

**265 NOTRE DAME AVENUE- CANADIAN GENERAL ELECTRIC BUILDING
(GREATER WINNIPEG GAS BUILDING)**
Northwood and Chivers, 1930



This sturdy, five-storey building was something of an anomaly when it appeared on the north side of Notre Dame Avenue between the intersections of Arthur and King streets in a transitional zone bridging Winnipeg's warehouse and downtown commercial districts.

It was one of the few large privately-funded projects to proceed in the downtown during the early years of the Great Depression. Moreover, its Art Deco styling was a marked departure from nearby offices and warehouses, many of which featured neoclassical designs popular prior to World War I.

The building was constructed for the Canadian General Electric Company (CGE), a Toronto-based manufacturer and distributor that began operating in Winnipeg in c.1893, about a decade after the

city entered the era of electrical power. As use of electricity grew, the firm was forced to relocate several times to accommodate increased consumer demand for a wider range of appliances and fixtures.

Compared to many other local businesses, CGE was not as vulnerable to the early effects of the Depression due to protective tariffs and less direct dependence on the wheat economy. Thus, the firm proceeded in 1929-30 with plans for a new facility.

Designed by George W. Northwood and Cyril W.U. Chivers, the \$225,000 project was built by general contractors Carter-Halls-Aldinger Company and various Winnipeg and eastern-Canadian subcontractors.

The Northwood-Chivers partnership created several notable city buildings including St. Ignatius Church (1928), the Canadian Wheat Board (1929), Assiniboine Park Pavilion (1929-30), Civic Auditorium (1932), Federal Building (1935), and Winnipeg Post Office addition (c.1935).

The partnership was formed after World War I from which both men emerged as decorated officers. Northwood studied in Montreal, then came to Winnipeg in 1905. Chivers, an English immigrant, arrived in the city in 1898. He practised with S. Frank Peters, George Browne and the Canadian Pacific Railway before establishing his own firm in 1910. Both men were prominent in the Manitoba Association of Architects and Royal Architectural Institute of Canada.

Their CGE building is constructed of reinforced concrete to provide a strong frame and load-bearing capacity. The King, Notre Dame and Arthur elevations are faced with polished blue granite along the foundation, Tyndall limestone, and "teepee mocha" brick laid with cut joints. The rear elevation is of plain light brick.

Smooth limestone rises to the base of the second-storey windows, topped at the corners by a saw-toothed design. Vertical emphasis is created through the movement of limestone up the entire height of the building at the corner window bays. Vertically-ornamented spandrels enhance the effect. The

symmetrical design is completed by a limestone parapet with ornamental stone carvings again highlighting the corners.

The large storefront windows have low-relief carved bronze surrounds while pierced bronze appears over the former main entrance in the centre of the Notre Dame facade. The surrounds were produced by the Architectural Bronze and Iron Work Company, a CGE subsidiary, from models by a Mr. Metge of Winnipeg. The building's other windows generally are plain and square with stone slip sills. The main entrance has been moved to the southeast corner. A second, recessed entrance off King leads to upper-floor offices.

The ground floor was designed as CGE's showroom with a rear shipping-receiving department. The second floor held offices; equipment was stored on the upper levels. A high-capacity freight elevator and basement monorail were installed.

In 1954, CGE relocated to industrial west Winnipeg. The firm has continued to expand. Product lines now include medical and industrial systems such as heavy equipment for northern hydro development. Its building was occupied by the Winnipeg and Central Gas Company, later Greater Winnipeg Gas Company, and several smaller business tenants. Canada Life Assurance Company assumed ownership in 1958, then sold the building to the gas company by 1965. The structure has experienced major interior alterations since the 1960s. It recently was renovated for new occupancy after standing vacant following relocation by the gas company in 1985-86.