



209 PACIFIC AVENUE

**JOHNSTONE BLOCK
(KUO MIN TANG BUILDING)**

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
Researcher: M. Peterson
May 2019

This building embodies the following heritage values as described in the *Historical Resources By-law, 55/2014* (consolidated update July 13, 2016):

- (a) This building is one of a dwindling number of buildings dating to the early 20th century development of Winnipeg's Chinatown district;
- (b) It has been associated, especially after 1930, with various Chinese-based clubs, institutions and organizations;
- (c) It was designed by local architect Frank R. Evans and built by local contractor A.J. Bonnett;
- (d) It is designed in the Two-Part Commercial Style, an often-used style found throughout the downtown ;
- (e) It is a modestly conspicuous building within its downtown neighbourhood; and
- (f) Much of the building's exterior has suffered little alteration.

209 PACIFIC AVENUE – JOHNSTONE BLOCK (KUO MIN TANG BUILDING)

In 1877, three Chinese immigrants stepped off a stagecoach from the U.S. to settle in Winnipeg and start a laundry business. The event was reported in the local newspapers and marked the beginning of the city's oriental community. For much of the late 19th century, this community was comprised of families operating laundries and other small businesses and living above or behind their shops. Spread out throughout the downtown and suburbs, it would be several decades before the population began to concentrate and create Winnipeg's Chinatown.¹

The development of Chinatown in downtown Winnipeg took place in the 1905-1910 period; in 1910 one block in the Alexander/Logan avenues area was occupied entirely by Chinese businesses, a Masonic Lodge (*Chee Kung Tong*), residences and boarding houses.² By World War I, Chinatown had expanded outwards from its King Street/Alexander Avenue centre and by 1920, there were 900 people of Chinese background in the city operating 150 laundries, three restaurants, eight grocery stores and three greenhouses.³ Chinatown now occupied several more blocks and continued its physical expansion and the community's evolution well into the 1920s. Other businesses and organizations flourished in this environment, including a chapter of the Chinese Nationalist Party (*Kuomintang*) and a Presbyterian Church-sponsored "Chinese Mission."⁴

The 1930s and 1940s saw a decline in the numbers of Chinese in Winnipeg as well as the re-introduction of non-Chinese businesses back into Chinatown, although the actual Chinese community formed stronger ties because of international events, most dramatic being the Japanese invasion of China in 1937. After World War II, there was a major reduction in the number of Chinese living in Chinatown, as many of the established families chose to live elsewhere in the city.

¹ Winnipeg Chinatown: The Revitalization of a Community (Winnipeg, MB: Winnipeg Chinatown Development (1981) Corporation, 1988), pp. 10-12.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 4-9. This increase was in spite of several discriminatory acts passed by the federal government including head taxes and immigration limits specifically targeting the Chinese.

³ P. Yee, Chinatown. An Illustrated History of the Chinese Communities of Victoria, Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, and Halifax (Toronto, ON: James Lorimer and Company, 2005), pp. 66-68.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-26.

Adding to the numbers were newly arriving immigrants, who took advantage of the removal of the racially discriminating immigration legislation in the late 1960s.

The cohesiveness and political clout of this group was tested in the late 1960s when City Council announced plans to route the Disraeli Freeway through Chinatown and demolish many of its buildings. A Chinese delegation met with Council and the plans were halted, leading to the organization of the Winnipeg Chinatown Development Corporation in 1971 to oversee renewal in the area. Since then, Core Area Initiatives and other government-sponsored funding programs have assisted in the construction of seniors' housing and several commercial developments and Chinatown has once again become one of Winnipeg's well-known neighbourhoods.⁵

In 1910, local real estate agents James and Robert Johnstone built a mixed use block in the heart of the burgeoning Chinatown, mid-block on the north side of Pacific Avenue between Main and King streets, naming it after themselves (Plate 1).

