

281 McDERMOT AVENUE – BEDFORD BLOCK (STOBART AND SONS BLOCK)
J.H. Cadham, 1903, 1907



The railway had opened up the northwest to thousands of settlers. This meant an increased demand for consumer goods. As a transportation center, Winnipeg assumed the role of a commercial nucleus for a hinterland stretching from the great lakes to the Rocky Mountains. Suppliers could scarcely keep up with the demand.

Familiar now as the home of Reiss Furs, this large brick warehouse was built in 1903 for the wholesale dry goods firm of Stobart, Sons and Company. Evolving from a pioneer-trading firm that supplied missions in the northwest in the 1870s, F.W. Stobart reorganized the company in 1899 to become a wholesale importer of dry goods such as clothing, household linens, carpets and draperies. Leaving its location on Portage Avenue because it was too small and far away from the rail supply line, the firm relocated to a large new warehouse with a prominent corner site on McDermot Avenue and King Street. The growth of Western Canada is evidenced by the fact that in 1907, just four years after the building was erected, two additional storeys were added to the building. In 1910, a second warehouse was built on McDermot Avenue. During World

War One, Stobart's entered the mail order business but soon experienced financial difficulty. Winnipeg retailers faced stiff competition from large department store chains based in Eastern Canada. The chains could afford to do business in large volumes and could inexpensively supply city goods to many small towns. After nearly fifty years of business, Stobart's closed its doors. The building was subsequently occupied by a number of small wholesalers in the garment trade.

Designed in 1903 by contractor-turned-architect James H. Cadham, the building showed a new interest in undecorated functionality as a stylistic trait for warehouse structures. Relying on motifs based on the Richardsonian Romanesque Style, the arched windows at the second level were complemented by paired rectangular ones with rusticated stone sills that were used through the upper floors of the building. The large number of window openings, which provided daylight to the interior, was made possible by the advanced state of masonry and steel construction. Rusticated keystones were placed in the radiating brickwork of the round-headed windows. When comparing this building with the Campbell Bros. and Wilson Building designed by J.H.G. Russell in the same year, the overwhelming dominance in Winnipeg of a modified Richardsonian Romanesque style is very clear. Although the elements are combined differently, much is similar. The manner of articulating the paired windows using rusticated stone lintels and sills separated by a brick mullion is the same.

This building remains as one of the dominant features of the warehouse area. The face of this city changed at the turn of the century. James Cadham, the prolific architect of Winnipeg's wholesale district, contributed to a large part of it.