284 WILLIAM AVENUE

WINNIPEG SADDLERY BUILDING

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
Researcher: M. Peterson
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Winnipeg in the early 1890s was, although few realized it, on the verge of a spectacular era of growth, development and maturity that would almost completely change it by World War I. But this comprehensive growth followed patterns established a decade earlier and resulted in specific districts within city boundaries.

The real estate and construction boom of the early 1880s was intimately connected to the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) around Winnipeg and onto the western prairies. 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 important, however, was the beginning of the segregation of the various sectors of the city – residential, commercial and industrial – and their specific buildings. The huge advance in land prices along Main Street north of Portage Avenue necessitated the replacement of the earlier residential development with large commercial structures. Investors chose to locate near one of the most important buildings, City Hall, from which would come assistance in advancing both singular business interests and those of the community at large.

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. The bust of 1882, while it seriously affected some parts of the local economy, did not have a devastating effect on the wholesale sector. This was mainly as a result of the expanding regional base of the wholesalers as settlement increased on the prairies and demand for goods grew. The areas east and west of Main Street, however, were undeniably developing as the warehouse district, slowly through the 1880s and 1890s and then rapidly after 1900.

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The City Hall/Public Market area was one of the earliest and most heavily developed areas, with dozens of warehouses, commercial blocks, hotels and the main fire hall (Plate 1). In 1903, a modest commercial building was added to William Avenue streetscape, its owner a successful businessman and developer who replaced his small, older shop (Plate 2) with a new, modern and larger structure (Plate 3).

**STYLE**

As originally built (Plate 4), this block was an excellent example of a Two-Part Commercial Style structure, very common throughout the downtown regions of most North American cities. Especially popular after 1900, the design was used to reflect the varied activities housed in the different areas of the building. The ground floor held the retail spaces, often with recessed entrances and large display windows. A metal cornice or similar feature was often used to visually separate the ground floor from the upper floors, which included banks of large windows to light the office and/or residential space. Access to this upper floor was usually provided by an ornate entrance on the front façade.

Beyond this basic layout, this type of block saw a tremendous variation in materials and ornamentation. They could be small, simple wooden structures or large, multi-storey brick and stone buildings with a wealth of ornamental elements, often depending on the neighbourhood in which they were located and the amount of money available to the developer. The Winnipeg Saddlery Building is only modestly ornamented; few embellishments are found on the upper floors or the roofline.

**CONSTRUCTION**

Originally, this building measured 7.8 metres wide by 29.1 metres deep and 21.4 metres in height.²

Built on a rubblestone foundation 76.2 centimetres thick, the superstructure was built of clay brick

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² City of Winnipeg Assessment Record, Roll No. 609630-12-2. Below as AR.
ranging from 43.2 to 53.3 centimetres thick. One of the most unique features of the building is the use of metal rods in combination with the wood beams on all floors (Plate 5).

The building suffered a serious fire only three years after construction, which gutted the top two floors and damaged the rest of the building.\(^3\) Reconstruction of the front entrance, brick repointing and general masonry repairs occurred in 1936. Comments in the late 1930s by City staff indicate that the building was already suffering from structural instability, noting floor heaving, wall settlement (especially the west wall), masonry cracks, a leaking roof and generally poor condition.\(^4\) Concrete piles were added to shore up the building in 1945 but in 1962 the top three floors were removed. This did not end the building’s problems and in 1971, the building was still considered to be in “poor condition” with only the first floor being used and the elevator having been taken out.\(^5\) The structure has stood vacant since at least the early 2000s.

**DESIGN**

As rebuilt in 1936, the main (north) façade featured a centrally-placed recessed main entrance flanked by large plate glass display windows (Plate 6). Above was a modest metal cornice separating this space from the plain upper floors. These were highlighted by large, square-headed window openings embellished with rough-cut continuous stone sills and heads. The upper floor continued to the window pattern and design of the second floor. The roof was finished with brick corbelling.

Today, the recessed entrance is intact although suffering from deterioration (Plate 7) and the upper three floors have been removed; the stone lug sills of the original third storey windows now capping for the new roofline.

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4. AR.
5. Ibid.
The east wall is covered by the adjoining building, only the top, uninterrupted storey of the west wall is visible (Plate 8). The rear (south) wall featured a large raised arched loading door in the centre of the ground floor with large arched windows on either side. The three second floor windows repeat this design and include stone lug sills (Plate 9).

