

284 WILLIAM AVENUE – WINNIPEG SADDLERY BUILDING

James Henry Cadham, 1903



The City Hall/Public Market area was one of the earliest and most heavily developed areas in what evolved into Winnipeg's downtown. First during the early 1880s railway-driven real estate boom and then after 1900, dozens of warehouses, commercial blocks, hotels and even the City's main fire hall were built near Winnipeg's "Gingerbread" City Hall, completed in 1886. In 1903, Archibald "Archie" Wright (1842-1912), a pioneer saddler, school trustee and City alderman, built a five storey mixed use block, the ground floor home to Wright's successful business, Winnipeg Saddlery.

The building's most identifiable feature, the recessed entrance with large display windows, was a common design feature of many downtown and suburban retail blocks of the late 19th and early 20th century but examples of the style have become rarer due to demolition and re-development.

Resting on a rubblestone foundation, the superstructure is built of common clay brick. One of the most unique features of the building's construction is the use of strengthening metal rods in the wood support beams. The building suffered a serious fire only three years after construction, gutting the top two floors and damaging the rest of the building. Reconstruction of the front entrance, brick repointing and general masonry repairs occurred in 1936. The building has had a history of structural issues and in 1962 the top three floors were removed. It has stood vacant since at least the early 2000s.

Many of the building's original exterior elements are suffering from deterioration due to age and neglect. On the interior, deterioration has also occurred, much of the original interior finishes and layouts have been removed and/or altered and only the ornamental tin ceiling on the main floor remains intact.

The building was designed by Ontario-born architect James H. Cadham (1850-1907), one of the City's most prolific late 19th and early 20th century designers (his contracts for the 1900-1907 period totalled nearly \$1.8 million).

Archie Wright came to what would become Winnipeg in 1869, setting up the area's first harness/saddle shop before being arrested by Louis Riel's men in December. His business headquarters after 1885 was in Market Square on William Avenue until business success necessitated the construction of larger modern premises at 284 William Avenue. Wright also built the Leland Hotel (1883-1884), helped built Winnipeg's first public school, 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.

An avid farmer, he is credited with introducing many crops and Holstein cattle to the prairies. After his death in 1912, his wife Mary (nee. Ramsey) took over the business, her presidency lasting until her own death in 1939. 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.

Elements of the building that would require approval if alterations were planned are:

Exterior-

- Two-storey brick and stone building with flat roof located mid-block on the south side of William Avenue between Princess and King streets, its main facades facing north onto William Avenue, its east façade hidden by the neighbouring building, its west façade partially hidden by the neighbouring building and its south façade facing a back lane;
- The front (north) façade with its recessed, centrally located entrance and large plate glass display windows, modest metal cornice above and large rectilinear window openings with continuous stone sill and stone heads and unembellished roofline;
- The uninterrupted brick wall that is the visible upper portion of the west façade; and
- The rear (south) façade with windows and doors in arched openings on both floors.

Interior-

- None