



165 McDERMOT AVENUE

GALPERN BUILDING

HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE

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Known to Winnipeggers for many years as the Galpern candy factory, this large brick warehouse is situated in the commercial district east of Main Street at the intersection of Rorie Street and McDermot Avenue. Before this building was erect in 1906, a blacksmith shop was on the site,¹ which demonstrates both the growth of the young city's commercial district, and the way it expanded in all directions from its symbolic nucleus at Portage and Main.

The firm of James Porter and Company previously had been housed in cramped quarters on Main Street. James Porter employed John H.G. Russell, one of the city's best architects, to design a new warehouse for the firm in 1906. The company was a wholesale and jobbing firm of crockery and china, importing from eastern Canada and overseas and selling through retailers across the prairies. At the time, it was the first company of its size catering exclusively to this market in the city.² Bulk shipments of china and crockery for domestic use would arrive by train, be broken down into lots and then shipped to their prairie destinations. This operation was repeated in similar warehouses across the city because Winnipeg had built up its distribution system and placed itself at the centre of this commercial core, assisted by geography, history and favourable freight rates.

Russell designed a simple, functional building for the James Porter and Company wholesale outlet. With the exception of basic facilities such as office space, show rooms and service areas, the interior of the building was unadorned storage space. Six storeys high, with dimensions 44 feet across and 100 feet deep, the warehouse is solid brick. The heavy walls are supported by a stone foundation 28 inches thick that rests on concrete footings. The ground floor of the building is faced with dressed limestone, which is also used for the sills and heads on the windows. There are belt courses of stone as well.

A mottled brown tapestry brick finishes the two public elevations while the west and rear sides show the coarser red brick. The facade rises in three bays that correspond with the central doorway and two storefront windows. The entrance has a three-light transom that is repeated in the side window, as well as engaged columns and a carved lintel in store. The stonework around the ground floor is

partially continued around the side down Rorie Street. The attic floor has the brick masonry in a rustication pattern then capped with another belt course and a dentilled cornice in metal and wood. Parts of this cornice have been altered across the front.

The front and rear of the building are well lit with large windows, and there are windows on each corner of the east side. Russell designed the building to be easily adapted to office space, should circumstances require. When it was near completion in December 1906, the new Porter warehouse was described in the Manitoba Free Press as "one of the handsomest business blocks in the city."³

Costing approximately \$38,600 to construct (excluding the cost of land and of furnishing), the warehouse took nine months to construct. The Winnipeg firm of Hindson and Davidson were the masons and acted as the general contractor. Carpenters McComb and McKay saw to the woodwork. Other companies working on the building include John Wallace for the galvanized ironwork, John Plaxton Ltd. for the plumbing and heating, R. Crawford for the painting and the Otis-Fensom Company supplied the single freight elevator.⁴ The elevator ran up the side of the building from the two loading docks on Rorie Street.

The firm of James Porter and Company remained in the building until it closed its doors in 1943. For many years since, the building was shared between Sanford Evans and Company Ltd., a firm that dealt in research, statistics and controlled direct mail, and the Galpern Candy Company.

Sanford Evans Statistical Company was a spin off of the larger publishing house of the same name. Sanford Evans himself co-founded the firm of Dawson Richardson, which published news for the grain trade and operated since 1920 in the building next door at 171 McDermot Avenue. The statistical service began its operations in the 1920s in the Dawson Richardson Building. Galpern's was a family business, opened in the early years of this century by Louis Galpern. Starting out in cramped quarters on Dufferin Avenue which later moved to Jarvis Avenue, Galpern's confections caught on in the public market and gradually grew into a large operation. Fine candy and Milady brand chocolates were the Galpern products. The logo for Milady Chocolates can still be seen

painted on the brick on the west side of the building. Sons Myer, Sam and Auby all took some part in their father's business,⁵ with Myer Galpern becoming president and staying with the factory after his father's retirement.

In 1973, the Galpern Candy Company ceased operations and this warehouse became a supply depot for Willson's office furnishings department. It has been vacant in recent years.

This building is the eastern terminus of a substantial turn-of-the-century streetscape on the north side of McDermot Avenue. It is larger in scale than its neighbours, but its size makes it a visual anchor as well as a bridge to the larger warehouses and commercial structures along Rorie Street. Both James Porter and Company and the Galpern Candy Company were local businesses, representatives of a period when small local enterprises held a strong position in the prairie economy.

FOOTNOTES

1. Selwyn S. Carrington "165 McDermot Avenue" in Early Building in Winnipeg, C.I.H.B., Vol. V, Report No. 389, p. 12.
2. "Wholesale Houses Make Big Showing", Manitoba Free Press, 6 December 1906, p. 36.
3. Loc. cit.
4. J.H.G. Russell Ledgers, P.A.M., MG11, E2, folio 368, 1906.
5. Donn Kirton, "What happened to...Auby Galpern", Winnipeg Tribune, 24 May 1980.

APPENDIX I

J.H.G. Russell

John Hamilton Gordon Russell was born to a large family in Toronto in 1862. Here he studied architecture before moving to the United States. After working in Washington and Chicago,¹ he moved to Winnipeg in 1893. His family built one of the earliest homes on Wellington Crescent, which later became his own home.

In 1895, Russell opened his architectural firm. With the economy of Winnipeg booming, and construction at a peak, Russell had an active business. He was prolific. Not given to specialization, J.H.G. Russell designed houses, churches, warehouses and commercial buildings in good numbers. We are particularly fortunate in having an archival record of his account books, which itemize suppliers and costs for most of his works.² An incomplete photographic record of Russell's work also survives.

His best-known buildings include Augustine Church (1903); the McArthur Building (now Childs) (1909); Westminster United Church (1912); the J.H. Ashdown house (1912) on Wellington Crescent (now Khartum Temple); and the magnificent Knox Presbyterian Church (1914) on Edmonton.

Russell was president of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada in 1912, the first year that it included all the provincial bodies. He was on the examining board of the Manitoba Association of Architects, involved in several local businesses, and Chairman of the Presbyterian Church board of managers.

Russell died in Winnipeg in 1946.

1. F.H. Schofield, *The Story of Manitoba Vol. III*, The S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., Winnipeg, 1913, p. 156.
2. J.H.G. Russell Collection, MG11, E2, P.A.M.

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Plate 1 – 165 McDermot Avenue, James Porter and Company Building, 1907. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

165 McDERMOT AVENUE – GALPERN BUILDING



Plate 2 – 165 McDermot Avenue, ca.1985. (City of Winnipeg, Planning Department.)