

98 ALBERT STREET

RELIABLE SERVICE STATION

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings and Resources Committee
Researcher: M. Peterson
May 2014

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Winnipeg in the mid-1890s was on the verge of a spectacular era of growth and development that would transform the small community into a regional metropolis, at the fore of the populating of Western Canada and the establishment of the wheat economy. As Winnipeg's built environment evolved to serve this new economic role and its new population, specific districts that had been established a decade earlier provided the basic pattern for this frenzied period of growth.

The real estate boom of the early 1880s was intimately connected to the early construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), Canada's first transcontinental railway, west of Winnipeg. 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. It was also the beginning of the segregation of the various sectors of the city – residential, commercial and industrial – and their specific buildings.[1] The huge advance in land prices was especially noticeable along Main Street north of Portage Avenue. Here the small residential properties were consolidated into larger blocks of land and replaced by increasingly massive commercial structures (Plates 1 and 2).

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.[2] With this development came a maturation of the retail and wholesale sectors. The bust of 1882 did not end this development, but rather strengthened it by removing the excess and inexperienced entrepreneurs, by reducing the surplus stock and by hardening attitudes towards credit.[3] The area, however, was undeniably developing as the warehouse district, slowly through the 1880s and 1890s and then rapidly after 1900.

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1 R.R. Rostecki, "The Growth of Winnipeg, 1870-1886," unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Manitoba, 1980, pp. 112-114.

2 Manitoba Free Press, September 3, 1904, p. 14.

3 R.R. Rostecki, op. cit., p. 113.

The original survey of the land in the area, based on the long, thin river lots, created some interesting street layouts in the downtown area. One of the more unusual was the intersecting of Albert and Arthur streets in a point at Bannatyne Avenue, creating a pie-shaped plot of land north of McDermot Avenue. Photographic evidence shows that by the mid-1890s, this block was filled with residential structures, some appear to have been converted into commercial property and the pointed end of the block featuring fencing ending in a substantial post (Plate 3).

By 1901, however, the block would see extensive development, on the south end, facing McDermot Avenue, was built the Alexandra Block, which was converted into the Mariaggi Hotel a year later (Plate 4). To the north, the three-storey Schmidt Foundry Building was also completed in 1901. And on the land that is now 98 Albert Street, a one-storey brick block was built along Albert Street (Plates 5-7).[4]

The block maintained this organization until the 1920s, when the last of the pre-1900 buildings were demolished, as was almost all of the 1901 brick retail block. In its place was built a small garage, the Reliable Service Station, including a pair of gas pumps opened in 1925 (Plate 8).

STYLE

The 1920s garage is modestly built and designed, its main architectural feature being a shallow tile roof. This was a common element of small-scale retail structures of the 1920s and 1930s, used extensively for local grocery stores built for the Safeway and Piggly Wiggly chains. Several examples of these structures are still extant in the downtown and suburbs.

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4 City of Winnipeg Building Permit (below as BP), #594/1901. Architect was the owner, W.J. Smith, contractor R. Watson, cost for the 16' x 65' structure, describes as an addition to an existing structure, was $800.

CONSTRUCTION

According to the original plans, the solid brick structure measured 6.1 metres on Arthur Street (west façade), 6.7 metres on Albert Street (east), 13.7 metres on its front (north) façade and 16.5 metres on the rear (south) – Plate 9. Exterior walls were all 30.5 centimetres solid brick, interior tile walls were 15.2 centimetres. The new building reused the east exterior wall and the brick walls of the washroom and the south wall is actually that of the neighbouring building, 90 Albert Street. The ceilings were 2.7 metres high and the reinforced concrete slab floor was 15.2 centimetres thick. Red brick was used to cap the roof and as window sills (Plate 10). Stucco was used as exterior cladding. A pair of gasoline pumps was located 4.9 metres to the north of the front elevation.

DESIGN

This small block was designed and built to fit its oddly shaped lot and originally included two windows on the east side (Plate 11), a series of five windows and two doors on the front (north) façade (Plate 12), and a large, 2.4-metre vehicle entrance at the south end of the north façade. Electric lights were placed in the wooden soffits along the front façade below the overhanging tile roof.

The building has been altered since construction, the east façade still features two large windows (Plate 13), the front now includes only one doorway and the north elevation features two bays, the southern opening is closed in, the northern one features a large window (Plate 14). It is unclear whether the stucco is original. It appears that the original lighting along the front façade remains (Plate 15).

INTERIOR

Now converted into a restaurant, the interior has been altered to include seating, counter and cooking areas (Plate 16).

INTEGRITY

The building stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition. Changes to the exterior, specifically windows and doors, have been extensive.

STREETSCAPE

The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada has recognized Winnipeg's Exchange District as a National Historic District. As such, all buildings in the Exchange District are an essential part of the historic streetscape and the Historical Buildings and Resources Committee gives all buildings in the District 60 points for streetscape (Plate 17).

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS

The 1925 City of Winnipeg Building Permit names the Boland Brothers as the architects and contractors for this building. This small-scale construction company was founded in the 1878 by James R. Boland (1849-1935), who had come to Winnipeg in 1872. Originally engaged as building movers, the company expanded to include renovations and then general contracting.[5] J.R. Boland moved to Portland, Oregon in 1908[6] and the business was taken over by his three sons – Charles Frederick (1881-1942), William F. (1883-?) and James M. (1887-?). Boland Brothers was incorporated in 1928.[7]

This is the first structure designed and built by the Boland Brothers to be evaluated by the Historical Buildings and Resources Committee.

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5 Manitoba Free Press, September 14, 1912, p. 13.