**INTERIOR**
The building’s ground floor continues to display some original features, layout and materials, including wood flooring, ornamental tin ceiling (Plates 10 and 11) and staircase detailing (Plate 12). Original elements removed in the last 5 years include the raised loading/office area at the rear of the building which included wood and glass partitioning (Plate 13) and radiators (Plate 14). The floor at the rear of the building has been completely removed to give access to the basement (Plate 15).

The second floor is open and the original wood floors have been removed (Plate 16). The basement with its dirt floor has been completely emptied – it originally held a brick encased boiler and a walk-in vault along the west wall (Plates 17 and 18).

**INTEGRITY**
The building stands on its original site. Alterations to the exterior have been substantial, with the reconstruction of the original recessed entrance in 1936 and the removal of the upper three floors in 1962. Its long-term vacancy has also negatively affected interior and exterior elements.

Structurally, the building has been observed by City assessors to be in poor shape since the 1930s (see Appendix I). The present owners have had the structure assessed by an engineer who found several issues with regard to the rubblestone foundation, exterior brick walls and the internal beam/post system (Plates 19 and 20).
STREETSCAPE
This building is located on the south side of William Avenue across from the City of Winnipeg Public Safety Building. It has been an important part of its streetscape for over 100 years (Plate 21). All buildings in the Exchange District are essential parts of their historic streetscape and as such, the Historical Buildings and Resources Committee has given them 60 points.

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS
James H. Cadham, Ontario born architect, designed this block, as well as many buildings in Winnipeg’s early warehouse district. Cadham was one of a number of self-trained designers who worked in Winnipeg in the late 19th century, Cadham being one of the most prolific, his contracts for the 1900-1907 period totalled nearly $1.8 million6 (see Appendix II for biographical information and Plate 22). He has received 20 points from the Historical Buildings and Resources Committee.

Local builders R. Watson and C.H. Simpson were responsible for its construction in 1903.

PERSON/INSTITUTION
The original owner of the block, Archibald Francis “Archie” Wright, was born in 1842 in Largs, Scotland (near Glasgow), moving to Montreal with his parents in 1852. He learned the harness manufacturing trade in Paisley, Canada West (Ontario), 250 kilometres northwest of Toronto7 and also lived in Fergus, Canada West (Ontario), about 80 kilometres west of Toronto. He then set out travelling, finally settling in the southern United States. During the American Civil War, he made a fortune supplying military equipment to the southern forces in New Orleans. After the war ended, he returned to Canada but was soon travelling again, this time through the Western United States.

6 City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books, 1900-1907.
When he arrived in Fort Garry in 1869 he set up his own harness/saddle shop, the first of its kind in the area, before being arrested by Louis Riel and his men on December 7, 1869. Originally the business was known as Wright and Arbuckle, general dealers in harnesses and saddles. By the early 1880s, Wright was operating his own saddlery business at 502 Main Street, near William Avenue (Plate 23) before moving to a shop on William Avenue at 284 William Avenue (Plate 2). Shortly before the turn-of-the-century, Wright entered into a partnership with Thomas A. Van Vliet as Wright and Van Vliet and the pair later founded the Winnipeg Saddlery Company that expanded into the newly built 284 William Avenue in 1903. Wright remained president of this enterprise until his death on September 19, 1912 at his home at 394 Academy Road (Plate 24).

His business influence was not confined solely to harnesses and one of Wright’s major contributions was the construction of the Leland Hotel on William Avenue, begun in 1883 and opened with a gala banquet on April 29, 1884. By the mid-1890s, however, Wright had become embroiled in a financial scandal and was forced to sign over the property to a bank liquidator to cover his debt.

He was also active in the public realm: he helped build the first public school in Winnipeg; was a member of the first board of Winnipeg school trustees; and was an alderman for the first five years after Winnipeg incorporated as a city, presiding over the finance committee. Also an avid farmer, he is credited with experimenting with a wide range of crops including fruit trees,

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8 Ibid., p. 140; Winnipeg Tribune, Summer 1934 and February 21, 1970, p. 24; and W.J. Healy, Women of Red River (Winnipeg, MB: The Women’s Canadian Club, 1923), pp. 233-234. The arrest came just three weeks after the Wrights’ marriage and one of the stories surrounding Mr. Wright’s arrest had wife Mary Wright smuggling in a bottle of brandy in her sleeve so that the incarcerated men had “Christmas spirits” with which to celebrate the season. On a second occasion, Mrs. Wright and the daughter of another detainee were arrested by Riel’s men when a letter they were smuggling in under a cake slipped off the plate.