STYLE

This building is an excellent example of a Two-Part Commercial Style structure, very common throughout the downtown regions of most North American cities. Especially popular after 1900, the design was used to reflect the varied activities housed in the different areas of the building. The ground floor held the retail spaces, often with recessed entrances and large display windows. A metal cornice or similar feature was used to visually separate the ground floor from the upper floors, which often included banks of large windows to light the office and/or residential space. Access to this upper floor was often provided by an ornate entrance on the front façade.

Beyond this basic layout, this type of block saw a tremendous variation in materials and ornamentation. They could be small, simple wooden structures or large, multi-storey brick and stone buildings with a wealth of ornamental elements, often depending on the neighbourhood in which they were located and the amount of money available to the developer. The use of

⁵ Ibid., pp. 24-38.

classically-based ornamental detailing, including arches, window and door accents and roof detailing make the Johnstone Block more intricately designed than many of its contemporary structures.

CONSTRUCTION

Completed in 1910 at a cost of \$27,000,⁶ this two-storey building measures approximately 22.0 metres wide by 21.7 metres deep including a 1.8-metre one-storey rear section running the full width of the structure (Plate 2). The solid brick structure rests on a stone foundation and glass blocks and ornamental tin are also used on the exterior (see Appendix I for more construction detail).

DESIGN

According to the original plans, the front (south) façade of the building was symmetrically designed with a centrally-placed main entrance finished by a transom window with the words “JOHNSTONE BLOCK” (Plate 3). Flanking this opening were smaller recessed doorways with similar openings at either end of the façade. Filling much of the remainder of the main floor were large display windows for the retail shops found within. Glass block or prism glass transom windows and ornamental tin covered the ceiling of the recessed areas. A complete metal entablature, with a curved pediment above the main entrance, divided the first and second floors. The upper storey featured square headed openings, paired in the centre and four larger units with large central and smaller side windows at the east and west ends. The upper storey openings were set under brick arches, joined between the windows by attached brick pendants which were repeated under the entablature of the ground floor. The building was completed by a second metal cornice with stone capped brick parapet.

Today, the front façade is a mixed of original and altered elements, the display windows are open at the east end and boarded over at the west end of the ground floor (as is the western-most

⁶ City of Winnipeg Building Permit, #1807/1901.

door). The glass block section is covered at the east end but uncovered at the west end (Plate 4). Some of the original ornamental tin is also visible (Plate 5), as is some of the tile flooring of the recessed entrances (Plate 6). The central entrance to the second storey still features its modest tin accenting (Plate 7). The upper floors have not been significantly changed and the entire façade has been painted on several occasions (Plates 8-11).

The rear (north) façade includes both windows and doors on both floors, second floor openings being arched (Plates 12). The east façade is windowless (Plate 13); the west only a few window openings (Plate 14). Old painted signage is found at the south end of the east façade (Plate 15).

INTERIOR

Little is known about the original interior of this building; it appears from contemporary lists that the ground floor was used for retail, the upper floors for offices until the 1930s when residential space was listed on the second floor.

Access could not be gained to the second floor or the west side of the ground floor. The suites on the east end exhibit high ceilings covered in beautifully-detailed ornamental tin (Plates 16-18).

INTEGRITY

The building stands on its original location but has suffered from neglect and aging and appears to be in poor structural condition for its age. Alterations have affected the appearance of the main façade, although some of the original design, ornamentation and materials are present in some areas.

STREETSCAPE

The streetscape near this block has significantly changed over the years, with older neighbouring structures removed, replaced by newer buildings (Plate 19).

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS

The architect of this building was local designer Frank R. Evans (ca.1865-1949). Evans was born in Wales and practiced in Regina, Saskatchewan before coming to Winnipeg. He designed many fine buildings in Winnipeg prior to his retirement in 1934 (see Appendix II for additional biographical information). This is the first Evans' design evaluated by the Historical Buildings and Resources Committee.

Local builder A.J. Bonnett is listed as the contractor of the block.

