

294 WILLIAM AVENUE – MASSEY BUILDING
G. Browne, 1885; S.F. Peters, 1904



By 1885, Portage Avenue and Main Street had become the centre of Winnipeg's commercial district. With the increasing value of downtown land, many nearby residential lots were taken over for commercial use. Grain companies, banks, and agricultural supply firms moved to be adjacent to the Winnipeg Grain Exchange, located in the basement of the City Hall.

One such company was the Massey Manufacturing Company. The company was established in Upper Canada in 1847, and became famous for its reapers just as Canadian agriculture was being mechanized. Although it opened a branch office in Winnipeg in 1881, the Massey Company did not build its own facility until 1885.

The new Massey Building was designed by George Browne, a local Winnipeg architect who had trained with his father in Montreal, studied in New York and had come to Manitoba in 1879. The building is an excellent example of the Commercial Style that was popular at the time. A rusticated stone base is a simple prelude to the elaborate detailing that follows. A rhythmic

quality is achieved by the use of paired windows with segmental arch-heads on the main level. These are emphasized by large, elaborate keystones leading to single segmental arch windows with smaller keystones on the second floor, framed by a string mould broken by giant order pilasters connected to a metal cornice. The rectangular windows on the third floor are even simpler, with even smaller keystones. Since the cornice has now been removed, a most unusual detail that is missing is the broken-fan pediment supported by paired brackets.

In 1891, Mass joined with another prominent implement manufacturer on the original Market Square to become the Massey-Harris Company. Business grew and in 1904, architect S. Frank Peters was commissioned to design a brick warehouse adjacent to the 1885 building, more than doubling the floor space. The brick addition was a much simpler design with little decorative treatment, reflecting the new concern for functionality. Many farm implement companies eventually deserted Market Square, but Massey-Harris continued to assemble and sell equipment from its original location until 1944 when the company moved. These two buildings are significant for they are among the last of Winnipeg's original Market Square.