13 Pioneers.
sugar cane, water melons and peanuts. He introduced sweet clover to the prairies, which continues to be an important crop. Most importantly, however, was his introduction of Holstein cattle to Western Canada.14

Wright’s wife was born Mary Ramsey at Upper Fort Garry on August 27, 1849 and was also an important business and social figure.15 She took over the presidency of the Winnipeg Saddlery Company upon her husband’s death in 1912 and maintained this role until her own death at the age of 90 in 1939.16

The couple had eleven children, six grew to adulthood: Robert John (born 1872), James Archibald (ca.1876), Agnes Jane (1878), Mabel Margaret (1880), Stewart (also as Stuart) Malcolm (1884) and Edith May (1894).17 Agnes J. Wright was known as “Birdie” and she became the owner of 284 William Avenue after her mother’s death.18 Called a “spinster” in tax documents, Miss Wright founded the Farm Equipment and Seed Company with A.M. Bannerman in the early 1950s, occupying part of 284 William Avenue.19 She lived for many years at 109 Fulham Avenue (Plate 25).

In the late 1950s, the building was sold to Abraham Dreman (1918-1992), who was president of the Logan Mail Order Company, a garment firm that occupied the building into the 1990s.20 The building was purchased by Sam and Harry Reiss in the late 1980s.21

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14 Marilyn Boyle (granddaughter of Archibald and Mary Wright), letter to Mr. and Mrs. H.J. Weil (owners of 694 Academy Road, 1978-2003), dated May 24, 1997.
15 Winnipeg Tribune, March 22, 1939; Winnipeg Free Press, November 5, 1949. When the Winnipeg Tribune newspaper hired Lillian Gibbons to write a series of articles on important Winnipeg women, Mary Wright was the first chosen.
16 L. Gibbons, op. cit., p. 140.
17 Census of Canada, 1901 and 1906.
18 City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls, Roll No. 609630 (Old No. 10121), Ward 2 (below as ARo), 1900-1950.
19 Ibid., 1930-1955; and Henderson’s Directory, 1900-1950.
EVENT
There is no known significant historical event connected with this building.

CONTEXT
This commercial/warehouse block was built at the beginning of the 20th century, a time of extensive growth and expansion for Winnipeg. During the 1900-1915 era, the City had enormous influence on all aspects of Western Canadian growth and the Manitoba capital was unchallenged as the region’s premier centre. This building was another of the small- to medium-sized businesses that founded, grew and flourished in this setting, using profits to expand its business and ultimately its accommodations.

LANDMARK
Although modest in design and finish, the building is located on a busy downtown street and would have neighbourhood conspicuousness.
APPENDIX I

CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report

Building Address: 284 William Avenue  
Building Name: Winnipeg Saddlery Building

Original Use: warehouse  
Current Use: vacant

Roll No. (Old):

Municipality: 12  
Ward: 2  
Property or Occupancy Code: 50

Legal Description: 6/7 St. John, Plan 33009, Lot 4 (Original: 7 St. John, Plan 320, Block A, west of adjacent east 20’ of Lot 3)

Location: south side between King & Princess streets

Date of Construction: 1903  
Storeys: 2 (originally 5)

Construction Type: Brick – ordinary

HERITAGE STATUS: ON NOMINATED LIST

- 968/1903 $16,800 (original); 2047/1936 [PPD] $500 (repairs); 154/1945 $500 (concrete piles); 3969/1962 (demolition of top 3 floors – permit not found in Ledger book); 1140/1968 $300 (interior alteration)

Information:
- 25½ x 95½ x 70 = 170,468 cu. ft.
- Front – Plate glass to 1st level, balance – clay brick, stone sills
- South – clay brick
- Upper Wall thickness – 21” to 17” brick;
- Foundation – 30” rubblestone
- History – 3-storey common wall with building to east. When building had fire and rebuilt, only 2 floors, east wall filled in above.
- Permit 2047/1936 – Brick work repaired, cracks re-pointed, store front rebuilt
- 1937 – Floors worn & heaved in centre. 1st floor levelled in 1936. Fair condition except for settlement in west wall
- 1941 – Crack at front, roof leaking. General condition poor
- Permit 3969/62 – Top 3 storeys of bldg removed, new T & G roof
- 1971- Poor condition, basement & 2nd floor not used. Elevator removed
- 1996 – “poor condition” - Appears used as Art Gallery