PERSON/INSTITUTION

James and Robert Johnstone, real estate agents, built this block as a rental property and continued to own it into the 1940s, although representatives of the late James Johnstone were listed as owners in the late 1920s.⁷ Little is known about the pair, they are only named in one other City of Winnipeg Building Permit between 1899 and 1926, a small commercial structure.⁸ Other owners of the block included: Chinese Nationalist League of Canada (owner and occupant) – 1947-1951; Frank Chan, agent and Thomas Gain Gin, restaurateur – 1946-1947 and 1952-1953; T.G. Gin, Richard Tyson, retired and Fook Toy Wong, cashier (owner and occupant) – 1954-1956; F.T. Wong et al (owner and occupant) – 1959-1968; Ton Quong, Louis Pak Tong and Thomas Jin Qjon – 1973-1981; and Kuo Min Tang Association of Manitoba Incorporated (owner and occupant) – 1982-1991.⁹

A partial list of tenants of the building can be found in Table 1 below. Many of the early tenants were connected to the trade in furs and wools, Western Canada's first industry. Beginning with the Hudson's Bay Company in the 17th century, the activity was responsible for the early exploration and permanent settlement of the entire West. By the 1880s, the sector had evolved, utilizing improved transportation – the transcontinental railway system in both the United States and Canada

⁷ City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls, Roll No. 800980, Ward 2 (old no. 12431), below as ARo, 1900-1950.

⁸ City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books, 1899-1926.

⁹ ARo, 1920-1991.

– to efficiently move raw hides and furs from the West to markets and manufacturers in the East. Winnipeg continued to occupy a central role in the trade, headquarters to fur auction houses, hide dealers and retail fur companies. One of the most influential and a tenant of the Johnstone Block in the 1940s and 1950s was the A.B. Shubert Fur Company, founded in Chicago, Illinois (Plate 20).¹⁰

TABLE 1
TENANTS, 209-215 PACIFIC AVENUE, 1912-1997¹¹

YEAR	INFORMATION
1912	209- Vacant 211- F. Matthews, barber shop 211½- no list of tenants 211½- Lutheran Book Company 213-215- ABC Café, H. Luttroff, proprietor
1916	209- not listed 211½- 2 suites listed: #5- Acme Commission Company & James Guthrie, electrical supplies; and #8- Lutheran Book Company 213- ABC Café
1929	209- Otto Silverman, raw furs, H. Cohen, manager 211- M.H. Levinson and Company Ltd., raw furs, M.H. Levinson, manager 211- Harry Genske (no description) 211½- 3 suites: #2- Koz Brothers (Isaac & Morris), wholesale jobbers; #7- Dominion Novelty Company; and #7 Acme Commission Company 213-215-A.B. Shubert Ltd., raw furs, B.A. Cortilet, Sr., manager
1935	209- Kuo Min Tang & Chinese Nationalist League 211- not listed 211½- 3 suites: Winnipeg Jobbers and Manufacturers' Agents, Winnipeg Fur & Hide Company and Acme Commission Company 213-215- Koz Brothers, wholesale jobbers
1940	209- Kuo Min Tang & Chinese Nationalist League 211- M.H. Levinson and Company Ltd., raw furs 211½- 5 suites, 3 residential, Winnipeg Fur & Hide Company and Acme Commission Company 213-215- A.B. Shubert Ltd., raw furs

¹⁰ Arthur J. Ray, *The Canadian Fur Trade in the Industrial Age* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 70. The A.B. Schubert Company of Chicago, Illinois, was, at this time, one of the largest mail-order fur-buying companies in Western Canada.

¹¹ *Henderson's Directory*, 1910-2000.

