



228 NOTRE DAME AVENUE

LINDSAY BUILDING

HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE

May 30, 1984

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Rising ten storeys above the intersection of Notre Dame Avenue and Garry Street, the Lindsay Building presents three irregular façades to the corner while appearing to turn its back to Portage Avenue. The site of the Lindsay Building, as well as its orientation on the site, seems unusual now, but the explanation lies in the historical development of the district.

When the Lindsay building was constructed in 1911-12, it faced forward onto an area of great activity. The block bordered by Notre Dame Avenue, Garry Street, Ellice Avenue and Smith Street (now a parking lot) was the home of Grace Methodist Church, the strong mother church of Winnipeg Methodism. Immediately beside this was the Walker Theatre (now the Odeon Theatre), the home of Winnipeg's finest "serious" theatre and host to some of the biggest names in North American stage. Behind the theatre was an earlier Knox Church, later converted into a revival hall, and the anchor of the Presbyterian faith in Winnipeg. On Notre Dame Avenue itself was the new Winnipeg Electric Railway Chambers, constructed at the same time as the Lindsay Building in 1912.¹ The Province Theatre was also located on down the street from the Lindsay Building.

With traffic flowing in both directions on these downtown streets, this district was vibrant and confident of continued high-profile growth westward down Notre Dame Avenue. It was the axis between Main Street and Portage Avenue, as well as the link between the warehouse district and the commercial district. The historic lot lines running in strips from the Assiniboine and Red rivers met at angles here, causing a substantial residential neighbourhood to be built up as well.² In the years before c. 1882, it looked as if Notre Dame Avenue might become the second main street. Even after Portage Avenue established its dominance, Notre Dame Avenue continued its strong commercial and residential development.

So confident was the owner of the Lindsay Building of the location, as well as the economy, that he added three additional floors to the seven originally planned as the office tower was in the

throes of construction. Frank Lindsay was an entrepreneur at a time when business opportunities in Winnipeg and the prairie west must have seemed endless. Lindsay had begun as a stage coach driver between Fargo, North Dakota and Emerson, Manitoba in the 1870s. In 1884, he landed in Winnipeg, becoming the proprietor of the St. Lawrence Hotel near to the C.P.R. station. Eventually, in 1909 he purchased the Oxford Hotel, adjacent to the Lindsay Building, and built his office building with the profits of earlier land investments.³ From the hotel, he could keep a paternal watch on his office tower construction nearly next door.

Following over fourteen months of construction, the Lindsay Building was prepared for occupancy in December 1912. The skyscraper featured reinforced concrete slab construction with a sheathing of cream coloured terra cotta, unlike most other steel frame office buildings in the City.⁴ It was designed by Winnipeg architects John Woodman and Raymond Carey, best known for the Paris Building (1915-17) at 259 Portage Avenue. Carey possessed a great flair for ornamentation that is evident in many of his house designs. With the Lindsay Building, he was able to work the terra cotta to a remarkable degree around the base and in the top storey. Garlands of flowers drip around the semicircular windows of the second floor while numerous cartouches and pilasters capped with Ionic capitals create further decorative interest. Especially intriguing are terra cotta angel twins, floating beneath each bounded window and holding the five plaques that identify the Lindsay Building. There are also ten wreath in green terra cotta bearing the stylized numbers of 1912. Relatively plain walls extend upwards with regular Chicago-style windows, culminating in a cornice storey that is also heavily embellished with decorations from the Italian Renaissance. The building is a visual feast.⁵

The cream-coloured terra cotta has weathered to produce attractive definition and depth, but it has also deteriorated quite badly in certain areas. The only major alteration to the façade has been to the ground floor windows. The size and spacing of the windows have not changed but originally each bay had an entranceway as well as what seems to be glass transoms where the slabs are at present. A photograph from the 1920s shows the storefront along Garry Street as attractively scaled. Awnings were used on most windows, now replaced with numerous window air conditioners.

These shops first housed a confectioner, the Harstone Brothers Fuel Company, the Sprague Lumber Company office and a drug store. In the 1920s, the Provincial Savings Office, a financial institution operated by the Manitoba government, occupied most of the Garry Street shop space with the stock brokerage firm of Clark and Martin in the corner office. A tailor shop owned by Harry Greenberg was in the Garry Street side for many years, which was eventually taken over by Palay Tailors, who are still in the block. The public offices of radio station CJOB were for many years on the ground floor of the Notre Dame side, as well as Lindy's lunch bar which has been replaced by a small deli restaurant.

