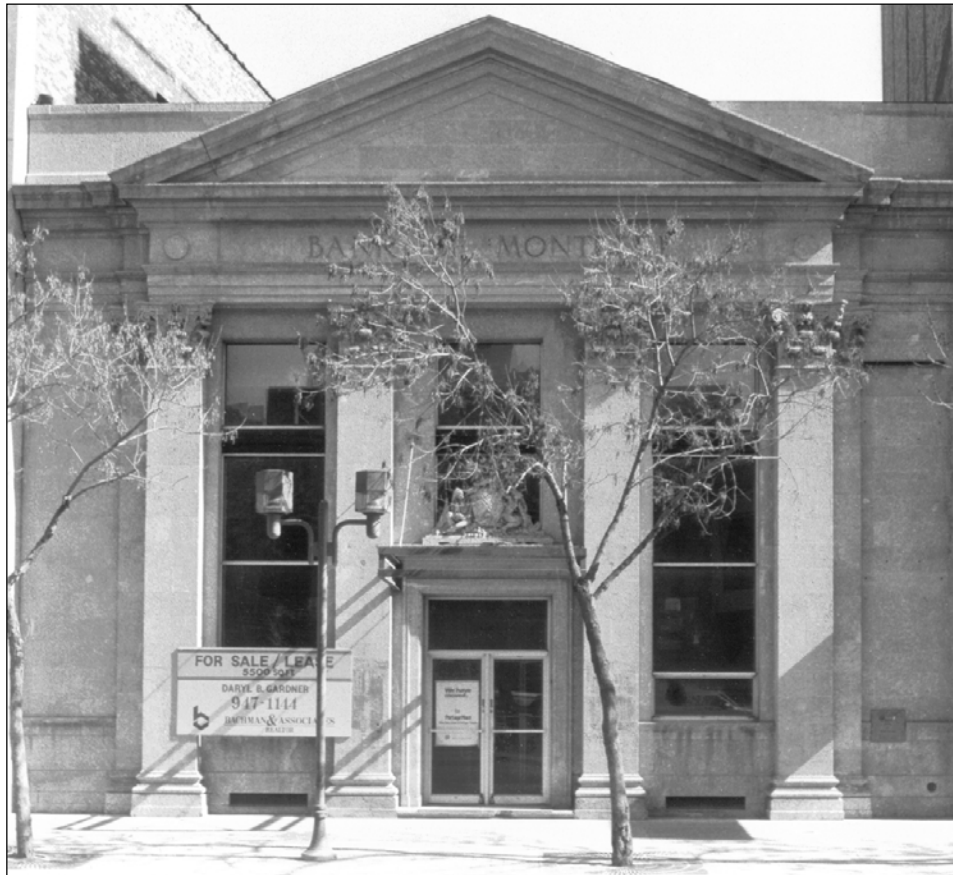


426 PORTAGE AVENUE – BANK OF MONTREAL
K. G. Rea, 1927



Construction of this elegant bank building on the south side of Portage Avenue symbolized a new market aggressiveness by its owner, the Bank of Montreal, and reinforced the westward expansion of commercial development along Portage during the 1920s.

Known as a relatively conservative institution, the Bank of Montreal had focused on cultivating a corporate clientele since its arrival in Winnipeg in 1877. However, as competitors moved into consumer loans and other personal financial services, the bank was compelled to respond. By the early 1920s, it was acquiring smaller firms and expanding its customer base through new services and conveniently located branches.

The 1927 addition of an outlet at 426 Portage between Vaughan and Kennedy streets was strategically timed to coincide with adjacent construction of two major sources of potential customers - the Hudson's Bay Company department store and the six-storey Power Building.

The linkages between these projects even took a physical form through their common use of smooth-cut, Tyndall stone facades and complementary designs.

The one-storey building, modelled on the main Bank of Montreal facility at the southeast corner of Portage and Main Street, conveys permanency, strength, wealth and traditionalism through its Classical Revival form. This was a later, more subdued version of the Beaux-Arts style prominent in commercial architecture in North America at the turn of the century.

Kenneth Guscotte Rea of Montreal, a leading architect of Canadian banking halls, designed the branch.

Following study and training in Montreal during the 1890s, Rea practised with Shepley, Ruttan and Coolidge in Boston and Cram, Goodhue and Ferguson in New York. He came under the tutelage of the American revivalist, Ralph Adams Cram, who advocated designs that replicated the order and inspiration offered by monumental medieval cathedrals.

Rea returned to Montreal in 1905, organizing a practice which lasted for more than 30 years. His portfolio included many commercial and residential structures in that city; Bishop's College School in Lennoxville, Quebec; the Canadian Legation in Tokyo, Japan; and several buildings for the Bank of Montreal and Royal Bank. He was named a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1913.

Built at a cost of \$70,000 by contractor R. N. Wyatt, the structure at 426 Portage consists of brick and steel reinforced concrete. Use of Tyndall stone for the facade reflected a contemporary emphasis on local building materials and the rising national popularity of this product from Manitoba quarries.

The bank's symmetrical, Greek temple facade features four complete Corinthian order columns leading to a carved architrave, a frieze inscribed with the bank's name, and a cornice. According to the architect's plans, a "metal covered false pediment supported with wood brackets" completes these elements. The columns, which display acanthus leaf capitals and acanthus flowers on moulded abaci, are consistent in design with those that grace the Hudson's Bay Company store to the west.

Two elongated openings with carved stone sills flank the main entrance. Above is a stone crest bearing the motto, "Concordia Salus" ("In Concord is Safety"), and the bank's name. As part of the crest, figures of two aboriginal persons frame a shield containing a saltire cross, rose, thistle, trefoil and beaver. Below the shield rests a cornucopia, above is another beaver.

Entered through a vestibule, the bank's interior features decorative fluted pilasters with Ionic capitals. A terrazzo floor with marble borders originally highlighted the public areas of the hall.

The manager's office initially was placed at the west side of the vestibule, while a customers' room, safety deposit vault and coupon booth were to the east. The manager's office and customers' room had terrazzo floors, panelled wainscotting and glazed screens for privacy.

The basement originally was laid out with men's and women's locker rooms, a furnace room, a steel vault, and storage space for bank documents. A "lift" was installed between the two levels to transport books and other records.

Major renovations occurred in 1948 and 1971. As a result, aluminum-cased windows and doors were installed and changes were made to the interior ceiling, floor covering and layout.

The building has been vacant since the Bank of Montreal relocated across the street to the Portage Place shopping centre.