

315 WILLIAM AVENUE – TEES AND PERSSE BUILDING

James H. Cadham, 1905



This six-storey, red brick building near the northeast corner of William Avenue and Adelaide Street was the fifth in a series of structures erected over a three-year period by the brokerage firm of Tees and Persse as it scrambled to meet and supply the needs of a rapidly growing prairie market.

Large-scale settlement during the early 1900s stimulated all sectors of Winnipeg's economy, especially the wholesale trade which sought to dominate the flow of domestic and imported goods to western retailers and consumers.

Formed in 1884, the Tees and Persse partnership was well-positioned to take advantage of the boom since it had successfully managed a number of retail lines or "agencies" on behalf of eastern clients, mostly in grocery and household items, but also the products of the major match and paper

manufacturer, E.B. Eddy Company of Hull, Quebec.

James Tees (1854-1906), the son of an Irish furniture producer in Montreal, was transferred to Winnipeg during the 1881 real estate boom as the branch manager for Canada Lead Works. A year later, the Irish-born John B. Persse (1861-1927), who had immigrated to Toronto in 1872, also relocated to Winnipeg, working as a freight agent for the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). He later joined the Great Eastern Fast Freight line and then resigned to work with Tees in forming one of western Canada's early brokerage firms.

Tees and Persse initially operated out of quarters on Lombard and Market Avenues. In 1903, they embarked on a substantial building program, establishing a track warehouse adjacent to the CPR's main line and one-storey frame and brick storehouses, followed by a five-storey brick structure (1904) and the William Avenue warehouse (1905-1906) beside the CPR's Princess Street spur line.

The company's next round of physical expansion occurred between 1909 and 1914 when six warehouses were erected at key points on the prairies and in Fort William (now Thunder Bay), Ontario. By then, Persse had succeeded to the company's presidency following the death of Tees, while his brother, Robert G. Persse, who introduced Heinz products to Canada, had become vice-president.

The facility at 315 William was designed by James H. Cadham (1850-1907), a self-taught architect who played a prominent role in shaping Winnipeg's warehouse district. The building, of mill construction with solid brick walls, was erected for \$65,000 by John A. Girvin and Company (carpentry) and Hodgins and Thompson (masonry). Born in London, Ontario, Cadham trained as a carpenter before coming to Winnipeg with the Wolseley Expedition in 1870. He worked as a contractor, and then concentrated almost exclusively on architecture after 1895. He designed more than a dozen buildings in the warehouse district.

Cadham generally employed the Richardsonian Romanesque style, but in the case of the Tees and Persse warehouse he produced a stark, utilitarian design with minimal ornamentation. The front (south) facade has a rusticated stone base up to the first-floor windows, with the main entrance set

off to the west corner. A solitary pilaster rises from the first storey up through a modestly recessed centre portion of the wall, separating bays and paired and single windows on both sides. These rectilinear openings are embellished with smooth stone heads and lug sills. Corbelled brick and a stone-capped parapet complete this elevation.

The west and north (rear) walls consist of common clay brick; the former is windowless, while the rear has openings with radiating brick heads and stone sills, plus a loading dock. Like the front facade, the east wall along the railway spur is finished in red brick. It also has windows with stone sills and three raised loading doors.

The original interior housed offices for Tees and Persse on the main floor, while the rest of the building, including the basement, was used to store the firm's stock. A 1924 fire gutted the building, resulting in \$700,000 in damages for Tees and Persse and its tenants, the John Martin Paper Company and federal Indian Department. The structure was restored to original standards within a few months by the John A. Girvin Company. During this \$57,000 reconstruction, the west wall was rebuilt and a new sprinkler system was installed. Since then, the only major exterior alteration has been the addition of wooden panelling to cover much of the front, second and third storeys.

After nearly 70 years at the William site, Tees and Persse relocated to the Inkster Industrial Park in 1974. The William Avenue building subsequently was acquired by a Variety Supply and Bag Company and occupied by several small firms. In the early 2000s, the warehouse's interior was completely renovated into modern educational space as part of the development of the Princess Street Campus of the Red River College.

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

Exterior-

- Six-storey brick and stone building with flat roof located mid-block on the north side of William Avenue west of Princess Street, its main facades facing south onto William Avenue, its east façade facing into an atrium, its west and north facades partially hidden by neighbouring buildings;
- The front (south) façade with its rusticated stone base and red Menominee brick superstructure, windows in rectilinear openings on all floors with smooth stone

heads and continuous stone sills (second floor) and stone lug sills (all other floors), corbelled brick and stone-capped parapet;

- The uninterrupted common clay brick wall with painted signage on west façade;
- The common clay brick wall with windows in arched openings with stone lug sills and painted signage on the visible portion of the north wall; and
- The east façade, now an interior element of the new education complex, with its windows and doors in arched openings on all floors and painted signage.

Interior-

- Heavy timber mill structural system; and
- Wood rails on all floors and machinery on top floor of the original elevator in middle of east elevation.