


# 388 DONALD STREET

# PHOENIX BLOCK

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
Researcher: Murray Peterson
December 2015

# 388 DONALD STREET – PHOENIX BLOCK

The growth of Winnipeg's warehouse district after 1900 was a dramatic process of replacing old residential structures and filling vacant lots with massive brick and stone structures. The buildings were massively built and reinforced to store and manipulate tonnes of goods, food, hardware and retail items of every possible description. Located on both sides of Main Street east of Portage Avenue, the Exchange District, as it became known, also filled with office buildings, garages, factories, hotels, theatres and banks – all the services needed by the thousands of people that frequented the area every working day.

Because of Winnipeg's unique position as warehouse and distribution centre for almost every type of manufactured good entering Western Canada, the city filled with a specialized worker, the manufacturers' agent. These salesmen, also referred to as commercial agents, would represent several lines of merchandize, a specific market or industry and maintain accounts in an assigned territory. The agent would then develop a customer base and add or remove manufacturers and their lines as he saw fit. On his own, in a partnership or as an incorporated company, the agent provided the manufacturer with a regional sales force usually without associated employee costs.

So prevalent and important was this sector, that in 1882, the North West Commercial Travellers' Association was formed in Winnipeg to provide organized support for agents, including travel discounts for accommodations and transportation, insurance programs and telephone rate reductions. In 1906, they built a large structure at the corner of Bannatyne Avenue and King Street to house the activities of their growing organization (Plate 1).

Apartment blocks had also become and extremely popular building form in Winnipeg after 1905. Hundreds of blocks were built in the City over the next decade, many included retail space on the ground floor.

Beyond manufacturers' agents' offices, there was also an increasing demand for modern space for other professionals and companies, as well as the need for retail space for the growing number of businesses catering to the needs of the growing population.

In 1910, another mixed-use block was planned and built, curving around the corner of two busy downtown streets – Notre Dame Avenue and Princess Street – at the southern edge of Winnipeg's well-established warehouse district (Plate 2).

**STYLE**

The Phoenix Block is an excellent example of a Two-Part Commercial 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.

**CONSTRUCTION**

This mixed use retail/office structure features an unusual wrap-around main façade fronting on both Notre Dame Avenue (north) and Donald Street (east).[1] The L-shaped building is of solid, dark-hued brick resting on a stone foundation with stone and concrete accenting. It measures approximately 36.6 x 33.5 metres and cost $70,000 to complete. Wall thicknesses were 68.6 centimetres (stone) in the basement, 43.2 centimetres on the ground and second floors and 33.0

[1] This block south of Notre Dame Avenue was originally known as Princess Street until ca.1916.

centimetres on the third floor.[2] A newspaper report suggested that the foundation was built to withstand additional storeys, should they be necessary.[3]

**DESIGN**

The building's two main façades (north and east) are similarly designed, with the brick walls meeting the sidewalk and no raised foundation wall. As originally designed, the Princess Street façade featured two recessed shop entrances with paired doors and large display windows at the south end, an central entrance to the upper storeys, brick panels to the north and the recessed shop entrance in the curved northeast corner (Plate 3). All entrances and the brick panels were topped with glass block sections. Modest brick pilasters with concrete heads and bases separate the ground floor elements and a plain metal cornice separated the ground and upper floors. The second and third storeys were designed with large windows in rectilinear openings set in raised brick frames and separated by plain or patterned brick panels. The area above the central entrance received special treatment, with grooved brick pilasters and a fan-shaped element just below the raised parapet. Ornamental brickwork was designed above the third storey windows and panels with the words "PHOENIX BLOCK" were placed above the central door and near the northeast corner of the third floor. The flat roof was detailed with a galvanized iron cornice, ornamental brick, another iron cornice and a brick parapet.

The north façade received similar treatment on the upper floors; the ground floor includes recessed entrances with paired doors and large display windows (Plate 4).

The rear façades feature several doors on the ground floor and windows in rectilinear openings with radiating brick heads and stone lug sills (Plates 5 and 6) on all levels, although it appears these openings were simplified at construction.

Alterations to the main façades have been numerous, including the replacement of all the original window units with single pane units (Plate 7), the reworking of the ground floor retail entrances at

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2 City of Winnipeg Building Permit #835/1910.

3 Manitoba Free Press, April 2, 1910, p. 20.

the south end of the east façade and a newer door hood over the upper storey entrance (Plate 8). The north façade ground floor has also seen upgrading, although the recessed entrances are still present (Plates 9 and 10). Much of the original ornamentation on the second and third floors is still intact. The rear façades have also seen extensive window replacement; many of the entrance doors are original (Plate 11 and 12).

**INTERIOR**

The original layout of the interior of this building[4] featured storage space for each of the retail stores, machinery and the boiler room in the basement, 11 shops on the ground floor (6 along Notre Dame Avenue, 4 along Princess Street and one in the rounded corner) and 11 offices on either side of the central corridor and a central bathroom on the second floor (third floor plans are missing from the plan roll).

Today, the ground floor features only two addresses on Donald Street, one in the corner space and three on Notre Dame Avenue. These spaces, like the upper floors, have seen extensive alteration and renovation (Plate 13), although there are original elements including cast iron posts and ornamental tin ceilings (Plate 14), a small portion of the original hallway (Plate 15) and the wood detailing of the main staircase (Plate 16).

