



340 VAUGHAN STREET
RALEIGH APARTMENTS

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee

January 1997

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The high good times of the pre-[First World] war West never came back to the Prairies. But, if Winnipeg's economic foundations were beginning to crack, no surface manifestations of the fact appeared in the 1920s. There has always been an ebullience about Winnipeg that the worst climate in Christendom could never suppress, a sort of what-the-hell optimism that keeps its attention permanently focused on the bright side.¹

To continue Mr. Gray's analogy, the cracking of the economic foundation of the 1920s would certainly lead to a crumbling superstructure in the 1930s. Yet Winnipeg's businessmen and leaders were still exhibiting some of that "what-the-hell optimism" in 1930 and 1931 despite the ever-increasing downward spin of North America's economy.

On the local construction scene, as the Depression worsened, governments moved in to organize and fund projects like bridges and the Winnipeg Civic Auditorium (now the Provincial Archives of Manitoba/Legislative Library Building). These undertakings were designed to put citizens to work contributing to the public infrastructure. Private construction also continued, although the number of cancelled permits in the City of Winnipeg Permit Books rose steadily in 1931 and 1932.

One 1931 project that did not get cancelled was a large, 37-suite, three-storey apartment block located at the corner of Vaughan Street and Ellice Avenue in the heart of Winnipeg's downtown. It was originally owned by Smith Agencies, the present-day property managers, and was completed late that same year.

¹ James H. Gray, The Winter Years (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1966), p. 4.

STYLE

The flat wall surfaces of the Raleigh Apartments, the use of geometric accents and low-relief ornamentation, and the vertical arrangement of windows and other components are all elements associated with the Art-Deco style that became popular on the North American scene from the late 1920s to the 1940s. It was a conscious attempt by architects to reject the simple re-creation of historical styles and elements that had been the rule previously.² First publicized at an exposition in Paris in 1925, the style soon caught on especially for the design of new high-rise structures in many North American cities.³

The style is distinguishable by its flat, sharp edges and low-relief ornamentation, often with unique motifs: geometrical (zigzags, chevrons, stripes); naturalistic (waves, animals, water falls); and/or man-made (bridges, machines, airplanes). These decorative themes first appeared in interior design and jewellery. But they soon found expression in architecture, giving small and large structures a streamlined visage that represented a more modern and futuristic approach. Vertical emphasis was added through the use of straight-headed windows and other elements arranged in bays.⁴

In Winnipeg, more pronounced examples of the style include the Winnipeg Civic Auditorium, 200 Vaughan Street (1932), the Federal Building, 269 Main Street (1935), and the former Canadian General Electric Building, 265 Notre Dame Avenue (1930), designated Grade III (1987).

CONSTRUCTION

The Raleigh Apartments are built of solid, 30.5-cm (12-inch) brick exterior walls resting on a concrete foundation. Interior walls dividing suites and lining the corridors are 22.9 cm (9 inches).⁵ Red face brick is the main construction material on the front (east) and side façades (Plates 1 and 2)

² Historic Resources Branch, Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg: Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, 1991), p. 30.

³ L. Maitland, et al., A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles (Toronto: Broadview Press, 1992), p. 139.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁵ Architect's Plans, #205/1931 (below as Plans), "First Floor Plan," City of Winnipeg Archives.

as well as a small section at the south end of the rear (west) elevation (Plate 3). The balance of the rear façade is comprised of common clay brick. All brick is laid in the common bond pattern - every sixth course consisting of headers, the other courses being stretchers.

Other construction material includes stucco on the top floor, Tyndall stone accents along the roofline and around windows and doors, dark brick to highlight window openings, and wrought iron above the east and south entrances.

The U-shaped, three-storey structure measures approximately 39.3 x 21.0 x 12.2 m (129 x 69 x 40 feet) and provides over 10,000 cu. m (281,520 cu. feet) of useable space.⁶

DESIGN

The architect chose to ornament the very flat surfaces of the main façades with a wealth of multi-coloured building materials. The walls of the raised basement, first and second floors are finished in a rust-coloured brick, the upper floor by a textured, beige-coloured stucco. Panels of this stucco are also found between first and second-floor windows on the south and east façades.