YEAR	INFORMATION
1945	209- Kuo Min Tang & Chinese Nationalist League 211- Rosenthal Fur Company 211½- 6 suites, 3 residential, Wong Wun Sun Travel Company, Winnipeg Fur & Hide Company and Acme Commission Company 213-215- A.B. Shubert Ltd., raw furs
1954	209- Kuo Min Tang & Chinese Nationalist League 211- Vacant 211½- 5 suites, 4 residential and Wong Wun Sun Travel Society, Charlie Wong, secretary 213-215- A.B. Shubert Ltd., raw furs
1962	209- Yuen Yuen Grocery 211- Vacant 211½- 8 residential suites and #2- Ling-You Club 213-215-Kuo Min Tang (Chinese Nationalist League) The Chinese Masonic Temple is located across the street at #216 Pacific Avenue
1976	209- Hop Wah Grocery 211- Winnipeg Help-All Employment Agency 211½- 8 suites, all residential 213-215- Vacant
1984	209-211- Yee's Grocery 211½- Leong Yue Club 213- Chinese Dramatic Society & Chinese Nationalist League 215- Chinese Benevolent Association
1997	209-211½- 5 vacant suites listed 213- office building (8 suites) – Chinese Benevolent Association, Manitoba Chinese Cultural Association Incorporated & Prairie Chinese News of Canada

EVENT

There is no known significant historical event connected with this building.

CONTEXT

This block was built during the height of the early 20th century expansion phase of Winnipeg. Dozens of similar mixed-use blocks were built throughout the city by small-, medium- and large-scale developers and businessmen who translated their own financial success into building development. Having no shortage of demand for commercial and residential space in all corners of

the city and surrounding municipalities made this type of investment extremely popular until World War I.

This block also became an important structure in the development of Winnipeg's Chinatown and has housed clubs, businesses and people for many decades.

LANDMARK

This building's conspicuousness lies mostly in the bright exterior paint that has been used over the last several decades. Although it stands fairly close to Main Street, it is now hidden by a large newer structure.



APPENDIX I

CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report Assessment Record

Building Address: 209 Pacific Avenue (209-215)

Building Name: Johnstone Block

Original Use: mixed (commercial/residential)

Current Use: mixed (commercial/residential)

Roll No. (Old): 13080098000 (12431)

RSN: 155144

Legal Description: 9/11 St. John, Plan 32065, Lot 32 (Original: 10^W St. John, Plan 3658, Parcel B and east 25' Parcel C)

Location: North side between Main and King streets

Date of Construction: 1910

Storeys: 2 and 1 storeys and basement

Heritage Status: **ON NOMINATED LIST**

Construction Type: Brick and stone foundation

Building Permits (Plans available: [M] Microfilm; [PPD] Department Storage):

- 1807/1910 [PPD] \$27,000 (original); 290/1958 [PPD] \$200 (new fire escape for club); 7018/1963 [M] \$1,500 (alteration to basement); 5908/1994 \$2,000 (alter interior of club building)

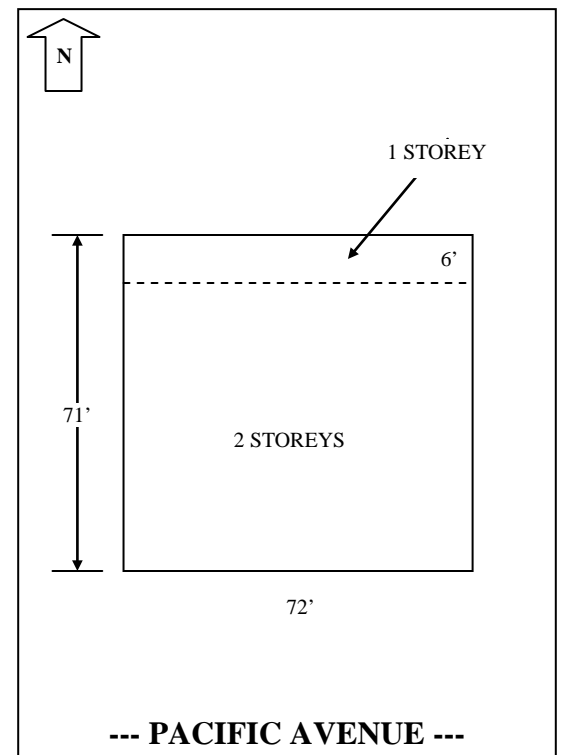
Information:

- 71 x 72 + ~37'

- ornamental tin cladding on ceilings of recessed entrances

ARCHITECT: EVANS, FRANK R.