**INTEGRITY**

The building stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition for its age. Almost all original window units have been replaced and the ground floor of the two main façades has seen alteration and renovation.

**STREETSCAPE**

This building is located just outside the Exchange District National Historic Site at the south end of Princess Street. Historically, this area included a wide variety of structures – theatres,

[4] Architect's Plans No. 835/1910, City of Winnipeg.

churches, office buildings, warehouses and factories and this has not significantly changed as the neighbourhood has evolved. It makes an important contribution to the streetscape along with its neighbouring buildings on the west side of the block (Plates 17 and 18).

**ARCHITECT/CONTRACTOR**

George W. Northwood, well-known local designer, was the architect for the Phoenix Block. Northwood had arrived in the city in 1905 and would continue his practice, alone or in one of several partnerships, until the 1940s (see Appendix II for biographical information). He has received 20 points from the Historical Buildings and Resources Committee.

The contractors for the building were Thomas Kelly and Sons Limited. Thomas Kelly was born in Ireland in 1855, went to the United States at the age of nine and got his early education in New York State. He came to Winnipeg in 1878, taking a job as a foreman for a local contractor. He joined with his brother Michael to form Kelly Brothers in 1880, becoming pioneers in the brick-manufacturing sector from their St. Boniface factory. The firm changed to Kelly Brothers and Company in 1884 when another brother, Martin, joined.[5] This enterprise became the Manitoba Construction Company from 1903 to 1905 when it was dissolved and Kelly Brothers and Mitchell was organized in its stead.

In 1908, Thomas Kelly joined with sons Robert Emmett and Charles B. to create Thomas Kelly and Sons (Plate 19). A third son, Lawrence C., joined in 1912. Thomas Kelly, as one of the most prominent contractors in Western Canada, was involved in a significant number of projects from Winnipeg to Vancouver, B.C. Local contracts included the Clarendon Hotel,[6] Portage Avenue (1883), both Grain Exchange Buildings, Princess Street (#164 – 1892; #160 – 1898),

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5 Biographical information on Thomas Kelly and his brothers compiled from F.H. Schofield, The Story of Manitoba (Winnipeg, MB: S.J. Clarke Publishing, 1913), Vol. III, pp. 135-36; G. Bryce, The History of Manitoba (Toronto, ON: The Canada History Company, 1906), p. 407; Manitoba Free Press, January 30, 1923, p. 2; Winnipeg Tribune, January 30, 1923, p. 1; Manitoba Free Press, August 3, 1925, p. 1; Winnipeg Tribune, August 3, 1925, p. 1; Winnipeg Free Press, March 21, 1939, p. 1; and Winnipeg Tribune, March 21, 1939, p. 3.

6 F.H. Schofield, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 135. It was said that Kelly discovered an excellent deposit of clay when excavating the foundation for the hotel. He set up a temporary kiln and produced brick for the superstructure on site.

Isbister School, 310 Vaughan Street (1898), the St. Andrews Locks (1900-1905) and the Provincial Normal School, 442 William Avenue (1905). The firm was also credited with laying down Winnipeg's first asphalt surface (on McDermot Avenue).

Of course, the Kelly family's largest and most prestigious contract came in 1912 for the construction of the new Legislative Building. As work progressed, rumours of questionable activities surfaced and when it was reported that the builder had received over $800,000 in over-payments, a royal commission was struck. Thomas Kelly fled to the United States to avoid prosecution. He was arrested in Chicago on October 1, 1915 and extradited for "perjury, obtaining money by false pretences, larceny or embezzlement and the obtaining of money, knowing the same to have been embezzled, stolen or fraudulently obtained."[7]

After a series of inquiries and court cases, a criminal trial found Thomas Kelly guilty and sentenced him to a 2½-year term in Stony Mountain Penitentiary. After his sentence, Kelly moved to the United States, settling in California. He died on March 13, 1939.[8]

**PERSON/INSTITUTION**

This block replaced a large greenhouse complex, the Royal Greenhouses operated by Richard Alston, that had been on the property since 1890 (Plate 20).[9]

The original City of Winnipeg Building Permit lists Joseph C. McGreevy as the owner. McGreevy was born in Stayner, Ontario in 1884 and was listed as a builder and contractor in

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7 "Application re: Extradition of Thomas Kelly," JX RBC, Manitoba Legislative Library, quoted in N. Einarson, "88 Adelaide Avenue," report for the Manitoba Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, Historic Resources Branch (January 1979), p. 5.

8 Manitoba Free Press, January 30, 1923, p. 2; Winnipeg Tribune, January 30, 1923, p. 1; Manitoba Free Press, August 3, 1925, p. 1; and Winnipeg Tribune, August 3, 1925, p. 1. Michael Kelly died on January 29, 1923 and Martin Kelly died on August 2, 1925.

9 Manitoba Free Press, various dates; and Canada Census, 1891. Alston, born in England in 1857, had arrived by steamboat in 1878 and by the mid-1880s was operating a floral business, taking over the business of T.H. Bowerman at the southwest corner of Portage Avenue and Hargrave Street (Manitoba Free Press, January 12, 1918, p. 12). He was elected the first president of the Gardeners' Association in 1900 and died on November 5, 1921.