Darker brick is used on the three main elevations to highlight windows openings and as belt courses at the first and third storeys. These bands of brick also reduce the boxy, squat appearance of the structure by emphasizing vertical elements. This includes vertical bands at the corners and similar strips rising from the three entrances to the roof. The roof is finished with a dark brick parapet that is capped with stone and raised slightly above the entrance and double window bays. Stone is also used around windows and in low-relief carved detailing at all corners.

The paired and single windows, also arranged to increase vertical expression, are finished in a variety of manners, including stone lug sills, dark brick heads and brick frames. Windowless bays with stone and dark brick accents are located at the north and south ends of the front façade. Dark

⁶ City of Winnipeg Assessment Roll, Roll No. 525250 & 525251.

brick belt courses below the first and third-floor windows act as continuous sills.

The main elevation is symmetrical, while the entrance door bays of the two side façades are placed slightly to the rear (west). The most ornamental elements on all façades are the entrances. All three feature a brick or stone panel above the doors with the inscription, "The Raleigh" (Plates 4 and 5).⁷ The Vaughan Street (east) and Webb Place (south) entrances are framed by heavy smooth-stone pillars that give way to dark brick pilasters running to the roofline and finished by carved stone heads. Stone arches connect these pilasters at the level of the third-floor windows and shallow wrought-iron fencing gives the impression of balconies on the first floors. The Ellice Avenue (north) entrance is much simpler, with dark brick rather than stone detailing. This door was intended for deliveries, therefore not requiring the same level of finish.⁸

INTERIOR

Original plans for the block describe a central corridor, 1.5 m (5 feet) wide, off of which led ten suites per floor, except in the basement where heating and storage space reduced the number to seven. Each of the upper floors contained a small, 20.8-square-metre (224-square-foot) one-room suite (no kitchen), one suite with no bedroom but a kitchen and dinette, six one-bedroom suites (with eat-in kitchens), one suite with two bedrooms and an eat-in kitchen, and one suite with one bedroom and a dining-room off an oversized kitchen area (Plate 6).

Access to individual units could not be gained, but hallways and stairwells lean towards austerity of ornamentation and sturdiness of finish. A unique feature was a small delivery door, since closed in, that gave direct access from the corridor to the kitchen for nearly every suite (Plate 7).

⁷ The original plans for the building, drawn in December 1930, have the block named "The Paramount," but by February 1931 when the Building Permit is filled out, the block had become "The Raleigh."

⁸ Plans, "First Floor Plans." This door was called a "Trades' Entry."

INTEGRITY

The building stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition. According to City of Winnipeg Assessment Records, alterations to the original building have been minor.⁹

STREETSCAPE

The Raleigh Apartments stand at the north end of Vaughan Street. A newer seniors' housing complex is located directly across the street. Other nearby structures include Isbister School (310 Vaughan Street), built 1898-99, the Y.M.C.A. Building (301 Vaughan Street), built 1911-13, the Y.W.C.A. (447 Webb Place), built 1967-68, and the Public Press Building (290-92 Vaughan Street), built 1917. The first two structures have been designated Grade II by the City of Winnipeg's Historical Buildings Committee; the third and fourth have not been brought before the Committee.

This part of Vaughan Street features a number of very different structures (in terms of use, style and scale) from very different eras. This apartment block bridges the gap between the highly-ornamental, smaller-scale designs of the pre-World War I era and more simplistic, large-scale high-rises of the more modern period.

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTOR

This block was designed by James W. Hawker a British-trained architect who came to Winnipeg in the early 1920s. Hawker began his career in England and partnered with A.A. Oakden of Eastbourne and Bexhill from 1900-05. For the next eight years he worked in the Brighton-Seaford-Portsmouth area, first in the firm Hawker and Clover (1905-10) and then on his own. In 1913 he came to Canada and in April 1921 requested membership in the Manitoba Association of Architects (MAA). He joined in January of 1922.¹⁰

⁹ City of Winnipeg Building Permits listed against the property include the addition of concrete piles in 1936 (Permit #2535) and 1938 (#2789) and \$12,000 of fire upgrading in 1980 (#7795).

¹⁰ "Hawker, James," file at the offices of the Manitoba Association of Architects.

