

145 McDERMOT AVENUE – CUSTOMS EXAMINING WAREHOUSE
Chief Dominion Architect's office of the Department of Public Works (1910)



This robust, 4-storey steel-framed brick and stone warehouse was built in the early 1900s to provide ample, modern space for the federal government's customs collection duties in Winnipeg, which was a major source of income for the national government and reinforcing Winnipeg's position as the centre of western growth and development.

The Customs Examining Warehouse was immediately after its 1910 completion one of the busiest and most important warehouses in the Exchange District, used as the central receiving and examining point for all goods arriving from the United States by rail until the 1960s. Also examined were imported goods including spices, textiles, and machinery from Great Britain and Europe. In 1912-1913 alone, duties collected on imported goods totalled over \$11-million.

The warehouse was designed by the Department of Public Works Staff of the Government of Canada, under the guidance of long-time Chief Dominion Architect David Ewart (1841-1921).

Well-known local firm J. McDiarmid Company, was responsible for its construction.

Its west and south façades feature large arched openings with stone keystones and fanlights, either holding windows or doors or open to allow for covered parking (originally used for loading and unloading). The west (Rorie Street) elevation openings were completely filled with “collapsible steel gates”, the upper portions of which have since been removed.

A stone belt course divides the main and second floors, the keystones of the arched openings attached to the belt course by stone elements mimicking brackets. The upper three floors are divided into bays by giant order pilasters with carved stone bases and heads. The paired windows within the bays are square headed and connected by stone lug sills. Stone keystones graces all window openings that are now filled with modern window units. The roofline features a complete entablature with heavy overhanging galvanize metal, modillioned cornice. The tall flag pole still stands on the roof. This layout and ornamentation were continued on the north and east façades. The east end of the building includes a one-storey enclosed parking area (originally a loading dock) with large arched windows on its north and south elevations (the east façade is windowless).

Today, the building is in an excellent state of originality. Some arched openings in the north façade have been bricked in or converted into doorways and one bay of windows on the upper floors have been closed.

Little remains of the original interior finishes and layout beyond the original iron and stone main staircase.

After World War II, the building housed not only Customs Examining personnel, but other federal departments (such as Agriculture in the late 1950s to the 1980s) and private firms. After the major interior renovations in 1992, the main occupants were Revenue Canada – Customs Excise & Taxation (main floor) and the upper floors by Canadian Heritage (Professional & Technical Service Centre).

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

A. Site

- i. The covered one-storey loading areas with arched entrances and steel gatings in the northwest corner and along the east end of the building.

B. Exterior

- i. The four-storey, rectangular red brick building with a flat roof and façades facing west onto Rorie Street, south onto McDermot Avenue, east onto a surface parking lot, and north onto a lane;
- ii. Each façade in a tripartite arrangement with a rusticated stone base, raised main storey with arched openings and stone keystones with large display windows and fanlight transoms, stone belt course dividing the main and second floors, upper three floors divided into bays by giant order pilasters with carved stone bases and heads, paired rectilinear window openings within the bays connected by stone lug sills and topped by stone keystones, and a complete entablature with heavy overhanging galvanize metal and modillioned cornice; and
- iii. The flagpole atop the roof.

C. Interior

- i. The fireproofed steel frame, reinforced concrete floors, and iron and stone staircase.