



78 PRINCESS STREET
MILLER, MORSE WAREHOUSE

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee

April 1998

78 PRINCESS STREET

MILLER, MORSE WAREHOUSE

This firm [Miller, Morse Company] reports business so far this season far in excess of last year, or, in fact, of any years since they had been in the country. Their capacity has been tested to the utmost, and the experience had [sic] been that it was difficult to get in goods fast enough to execute orders.¹

It was clear to some, as this quote from a local newspaper of 1889 points out, that business could succeed in Winnipeg. Few, however, could foresee the dramatic era of growth and expansion that would last for nearly two decades after 1896. But this comprehensive growth was far from random. Specific districts that had been established a decade earlier provided the pattern for this frenzied period of growth.

The real estate and construction boom of the early 1880s was intimately connected to the early construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), Canada's first transcontinental railway, west of Winnipeg. Land prices in the small capital city skyrocketed, the population soared and solid brick structures began replacing the small wooden shacks that dotted the mud streets and avenues. Perhaps more importantly, various sectors of the city – residential, commercial and industrial – and their specific buildings began to be segregated.² The huge advance in land prices along Main Street north of Portage Avenue necessitated the replacement of the earlier residential development (Plate 1) with large commercial structures. Investors chose to locate near one of the most important buildings in the city, the town hall, from which would come assistance in advancing both singular business interests and those of the community at large.

NOTE: BUILDING ORIGINALLY KNOWN AS #86-88 PRINCESS STREET

¹ The Sun, March 30, 1889, p. 4.

² R.R. Rostecki, "The Growth of Winnipeg, 1870-1886," unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Manitoba, 1980, pp. 112-14.

Commercial interests, both local and from Eastern Canada, were quick to locate in this area. The city rapidly assumed the role of wholesale hub for all of Western Canada. Companies like R.J. Whitla, Stobart, Eden and Company, George D. Wood and J.H. Ashdown were all organized and carrying on business prior to the CPR boom.³ With this development came a maturation of the retail sector. The bust of 1882 did not end this development, but rather strengthened it by removing the excess and inexperienced entrepreneurs, by reducing surplus stock and by hardening attitudes towards credit.⁴ The area, however, was undeniably developing as the warehouse district, slowly through the 1880s and 1890s and then rapidly after 1900.

In the spring of 1887, a decade before the real growth phase of Winnipeg began, the wholesale hardware firm of Miller, Morse and Company purchased land on Princess Street with the intention of erecting a handsome brick and stone warehouse (in what was, at the time, a residential district - Plate 1). By the summer, excavation had begun and soon the new warehouse was complete.⁵

STYLE

The Miller, Morse Warehouse is designed in the Romanesque Revival style that became the prominent architectural style of the warehouse district. In the 1880s, the style was influenced greatly by American architect H.H. Richardson (1838-86) and was often referred to as Richardsonian Romanesque.⁶ Primarily built of brick with a raised rusticated stone base and stone accenting, the structures often displayed a textured visage. Towers could flank the main façades. Quoins, belt courses and decorative brick corbelling or chevrons were often added to animate the flat elevations. The most familiar element, however, was the arch, used for entrances and windows. Often, straight-topped windows were grouped under large arches.⁷

³ Manitoba Free Press, September 3, 1904, p. 14.

⁴ R.R. Rostecki, op. cit., p. 113.

⁵ Winnipeg Sun, March 29, 1887, p. 4 and July 21, 1887, p. 4.

⁶ L. Maitland et al., A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1992), p. 84.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 84; and Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg: Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, Historic Resources Branch, 1991), p. 14.

Although the style was applied to other public and private structures, it was used almost exclusively for warehouses in Winnipeg. Its massiveness and sturdiness appealed to wholesalers looking to promote their businesses and portray the stability of their firms through the design of the structures they occupied.

CONSTRUCTION

The warehouse at 86-88 Princess Street was built in 1887 of solid brick resting on a rubblestone foundation.⁸ Like so many other warehouses in the district, internal support was based on square timber beams and posts. Flooring was wooden and sturdy to withstand the pressure of heavy loads of goods and materials.

The structure was built in two parts. The original section was three storeys in height and measured approximately 10.7 x 27.5 metres (35 x 90 feet), with a heavy, galvanized iron cornice.⁹ In 1892, the building was doubled in size through an addition similar in all aspects to the 1887 section.¹⁰ The original northern exterior brick wall of the warehouse became an internal firewall. The building remained in this form until 1920 when two more storeys were added to the structure. This addition was completed in brick with stone accenting.¹¹ The roof is flat.

DESIGN

As originally designed, the Miller, Morse Warehouse was a very substantial structure for its time, designed along popular lines for like buildings of this era (Plate 3). The ground floor was finished in rusticated stone, ending at the sills of the second-storey windows. The front (east) façade was divided into three vertical bays, expressed on the ground floor by wide arched

⁸ City of Winnipeg Assessment Record, Roll No. 609725, Ward 2, PC 50.

⁹ The Sun, July 21, 1887, p. 4.

¹⁰ The Commercial, Vol. II, February 14, 1893, p. 661.