Hawker's first job in the city seems to have been as the chief draughtsman for James Chisholm and Son, although he quickly set up his own architectural practice. Hawker was named president of the MAA for 1930 and 1931 and, after travelling to England on an extended trip in 1935, decided to remain there.¹¹

Another structure designed by Hawker was "The Wiltshire Apartments" on Spence Street. It was built in 1930 overlooking the Assiniboine River. Oddly enough, like the Raleigh Apartments, this block was renamed between its design and its opening, appearing in original plans as "The Riverbend." It too exhibits the low-relief ornamentation of the Vaughan Street block and has similar materials and accents (Plates 8 and 9). Hawker also designed the Tudor-style John A. Forlong House at 295 Dromore Avenue, built in 1928 at a cost of \$35,000.¹²

A survey of City of Winnipeg Building Permits for 1920-26 yields only a small amount of work credited to Hawker:

- City Dray Co. garage, Rupert Avenue, \$16,000 (1923 - Permit #284)
- business block (A.R. McNichol, owner), William Avenue corner Princess Street, \$45,000 alteration (1923 - Permit #534)
- retail block, 377 Portage Avenue, \$14,000 alteration (1926 - Permit #621)

This is the first structure designed by James W. Hawker to be reviewed by City of Winnipeg's Historical Buildings Committee.

PERSON

The building was originally owned and managed by the Smith Agencies, which continues to do business in the city. This firm, founded in 1910 by brothers Captain Wilson (1880-1955) and Benjamin Billingsley (1882-1975) Smith, began as a general insurance company. B.B. Smith came

¹¹ Ibid.; and "Notes," Royal Architectural Institute of Canada Journal, XII, 10 (October 1935), p. 174.

to Winnipeg in 1902 from New Carlisle in the southern Gaspé Peninsula region of Quebec.¹³ After working in a number of offices, he eventually made a name for himself in the insurance business. At that time, his elder brother was commanding the Canadian Steamship Lines' "Empress of Ireland" back and forth across the Atlantic Ocean.¹⁴ Seeing an opportunity, the younger Smith convinced his brother to leave the ocean, relocate in Winnipeg and open an insurance company, which they did in 1910.

The company enjoyed immediate success from its offices in the now- demolished Child's Building.¹⁵ The insurance company quickly established a number of professional ties with several of the city's contracting firms. The builders would work dawn to dusk during Manitoba's short construction season and vacation in warmer climes in the winter. Because many of them maintained ownership of their office and apartment blocks, they sought agents to manage the holdings in their absence. Smith Agencies became well-known property managers and presently 98% of their business involves this type of work.¹⁶

The Raleigh was owned by Smith Agencies until 1984 when the block, along with several other structures in the area, was expropriated and turned over to the North Portage Development Corporation.

Tenants of the block have come from a wide range of lifestyles, yet interestingly enough, during its first 30 years, more women, single and married, are listed as tenants than men. One possible explanation is that many of the women wished to live close to the Y.W.C.A. on Webb Place to take advantage of its programs and facilities. Tenants worked as accountants, salesmen, clerks, railway

¹² Manitoba Free Press, May 12, 1928, p. 36 and June 16, 1928, p. 17.

¹³ Winnipeg Tribune, April 4, 1975.

¹⁴ Winnipeg Free Press, June 11, 1955.

¹⁵ Ian Plant, employee of Smith Agencies, in conversation with the author, October 2, 1996. Mr. Plant, the son-in-law of B.B. Smith, stated that the company was the last original tenant of the Child's (McArthur) Building to vacate prior to its demolition.

¹⁶ Ibid.

company employees and secretaries, mostly junior office staff in nearby business blocks.¹⁷ According to Smith Agencies personnel, suites are rarely vacant.¹⁸

EVENT

There is no known significant event connected with this structure.

CONTEXT

The Raleigh Apartments were built at the beginning of one of the worst economic periods in history. All of Canada suffered through the Great Depression of the 1930s as unemployment skyrocketed and prices dropped. The construction of this block illustrates why apartment blocks were so popular in Winnipeg after 1900 as an investment and place of residence. Even as the economy showed signs of collapse, this well-designed, modestly finished block in a central location attracted both the necessary capital for its construction and the necessary tenants to make it viable.

LANDMARK

The Raleigh is one of dozens of modestly adorned, three-storey brick apartment blocks that dot streets from one end of the city to the other. While its colouring adds to its visual impact, it would not be considered a highly conspicuous structure.

¹⁷ Henderson's Directory, 1935-55.

¹⁸ I. Plant interview, op. cit.

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Plate 1 – Raleigh Apartments, 340 Vaughan Street, front (east) and north façades. (Murray Peterson, 1996.)