Sault Ste. Marie, ON in the early 1900s.[10] He moved to Winnipeg in 1904 and operated as a contractor and real estate agent into the 1920s.[11] He owned several downtown office buildings including the Phoenix Block. After World War I, McGreevy was charged and convicted of a number of fraud offenses including not paying rent, trespassing, robbery and, in 1939, of selling the former Hugh John Macdonald House (Dalnavert), 61Carlton Street to a construction company for demolition when he was not the owner.[12] He died in the city on June 17, 1959 at the age of 75.[13]

Original tenants of the block on the Donald/Princess street side included Wood Brothers, wall paper, John S. Mortimer, real estate, S. Frank Peters, architect, the Columbian Conservatory of Music and the Winnipeg Scenic Company. The Notre Dame Avenue shops were originally filled by Greeless Company, clothiers, H. Stone, confectionary, Muno and Company, tailors, Tessler Brothers, tailors, and August H. Stolper, proprietor of the Royal Greenhouses, which had relocated to Elmwood.[14]

Over the years, the building has seen a number of owners and varied short-term and long-term tenants.

**EVENT**

There is no known significant historical event connected with this structure.

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10 C. W. Parker, editor, Who's Who in Western Canada: A Biographical Dictionary of Notable Living Men and Women of Western Canada, (Vancouver, BC: Canadian Press Association, 1911), Volume 1.

11 City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books, 1899-1926. Between 1905 and 1923, McGreevy was listed as owner, architect and/or contractor for nearly $400,000 worth of work.

12 Winnipeg Free Press, May 6, 1939, p. 3.

13 Winnipeg Free Press, June 18, 1959, p. 37.

14 Henderson's Directory, 1915; City of Winnipeg Assessment Roll, Roll No. 627720-12-2; and Manitoba Free Press, February 27, 1915, p. 40.

**CONTEXT**

This mixed use structure is a good example of the type of development that occurred in downtown Winnipeg. Built prior to World War I, it was part of a large stock of well designed, sturdily built and attractive structures that provided modern office and retail space for the growing number of local, national and international firms expanding their presence in the region's primary city, Winnipeg.

It was also part of the trend towards real estate investment, local businessmen and contractors built hundreds of similar blocks throughout the city and in the surrounding communities as a safe investment.

**LANDMARK**

The Phoenix Block, with its unique curved façade and commanding location at the intersection of two busy downtown streets, is conspicuous in the area.

# APPENDIX I

***CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report***

**Assessment Record**

Building Address: 388 Donald Street (380-388) 300-310 Notre Dame Avenue

Building Name: Phoenix Block

Original Use: retail/office

Current Use: retail/offices

Roll No.: 13052669000

RSN: 150010

Municipality: 12 Ward: 2

Property or Occupancy Code: --

Legal Description: 1 St. John, Plan 129, Block 4, Lots 10/12

Location: southwest corner Notre Dame Avenue

Date of Construction: 1910 Storeys: 3 + B **Heritage Status: ON NOMINATED LIST**

Construction Type: ordinary brick and stone foundation

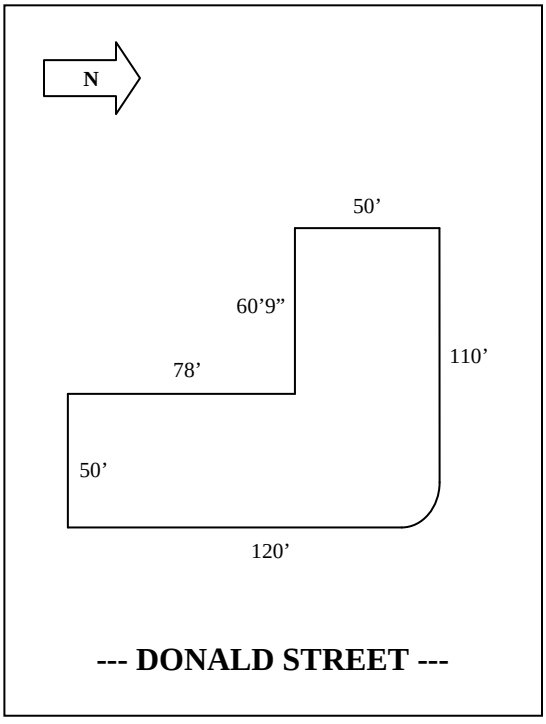
Building Permits (Plans available: **[CS]** Archives; **[M]** Microfilm):

- 835/1910 **[CS]** $70,000 (original); 6519/1948 $? (interior alterations); 27/1951 $3,500 (rebuild elevator); 8082/1965 $2,200 (interior alteration to 388 Donald St.); 3767/1966 $4,400 (interior alteration to 388 Donald St.); 7376/1966 $1,900 (interior alteration to 388 Donald St.); 2141/1971 (unknown); 3675/1971 (unknown); 2379/1981 $100,000 (renovations); 7089/1981 $6,000 (interior alterations); 1195/1985 (unknown); 6134/1985 $1,300 (interior alteration to 300 Notre Dame Ave.); 7852/1986 $5,000 (interior alteration to 302 Notre Dame Ave.); 203/1988 $1,000 (interior alteration to 382 Donald St.); 10776/1988 $1,000 (interior alteration to 386 Donald St.); 2433/1992 unknown (alterations to 306 Notre Dame Ave.); 236/1994 unknown (alterations to 300 Notre Dame Ave.)