¹¹ City of Winnipeg Building Permit (below as BP), #197/1920.

openings. The outer two held small basement windows and large, ground floor display windows divided by the heavy stone sills of the display windows. The middle bay of the ground floor held the recessed entrance up a short flight of stairs from grade.

The second and third floors each featured three arched recessed windows, embellished by continuous rusticated stone sills and keystones. Both floors also contained various brick ornamentation – corbelling, quoins and decorative panels. The building was finished by a heavy pedimented cornice with ornate brackets and a brick parapet.

As mentioned previously, the 1892 addition mimicked this original design (Plate 4). The building continued in this form for nearly 30 years (Plate 5) until 1920 when two storeys were added. The new floors were designed to complement rather than copy the lower sections. The fourth-floor windows featured similar arches to those of the third floor, while rectangular openings were placed along the fifth floor. Rather than the heavy cornice and ornamental parapet that had, by 1920, lost its popularity, a plain brick parapet finished the building (Plate 6). Another change to the exterior was the closure of the northern-most entrance in 1945.¹²

The loss of the earlier roofline ornamentation has seriously changed the appearance of this block, although the design features of the lower sections remain intact.

INTERIOR

The original interior of this warehouse was well laid out for carrying on the business of the wholesale trade. The ground floor was divided into an office and sample room at the front, with a vault and packing and loading rooms to the rear. The second-floor walls were lined on both sides with display shelves for general merchandise and the upper floor was used for storage.¹³ The floors were open, bright and spacious.

¹² BP #3050/1945.

¹³ The Sun, July 21, 1887, p. 4.

The interior of the structure has seen many minor changes since it was completed. The most notable are the openings in the party wall that now offer access on all floors (including the basement) with the Mackenzie and Powis Warehouse, 78-84 Princess Street (Plate 7). It is not known when this alteration was completed, although the addresses (78-84 and 86-88) were not combined in the Henderson's Directory until 1976.¹⁴ The actual warehouse space, however, has seen less dramatic alteration. The ground floor has been converted into modern office space, now occupied by the owner's business. All other floors are vacant and have not been partitioned off – leaving the spaces open and uncluttered. Brick exterior and interior walls are exposed on all floors, as are the wooden beams and posts. Carpeting and fluorescent lighting are the most obvious alterations. The original wooden floors of the fourth and fifth storeys are uncovered (Plate 8).

Heat for both buildings (except the fourth floor of 78-84 Princess Street which is unheated) is provided by two boilers located in the basement of the Miller, Morse Warehouse (this system was installed in 1991 after the closure of the City Steam Plant).

The present owner (Earn International Incorporated) bought this building and the warehouse next door (78-84 Princess Street) in November 1997. Because the two are so closely connected (including their heating system), the City of Winnipeg Assessment Department has agreed with the owner's request to treat the structures as a single unit, officially known as 78 Princess Street.¹⁵

INTEGRITY

The warehouse stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition. Alterations described above have changed the original design, although the lower section has not been significantly altered.

¹⁴ Henderson's Directory, 1960-present.

¹⁵ Darren Earn, owner of the building, in conversation with the author, April 14, 1998; and City of Winnipeg Assessment Department.

STREETSCAPE

The Miller, Morse Warehouse is located in the midst of Winnipeg's warehouse district, one of the finest of its kind in North America and recently chosen by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada as a National Historic District. The building's massing and ornamentation are similar to many other neighbouring structures. The warehouse, like all the others in the district, is an integral part of the area (Plates 9 and 10).

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTOR

George Browne (1852-1919) designed this warehouse,¹⁶ one of many fine works he completed in his long career in the city (see Appendix I for biographical information). He was also responsible for the Massey Building, 294 William Avenue, constructed in 1885 (Grade II) and the Mackenzie and Powis Warehouse, formerly 78-84 Princess Street (1891).

He has been given 10 points by the Historical Buildings Committee.

PERSON/INSTITUTION

This warehouse was built for the wholesale hardware firm of Miller, Morse and Company, organized by Hyman Miller and Fred W. and F. Morton Morse in 1881. By 1890, the firm employed two travelling salesmen and a warehouse and office staff of six, and it covered a territory stretching into British Columbia.¹⁷ Two years later, business expansion warranted the doubling of the Princess Street premises.

Within a decade, however, the company was again reaching the limits of its structure's capacity. Rather than make a second addition, the owners decided to build elsewhere, choosing property at the corner of McDermot Avenue and Adelaide Street. In 1904, the massive new headquarters were completed (Plate 11). The Princess Street building was sold to two smaller firms. J. Stuart

¹⁶ City of Winnipeg Plumbing Permit, #118/1891, courtesy of R.R. Rostecki.

¹⁷ Manitoba Free Press, December 20, 1890, p. 12.