6 Winnipeg Free Press, November 15, 1935, p. 4.

7 Winnipeg Free Press, May 23, 1928, p. 3.

PERSON/INSTITUTION

During World War I, the 1901 brick structure was purchased by Frank Watson, owner of the Watson Tire Company and converted the building into an automobile tire retail and repair shop.[8] A year later, Watson added gasoline service to the site. By 1922, the Reliable Station had expanded into most of the remaining structures on the site (Plate 18).

After the 1925 construction, the Reliable Service Station operated for many decades (Plate 19), although the original owner, paper hanger W.J. Smith maintained his control of the property until the late 1920s and F.A. Smith (relationship unknown) owned it until 1954.[9]

In the 1930s, A. Hicks is listed as the proprietor of the service station, by the late 1930s it is Karl Norek, who purchased the building from the Smith family in 1955.[10] The service station operated until the early 1970s, when the Metro government had begun to study automobiles and more stringent regulation for gas stations.[11] The next tenant of the building was the State Window and Building Cleaning Company (Plates 20 and 21), founded by Gregory "Roy" Royko (1923-1996) after World War II.[12] This business remained in the building until the 1980s.

More recently, the building has operated as a restaurant with an outdoor patio and has been an important part of the Exchange District and Old Market Square redevelopment (Plate 22).

EVENT

There is no known significant historic event connected with this building.

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8 S.C. Grover, "98 Albert Street – State Window Cleaning Building," report for the Historical Buildings Committee, 1984.

9 City of Winnipeg Assessment Roll, 13-060910000, 1920-1960.

10 Loc. cit.; and Henderson's Directory, 1920-1960.

11 Metropolitan Corporation of Greater Winnipeg, A Study of Service Stations Within the Metropolitan Area, Planning Division, 1966, pp. 6 and 21, quoted in S.C. Grover, op. cit. The study found 424 stations in the City serving Winnipeg's cars, which had doubled in number between 1950 and 1960. The Commission recommended stricter zoning requirements and ratios of pump islands to total property.

12 Winnipeg Free Press, November 9, 1996, p. 54.

CONTEXT

This retail structure was built during the post-World War I era, a period of modest economic growth. The growth in sales of automobiles necessitated an increasing number of gas stations and repair garages and downtown Winnipeg saw a number of such facilities built during this time.

LANDMARK

This modest structure is found in the middle of the Exchange District and close to Old Market Square. It would be a well-known building to many Winnipeggers because of its use and its unique location.

Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
THE CITY OF WINNIPEG

APPENDIX I

CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report
Assessment Record

Building Address: 98 Albert Street

Building Name: Reliable Service Station

Original Use: service station

Current Use: café

Roll No. (Old): 609100 (10091)

Municipality: 12 Ward: 2 Property or Occupancy Code: 30

Legal Description: 6/7 St. John, Plan 33009, Lot 25 (Original: 6 St. John, Plan 16, part Lot 6: Lot 7)

Location: west side between McDermot and Bannatyne avenues

Date of Construction: 1925

Storeys: 1

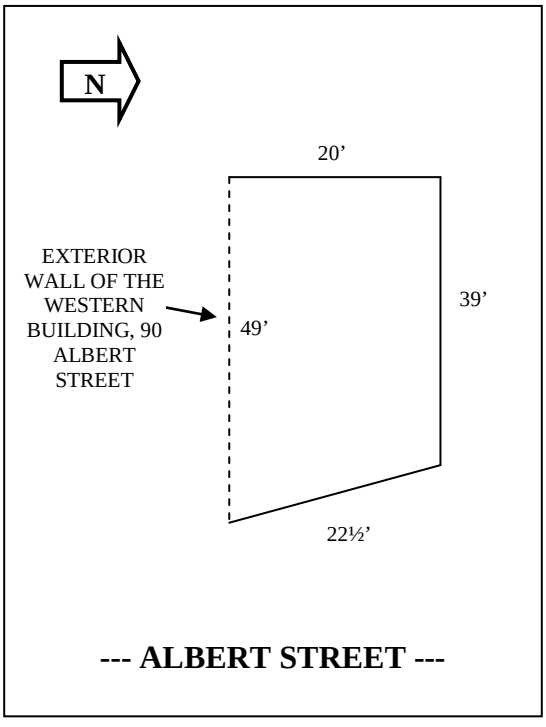
Construction Type: Brick and stucco

HERITAGE STATUS: ON NOMINATED LIST

Building Permits (Plans available: **[CS]** City Storage):
- 97/1925 **[CS]** $1,300 (original); 1014/1936 $100 (tank); 1747/1941 $100 (pumps); 5022/1954 $200 (Storage Tanks); 4939/1996 **[CS]** (alteration to restaurant), 149636/2000 $50,000 (interior alterations); 176020/2001 $1,200 (construct patio); 214126/2002 $1,773 (exterior alteration – canopy)

Information:

- 20 x 44 x 12½ = 11,000 cu, ft.
- Finish – plaster/brick
- Surface concrete floor
- 1945 Assessment – "good condition"
- 1954 – some settlement, stucco cracks
- 1960 – Building in good general condition. Heated by 2 gas unit heaters
- 1980 – pumps & tanks removed
- 1984 Inspection – building vacant



ARCHITECT: BOLAND BROTHERS

CONTRACTOR: BOLAND BROTHERS

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Plate 1 – McDermot Avenue looking west from Main Street, ca.1881. (Archives of Manitoba, "Winnipeg- Streets- McDermot #1".)



Plate 2 – The same view approximately two decades later (ca.1903). Large brick and stone warehouses and retail/office buildings have replaced all the residential property in this shot. (Archives of Manitoba.)

