



33 PRINCESS STREET

PECK BUILDING

HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE

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Located at the intersection of Notre Dame Avenue and Princess Street, the Peck Building was erected in 1893. The John W. Peck Company, clothing manufacturers and importers, commissioned Charles H. Wheeler to design a new building for the company.

Wheeler, an architect, was born in England in 1838 and trained in architecture in Britain. He first practiced in Birmingham and later in London.

His English influence showed clearly in his best-known local work, Holy Trinity Church on Donald Street. Wheeler moved to Winnipeg early in 1882 with his wife and six children. He worked in the office of architect James Chisholm until he was able to establish his own practice.

Charles Wheeler was extremely active in the 1890s when he designed the Peck Building, yet architecture was never really his first love. He had also studied music in England and this was truly his passion. As choir master of Knox and Zion churches, Wheeler seems to have maintained his architectural business essentially to pay the bills for his large family. In later years, when his children were grown, Wheeler became the music and drama critic in the Winnipeg Tribune, devoting his time almost exclusively to the cultivation of good music in the west.¹

The John W. Peck Company had already been established in Winnipeg for 13 years when the company had their new quarters built. John W. Peck had scouted the market in Winnipeg in the 1870s, having already established his head office in Montreal, and entered locally into a partnership with two Winnipeg businessmen, A.B. Bethune and J.D. Carescaden in 1880. Initially the new company was known as Carescaden and Peck, under the management of Bethune, but following Mr. Carescaden's retirement, it became the John W. Peck Company. Peck himself seems to have maintained a residence in Winnipeg during the early years but spent the greater part of his time in Montreal.²

Because John Peck was born in 1849, he was a young man in the 1870s, and only 31 years of age when he established the Winnipeg branch of his manufacturing company. His business venture started on a small scale in Winnipeg, acting mainly as a wholesale outlet for the clothing manufactured and shipped from Montreal. Both businesses grew rapidly, but Montreal remained the base while Winnipeg, and later Vancouver, were branches. By 1912, the John W. Peck Company employed 2,000 people, which gives an idea of the size of the operation.³

The company manufactured mens' and boys' clothing, shirts, sheeplined coats and caps. As well, the company imported woolen goods for mens' furnishings. The Winnipeg branch supplied retailers with a wide range of mens' wear, but made a specialty of clothing for working men and farmers generally, rough clothing of durable quality rather than high fashion. Of particular interest was a fur overcoat they marketed to replace the buffalo coat, already unobtainable in the 1890s. Named the "African Buffalo Coat", this heavy fur coat was reasonably cheap and highly serviceable. It was intended for use by farmers and other outdoor labourers.⁴

Wheeler's design for the Peck Building had the structure divided into two distinct sections. John W. Peck Company occupied the larger southern portion of the building that faces Notre Dame Avenue and Princess Street. The northern third of the building, with a separate entrance, was the home of O'Laughlin Brothers Stationers. A firewall separated the two sections.

The Peck Building originally measured 100 by 93 feet and rose four storeys. The raised basement had a stone foundation on concrete footings, with the walls made of solid brick. The red sandstone of the foundation rose to a limestone on the first floor. The limestone thickens between the windows and gives the impression of a buttress, which is further accentuated by the use of raincaps over the stone. The middle two floors had round-headed windows except those on either side of the corner section of the second storey. The top floor employed a series of window treatments to emphasize a horizontal pattern of archway and flat course on the parapet. Corner, mid-section and ends were heavily emphasized. A section of the original roofline remains on the eastern section of the Princess Street façade. This section, which remains

completely in its original form, denotes the division between the Peck Company space and that of its tenant.

Ornamental details abound on the Peck Building, many of which remain on the lower floors. The two doorways have recessed architraves, with an arch and quoins of red sandstone. The eastern entrance arch ends in two carved faces while the corner entrance arch terminates in a more restrained manner to hold an arched sign for the John W. Peck and Company. There is considerable detailing in the brickwork and trimming of the mid-section, while the parapet of the original roof was extremely ornamental. The building was intended to be viewed at an angle, hence the attention given to the corner and each façade.