Information:

- Permit 6519/1948- interior alterations to 2nd floor office

- Permit 7089/1981- new lighting & office doors, 1st & 2nd floor offices




**ARCHITECT: G.W. NORTHWOOD**

**CONTRACTOR: THOMAS KELLY & SONS LTD.**

## APPENDIX II

Major George William Northwood

G.W. Northwood was born in 1876 and came to Winnipeg in 1905 as a graduate of McGill University. At the time, he was affiliated with Werner E. Noffke of Ottawa, under the name Northwood and Noffke. For several years, this firm was the corporate architect for the Winnipeg-based Northern (later Northern Crown) Bank and, as such, was responsible for the design of the company's banks prior to 1912.[1]

Shortly after his arrival in the city, Northwood formed a short-lived partnership with William Wallace Blair (1852-1916), an Irish-born designer 24 years his elder. This short-lived partnership lasted only the construction year of 1906. By 1907, the pair was working individually according to the City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledgers. Northwood continued working alone for over a decade, designing a number of large and small structures. In 1919, Northwood formed a four-year partnership with local architect Raymond Marwood-Elton Carey (1883-1975).

Northwood worked alone after 1922 until ca.1928 when he joined with fellow World War I veteran, Brigadier Major Cyril W. U. Chivers (1879-1969). This pair designed many notable public buildings throughout Winnipeg. Northwood's career also included a seat on the Board of the Manitoba Association of Architects, membership in the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, and the presidency of the Manitoba Club. He died in 1959.[2]

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1 R.R. Rostecki, "St. John's Telephone Exchange - 405 Burrows Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba," report for the City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee (August 1991), p. 17. C.W.U. Chivers, later a partner of Northwood's, worked briefly for Northwood and Noffke, ca.1905-06.

2 Winnipeg Free Press, December 15, 1959, p. 38.

The list of buildings that Northwood designed alone or in partnership would include:

Thomas Ryan Warehouse, 44 Princess St., with W.W. Blair (1906) – Grade III
Henderson Directory Building, 279 Garry St., with W.W. Blair (1906)
Retail/residential block, Lydia St., with W.W. Blair (1906)
Beckett Care Company Warehouse, Henry Ave., with W.W. Blair (1906)
Richards and Brown Warehouse, 132 James Ave. (1911)
Finnie & Murray Block (Western Glove Works), 321 McDermot Ave. (1912) – Grade III
R.J. Whitla House, Yale Ave. (1912)
A. Bernard House, Assiniboine Ave. (1912)
Robinson and Black Building, Portage Ave. (1912)
Bank of Ottawa, 363 Main St. (1912 addition and alteration) – demolished
Ralph Connor House, 54 West Gate (1913) – Grade II
Dominion Bank, Portage Ave., with R. Carey (1919 alterations) – demolished
Winnipeg Paint and Glass Co. Warehouse, Notre Dame Ave. East, with R. Carey (1919 alterations)
J.K.L. Ross Garage, Lombard Ave., with R. Carey (1919)
B.M. Armstrong House, Kingsway, with R. Carey (1920)
Hudson's Bay Company Offices, 208 Main St., with R. Carey (1920 alterations)
Union Tower Annex, 500 Main St., with R. Carey (1921) – Grade II
Bank of Ottawa, 363 Main St., with R. Carey (1922 alterations)
Dominion Bank, Redwood Ave., with R. Carey (1922 alterations)
St. Ignatius Catholic Church, Jessie Ave., with C.W.U. Chivers (1928)
Canadian Wheat Board Building, 423 Main St., with C.W.U. Chivers (1929) – List of Historical Resources
Assiniboine Park Pavilion, with C.W.U. Chivers (1929) – Grade II
Canadian General Electric Bldg., 265 Notre Dame Ave., with C.W.U. Chivers (1930) – Grade III
Women's Tribute Memorial Lodge, 200 Woodlawn St., with C.W.U. Chivers (1931) – Grade II
Queenston School, 245 Queenston St. (1931)
Bank of Toronto, Academy Road Branch, with C.W.U. Chivers (1934)
Federal Building, 269 Main St., with C.W.U. Chivers (1935)
St. John's Telephone Exchange, 405 Burrows Ave., with C.W.U. Chivers (1946 addition)

**388 DONALD STREET – PHOENIX BLOCK**




Plate 1 – Travellers Building, 283 Bannatyne Avenue, front (south) and east façades, 2005. (M. Peterson, 2005.)