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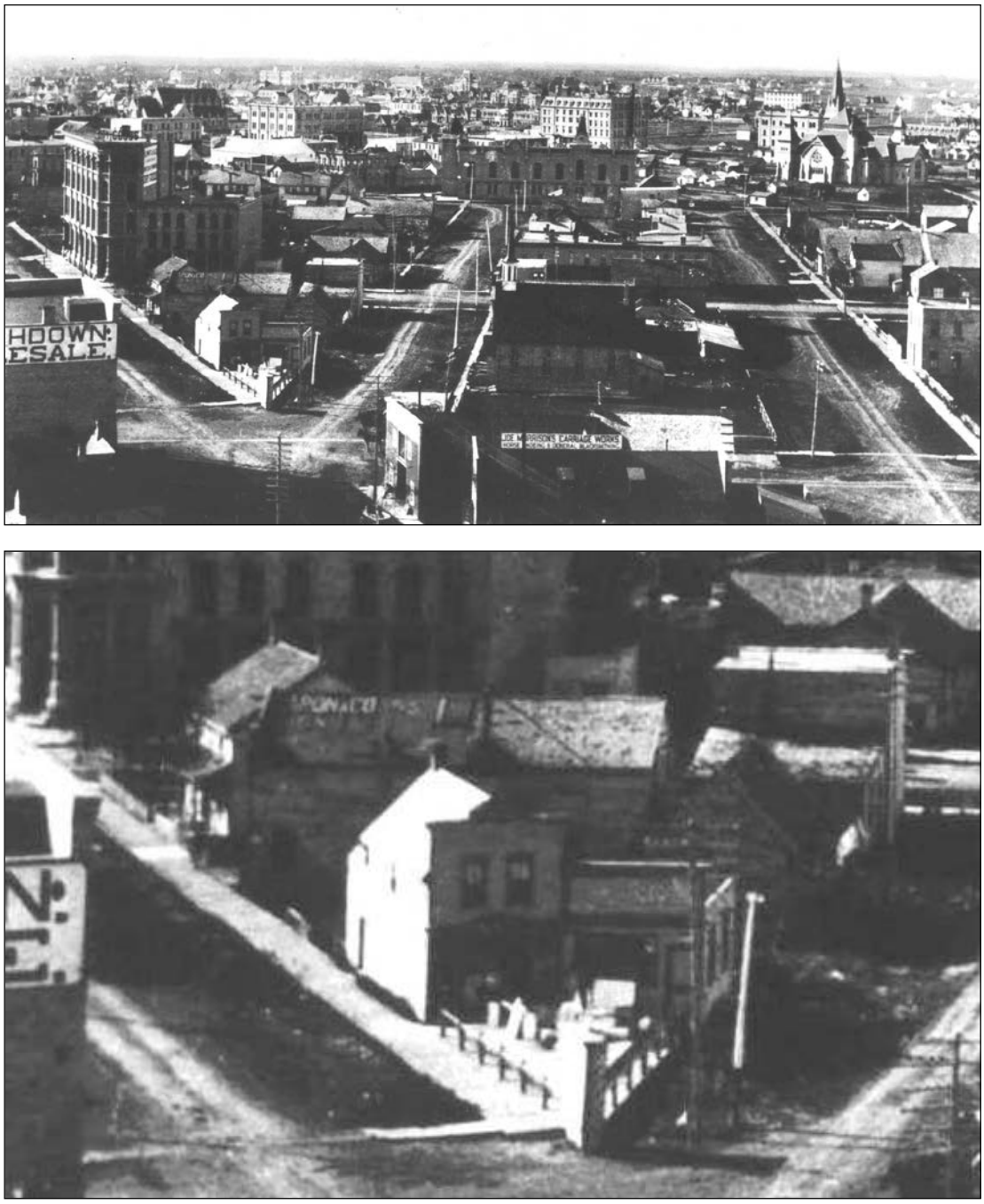


Plate 3 – Looking south from Bannatyne Avenue, ca.1895 with enlargement of the Albert/Arthur streets intersection (below). (Archives of Manitoba.)

