

55 PRINCESS STREET – WINNIPEG HYDRO SHOWROOM
James Chisholm & Son, 1919



This building was completed in 1919 by City Light and Power, Western Canada’s first public electrical utility, formed by the City of Winnipeg after 90% of citizens voted in favour of its creation in 1906. The entity began generating power from its new dam at Pointe du Bois on the Winnipeg River in 1911 and immediately cut electric prices in half to Winnipeg customers who had been paying a private company, Winnipeg Electric Street Railway Company, for power since the 1890s.

City Light and Power, commonly known as City Hydro, joined the global movement of expanding electrical power after World War I – the “Roaring Twenties” were very much fuelled by new electric gadgets, especially in the home. Advertisements for the latest electrical technologies were

found in newspapers and magazines which led to increased demand from customers, including both urban and rural areas.

Through the original revolving door entrance of the modern Princess Street showroom, customers were greeted by a modern display area on the main floor with high ceilings and terrazzo and hardwood floors. Displays of the latest electric appliances and machinery were found on the ground floor, the second floor held employees' offices and locker rooms and a sales counter at the east end.

The original exterior, which has seen extensive alteration, was unique. Planned as a one-storey structure but built with two-storeys, the symmetrical front (west) façade featured a central entrance flanked by large plate glass display windows and smaller side windows, all square headed and all set in light terra cotta. The base of the building was accentuated with a wide band of terra cotta at grade. Terra cotta attached columns were placed around the display windows and doorway with ornate capitals that led to the complete entablature above. The upper level featured large, square-headed window openings with ornate terra cotta accents and dark brick walls. A complete terra cotta entablature was placed at the flat roof. The rear of the building is a party wall; the side walls are completed in brick.

The building's designer was the local firm James Chisholm and Son. The father, (1840-1920) finally settled in Winnipeg in 1900 after working in Winnipeg in the 1870s and 1880s and the United States in the 1890s. His son and youngest child, Colin Campbell Chisholm, was born in Winnipeg in 1883 and officially joined his father's architectural firm ca.1906, became its active manager in 1910 and eventually took over the practice. He died in Winnipeg on September 5, 1936. Among they more well-known local works are: Young Methodist (United) Church, 222 Furby Street (1907, 1910) – Grade II (only tower left after fire); I.O.O.F. (Odd Fellows') Temple, 293 Kennedy Street (1910) – Grade III (façade only remains); Sterling Bank Building, 283 Portage Avenue (1910-1911); Granite Curling Club, 22 Granite Way (1912) – Grade III; and the Marlborough Hotel, 331 Smith Street (1913) – Grade II.

Contractors of the building were the well-known firm Thomas Kelly and Sons Limited, which built many large structures in Winnipeg and throughout Western Canada. Thomas Kelly was at

the centre of the Legislative Building controversy and fled to the United States to avoid prosecution. He was arrested in Chicago, IL in 1915 for “perjury, obtaining money by false pretences, larceny or embezzlement and the obtaining of money, knowing the same to have been embezzled, stolen or fraudulently obtained” and extradited back to Winnipeg. After serving his jail sentence, Kelly moved to the United States.

In 1964, the name of City Hydro was changed to Winnipeg Hydro and the utility continued to operate out of the Princess Street address until the 1970s, when it was converted into a garage by the City’s Signals Department.

Elements of the building that would require approval if alterations were planned are:

Exterior-

- Two-storey dark brick and terra cotta building with flat roof located mid-block on the east side of Princess Street, its main façade facing west onto Princess Street, its north and south façades facing parking lots and its rear façade hidden by the neighbouring building;
- The symmetrical main (west) façade with its central, recessed entrance framed by large openings and ornamental terra cotta, windows in rectilinear openings in terra cotta frames, upper storey windows in rectilinear openings in terra cotta frames and a terra cotta entablature; and
- The north and south façades with windows in rectilinear openings.

Interior-

- None