

216 McDERMOT AVENUE – LECKIE BUILDING

Henry Sandham Griffith, 1900



This modest building, located in the heart of the Exchange District National Historic Site, was completed in 1900 at the early stages of Winnipeg's major growth era that lasted into the 1910s and would significantly change the community from a small settlement into one of the country's premier modern cities.

It was built for Robert Leckie (1850-1921) an Ontario-born paperhanger/interior decorator who came to Winnipeg in 1874. Leckie was well known throughout the city and for many years, he maintained a store in the McDermot Avenue building. It was also used for a time in the 1920s as a Canadian Order of Foresters' Hall and Canadian Footwear Limited was a long-time owner/occupant, from the 1960s into the 1990s.

Architectural features of the main (north) façade include the familiar large display windows for the retail shop of the ground floor that were, in the early 1960s, renovated from their original design to the present-day arrangement. A modest metal entablature flanked by two oversized ornamental brackets is located above the ground floor windows. The second and third floors of the building appear to be unchanged from the original design; both levels feature large square-headed wood framed windows with transoms above and joined by smooth-cut continuous stone sills and slightly wider heads. Ornamental brick panels are found in the spandrels of the upper floors. Above the top floor, the roofline is finished with corbelled brick, a stone band and a raised, stone-capped parapet with a carved stone date stone.

The east and west façades are completely covered by neighbouring buildings constructed shortly after the Leckie Building; the lower portion of the original rear (south) façade is covered by a one-storey cinder-block addition, while the original windows of the third floor are visible and bricked in.

The interior is a mix of both old and new and includes the original staircase (to the third floor along the building's west wall) with its original handrail and brass hardware. Wainscoting, tin ceilings, wood flooring, walk-in vaults and wood partitioning are found in areas throughout the building.

Henry Sandham Griffith (1865-1943), British-born and trained architect, was responsible for the design of the Leckie Building. Griffith arrived in Winnipeg in 1887 and remained active until his move to Saskatoon, SA in 1906, Victoria, B.C. in 1907 and finally Vancouver. He was responsible for a wide range of buildings throughout Western Canada, his local work included: the Ryan Block, 104 King Street (1895, Grade III – dismantled); Central Fire Hall, Albert Street and McDermot Avenue (1899 – demolished); St. Boniface Normal School, 210 rue Masson (1902 – Grade II); and the Criterion Hotel, 214 McDermot Avenue (1903 – Grade II).

The Leckie Building is contextually important as an excellent example of an early 20th century retail/office building, an important addition to Winnipeg's urban landscape at a time when the demand for such space was constantly growing. Its construction as a rental property by a modest local businessman is illustrative of the type of investment made during this period. Many businessmen took earnings from their successful ventures and invest in the real estate market, either

land or through development. Such structures, which included office buildings, apartment blocks and retail stores, returned steady, though modest, returns on this investment. It was one of the most popular investments for Winnipeggers for many decades because of the relative cheapness of materials and the constant demand for space, be it residential, commercial or professional.

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

Exterior:

- Three-storey brick and stone building with flat roof on the south side of McDermot Avenue, its north facade facing McDermot Avenue, its east and west facades hidden by neighbouring buildings and its rear (south) facade facing a back lane and partially hidden by a 1970s addition;
- Its main (north) façade with second and third floors with windows and transoms in rectilinear openings, stone sills and heads, ornamental brickwork in spandrels, corbelled brick and stone-capped parapet with carved stone date stone; and
- Arched openings on the second and third floors of the south facade.

Interior:

- None.