Plate 2 – Raleigh Apartments, 340 Vaughan Street, south façade. (Murray Peterson, 1996.)

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Plate 3 – Raleigh Apartments, 340 Vaughan Street, rear (west) façade. (Murray Peterson, 1996.)



Plate 4 – Raleigh Apartments, 340 Vaughan Street, main (east) entrance. (Murray Peterson, 1996.)

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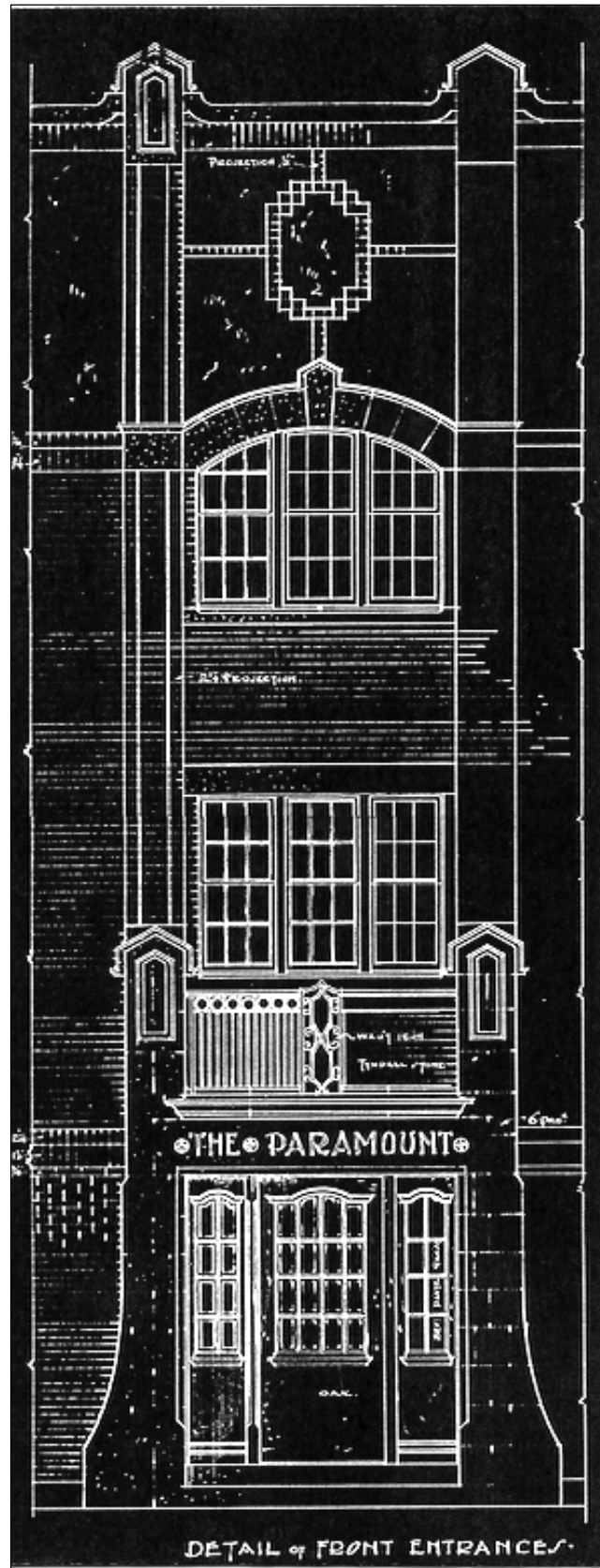


Plate 5 – Raleigh Apartments, 340 Vaughan Street, plans of main entrance with the original name “The Paramount.” (Courtesy of City of Winnipeg Archives, Plan #205/1931.)

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Plate 6 – Raleigh Apartments, 340 Vaughan Street, “First Floor Plans.” (Courtesy of City of Winnipeg Archives, Plan #205/1931.)

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Plate 7 – Raleigh Apartments, 340 Vaughan Street, first floor corridor. Note the small delivery doors on both sides of the hallway. (Murray Peterson, 1996.)

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Plate 8 – Wiltshire Apartments, 30 Spence Street, front (east) façade. (Murray Peterson, 1996.)



Plate 9 – Wiltshire Apartments, 30 Spence Street, south façade. (Murray Peterson, 1996.)