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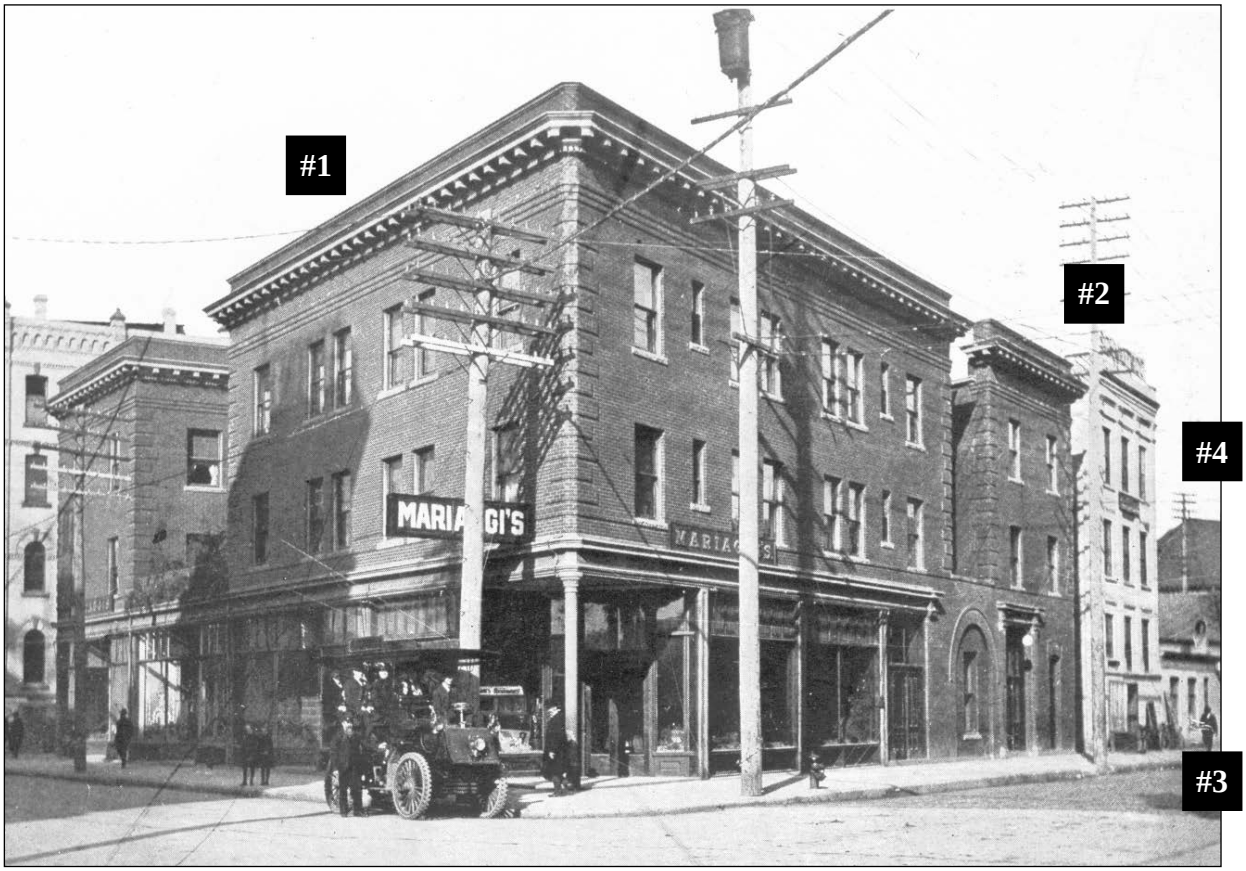


Plate 4 – The Mariaggi Hotel, 85 Arthur Street (#1), the Schmidt Foundry Building, 90 Albert Street (#2) and part of the W.J. Smith commercial block (#3) and roof of pre-1900 residential/commercial property (#4), 1903. (Archives of Manitoba, "Winnipeg-Hotels-Mariaggi-1".)

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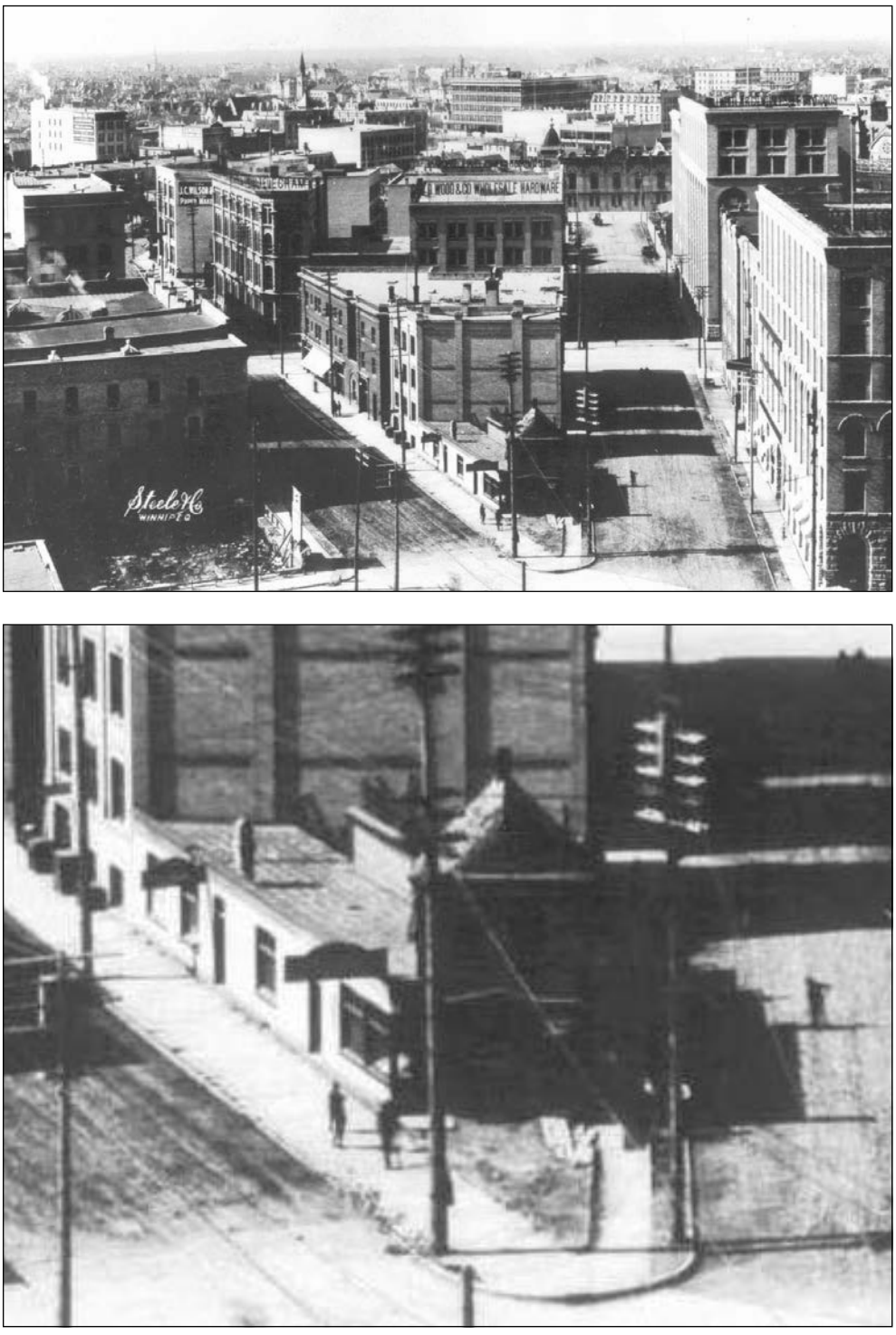


Plate 5 – Looking south from Bannatyne Avenue along Arthur (right) and Albert (left) streets, ca.1905, showing the development of the block, including the W.J. Smith retail structure along Arthur Street and the retention of some of the pre-1900 property (below). (Archives of Manitoba.)