Two distinct patterns arise when examining the tenants of the upper office floors. One tendency is apparent from a 1928 photograph of the building that reads "Lindsay Life Insurance Building — Fireproof". The building housed numerous large and small insurance companies for several decades with Sun Life occupying the entire ninth and tenth floors, London Life on the fourth, Metropolitan Life on the sixth and smaller companies elsewhere in the building. These were the dominant group of businesses in the Lindsay Building right up to the 1960s.

The second large pattern of occupancy was several lawyers' offices, along with a sampling of other professional offices over the years. Architects Woodman and Carey maintained their office in the Lindsay Building for several years, as well as a few doctors, dentists and accountants.

Besides these occupants, there were federal government offices during and after the second World War such as the Wartime Bureau of Personnel, the Veteran's Welfare Division and later the Dominion Treasury Office. The Block Broadcasting Corporation, owners of CJOB, occupied the top floor for many years and kept a huge aerial atop the Lindsay Building with their code letter on it.

More recently, there has been a broader mixture in the types of businesses in the office tower. A coin store, a travel agency, the Métis Women's Association office, a consulate, and a finance company are typical of the range of occupants in the last decade.

The demolition of Knox and Grace churches, the conversion of the Walker Theatre and the relocation of much of the downtown residential population has altered the district around Notre Dame Avenue. The street itself is a prominent traffic artery and an important streetscape. The Lindsay Building is known by name to many Winnipeggers, partly because of the five nameplates on the building, partly because of its seemingly unusual location and also because of its profusion of ornamentation. Its owner Frank Lindsay, belonged to the pioneer group of entrepreneurs responsible for much of the early growth of the city. Housing most of the major insurance firms for many years gives the Lindsay Building significance in the business history of Winnipeg. In sum, the Lindsay Building stands as an important architectural reminder of Winnipeg's growth immediately prior to World War One.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ “Two New Ten Storey Buildings in the Heart of Busy Winnipeg”, Manitoba Free Press, 21 December 1912, p. 13.
- ² Alan F.J. Artibise, Winnipeg - A Social History of Urban Growth 1874-1914, McGill-Queen’s University Press - Montreal and London 1975, p. 149.
- ³ “Frank Lindsay Funeral Tuesday”, Winnipeg Tribune, 2 May 1940.
- ⁴ “Two New Ten Storey Buildings”, op. cit.
- ⁵ It was constructed by the Kelly-Simpson Company which seems to have evolved the following year into James Kelly’s National Construction Company. From City of Winnipeg Building Permits No. 2714, 24 August 1911 and No. 2249, 29 May 1912. The first permit, presumably for only seven storeys, estimated the cost of construction at \$150,000. The 1912 permit was for three more floors and \$43,000 extra bringing the total to \$193,000.

APPENDIX I

Woodman and Carey

Partners John Woodman and Raymond Carey worked together on such buildings as the Lindsay Building (1911-12) at 228 Notre Dame Avenue, the Free Press Building (1912) on Carlton Street and the Paris Building (1915-17) at 259 Portage Avenue. In addition, the firm placed second in a 1912 design competition for a new Winnipeg City Hall which was never built.

Singly and in partnership with other architects, John Woodman designed the Eaton Warehouse, the Selkirk Mental Hospital for the Insane and many fine Winnipeg residences. Carey also designed among other houses, the R.A. Rogers/Bedson house at 64 Nassau Street and the Aikins/Cantor house at 218 Roslyn Road.

Jill Wade Manitoba Architecture to 1940 - University of Manitoba Press - Winnipeg 1976.

“Competitive Design for the City Hall, Winnipeg, Manitoba.” Construction, April 1913, pp. 147-160.

“Many New Winnipeg Buildings are Soaring Skyward in a Record Year”, Dominion, May 1912, p. 158.

Files at Provincial Archives of Manitoba Photograph Collection.

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Plate 1 – Lindsay Building, 228 Notre Dame Avenue, 1969. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Architectural Survey.)

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Plate 2 – Looking north on Notre Dame Avenue, ca.1927. To the left is the Oxford Hotel, the Princess (Argyle) Block, the Lindsay Building with Grace Methodist in the background. On the right are the Province Theatre, the Winnipeg Electric Railway Chambers and the St. Charles Hotel. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

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Plate 3 – The Lindsay Building during construction, Grace Methodist Church is on the right.
(Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

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Plate 4 – Notre Dame Avenue, 1911. Construction is well underway on the Lindsay Building, but has not yet started on the Electric Railway Chambers. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

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Plate 5 – The Provincial Savings Office in the Garry Street side of the Lindsay Building, ca.1925. This shot details the original features of the ground floor. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)