He worked for a short period in Winnipeg designing many stately apartment blocks: the Roslyn Apartments (1908); The Princeton Apartments (1909); The Warwick Apartments (1909); and the Fortune Residence (1911). In 1912, Blair retired to Victoria where his home is considered to be a showpiece of domestic architecture.

Built to withstand the use of heavy manufacturing equipment, this building is solid concrete with brick walls on a heavy stone foundation. The tripartite main elevation features a rusticated stone lower level that is juxtaposed by smooth stone lintels, two belt courses and a projecting pedimented fronticepiece. The central section of the building is divided into three bays by projecting brick pilasters that are ornamented with smooth stone caps and a stone belt course. a corbelled brick cornice, a Victorian detail, decorates the attic storey. By 1911, new building materials and technology had changed the appearance of industrial buildings. Restrained neo-classical motifs at the doorway and limited surface ornamentation projected a look of stability and conservatism compared to the exuberance of design during the late Victorian years.

In the 1950s the building was used by garment manufacturers but was vacant by 1978. In 1985, the DSI Development Corporation prepared a renovation proposal to convert this building into residential use for the Prairie Housing Cooperative. The project is an important private initiative in keeping with the policy objectives of Plan Winnipeg and the Winnipeg Core Area Initiative in revitalizing the city's core.