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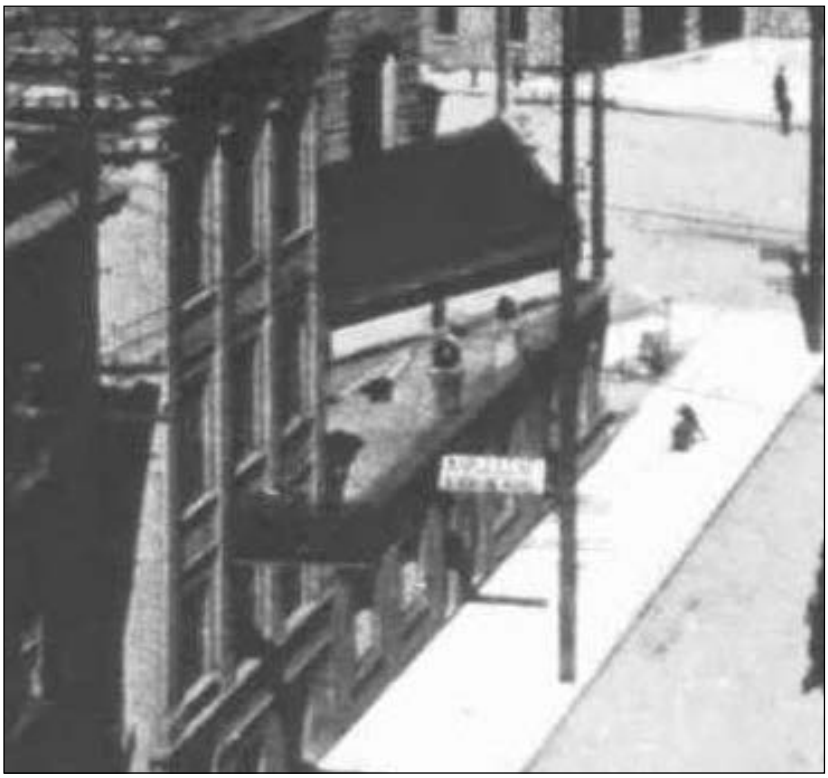


Plate 6 – Looking north along Albert Street towards Central Fire Hall (present-day Old Market Square), ca.1910, with close-up of the Albert Street façade of the W.J. Smith retail block (below). (Archives of Manitoba.)

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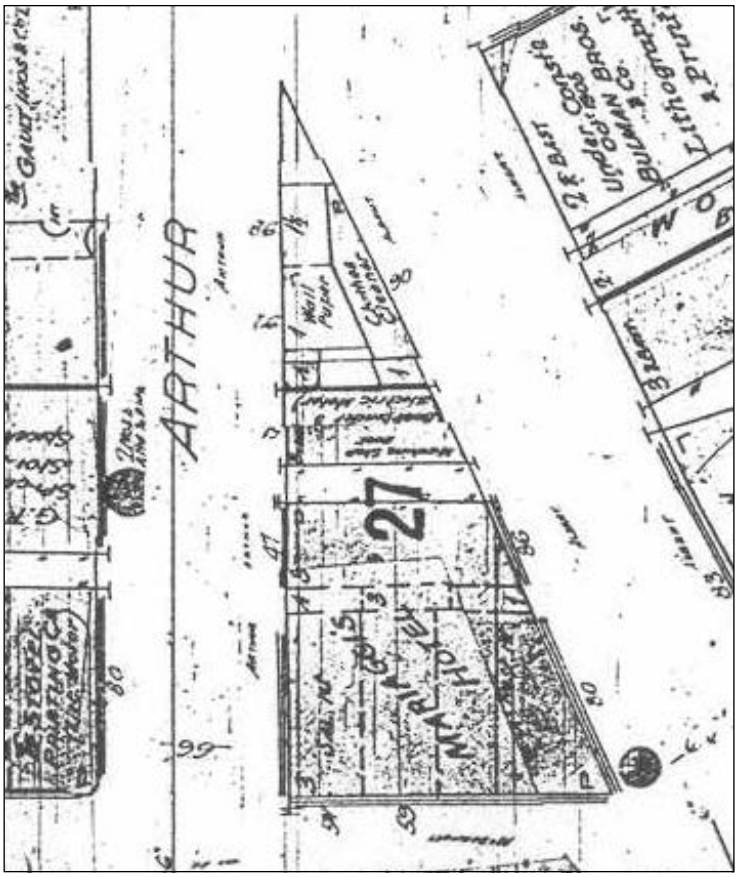


Plate 7 – Charles Goad, Fire Atlas of the City of Winnipeg, 1895 (revised 1905), Sheet 6 and enlarged. (City of Winnipeg.)

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Plate 8 – Looking south along Arthur Street from Bannatyne Avenue, ca.1926. (Archives of Manitoba, Thomas Burns Collection No. 623.)