Machinery Company, wholesale electrical supplies, and William A. Marsh Company, shoe and boot vendor, purchased the north and south halves respectively.¹⁸ Marsh joined with long-time wholesale shoe merchant Arthur Congdon (Plate 12) in 1914 to form Congdon, Marsh Limited. Congdon, who was born in Nova Scotia in 1863, came west to Winnipeg in 1882 and worked for the Hudson's Bay Company from 1886 to 1895 as a shoe buyer. In 1895 he went into business for himself in a warehouse on Princess Street.¹⁹ After a series of amalgamations, he formed Congdon, Marsh Co., one of the largest firms of its type in the city. The company had ownership of both sections of 86-88 Princess Street by 1920 when the upper two storeys were added. It remained the owner-occupant until the spring of 1974 when it sold the building to the owner of 78-84 Princess Street, C.A. DeFehr and Sons Furniture, a company that had begun in the city in 1925 as importers of German and Swedish cream separators.²⁰ The new owners opened doors between the two warehouses and used them as one structure into the early 1990s.

EVENT

There is no known significant event connected with this building.

CONTEXT

The Miller, Morse Warehouse was built during the very early development of the warehouse district. It highlights the wholesale sector that became such an important springboard for the development of Winnipeg both before and after the turn of the century. The receiving of manufactured goods and perishable items from Eastern Canada and elsewhere and storing, organizing and shipping them to markets in Western Canada became one of the city's chief roles during the modern development of the region west of the Great Lakes.

¹⁸ Manitoba Free Press, March 31, 1905, p. 7; and City of Winnipeg Assessment Roll, No. 609725 and 609740, Ward 2. Below as ARo.

¹⁹ G. Bryce, A History of Manitoba (Toronto:Canada History Company, 1906), p. 426; and Pioneers and Prominent People of Manitoba (Winnipeg: Canadian Publicity Co., 1924), p. 145.

²⁰ ARo; and Winnipeg Tribune, May 18, 1957, p. 7.

The building was associated for long periods of its history with two major wholesaling firms, both expanding their business to the point where additions to the warehouse were necessary. This is another example of the type of success that was so common in Winnipeg's wholesale sector during this period.

This structure is one of a group of pre-1895 structures left in the Exchange District. Other early warehouses include:

Albert Street, 70 – Telegram Building, 1882 (Grade II)
 Bannatyne Avenue, 137 – Swiss Building, 1882 (Grade III)
 Bannatyne Avenue, 291 – Sanford Building (Old Spaghetti Factory), 1890 (Grade II)
 McDermot Avenue, 173 – Mitchell Block (Grange Building), 1886 (Grade III)
 McDermot Avenue, 217-23 – Bate Building, 1883 (Grade II)
 McDermot Avenue, 246-48 – Sures Building, 1882 (Grade III)
 Princess Street, 72-74 – I.O.O.F. Hall, 1883 (Grade III)
 Princess Street, 78-84 – Mackenzie and Powis Warehouse, 1891 (Inventory)
 Princess Street, 103 – Galt Block, 1887 (Inventory)
 Princess Street, 104-08 – Warehouse, 1885 (Grade III)
 Princess Street, 154 – Hochman Building, 1882 (Grade III)
 William Avenue, 294-96 – Massey Building, 1885 (Grade II)

LANDMARK

This warehouse is located near a busy corner at the intersection of two of the Exchange District's major arteries and has been an important part of this nationally recognized Historic District for over a century.

APPENDIX I

George Creeford Browne

George Browne was born in Montreal in 1852, the son of architect George Browne, a prominent designer and major real estate holder. After finishing high school, he immediately went to work in his father's office. At the age of eighteen, he went to New York and worked for Russell Sturgis, one of that city's leading architects. After three years, Browne resigned and left for Europe to study design history.¹

He spent over three years in England, Ireland, France, Italy and Switzerland, and won an international design competition in England. He returned to Montreal in 1877² and in 1879 he inexplicably gave up architecture to homestead on 129.5 ha (320 acres) of land in the Tiger Hills district south of Holland, Manitoba.³

Browne moved to Winnipeg in 1882⁴ and set up a private architectural practice. He continued to design buildings throughout Manitoba and Western Canada into the new century, although by 1904 City of Winnipeg, Building Permits show little work attributed to his office. In 1907, he had his name officially changed from George Browne to George Creeford Browne.⁵ His work ranged from small houses and cottages to major office structures and warehouses. He moved to New York City ca. 1910.⁶ Perhaps his two most famous designs were the Public Market Building behind City Hall, built in 1889-90 (demolished in 1964), and Wesley College (University of Winnipeg), Portage

¹ G. Bryce, A History of Manitoba (Toronto: The Canada History Company, 1906), pp. 483-84.

² W.P. Thompson, "Browne, George, Jr." The Canadian Encyclopedia (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1988), Volume 1, p. 289.

³ Winnipeg Daily Tribune, August 1, 1891, p. 13.

⁴ Men of Canada, p. 222 (unidentified article in the Department of Culture and Heritage, Historic Resources Branch files).

⁵ Statutes of Manitoba, 1907, Chapter 51, p. 11 (Historic Resources Branch files).

⁶ W.P. Thompson, op. cit., p. 289.