The style of the Peck Building pre-dates the rigid adherence to the “warehouse architecture” of later years. Given the masonry construction, its windows exploit the natural sunlight that the site provides and Wheeler used the fenestration to create interest. The varied roofline displayed remarkable collection of details. The Peck Building was high Victorian Romanesque style, more a reflection of Wheeler’s grand tastes and British background than an anticipation of the Chicago school of future warehouse design. Its own design of 1907,⁵ designed by John D. Atchison, brought the Peck Building into the twentieth century with its angular lines and monochromatic finish.

Constructed in 1893, the Peck Building was first occupied early in 1894. Into the ground floor of the larger southern section went the offices, sample room and shipping facilities of the John W. Peck Company. The basement was used for receiving goods down a chute from the rear loading docks, and for the packing and storing of goods. An electric freight elevator (a real novelty in 1893) distributed stock to the upper floors. The second floor contained the furnishings stock of shirts, collars, and ties as well as another sample room. Hats, caps, and fur goods such as the “African Buffalo Overcoats” were stored on the third floor, with miscellaneous storage on the fourth floor. Each floor of the Peck Warehouse had 28 windows around it with only the north side dark.⁶

In the north section of the Peck Building, with 32 feet of frontage along Princess Street, was the firm of O'Loughlin Brothers Stationers. They had offices, a sample room and shipping facilities on the ground floor. Their offices were divided by ornamental ironwork, said to be quite beautiful, light, spacious and giving a "business-like appearance".⁷ Heavy wrapping paper for commercial use was stored in the basement with lighter stationery, books and sundries stored on the second floor. On the third floor was a job printing press for industrial printing such as bags, wrapping paper and stationery. Paper bags and wallpaper were stored on the fourth floor. This section also had its own freight elevator.

O'Loughlin Brothers was a large firm, with a staff of 23 people doing business from the Great Lakes to Vancouver. It was absorbed by Consolidated Stationery, which continued to operate in the Peck Building until expansion to the Whitla Block was undertaken in 1900. As the move was actually in progress, a small stove on the third floor touched off a fire one blustery winter day. Stored paper stock fed the fire quickly, creating an inferno so hot that the greatest danger to firemen was the shards of flying glass as the windows popped. Before the fire was brought under control, \$40,000 worth of stationery stock had burned and the roof of the northern section of the building collapsed. The firewall held, with the Peck stock suffering only slight smoke damage.⁸

The fire was on a Sunday near noon. The newspaper estimated that a crowd of several thousand assembled to watch, a vivid indication of the downtown population of the City in 1900.

The northern section of the warehouse was quickly repaired and reoccupied by long time tenants, the Winnipeg Rubber Company, later the Columbus Rubber Company.

John Peck Company's business continued to boom. Winnipeg served strictly as a warehouse, with the factory shipping all the stock from Montreal. Winnipeg had a particular hold in the wholesaling and distribution of dry goods and clothing because of preferential freight rates extended by the C.P.R. Since 1886, there was a 15% reduction of freight rates west of Winnipeg and since 1890, the C.P.R. introduced lower rates on merchandise shipped from the east to Winnipeg. These rates applied only as far as Winnipeg, thereby reinforcing the City's key

position in the west.⁹ It was also strong incentive for eastern firms to establish distribution branches in Winnipeg, rather than in another prairie city.

As fast as John W. Peck in Montreal could manufacture clothing and ship it, John W. Peck in Winnipeg could break up the shipments and distribute it to western retailers. In 1907, two storeys were added to the Princess Street warehouse to keep up with the demand. Architect J.D. Atcheson and contractors Carter-Halls-Aldinger made the addition and underpinned the foundation to carry the additional weight. New posts were added on all floors. As well, all floors were leveled and the bearings shortened with new columns for a cost of \$30,000.¹⁰ This essentially brought the building to its present appearance. Of the John W. Peck Company and building it was said in 1912:

It forms one of the most extensive mercantile concerns in the City and adds greatly to the strength and beauty of its physical development.¹¹

The Peck Company lasted in Winnipeg until the early years of the 1930s depression, after more than fifty years of business in Winnipeg. After that time, a cluster of smaller wholesale firms occupied the building such as S. Stall and Son Ltd., Dobbs Cap Manufacturing Co., and the KBB Manufacturing Co. Ltd.¹² It was probably sometime in the 1940s or 1950s that two more entrances were set into the central portion of the Princess Street façade.