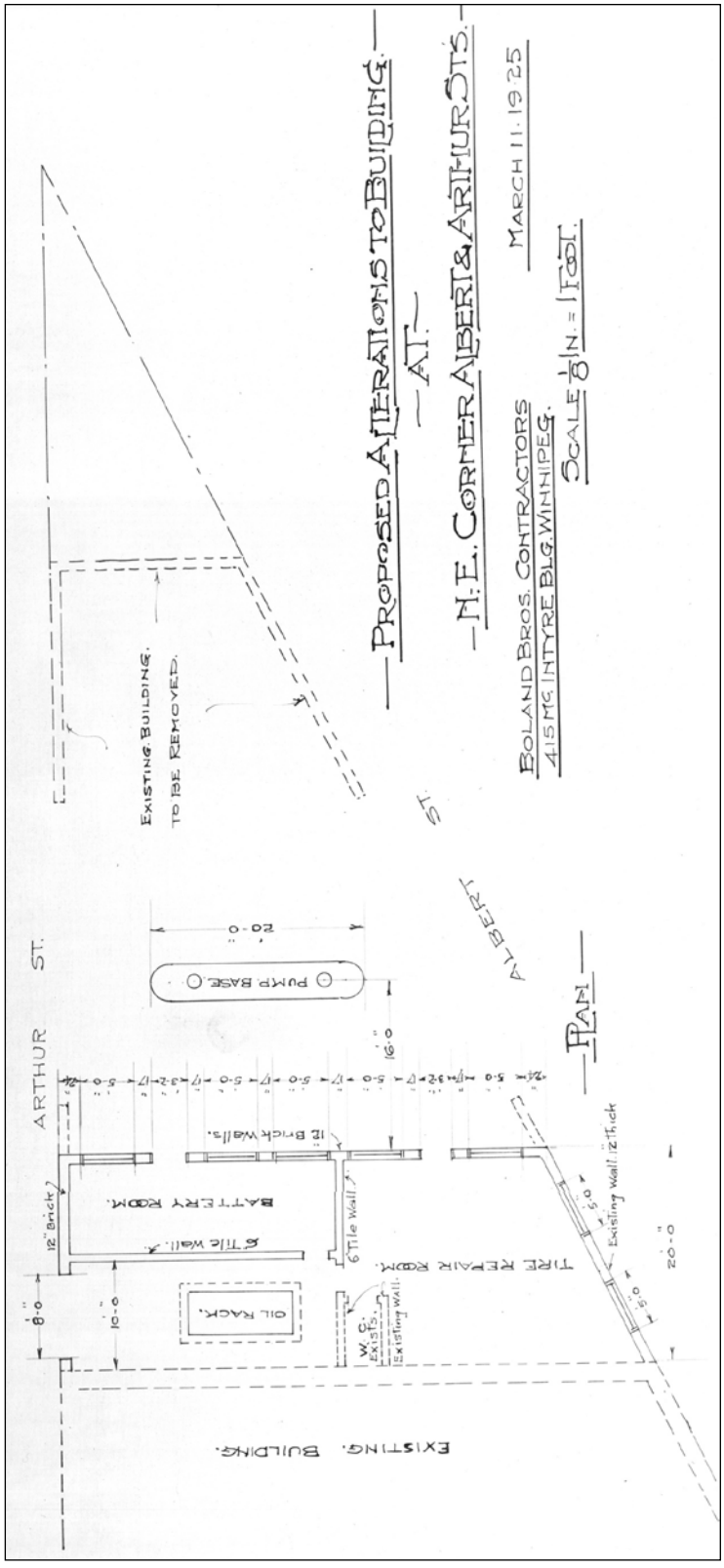


Plate 9 – Architect's plans #97/1925, "Plan". (City of Winnipeg.)

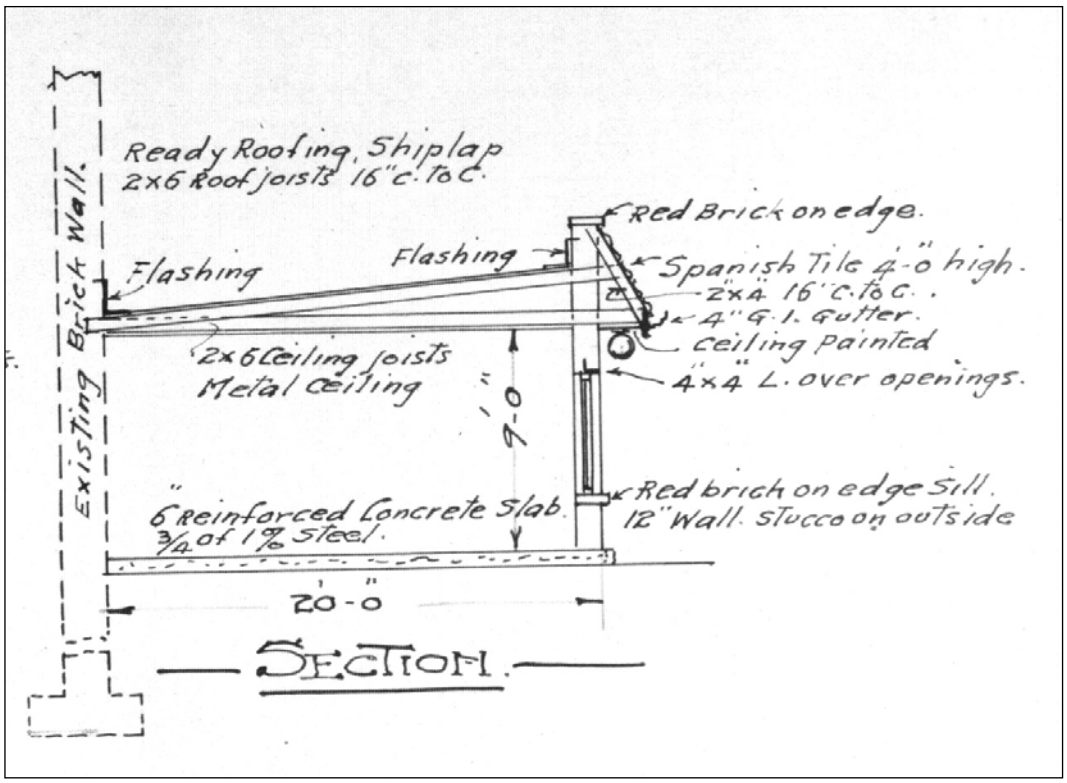


Plate 10 – Architect's plans #97/1925, "Section". (City of Winnipeg.)