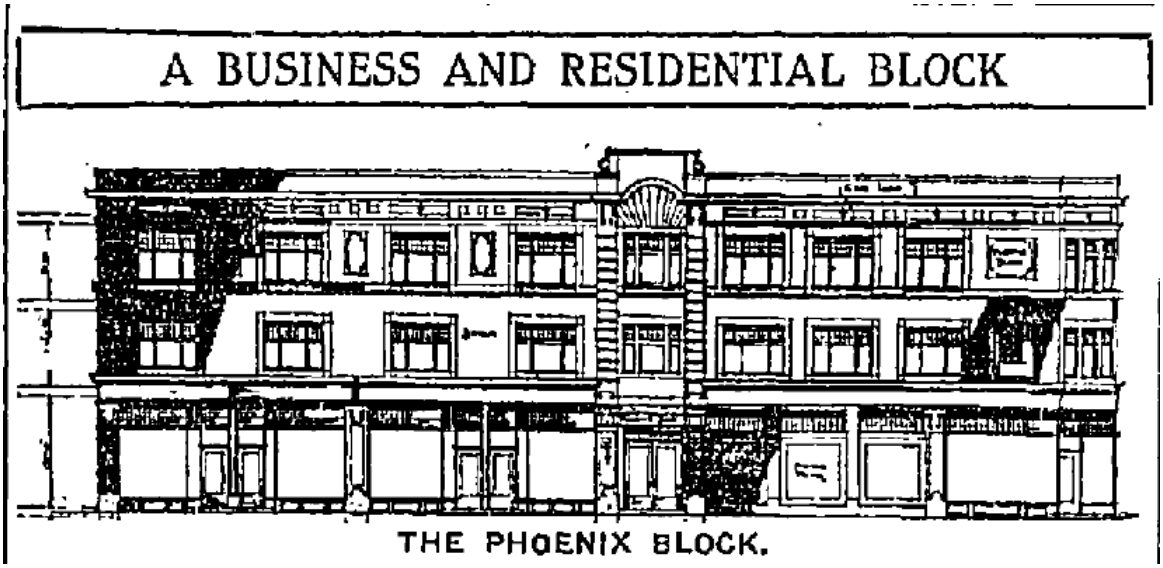



Plate 2 – Drawing of the new building, the Phoenix Block, corner Princess Street and Notre Dame Avenue. (Reproduced from Manitoba Free Press, April 2, 1910, p. 20.)

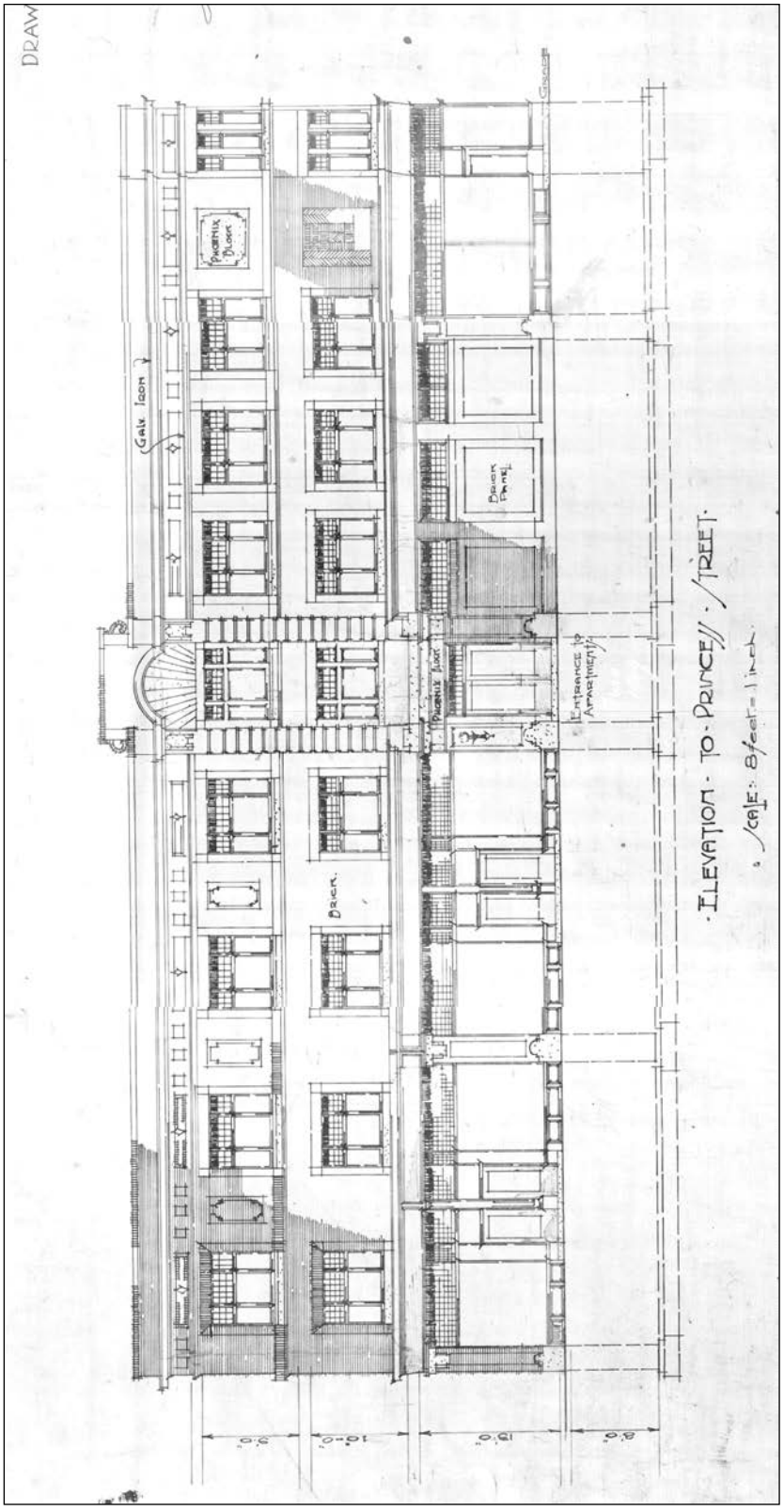



Plate 3 – "Elevation to Princess Street," Architect's Plans No. 835/1910. (City of Winnipeg.)