Avenue, built in 1895 and still standing. He died in South Nyack, New York on March 12, 1919.⁷

A list of his varied work includes:⁸

Massey Building, 294 William Avenue, 1885, Grade II
Miller, Morse and Co. Warehouse, 86 Princess Street, 1887
City of Winnipeg, Public Market Building, City Hall, 1889-90 – demolished
Mackenzie and Powis Warehouse, 78 Princess Street, 1891
Euclid (or North Central) School, Euclid Avenue, 1892 - demolished
Manitoba College, major addition, Broadway, 1892 - demolished
Mulvey School, Broadway, 1893 (and 1895 replacement)- both demolished
Aberdeen School, Salter Street, 1893 - demolished
Court House and Jail, PORTAGE LA PRAIRIE, 1894-95
Mulvey School, Broadway, 1895 - demolished
Masonic Temple (Mother Tucker's Restaurant), 335 Donald Street, 1895
Presbyterian Indian Mission residence, REGINA, 1895
Presbyterian Indian Mission residence, PORTAGE LA PRAIRIE, 1895
Hudson's Bay Co. store, CALGARY, 1895
Hudson's Bay Co. store, PORTAGE LA PRAIRIE, 1895
Hudson's Bay Co. warehouse, York Avenue at Fort Street, 1895
Wesley College (University of Winnipeg), with S.F. Peters, 1895
Trust and Loan Co. Building, Portage Avenue, 1898
Victoria Jubilee Wing, Winnipeg General Hospital, 1898
Strevel Terrace, Donald Street, 1899 - demolished
Union Bank, NEPEAWA, ca. 1899
Young Men's Christian Association Building (Birk's Building), 276 Portage Ave., 1900 (Grade II)
Gault Building, 92-104 Arthur Street, 1900, Grade II
Gurney Foundry Co. warehouse, Owen (McDermot) Avenue, 1902
Strathcona Block, Main corner Broadway, 1902-03 - demolished
American Able Machinery Company, Dufferin Avenue - warehouse, 1902; factory, 1902-03; and offices and warehouse, 1903
Hudson's Bay Co. stables, York Avenue, 1903
Forman Block, Fort Street, 1903
Toronto Type Foundry warehouse, major addition, 175 McDermot Avenue, 1904 (Grade III)

⁷ Ibid., p. 289.

⁸ This list is compiled from: personal files of the author; various local newspapers' building issues, 1879-1911; Canadian Architect and Builder, 1896-99; City of Winnipeg, Building Permits, 1899-1904; Giles Bugailiskis, "Quiet Dignity," unpublished Master of Arts Thesis, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, 1990, p. 156; and files of the City of Winnipeg, Heritage Planner.



CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report

Assessment Record

Building Address: 78 Princess Street (formerly 86-88) Building Name: Miller, Morse Warehouse

Original Use: warehouse

Current Use: warehouse

Roll No. (Old): 609725 (10130)

Municipality: 12

Ward: 2

Property or Occupancy Code: 50

Legal Description: 6/7^W St. John, Plan 16, Block B, east ½ of Lots 5 and 6

Location: west side between McDermot and Bannatyne avenues

Date of Construction: 1887

Storeys: 5 and basement

Construction Type: solid brick and stone foundation

Building Permits (Plans available: [A] Archives; [M] Microfilm; [V] Vault):

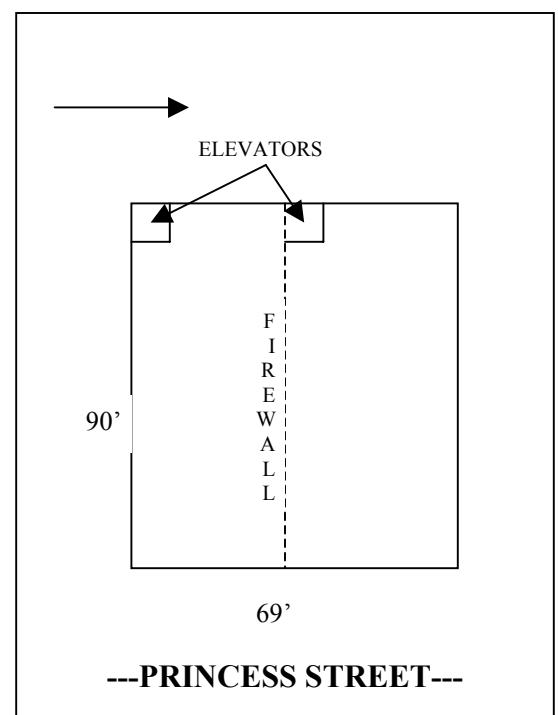
- 197/1920 \$25,000 (2 storey addition); 3050/1945 (sills of front 4 windows replaced, new entrance);
3749/1974 \$30,000 (office alterations)

Information:

- 69 x 90 x 68 + = 425,360 cu. ft.