ARCHITECT: J.H. CADHAM
CONTRACTOR: R. WATSON & C.H. SIMPSON
APPENDIX II

James Henry Cadham

James H. Cadham was born near London, Canada West (Ontario), on August 31, 1850, the son of Thomas and Eliza Cadham, both English-born settlers of the area. Thomas operated a sash, door and blind factory in London. J.H. Cadham left public school at the age of 16 to learn the carpenter’s trade. In 1870, Cadham answered the call to arms in Eastern Canada by the Dominion government to protect its rights in the recently ceded territory that would become the Province of Manitoba. He was a private in No. 1 Battalion under Captain Cooke, part of the 1,200-man force that included 400 British Regulars and 800 Ontario and Quebec militiamen and would become known as the Wolseley Expedition.

Cadham arrived with the rest of the force in late August to find the uprising led by Louis Riel and his followers had ended. Cadham, unlike many of the other militiamen, decided to stay after his discharge on March 4, 1871 and began working as a carpenter and contractor, under the name Blackmore and Cadham. Little is known about his early work in the city, although he apparently had enough experience by the mid-1890s to begin practice as an architect. In this capacity, Cadham had a profound effect on Winnipeg’s skyline. He was responsible for many warehouses in the district before and after 1900. So highly regarded was Cadham that builders would often consult him about a new structure even though he was not the architect of the building. He was an ardent hunter and was a Mason and a member of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. Cadham continued to work up until a few weeks before his death from pneumonia on December 10, 1907. He left a wife, three sons and two daughters.

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24 Manitoba Free Press, December 11, 1907, p. 5.
A partial list of his work includes many of the Exchange District’s most outstanding structures (marked with an “*”).

Merchants Bank, Main and Post Office Street (now McDermot Avenue), 1875 (carpenter with Mr. Blackmore)

Paulin, Chambers & Co. Biscuit Factory, Ross Avenue, 1899

McIntyre Block, 416 Main Street (contractor – demolished)

McLaughlin Carriage Building, 200 Princess Street, 1893

*W.F. Alloway Building, 179 McDermot Avenue, 1898 (Grade III)

*Whitla Building, 70 Arthur Street, 1899

*G.D. Wood & Company Building (Merchants Building), 250 McDermot Avenue, 1898

*Daylilte Building, 296 McDermot Avenue, 1899 (Grade II)

*Imperial Dry Goods Building, 91 Albert Street, 1900 (Grade III)

*G.F. Stephens Warehouse, 176 Market Avenue, 1901 (and additions) - demolished

*Alloway & Champion Block, Portage Avenue, 1901 (demolished)

Moss (Kantor) House, 218 Roslyn Road, 1901

 Anne (Blue Ribbon Company) Building, 87 King Street, 1901 (Grade III)

Jerry Robinson Department Store, 49 Albert Street, 1902

Gregg Building, 52 Albert Street, 1903 (Grade III)

Elim Chapel (St. Stephens Presbyterian Church), 546 Portage Avenue, 1903

R.J. Whitla Factory, 371 Hargrave Street, 1903

Dingle and Stewart Warehouse, 263 Stanley Street, 1903

Robinson, Little and Company Building, 54 Arthur Street, 1903 (Grade II)

Prairie Lumber Company Warehouse, foot of Henry Avenue, 1903

Rat Portage Lumber Company Warehouse, 101 Higgins Avenue, 1903

Gaylord Block (Kemp Building), 111 Lombard Avenue, 1903

Winnipeg Saddlery Building, 284 William Avenue, 1903

Galt Building Annex, 92 Arthur Street, 1903 (Grade II)

Bedford (Stobart) Building, 275 McDermot Avenue, 1903 (Grade III)

Scott Furniture Building, 274 Main Street, 1904

Stobart Company Overall Factory, 327 Cumberland Avenue, 1904

G. Velie Warehouse, 183-87 Portage Avenue East, 1904

Miller, Morse and Company Warehouse, 317 McDermot Avenue, 1904

Telfer Brothers Warehouse, 156 Lombard Avenue, 1904

Avenue Block, 261 Portage Avenue, 1904

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25 Compiled from local newspaper building lists, 1874-1908; The Exchange District. Part 1: A Property Survey (Winnipeg, MB: City of Winnipeg, 2001); and City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books, 1900-1907.