CONTRACTOR: BONNETT, A.J.



APPENDIX II

Frank Robert Evans

F.R. Evans was born in Wales ca.1865, and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Dublin University in 1884. He moved to London, England and took up the study of architecture in his father's office, remaining there until 1888. He decided to emigrate and arrived in Winnipeg, although his stay was short, moving on to Regina, Saskatchewan, where he practiced until his return to Winnipeg in 1896.¹ He established his practice here in 1901-1902, which continued until his retirement in 1934. He died at his home at 461 Heatherington Avenue on May 9, 1949.²

Some of his larger contracts included:³

WINNIPEG

- Foley, Lock and Larson Warehouse, 181-189 Market Avenue (1903, demolished)
- Great West Saddlery Factory, 112 Market Avenue (1903 addition)
- Paulin-Chamber Company Building, 311 Ross Avenue (1904 & 1910)
- Leland Hotel, 222 William Avenue, (1904 additional storeys and remodelling of existing building)
- Brydon Chambers Apartments, 150 Rupert Avenue (1904, demolished)
- A. Hollinquist House, Logan Avenue southeast corner Ellen Street (1904, demolished)
- Dufferin Avenue Presbyterian Church, Dufferin Avenue at McGregor Street (1905, demolished)
- Orris Apartments, Elgin Avenue, 1905
- Tabernacle Baptist Church, Burrows Avenue at Charles Street (1906, demolished)
- Charles A. Baskerville House, Donald Street (1906)
- D. Ackland and Sons Warehouse, Higgins Avenue (1907, demolished)
- Duncan D. McOuat House, Balmoral Place (1907)
- Leslie Storage Warehouse, 83 Kate Street (1909 & large addition 1912)
- Johnstone Block, 209 Pacific Avenue (1910)
- Somerset Building, 294 Portage Avenue (1911)
- Enright Block, 189 Jarvis Avenue (833 Main Street) (1911)
- Gordon Harold Aikins House, 69 Langside Street (1911, demolished)

¹ John Chivers, "A History of The Manitoba Association of Architects,: unpublished manuscript, ca.1966.

² Winnipeg Free Press, May 11, 1949, p. 33.

³ City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books, 1899-1926; and Robert G. Hill, Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada, 1800-1950, 2009-2012.

WINNIPEG (continued)

- Exchange Hotel, Main Street (1917, demolished)
- Manitoba Gypsum Company Warehouse, St. James Street near Sargent Avenue (1917)
- R.S. Robinson Company Warehouse, Louise Avenue (1919)
- St. John's (Olympic) Skating Rink, Church Avenue (1922, demolished)
- Gregg Building, 52 Albert Street (1922, additional floor)
- I.O.O.F. Hall, 74 Princess Street (1930, interior fire repairs)⁴

NON-WINNIPEG

- Regina Leader Building, Hamilton Street (1893)
- Moosomin, Saskatchewan Town Hall and general hospital (1905)
- public schools in Manitoba: Elm Creek (1905), Shoal Lake (1906), Grandview (1906), Headingley (1906), Stonewall (1907), Darlingford (1910) and Portage la Prairie (Victoria, 1916-1917)
- Sanford, Manitoba Municipal Hall (1905)
- Broadview, Saskatchewan public school (1907)
- Yorkton, Saskatchewan hotel (1907)
- Clement Block, Rosser Avenue at Ninth Street, Brandon, Manitoba (1910)
- St. Andrew's, Manitoba Municipal Hall (1910)
- St. John's Roman Catholic Church, Portage la Prairie, Manitoba (1913-1914)
- Young Women's Christian Association, Eleventh Street, Brandon, Manitoba (1917)

⁴ According to a website on the I.O.O.F. Hall, 74 Princess Street (http://www.ioofmanitoba.ca/74_princess_ave.htm), Evans was hired as the architect to design interior repairs to the building after a January 1930 fire.