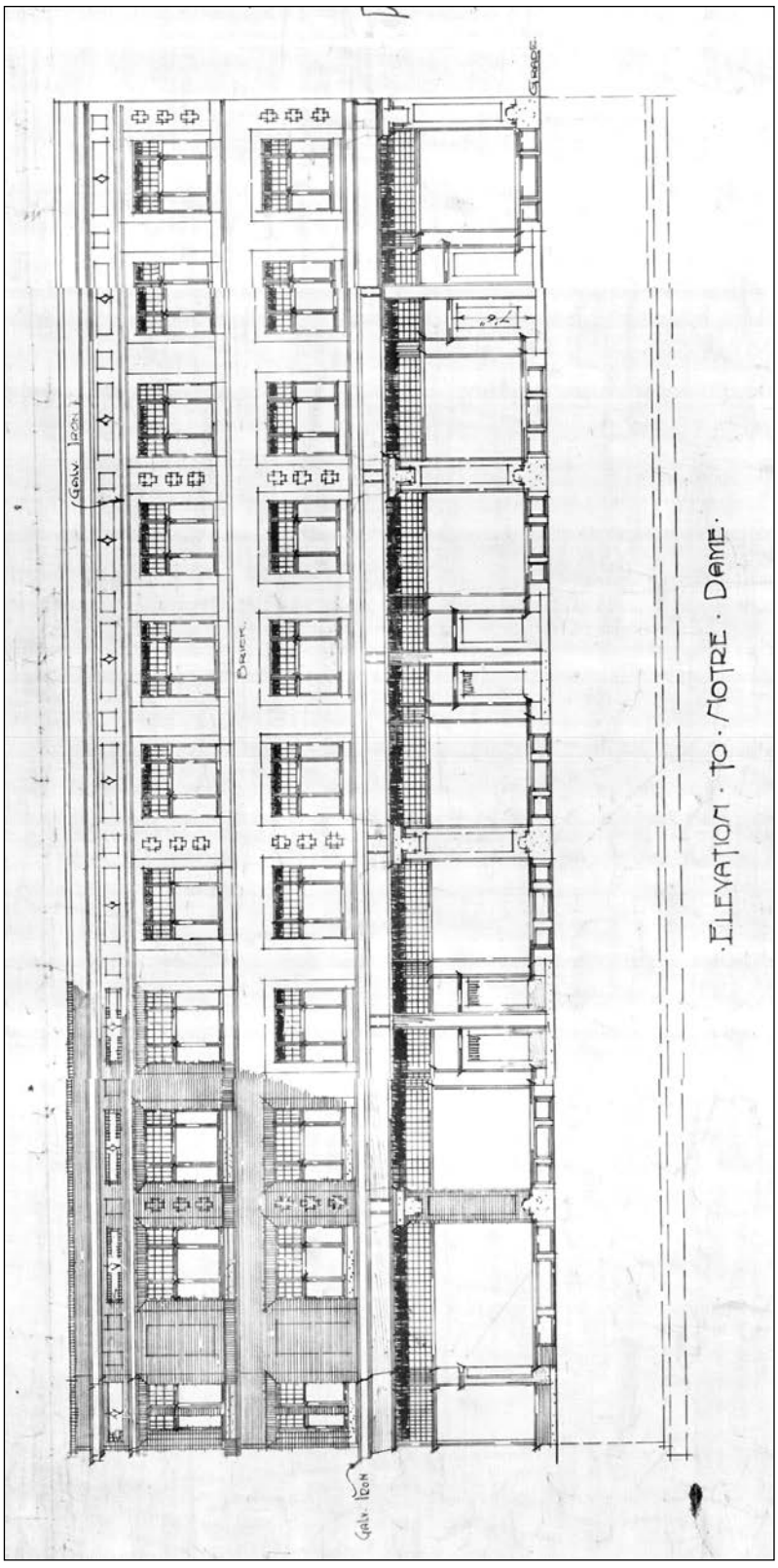



Plate 4 – "Elevation to Notre Dame," Architect's Plans No. 835/1910. (City of Winnipeg.)