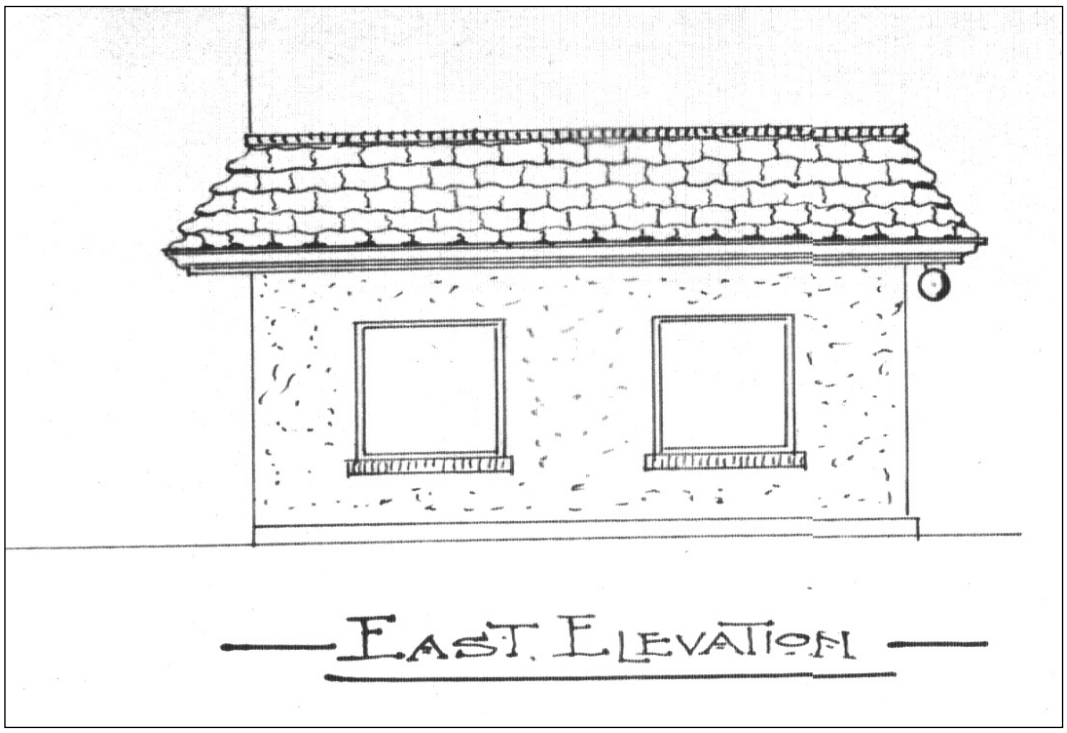


Plate 11 – Architect's plans #97/1925, "East Elevation". (City of Winnipeg.)

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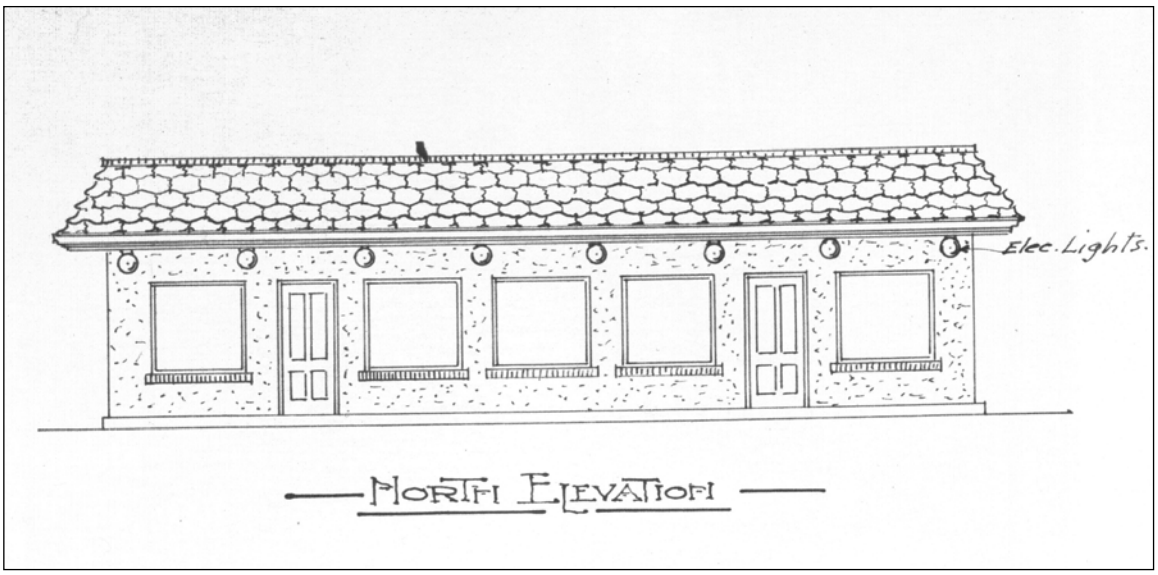


Plate 12 – Architect's plans #97/1925, "North Elevation". (City of Winnipeg.)