209 PACIFIC AVENUE – JOHNSTONE BLOCK (KUO MIN TANG BUILDING)



Plate 1 – Johnstone Block (Kuo Min Tang Building), 209 Pacific Avenue, front (south) and west façades, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)



Plate 2 – Johnstone Block (Kuo Min Tang Building), 209 Pacific Avenue, rear (north) and west façades, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)

209 PACIFIC AVENUE – JOHNSTONE BLOCK (KUO MIN TANG BUILDING)

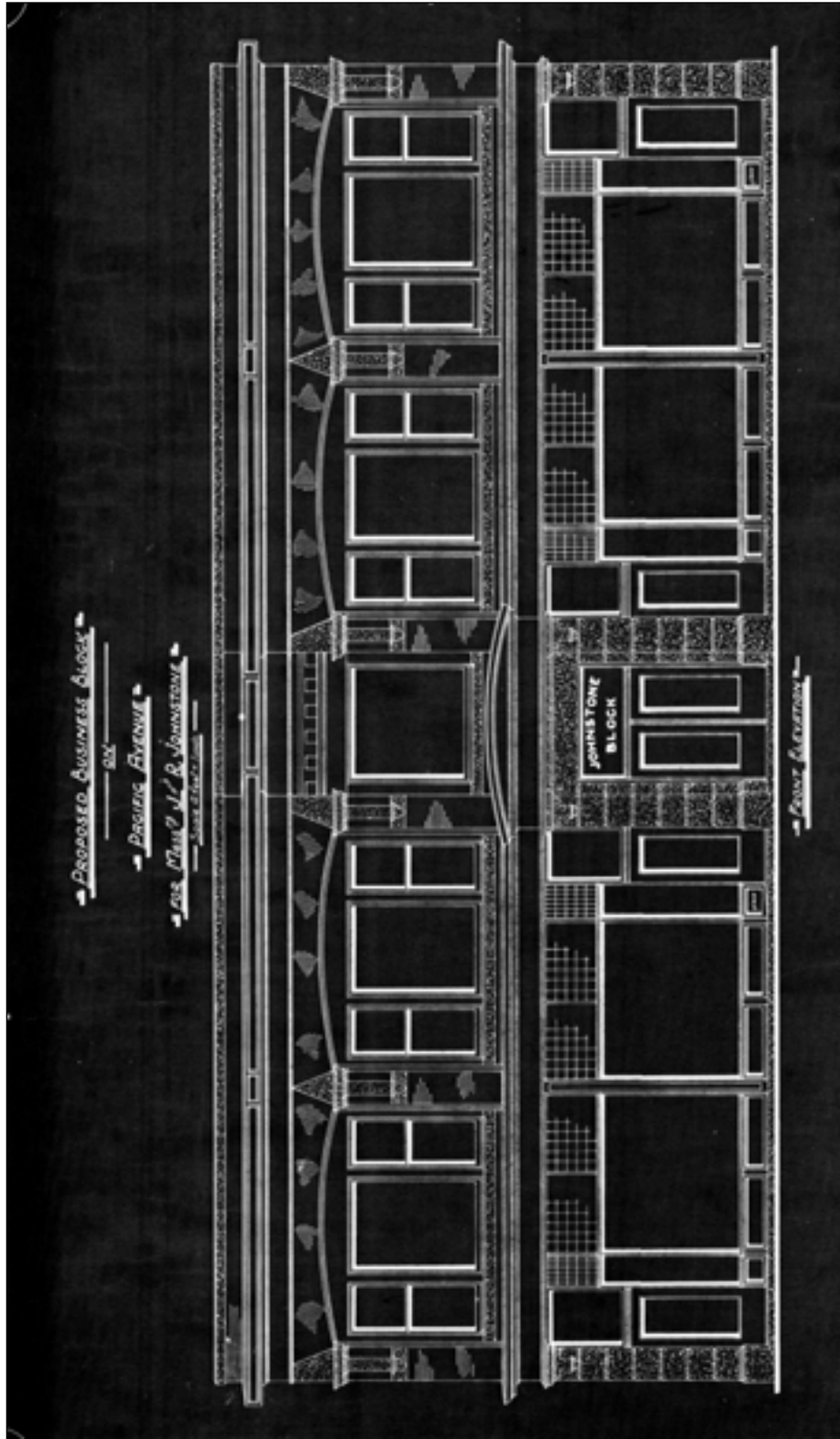


Plate 3 – Architect’s plans #1807/1910, “Front Elevation”. (Courtesy of the City of Winnipeg Archives.)

209 PACIFIC AVENUE – JOHNSTONE BLOCK (KUO MIN TANG BUILDING)



Plate 4 – Johnstone Block (Kuo Min Tang Building), 209 Pacific Avenue, west end of front (south) façade, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)



Plate 5 – Johnstone Block (Kuo Min Tang Building), 209 Pacific Avenue, west end of front façade, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)

209 PACIFIC AVENUE – JOHNSTONE BLOCK (KUO MIN TANG BUILDING)



Plate 6 – Johnstone Block (Kuo Min Tang Building), 209 Pacific Avenue, tile flooring in recessed entrance to #211, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)

209 PACIFIC AVENUE – JOHNSTONE BLOCK (KUO MIN TANG BUILDING)



Plate 7 – Johnstone Block (Kuo Min Tang Building), 209 Pacific Avenue, detail of front (south) entrance, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)



Plate 8 – Johnstone Block (Kuo Min Tang Building), 209 Pacific Avenue, detail of front (south) façade, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)

209 PACIFIC AVENUE – JOHNSTONE BLOCK (KUO MIN TANG BUILDING)



Plate 9 – Johnstone Block, 209-215 Pacific Avenue, front (south) and west façades, ca.1950.
(Reproduced from riseandsprawl.blogspot.com, “Building weaker communities”, January 14, 2009.)