- when central heating plant was shut down in 1991, new gas boiler system was installed in 86 Princess St. and used to heat the basement and first 3 floors of 78-84 Princess St. (no heat to top floor)

- north wall shared with 86 Princess Street



78 PRINCESS STREET – MILLER, MORRIS WAREHOUSE



Plate 1 – McDermot Avenue looking west from Main Street, ca.1881. Note the extensive number of homes in the area. (Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)



Plate 2 – The same view of McDermot Avenue as in Plate 1. This ca.1910 photograph shows the change in the area over 30 years. (Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

78 PRINCESS STREET – MILLER, MORSE WAREHOUSE

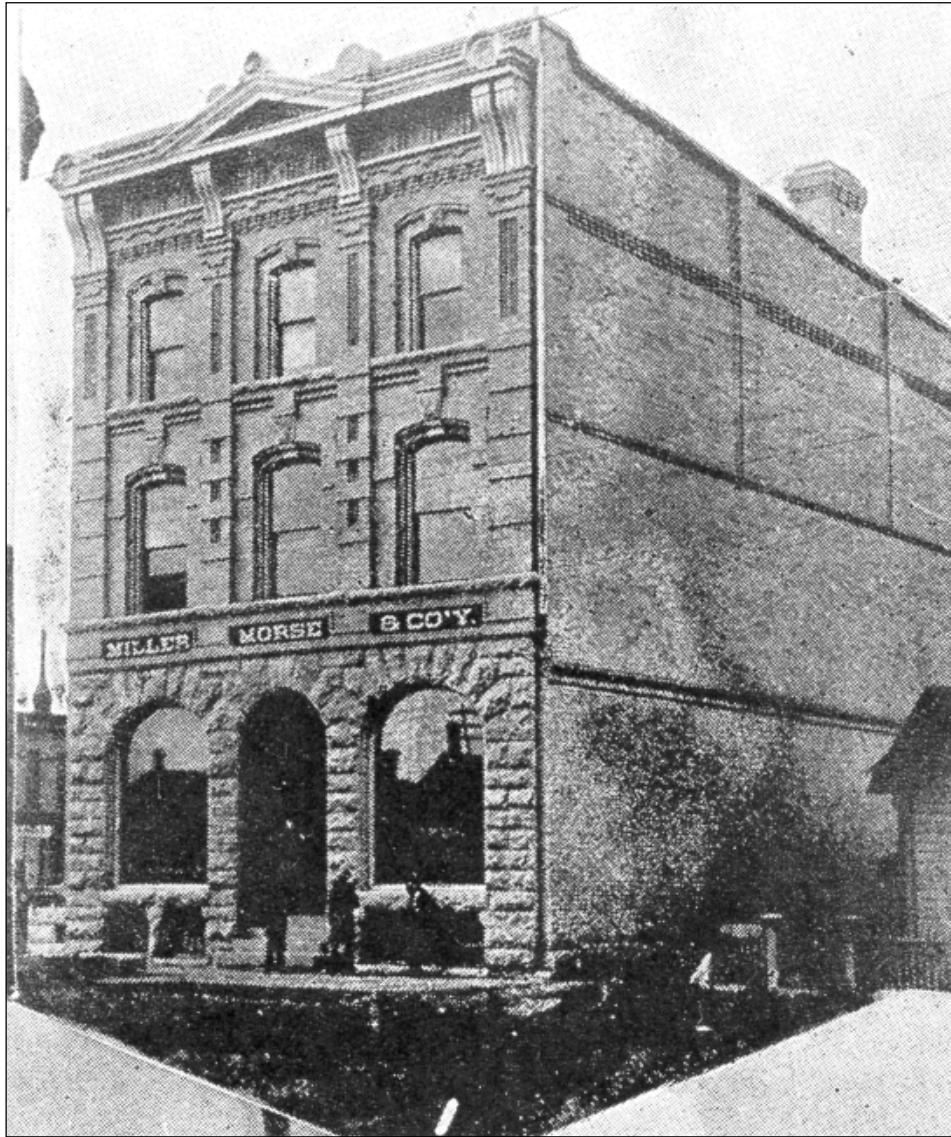


Plate 3 – Miller, Morse Warehouse, 86 Princess Street, 1891. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