26 Manitoba Free Press, September 23, 1875, p. 3.

27 Manitoba Free Press, March 14, 1899, p. 3.
J.H. Cadham designs (continued):

M. Fortune and Company Block, Smith Street, 1904
G.F. and J. Galt Building, 103 Princess Street (addition), 1904
Alloway and Champion Building, 667 Main Street, 1905 (Grade III)
Genser’s Furniture Building, 289 Portage Avenue, 1905
West Hotel, 786 Main Street, 1905
H. Leadley Warehouse, 298 Ross Avenue, 1905
Manitoba Medical College, Bannatyne Avenue (corner Emily Street), 1905 – demolished
Trees, Spriggs Company Warehouse, 312 Ross Avenue, 1905
J.H. Cadham House, 336 River Avenue, 1906
Grose and Walker Warehouse, 261 Stanley Street, 1906
Plate 1 – William Avenue looking west from Main Street, 1887. The Wright & Van Vliet Store is located at the arrow. (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba, N009.)
Plate 2 – South side of William Avenue, west of King Street, ca.1901. The small Wright and Van Vliet Company Building, with its wooden horses for advertising (arrow), is located just west of the Maw Building. (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba.)
Plate 3 – This undated panoramic view of the City Hall/Public Market area shows its highly developed streets, including the Winnipeg Saddlery Building (arrow and inset). (M. Peterson Collection.)
Plate 4 – This 1915 picture shows the Market Building with the Winnipeg Saddlery Building in the background (arrow). (M. Peterson Collection.)
Plate 5 – Winnipeg Saddlery Building, 284 William Avenue, 2012. Metal rods were added to the wood beams on the second floor to add strength. (M. Peterson, 2012.)
Plate 6 – Winnipeg Saddlery Building, 284 William Avenue. This 1936 plan for the reconstruction of the main entrance shows the building in its original 5-storey configuration. (Courtesy of City of Winnipeg Archives, Plan #2047/1936.)
Plate 7 – Winnipeg Saddlery Building, 284 William Avenue, detail of front (north) entrance, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

Plate 8 – Winnipeg Saddlery Building, 284 William Avenue, front (north) and west façades, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 9 – Winnipeg Saddlery Building, 284 William Avenue, rear (south) façade, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 10 – Winnipeg Saddlery Building, 284 William Avenue, ground floor looking from the staircase in the southwest corner, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

Plate 11 – Winnipeg Saddlery Building, 284 William Avenue, ground floor looking from the front entrance, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 12 – Winnipeg Saddlery Building, 284 William Avenue, staircase to second floor, southwest corner of ground floor, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 13 – Winnipeg Saddlery Building, 284 William Avenue, partition in raised area at south end of ground floor, 2012. (M. Peterson, 2012.)

Plate 14 – Winnipeg Saddlery Building, 284 William Avenue, original radiator at north end of ground floor, 2012. (M. Peterson, 2012.)
Plate 15 – Winnipeg Saddlery Building, 284 William Avenue, south end of ground floor and view into basement, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

Plate 16 – Winnipeg Saddlery Building, 284 William Avenue, second floor, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 17 – Winnipeg Saddlery Building, 284 William Avenue, basement, 2012. (M. Peterson, 2012.)

Plate 18 – Winnipeg Saddlery Building, 284 William Avenue, basement boiler and walk-in vault, 2012. (M. Peterson, 2012.)
Plate 19 – Winnipeg Saddlery Building, 284 William Avenue, ground floor beam pulling away from the exterior wall, 2012. (M. Peterson, 2012.)

Plate 20 – Winnipeg Saddlery Building, 284 William Avenue, brick deterioration, rear (south) façade, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 21 – William Avenue, south side west of King Street, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

Plate 22 – J.H. Cadham, ca.1907. (Winnipeg Telegram, December 11, 1907, p. 11.)
Plate 23 – A. Wright Saddler, 502 Main Street, ca.1882. (Courtesy of M. Smith.)
Plate 24 – Archibald and Mary Wright House, 694 Academy Road, built ca.1881, 2008. (M. Peterson, 2008.)

Plate 25 – Agnes J. “Birdie” Wright House, 109 Fulham Avenue, built 1939, front (south) façade, 2008. (M. Peterson, 2008.)