Gradually, Sterling Stall, manufacturers of women's outer wear and sportswear grew to use most of the space in the Peck Building, although no one company has ever occupied the entire building. The Stall Group has now relocated to a larger factory at 200 Disraeli Street.

The Peck Building, dating from 1893, has a strong representative role in the history of Winnipeg's wholesale trade. Companies such as John W. Peck reinforced the City's dominance over the west in the period before 1914. Large warehouses were built, often expanded with the trade as the Peck Building was, to form a cohesive and identifiable district. Slightly older than

most of the district's buildings, the Peck Building demonstrates a Victorian approach to warehouse design that was at the close of an architectural era.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ “Chas. H. Wheeler Dies in Hospital,” Manitoba Free Press, 9 January 1917.
- ² “Prominent Clothing Manufacturer Dead,” Manitoba Free Press, 28 May 1920.
- ³ “John W. Peck and Company Ltd.,” Winnipeg Saturday Post, 8 June 1912, p. 50.
- ⁴ “A Handsome Warehouse,” The Commercial, 16 April 1894, p. 734.
- ⁵ City of Winnipeg Building Permit No. 217, 16 March 1907.
- ⁶ “A Handsome Warehouse,” op. cit.
- ⁷ Loc. cit.
- ⁸ “Peck Block Damaged,” Manitoba Free Press, 22 January 1900, p. 6.
- ⁹ Ruben Bellan, Winnipeg First Century an Economic History, Queenston House Publishing Co. Ltd., Winnipeg 1978, p. 49.
- ¹⁰ Permits, op. cit., No. 217, 16 March 1907.
- ¹¹ Winnipeg Saturday Post, op. cit.
- ¹² Henderson’s Directory for Winnipeg 1922, 1927, 1931, 1935, 1941, 1950, 1960, 1972 and 1983.

APPENDIX I

Charles H Wheeler

C.H. Wheeler was born in Leicester, England in 1838. He learned architecture through the study of its composite trades: carpentry, brick-laying and stone masonry. He was also instructed in pattern-making in the Coventry Engine and Art Metal Works. He worked as an architect with firms first in Birmingham and later in London. Some of his work carried him to continental Europe.

Wheeler brought this wide range of experience to Canada when he emigrated to Winnipeg in 1882 with his family. He worked first in the architectural office of James Chisholm before establishing his own trade late in the 1880s. His first major work was the design of the beautiful Holy Trinity Church on Donald Street, competing against sixty other entries. Wheeler was most active during the 1890s, designing such structures as Hugh John MacDonald's Dalnavert House, now restored as a Victorian mansion, the G.F. and J. Galt Warehouses, the Geo. Wood Warehouse, the Portage la Prairie Home for Incurables, the Merchants' Bank in Brandon, the Winnipeg Deaf and Dumb Institute, an Anglican Church in Regina and innumerable fine residences and public buildings. By 1897, he had designed over 270 buildings in Manitoba and the North West Territories.

In later years, Charles Wheeler pursued his other great love, music. He was choir master of Knox and Zion churches, a vocalist and choir trainer, and a music and theatre critic. For several years, Wheeler had a regular music and theatre column in the Winnipeg Tribune and was a well-known figure in these circles. In 1916, he published a study of artistic affairs in Winnipeg since the early days entitled The Story of Music and Drama. He died in Winnipeg in 1917.

Sources:

"A Group of Winnipeg Architects" Canadian Architect and Builder, January 1897, pp. 3-4.

"Chas. H. Wheeler" Winnipeg Daily Tribune, 1 August 1891, p. 13.

"Chas. H. Wheeler Dies in Hospital" Manitoba Free Press, 9 January 1917.

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Plate 1 – The Peck Building, 33 Princess Street, ca.1896. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Gisli Goodman Collection #1 [N7119].)



Plate 2 – The Peck Building, ca.1903. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N1524.)

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Plate 3 – The Peck Building with its addition, 1907. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N7104.)

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Plate 4 – The Peck Building, ca.1914. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N7103.)

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Plate 5 – An interior shot of the Stall Factory in 1939. This shot was taken on the second floor with the lights in the background on the Princess elevation. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Jewish Historical Society of Western Canada, #3065.)



Plate 6 – The Peck Building, 1969. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Architectural Survey.)

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Plate 7 – Detail of the northern portion, unchanged from the 1893 construction, 1969. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Architectural Survey.)