78 PRINCESS STREET – MILLER, MORSE WAREHOUSE

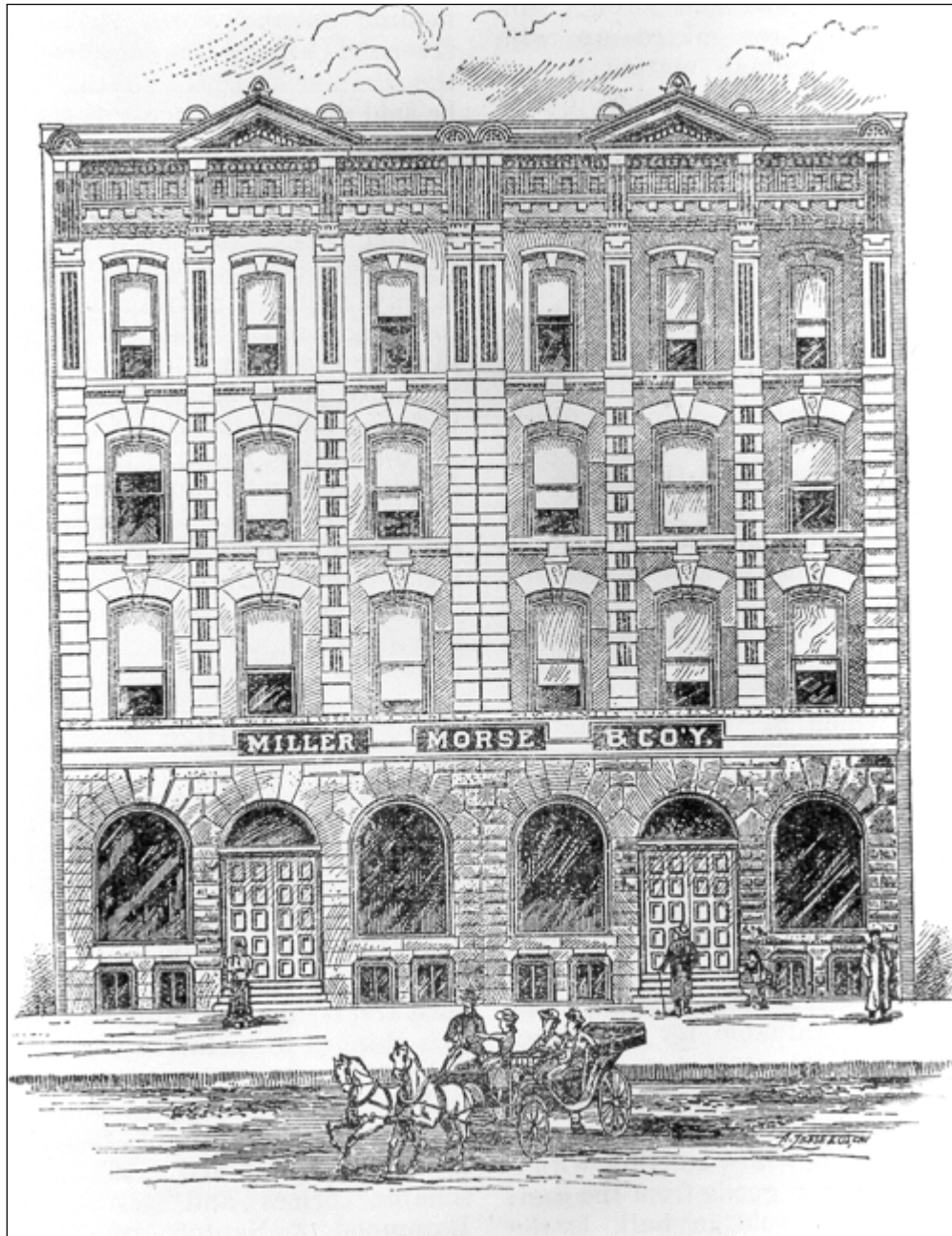


Plate 4 – Sketch of Miller, Morse Warehouse, 86 Princess Street, 1893. As often occurred in this period, this sketch included a fourth floor that was not actually present. (Courtesy of the [Provincial Archives of Manitoba.](#))

