

290 VAUGHAN STREET – PUBLIC PRESS BUILDING (ROBINSON BUILDING)
John Woodman and A.E. Cubbidge, 1917; A.E. Cubbidge, 1927



Though located in an urban environment, the Public Press Building on the west side of Vaughan Street between Portage and Ellice avenues represents a key participant in the agricultural development and politics of rural Western Canada.

That participant was The Grain Growers' Guide, a publication founded in 1908 by the Grain Growers' Grain Company, a farmers' cooperative, and edited by George F. Chipman who was active in the Progressive political movement.

The Guide advocated public policies and economic initiatives which supported agrarian values and greater farmer control over the agricultural economy. It also gave wide circulation to information on advances in plant genetics, farming methods, stock breeding and farm technology, and on crop and market trends. Social news, household hints and a children's section rounded out its weekly contents.

The publication's roots and influence were centred in Western Canada but The Guide also circulated in Central and Eastern Canada. Its owner, known later as the United Grain Growers, was established in 1905-06. Assisted by provincial governments, the cooperative soon was operating a series of country and terminal elevators in competition with private grain traders.

Chipman, editor of The Guide from 1911 to 1935, and T.A. Crerar, president of the cooperative from 1907 to 1930, promoted United Farmers' governments in Ontario, Manitoba and Alberta, and election of 65 Progressive to Parliament in 1921. Crerar led the federal Progressives, later becoming a Liberal cabinet minister and senator. Chipman was closely involved in the electoral success of the United Farmers of Manitoba in 1922.

The Public Press Limited was formed in 1909 as a subsidiary to provide the grain cooperative with internal capacity to print The Guide and other materials. When the original plant on Sherbrook Street became too small, Public Press moved in 1917 to this new building, designed by Winnipeg architects John Woodman and A.E. Cubbidge, and constructed by J. McDiarmid and Company at a cost of \$110,750.

Woodman, formerly chief engineer of Canadian Pacific Railway's western division, established his practice in 1921 and, alone or in partnership, designed the Somerset, Lindsay, Paris and Free Press buildings, T. Eaton Company track warehouse on Alexander Avenue, and Hudson's Bay Company wholesale headquarters on Main Street. Cubbidge specialized in residential architecture.

The building originally was two storeys high with a raised basement to house heavy printing equipment. Cubbidge designed a third-floor addition in 1927. It was built by Borrowman and Jamieson for \$38,000. A penthouse addition and building alterations also occurred in 1947.

The foundation is concrete and stone; the walls are reinforced concrete with brown brick on the façade and sides, and rough white brick on the rear elevation. The south side has a set-back in the middle with skylights over the ground-floor section.

Tower-like projections, rising above the roof-line with stone-capped pediments, highlight each corner. Both corners of the front elevation have entrances stretching the height of the raised basement and first floor. The entrances are framed in limestone and brick, and topped by large lit transoms and segmented arches.

Limestone is used in the trim above and below flat-headed windows, and in a band across the façade between the first and second floors. Carved stone detailing and skillful brick work provide subtle ornamentation on the upper floors.

In 1926, The Guide became a semi-monthly publication. Two years later, its name was changed to The Country Guide. A new subsidiary, called Rapid Grip and Batten, was formed in the 1930s of commercial artists, photographers and photo-engravers.

Public Press relocated in the late 1950s to an industrial area in St. James. The Vaughan Street building was occupied by Sidney I. Robinson Sporting Goods and S.I. Robinson Furs. Other tenants have included optical, architectural, trophy and handicraft firms.