



325 NAIRN AVENUE

CANADIAN IMPERIAL BANK OF COMMERCE

PREPARED BY PETERSON PROJECTS – DECEMBER 2009



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Date of Construction: 1906

Building Permit: 1442/1906

Architect: Darling and Pearson

Contractor: Dolmer, J.

ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

This turn-of-the-century bank building, located in the quickly growing community of Elmwood, took its place among the many fine buildings being constructed on one of its major streets, Nairn Avenue.

The building, completed in dark brick is accented in smooth cut limestone. The front (south) façade is symmetrically designed with a central entrance located at the top of a short flight of open stairs. The door is topped by an arched stone hood with oversized brackets. Four large, Doric Order stone columns run from the raised stone base to the entablature above the second storey windows. Wide stone lintels enliven the ground floor windows and continuous stone sills ornament the upper floor openings. Blocks of stone are used to mimic quoins at the corners of the building. A pediment is placed above the entablature and a stone capped brick parapet completes this façade.



Front (south) and east façades, 2009

The sides and the rear (north) of the bank are plain brick with numerous window openings with stone sills.

The building stands on its original site, appears to be in good structural condition and has not suffered major exterior alteration.

The bank building is designed in the Classical Revival style, in fashion during the first three decades of the 20th century as a reaction to the highly picturesque styles of the late 19th century. Based on the historic examples of Greece and Rome, the style produced simple, symmetrical buildings with smooth surfaces, monumental proportions and flat, unadorned rooflines. Columns, capitals, pediments, porticos and lintelled openings were some of the more frequently used elements of the style.¹

Frank Darling and John A. Pearson began working together in Toronto in 1889 when Pearson joined the staff of the well-established, nine-year-old firm of Darling and Currie. Within three years Pearson had become a full partner and in 1897 these two men embarked upon a remarkably successful career spanning more than a quarter of a century and the entire Dominion of Canada.²

Frank Darling was born the son of a rector of the Church of the Holy Trinity in 1850 and trained with Henry Langley after his graduation from Upper Canada and Trinity colleges. He practiced for three years in the London, Ontario offices of G.E. Street and Arthur Blomfield before returning to Toronto. After a year on his own, he formed a one-year partnership with Henry Macdougall. From 1875-78 Darling again worked alone,³ although this was the last time he was without at least one partner for the rest of his career.³



Rear (north) and east façades, 2009

Darling was architect to Trinity College, Toronto, for 45 years and was the long-standing architect for both the Bank of Commerce and the Bank of Montreal. Several Anglican congregations in Toronto also used him exclusively. He was the first overseas winner of the Gold Medal of the Royal Institute of Architects of England in 1915 and died in 1923.⁴

John Andrew Pearson, born at Chesterfield, England on June 22, 1867,⁵ came to Toronto in 1889 and joined the staff of Darling and Samuel George Currie. He began his Canadian career by working on plans for the Victoria Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. From 1892-95 he spent much of his time in St. John's, Newfoundland assisting in its rebuilding after a major fire. Undoubtedly, a high point came in 1916 when Pearson was hired, along with J. Omer Marchand, to reconstruct the Parliament Buildings. He died in 1940.⁶

Together, Darling and Pearson designed a wide array of buildings throughout Canada, varied in scope, style and use. In Winnipeg, the firm opened a branch in 1902 and sent fellow Torontonian W. Percy Over to run the office. Over worked for several years in the city and was a regular contributor to the journal, Canadian Architect and Builder, with his “Northwest Letter” which described construction throughout the West.⁷

Their major Winnipeg designs include: A.M. Nanton Residence, 229 Roslyn Road (1900-01, demolished 1935, gates and gatehouse survive – Grade II); Royal (Union) Tower, 504 Main Street (1903-04, Grade I); Travellers' Building, 283 Bannatyne Avenue (1906-07, Grade II); Imperial Bank of Canada, 441 Main Street (1906-07, Grade II); Grain Exchange Building, 167 Lombard Avenue (1906-08, Grade II); and Canadian Bank of Commerce (Millennium Centre), 389 Main Street (1910-12, Grade I). They have been given 40 points by the Historical Buildings Committee.



Front (south) façade detail, 2009

HISTORICAL INTEREST:

The history of Elmwood's settlement does not begin until well after the City of Winnipeg was incorporated, and decades after the settlement of other areas around the city had begun – mainly because Elmwood was a low lying area and therefore swampy and prone to flooding. Settlers chose higher ground to the north (what became North and East Kildonan).⁸ In 1877, Charles Midwinter (1851-1939) became the first settler in the area, all of which became part of the Kildonan Municipality in 1876. Midwinter was an employee of the Brown and Rutherford lumber yards across the Red River in Point Douglas.

As with other communities in western Canada, the coming of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) was to have a dramatic effect on the development of Elmwood. The construction of the Louise Bridge for rail traffic was so eagerly anticipated, civic officials declared a half day civic holiday for citizens to attend its opening in 1881. Prior to its construction, crossing the Red River meant travelling north to the Kildonan ferry or south to the St. Boniface ferry. The new bridge provided Elmwood with its own, year-round connection to Winnipeg.⁹

The Elmwood side of the bridge, what became Nairn Avenue, quickly developed with stores, stables, a farmers' market and other businesses, while the rest of the area remained virtually empty. By the turn-of-the-century, however, several dairy farmers and market gardeners had established themselves in the neighbouring river lots. Industrialization along the CPR tracks, including the J.Y. Griffin meat packing plant, also spurred settlement.¹⁰

After the CPR stopped using the Louise Bridge, pedestrians and streetcar traffic were free to move across it anytime, not just when there were no trains. Streetcars first began running over the bridge in 1903, servicing the meat packing plant along the river. As the service extended



Manitoba Free Press, December 6, 1906, p.26

further into Elmwood, the cheaper land and lower taxes began attracting buyers, many of them recently arrived immigrants. The Redwood Bridge was opened in 1908 and the entire area populated and urbanized so quickly that it soon asked to separate from the more rural Kildonan municipality. In 1906 Elmwood became Ward 7 of the City of Winnipeg.

In February of 1918, several business blocks and a large hotel were destroyed by a major fire that took the lives of three people. Although severely damaged, the bank was repaired and continued to be used by the financial institution until the early 1990s.

RECOMMENDATION TO HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE:

Under the Historical Buildings By-law, this building meets a number of important criteria:

- its historical importance- an important building in the development of the new Winnipeg suburb of Elmwood at the turn-of-the-century;
- its associations- its long-term connections to banking and the development of Nairn Avenue as Elmwood's primary commercial thoroughfare;
- its design- an excellent example of the Classical Revival style;
- its architect- Darling and Pearson were respected and important practitioners;
- its location- contributes greatly to the historic streetscape of this section of Nairn Avenue; and
- its integrity- its main façades continue to display many of their original elements and design.



Front (south) façade, 1978

ENDNOTES:

- 1 Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, 1991), pp. 32-33.
- 2 E. Arthur (revised by S.A. Otto), Toronto. No Mean City (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1984), pp. 244-256.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 244.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 256.
- 5 The Canadian Encyclopedia, Vol. 3 (Edmonton, AL: Hurtig Publishers Limited, 1985), p. 1635.
- 6 E. Arthur, *op. cit.*, p. 256.
- 7 Canadian Architect and Builder, 1902-03.
- 8 City of Winnipeg, East Kildonan-Transcona Community, On the East of the River (Winnipeg: East Kildonan-Transcona Community, n.d.), p. 92.
- 9 On the East of the River, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-3.
- 10 *Ibid.*, pp. 93-5.