

180 SINCLAIR STREET – FIRE HALL NO. 11 (FIRE HALL NO. 7)
A.R. and W.N. Melville, 1910



This two-storey, solid brick building at the northwest corner of Sinclair Street and Pritchard Avenue is one of the more modest survivors out of 13 fire halls established by the City of Winnipeg in the decade leading up to World War I.

During that era, the city's population tripled and its physical fabric underwent extensive redevelopment and expansion. In particular, the built-up area north of the Canadian Pacific Railway Yards pushed rapidly outward to the west and north. The district filled with new houses, commercial buildings, schools, churches, clubs, factories, a police substation, telephone exchange, public library, swimming pool, and a branch of the Young Men's Christian Association.

Fire Hall No. 11 symbolized the pace and density of development. It was the second fire station to be built in the North End within a six-year period; as well, it was only about 10 blocks southwest of

the first hall at Burrows Avenue and Aikins Street.

All facilities in the pre-war series were based on a standard design prepared for the Fire Department by architects Alexander R. and William N. Melville. Winnipeg was among several North American centres that opted for common fire hall plans as a cost-efficient response to public demands for improved protection and for facilities adapted to contemporary fire-fighting methods and equipment.

The hall at 180 Sinclair is a simplified version of the Melville plan. Built by John Saul at a cost of \$14,000, it rises from a stone foundation to a cream-coloured brick superstructure and hip roof with gable dormers. A square tower extends 21.05 metres (69 feet) above the southwest corner, while a one-storey former stable is attached to the rear.

The front (east) façade displays Richardsonian Romanesque details, including a rusticated base, an arched pedestrian entrance, and three large vehicle doorways, also set in round arches ornamented by brick keystones and drip moulding. The garage doors have been modernized, but their multipaned transoms remain intact. This facing also features corbelled brick accents, segmentally arched second-storey windows with continuous rough-cut stone lug sills, and an oculus ringed by four brick keystones.

The hose-drying tower contains several windows of various sizes and shapes, some set in round arches, others with rectangular heads. Stone sills and lintels, corbelled brick arches and panels, a heavy cornice, and a stone-capped crenellated parapet also adorn this element.

Inside the station, pressed tin ceilings are still evident on the main and second storeys. The upper level is divided into bedrooms, offices, small common room, and a bathroom, while the rear stable has been converted to kitchen and storage use. One of two metal poles used by firemen for quick access to the main floor no longer is operative. As well, the tower has been condemned above the second storey.

Like its pre-war counterparts, 180 Sinclair (now Fire Hall No. 7) was a welcome addition to the

City's public service infrastructure. Stations built in the 1880s, when the Fire Department became a full-time paid force, had been criticized for poor stable and equipment storage arrangements, plus inadequate living quarters for firemen who spent most of their time on site and on call. The Melvilles' design responded to issues such as these, not only in the early 1900s, but also in succeeding decades as their stations proved adaptable to subsequent equipment and staffing changes.

The fire halls also became a defining aspect of the Melville brothers' professional partnership from c.1904 to c.1913. Many of their other co-designs (e.g., residential structures, movie theatres and a dance hall) no longer exist. Moreover, the two went separate ways shortly after their last fire stations were built. William left Winnipeg, while Alexander (1873-1949) continued to practise locally into the 1940s.