

214 McDERMOT AVENUE – THE CRITERION HOTEL
H.S. Griffiths, 1903



Winnipeg's economy boomed at the turn of the century as wheat and the development of the prairie west brought on stable economic growth of real substance. Thousands of people passing through the city created a great demand for hotel space with dozens of hotels erected to fill this demand. The Criterion Hotel, built in 1903, was one of these.

The ground floor of the hotel consisted of a large bar finished with quartered oak and an equally handsome billiard room. These facilities found a ready market in members of the press who

abounded in the district. McDermot Avenue between Main Street and Princess Street was known as “Newspaper Row”, because the three major dailies, the *Free Press*, the *Tribune* and the *Telegram*, as well as several smaller daily, weekly and monthly publications were located there. The newsmen formed a social fraternity which met daily in the Criterion. Although the fraternity fell by the way during Prohibition, it re-emerged during the 1930s and 40s, well after the newspapers had moved from McDermot Avenue.

The second floor of the Criterion had a large dining room and parlour. The upper two floors contained the private rooms with common washroom facilities. The long, narrow design of the hotel created problems of ventilation and natural light which were resolved by the use of air shafts and skylights.

Built at a cost of \$20,000, the Criterion was designed by H.S. Griffiths, one of several British architects practicing in Winnipeg. The architect used the windows to create interest in the façade and to offset the vertical shape of the four-storey hotel. It has a facing of limestone, accented by a parapet and a balconet. The outstanding feature of the façade is the multi-coloured terra cotta detailing that was added to the ground floor in 1915. This treatment is both beautiful and rare in Winnipeg.