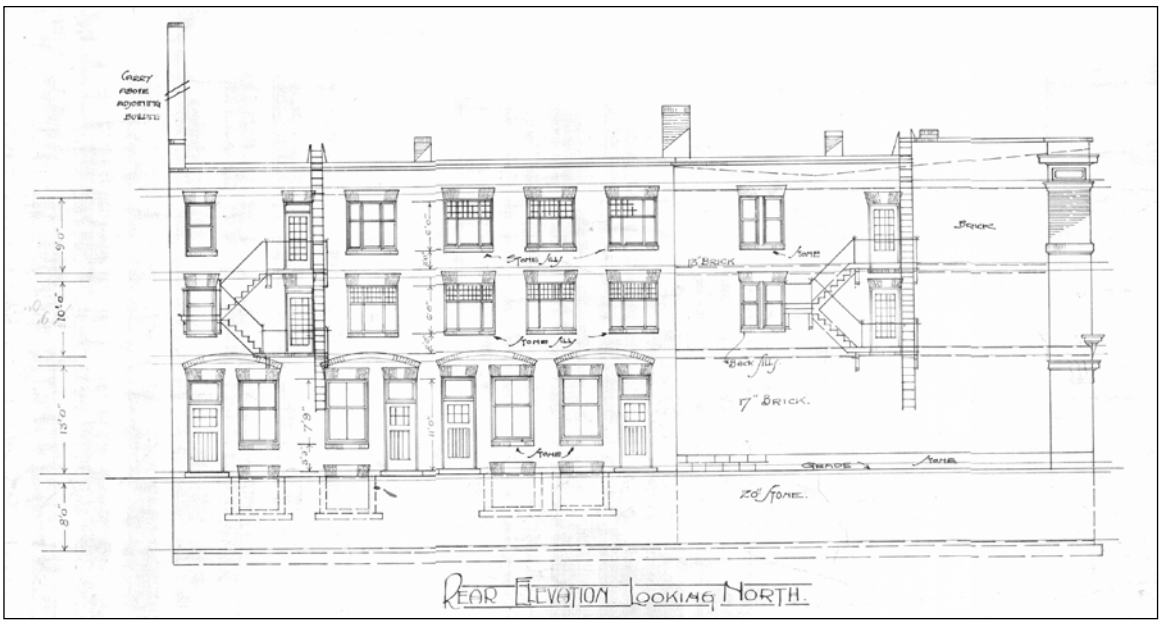



Plate 5 – "Rear Elevation Looking North," Architect's Plans No. 835/1910. (City of Winnipeg.)

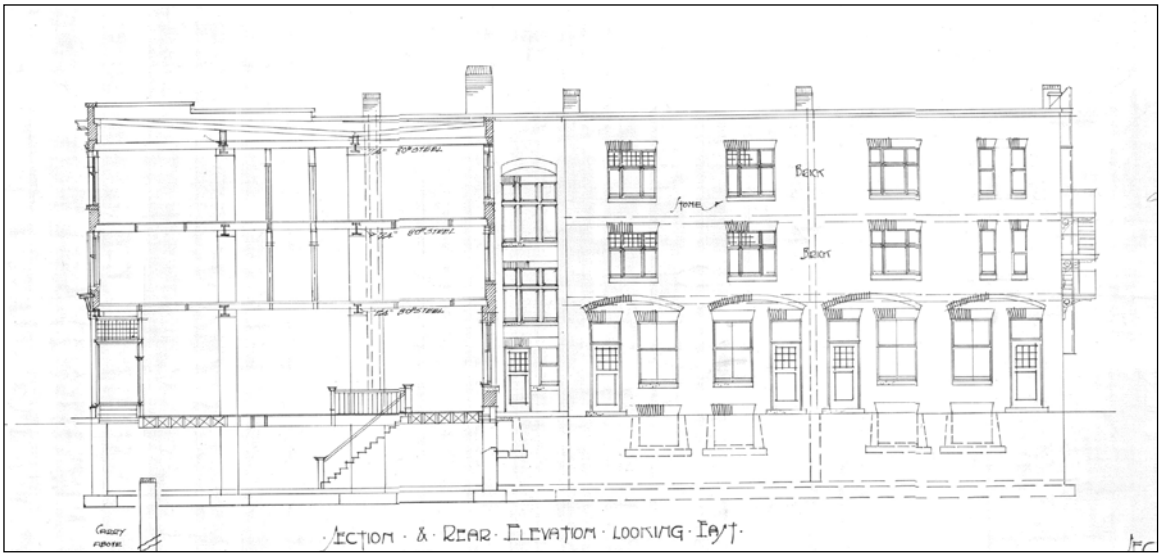



Plate 6 – "Section & Rear Elevation Looking East," Architect's Plans No. 835/1910. (City of Winnipeg.)

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Plate 7 – Phoenix Block, 388 Donald Street, east and south façades, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)




Plate 8 – Phoenix Block, 388 Donald Street, door hood above entrance in north façade, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

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Plate 9 – Phoenix Block, 388 Donald Street, north façade, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)




Plate 10 – Phoenix Block, 388 Donald Street, detail of retail entrances on north façade, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

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Plate 11 – Phoenix Block, 388 Donald Street, rear (west façade), 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)



Plate 12 – Phoenix Block, 388 Donald Street, rear (south façade), 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)



Plate 13 – Phoenix Block, 388 Donald Street, second floor office space, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)



Plate 14 – Phoenix Block, tin ceiling, 380 Donald Street, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)




Plate 15 – Phoenix Block, 388 Donald Street, rear (west) exit hallway, second floor, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

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Plate 16 – Phoenix Block, 388 Donald Street, staircase, third floor, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)




Plate 17 – Looking north from Cumberland Avenue towards Notre Dame Avenue and Princess Street, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)




Plate 18 – West side of Donald Street between Cumberland and Notre Dame avenues with the Phoenix Building, 388 Donald Street (#1), the Aldous Building, 374-376 Donald Street (#2) and the Bell Block, 370 Donald Street (#3), 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)




Plate 19 – Thomas Kelly and Sons, Contractors, 1911 letterhead. (City Archives, Architect's Plan #457/1911.)