78 PRINCESS STREET – MILLER, MORSE WAREHOUSE

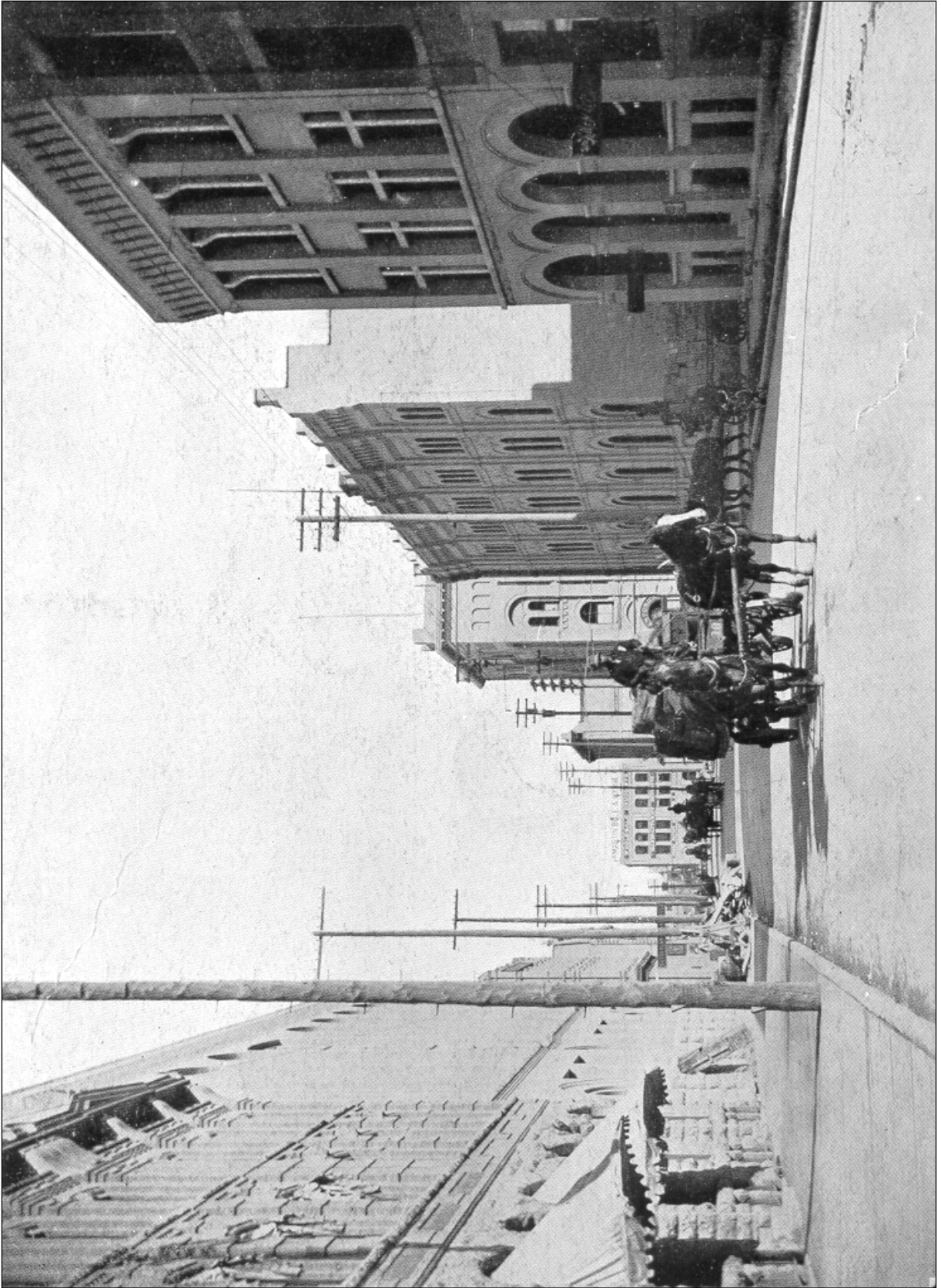


Plate 5 – Princess Street looking north from McDermot Avenue, ca.1903. The Miller, Morse Warehouse is on the left hand side of the photograph. (M. Peterson Collection.)

78 PRINCESS STREET – MILLER, MORSE WAREHOUSE



Plate 6 – 78 (86-88) Princess Street, front (east) façade. (M. Peterson, 1998.)

78 PRINCESS STREET – MILLER, MORSE WAREHOUSE



Plate 7 – Fourth floor interior doorway leading from former 78-84 to 86-88 Princess Street. (M. Peterson, 1998.)



Plate 8 – Fourth floor space in former 86-88 Princess Street. (M. Peterson, 1998.)

78 PRINCESS STREET – MILLER, MORSE WAREHOUSE



Plate 9 – Princess Street looking north from McDermot Avenue. (M. Peterson, 1998.)



Plate 10 – Princess Street looking south from Bannatyne Avenue. (M. Peterson, 1998.)

