

293 KENNEDY STREET – I.O.O.F. TEMPLE
J. Chisholm and Son, 1909-1910



The Independent Order of Odd Fellows (I.O.O.F.) is a fraternal organization that was formed in early 18th century England by artisans and common labourers who were left out of the established guild system which offered fellowship and protection to its members. Each member paid weekly dues that were pooled and dispersed to other fellows in need: family men suddenly out of work, heads of families disabled by ill health or accident, widows, the orphaned families of deceased brothers.

The first Winnipeg lodge of Odd Fellowship was established in the summer of 1873. A membership count, published thirteen years later, showed thirteen subordinate lodges with 1,000 members for all of Manitoba, comprised of working-class people and small businessmen.

The first Oddfellows Hall built in Winnipeg was completed in 1883, on the southwest corner of Princess Street and McDermot Avenue and was used by the many Oddfellow lodges that had organized by this time.

In 1907, under the leadership of Captain Harper Wilson, an Irish-born retired officer from the American Civil War, Minnehaha Lodge No. 7 purchased a lot on the east side of Kennedy Street, just north of Portage Avenue and presented it to the I.O.O.F. Association.

Three years later, the Order's new Temple was officially opened. The finely designed main façade was built of red brick with lightly hued limestone accenting. The design and ornamentation are excellent examples of the Neo-Classical or Classical Revival style, popular in North America for public buildings or all sizes.

The firm of James Chisholm and Son (Colin C.) were hired to draw up plans for the building. James Chisholm had come to Winnipeg in 1877 and became identified with local architectural interests. After nearly a decade in the United States beginning in 1892, Chisholm returned to Winnipeg in 1900 where he would work until a move to California for health reasons in 1914. His son, Colin C., joined his father's firm ca.1906 and eventually took over the practice. A list of their designs is lengthy and includes many fine buildings, including: Young Methodist (United) Church, 222 Furby Street (1907, 1910); Sterling Bank Building, 283 Portage Avenue (1910-1911) – List of Historical Resources; and Marlborough Hotel, 331 Smith Street (1913) – Grade II.

Built by prominent contractor S.B. Ritchie at a cost of \$43,000, the cornerstone was laid in 1909 with the formal opening in the spring of 1910.

An elaborate entranceway is articulated by a projecting stone cornice supported by large brackets. Egg and dart motif molding emphasizes the main doorway. Six colossal pilasters with stylized capitals support a full entablature and a balustrade. Rectangular panels with the letters F, L and T on the façade, represent the golden rule of the order: friendship, love and truth.

The new temple, with its numerous halls, served as a meeting place for many lodges, such as the Eureka Encampment, Hiawatha Lodge, Florence Nightingale Rebekah Lodge and the Olive Branch Rebekah Lodge, all of whom shared the space on a regular basis. Numerous other organizations, such as the airline Mechanics' Union, the Ladies Brotherhood of Engineers and the Manitoba Telephone Workers' Union also rented hall space for meetings.

A fire, in January 1946, gutted the interior of the building, destroying the records and regalia of many lodges and organizations. No structural damage occurred and new meeting rooms and halls were quickly rebuilt.

In 1985, as the north side of Portage Avenue was undergoing significant redevelopment in the Portage Place Mall, the front façade of the Temple was dismantled. In 1987, it was reassembled as a retail entrance on the north side of the Mall.