209 PACIFIC AVENUE – JOHNSTONE BLOCK (KUO MIN TANG BUILDING)



Plate 10 – Johnstone Block (Kuo Min Tang Building), 209-215 Pacific Avenue, ca.1979. (City of Winnipeg.)



Plate 11 – Johnstone Block (Kuo Min Tang Building), 209-215 Pacific Avenue, 2002. (M. Peterson, 2002.)

209 PACIFIC AVENUE – JOHNSTONE BLOCK (KUO MIN TANG BUILDING)



Plate 12 – Johnstone Block (Kuo Min Tang Building), 209 Pacific Avenue, rear (north) façade, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)



Plate 13 – Johnstone Block (Kuo Min Tang Building), 209 Pacific Avenue, front (south) and east façade, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)

209 PACIFIC AVENUE – JOHNSTONE BLOCK (KUO MIN TANG BUILDING)



Plate 14 – Johnstone Block (Kuo Min Tang Building), 209 Pacific Avenue, rear (north) and west façades, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)



Plate 15 – Johnstone Block (Kuo Min Tang Building), 209 Pacific Avenue, painted signage on the east façade, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)

209 PACIFIC AVENUE – JOHNSTONE BLOCK (KUO MIN TANG BUILDING)



Plate 16 – Johnstone Block (Kuo Min Tang Building), 209 Pacific Avenue, tin ceiling, #211 Pacific Avenue, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)

209 PACIFIC AVENUE – JOHNSTONE BLOCK (KUO MIN TANG BUILDING)



Plate 17 – Johnstone Block (Kuo Min Tang Building), 209 Pacific Avenue, tin ceiling, #211 Pacific Avenue, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)



Plate 18 – Johnstone Block (Kuo Min Tang Building), 209 Pacific Avenue, tin ceiling, #209 Pacific Avenue,, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)

209 PACIFIC AVENUE – JOHNSTONE BLOCK (KUO MIN TANG BUILDING)



Plate 19 – Pacific Avenue looking west from Main Street, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)

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