



**60 OSBORNE STREET**

**GREAT-WEST LIFE BUILDING**

PREPARED BY PETERSON PROJECTS – FEBRUARY 2008



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## 60 OSBORNE STREET GREAT-WEST LIFE BUILDING

**Date of Construction:** 1957

**Building Permit:** 1583/1957 (Plans on file at City Records Branch)

**Architect:** Marani and Morris (Toronto) and Moody, Moore and Partners (Winnipeg)

**Contractor:** Baert, G.A. Construction Company

### ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

Still one of Winnipeg's finest large office structures is the Great-West Life Building, conspicuously located on the west side of Osborne Street overlooking the Provincial Legislative Building and its extensive grounds. Designed by Toronto architects Marani and Morris, it was overseen by one of Winnipeg's most influential architectural firms of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Moody, Moore and Partners.

The sleekly-designed T-shaped building includes a front (east) façade with a low, darkly-clad one-storey section, while the main structure behind is finished in bright limestone, which is also used as wide frames of the ground floor windows south of the main entrance on the ground floor. The projecting centre area holds the main entrance below a windowless upper section – a wall to hang the large piece of artwork – and windows on the



Front (east) and south façades, 2007

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south and north walls to light the stairwells within. The building is topped by a penthouse with front and rear facing windows.

The main body of the building features unadorned, frameless windows in a grid-like pattern on each floor. The roof is flat and unadorned. The south elevation includes windows similar to those found on the front façade, the north wall is windowless. The rear façade includes the large projecting area creating the “T” shape and all elevations feature the same plain windows on all floors.

This building is one of numerous office structures built in the International Style in downtown Winnipeg. Although the style dates to the early 1930s, its widespread popularity throughout Europe and North America did not occur until after 1950. The style is seen as a reaction to the historically based styles of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The age of machines created a desire for a new aesthetic, one that fully utilized the new construction materials and technologies, especially steel framing and reinforced concrete.<sup>1</sup> Architects could design buildings without the need for load-bearing exterior walls – these elements became “curtains” covering the steel/concrete structural system and could be constructed almost entirely of glass if desired. Through its use of hard, angular edges, severely plain surfaces, large areas of glass and square or rectangular modules, the style stressed material and proportionality over ornamentation.

There are a number of excellent examples of the style in downtown Winnipeg because of the city’s place at the forefront of the post-1950 International Style movement. Leading local firms at the time included: Waisman-Ross and Associates; Moody, Moore and Partners, Smith-Carter; Libling, Michener and Associates; Green, Blankstein, Russell and Associates; and Blankstein, Coop, Gillmor and Hanna. Extant examples of the style





Rear (west) and north façades, 2007

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include the former New York Life Insurance Building, 385 St. Mary Avenue, 1957-58, the Norquay Building, 1958-60, the former Monarch Life Building, 333 Broadway, 1959-63, the former Parkade Building, 283 Portage Avenue, 1962-63 and the Royal Bank Tower, 220 Portage Avenue, 1965.

The building was the design of influential Toronto architects Marani (Ferdinand Herbert, 1893-1971) and Morris (R.S.), a partnership that lasted from 1947 to 1959 and produced many fine designs, including the Grandstand at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto, winner of the Massey Medal in Architecture for 1947.<sup>2</sup> This is the only known work by this firm in Winnipeg.

Locally, this large project was overseen by the influential post-War architectural firm Moody and Moore. This firm was founded in 1936 by University of Manitoba Architecture graduates Herbert H.G. Moody (1903-1991) and Robert E. Moore (1909-ca.1992). This successful partnership lasted for over 30 years and in 1969 became Moody Moore Duncan Rattray Peters Searle Christie, Architects, Engineers and Planners, with the founders taking on consulting roles.<sup>3</sup> Moody and Moore were responsible for a number of fine structures including Red Cross Division Headquarters, 226 Osborne Street N (1948), Winnipeg Stadium, 1465 Maroons Road (1954- demolished), Churchill High School, 510 Hay Street (1956), Great-West Life Building, 60 Osborne Street (1957 – in conjunction with Marani and Morris, Toronto), Bank of Montreal Building, 1188 Pembina Highway (1958), Centennial Concert Hall, 555 Main Street (1967), Hudson Bay House, 79 Main Street (1972), Medical Arts Building and Parkade, 233 Kennedy Street (1972-1974), Manitoba Museum, 190 Rupert Avenue (1973), Royal Canadian Mounted Police Headquarters, 1091 Portage Avenue (1978) as well as almost all the major buildings in the Health Science Centre Complex.<sup>4</sup> The firm has not been evaluated by the Historical Buildings Committee.



Rear (west) and south façades, 1994

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HISTORICAL INTEREST:

Great-West Life Assurance Company was founded in Winnipeg in 1891 by businessman J.H. Brock and a fifteen-person board of directors that included two future lieutenant-governors and a future Winnipeg mayor. The company rented a small office for its five staff members for \$30 a month.<sup>5</sup> Expanding quickly, the company moved to the forefront of the insurance sector in Western Canada. In 1911, the company built its first headquarters, located at 177 Lombard Avenue.

Today, Great-West Life is a leading Canadian insurer, with interests in life insurance, health insurance, investment and retirement savings and has grown to be an international presence.



Detail of main (east) entrance, 2007

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RECOMMENDATION TO HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE:

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

- its historical importance- one of the finest 1960s-era office buildings in downtown Winnipeg and a reminder of the growth of the city during this period;
- its associations- its long-term connections Great-West Life Assurance Company;
- its design- an excellent example of the International style;
- Marani and Morris (Toronto) and Moody and Moore (Winnipeg) were both nationally and internationally respected architectural firms;
- its location- contributes greatly to its streetscape and a visually conspicuous structure; and
- its integrity- its main façades continue to display many of their original elements and design.



Front (east) façade, 1994

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ENDNOTES:

- 1 Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg: Manitoba Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, 1991), pp. 34-35; and L. Maitland, et al., A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1992), p. 178.
- 2 Information from Canadian Encyclopedia (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, ca.1988).
- 3 Winnipeg Architecture Foundation Inc., “Winnipeg Architecture: Oral History Project, Architectural Practitioners, 1945-1975.”
- 4 Ibid.; and Historical Buildings Committee files.
- 5 “100 Years of Great-West Life: The Early Years” (Winnipeg: Great-West Life, ca.1991), found at [http://www.greatwestlife.com/web5/groups/corporate/@public/documents/web\\_content/s7\\_002037.pdf](http://www.greatwestlife.com/web5/groups/corporate/@public/documents/web_content/s7_002037.pdf)