78 PRINCESS STREET – MILLER, MORSE WAREHOUSE

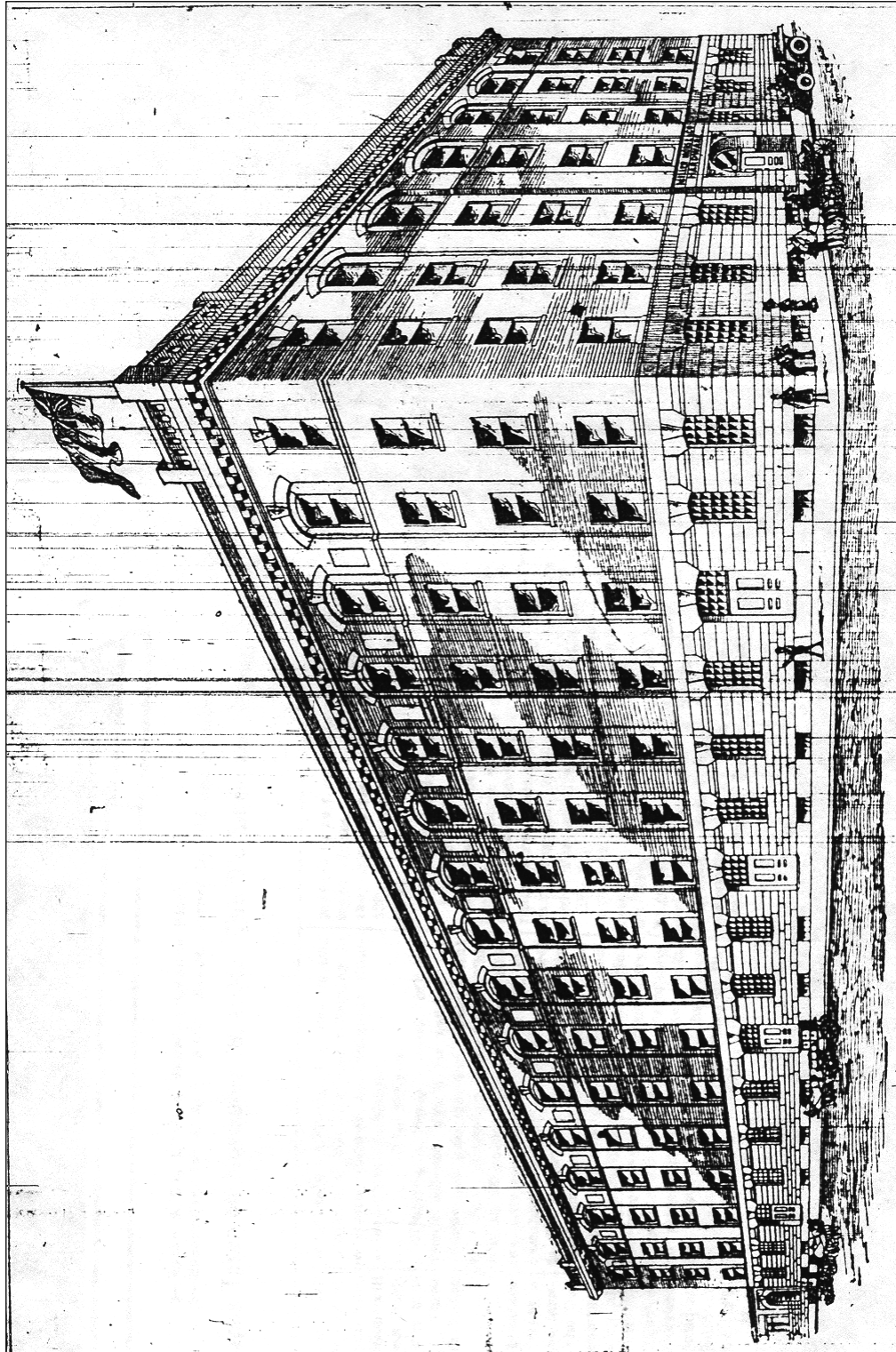


Plate 11 – Miller, Morse Warehouse, 317 McDermot Avenue, built in 1904, J.H. Cadham, architect. (Reproduced from Manitoba Free Press, November 24, 1904, p. 18)

78 PRINCESS STREET – MILLER, MORSE WAREHOUSE

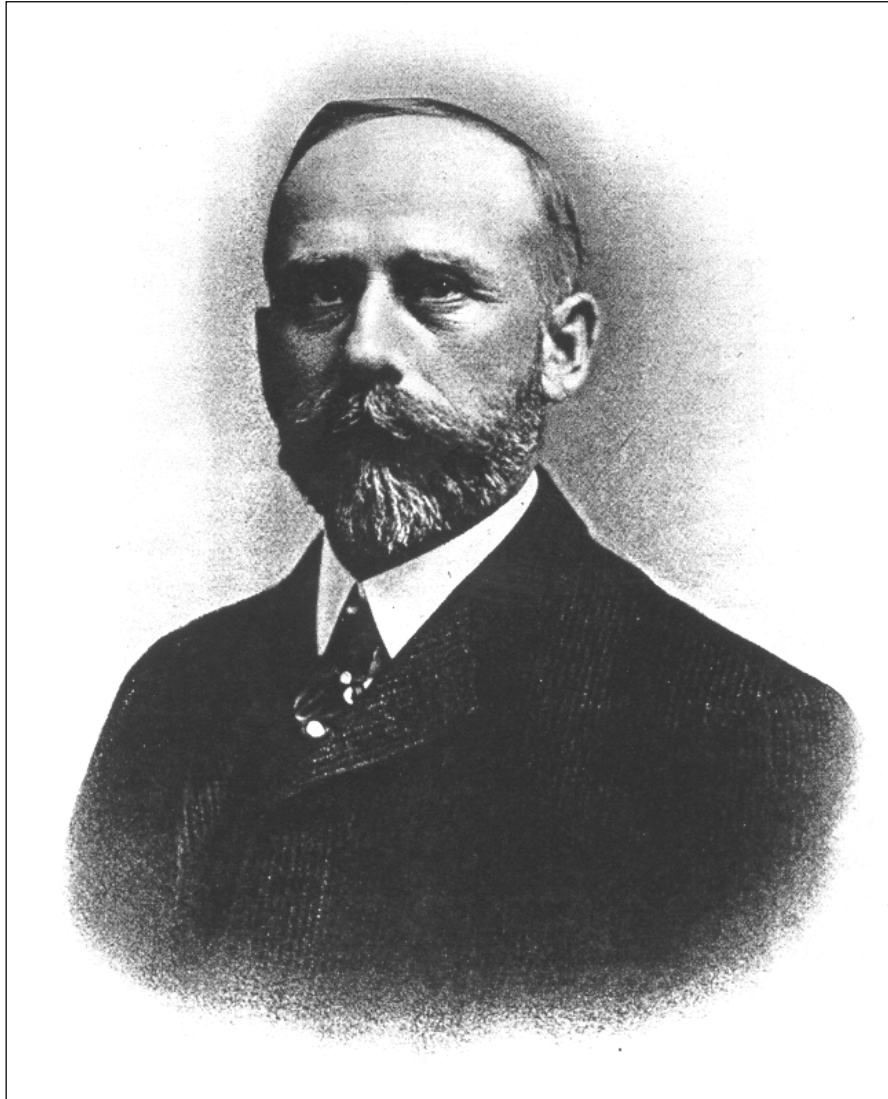


Plate 12 – Arthur Congdon, president of Congdon, Marsh Company, wholesale shoes and boots.
(Reproduced from G. Bryce, *A History of Manitoba*, p. 426.)