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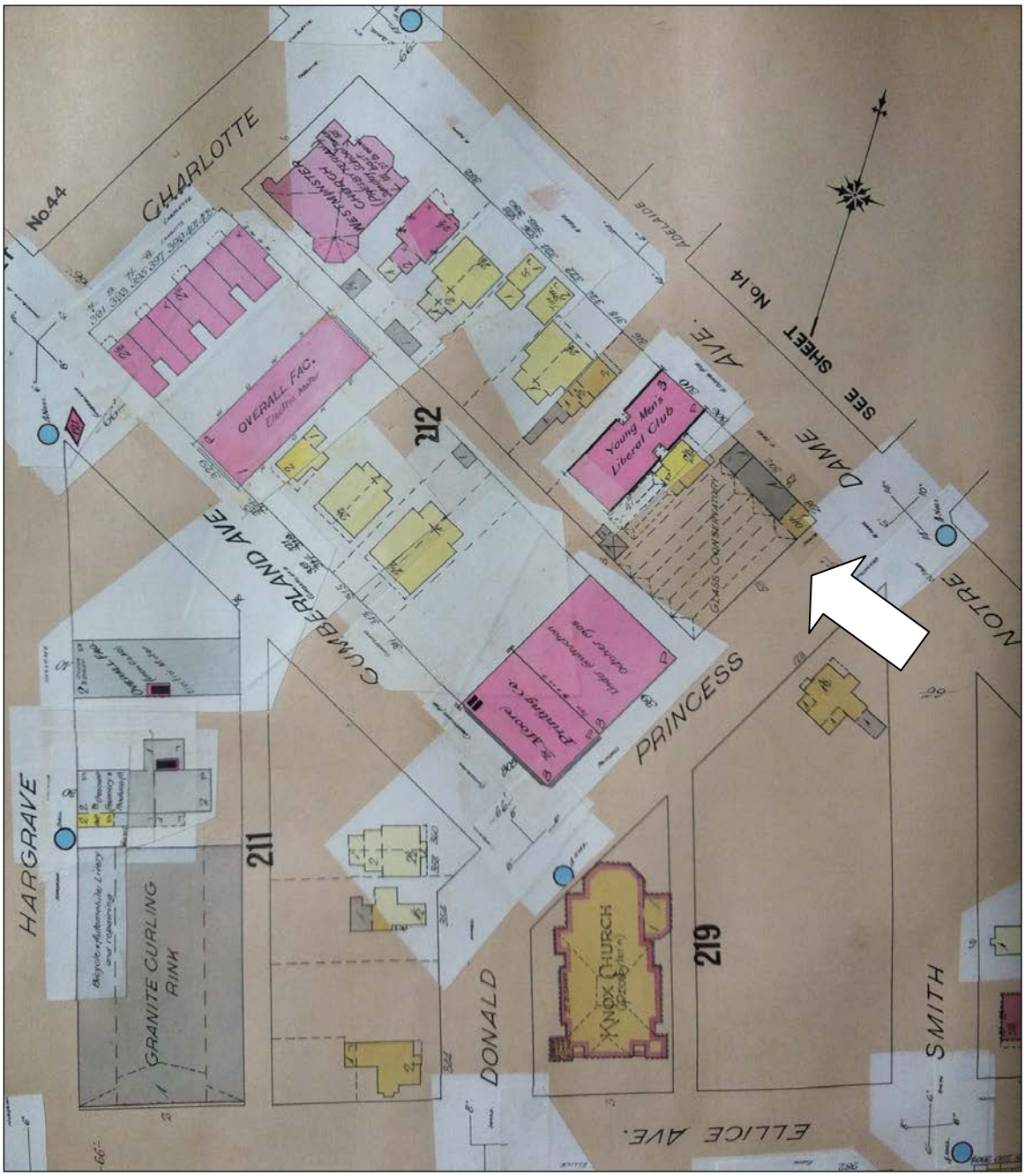



Plate 20 – Fire Atlas of Winnipeg, Vol. I, Sheet 37, 1895 (revised to 1905). The mixed use of the neighbourhood is shown in these few blocks with a curling club, single family and duplex housing, offices, churches, a factories and commercial property. The Royal Greenhouses are at the arrow. (City of Winnipeg.)




Plate 20 – Advertisement for Royal Greenhouses, corner Princess Street and Notre Dame Avenue. (Reproduced from the Manitoba Free Press, November 17, 1898, p. 8.)



Plate 21 – Joseph C. McGreevy, date unknown. (Reproduced from Manitoba Historical Society, Memorable Manitobans, "McGreevy, Joseph C.," online.)