Plate 13 – Reliable Service Station, 98 Albert Street, front (north) and east façades, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 14 – Reliable Service Station, 98 Albert Street, front (north) and west façades, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)



Plate 15 – Reliable Service Station, 98 Albert Street, original lighting fixtures on front (north) façades, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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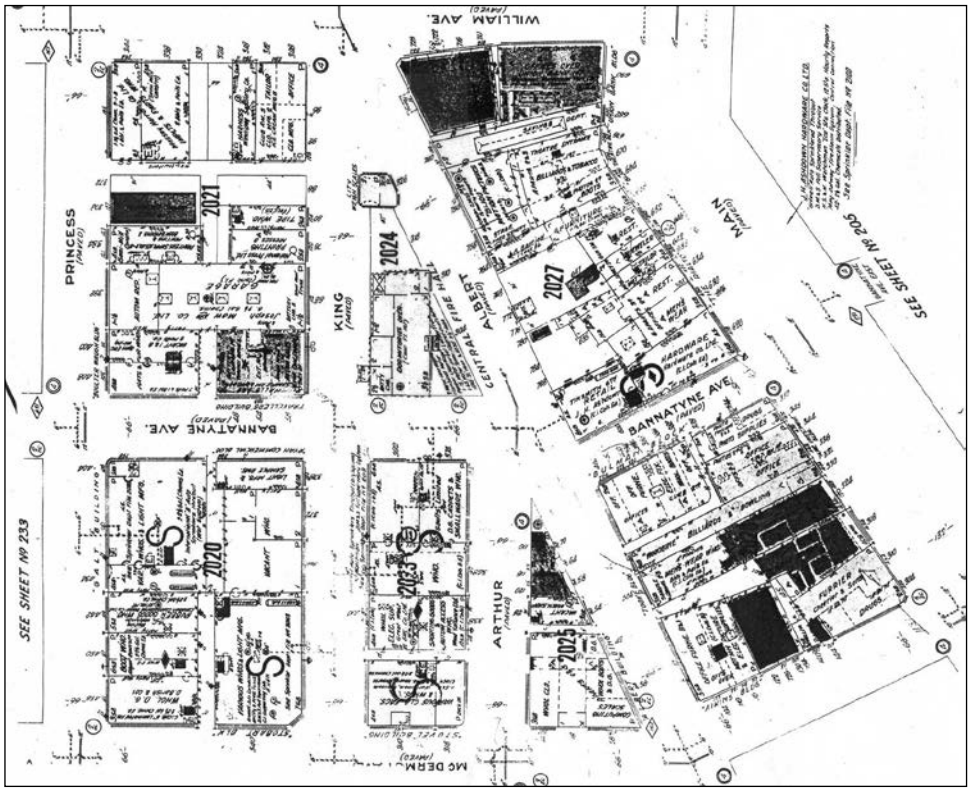
Plate 16 – Reliable Service Station, 98 Albert Street, interior, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 17 – Looking south from Bannatyne Avenue, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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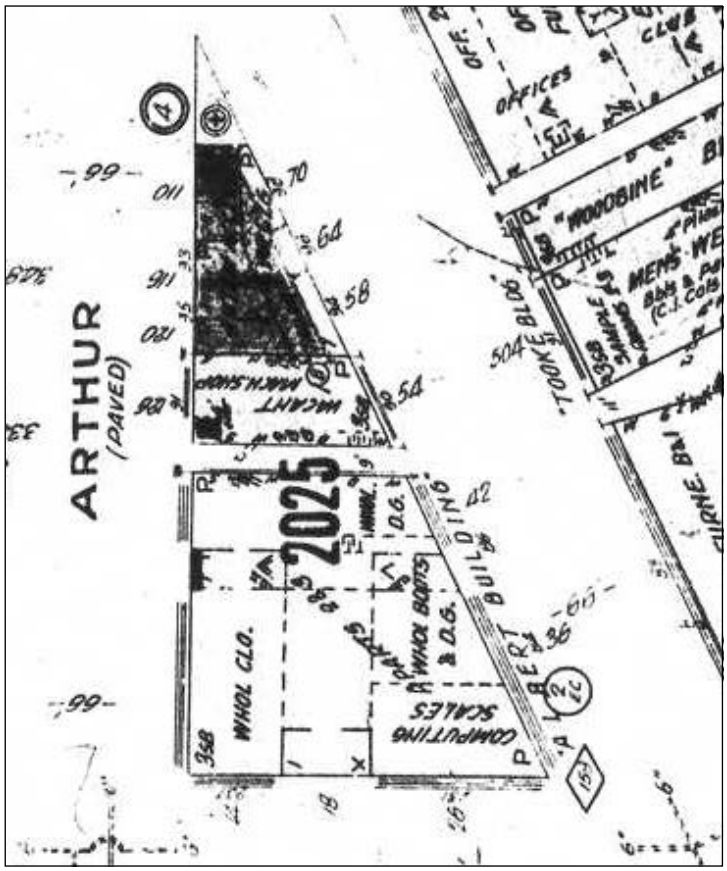


Plate 18 – City of Winnipeg Fire Insurance Atlas, 1918, Vol. II, Sheet 202. (City of Winnipeg.)

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Plate 19 – Advertisement for the Partridge "Quality" Tire Shops in Winnipeg, including the Reliable Service Station, Bannatyne Avenue and Albert Street, 1929. (Reproduced from the Manitoba Free Press, June 11, 1925, p. 5.)

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Plate 20 – 98 Albert Street, State Window and Building Cleaning Company Building, ca. 1978. (City of Winnipeg.)

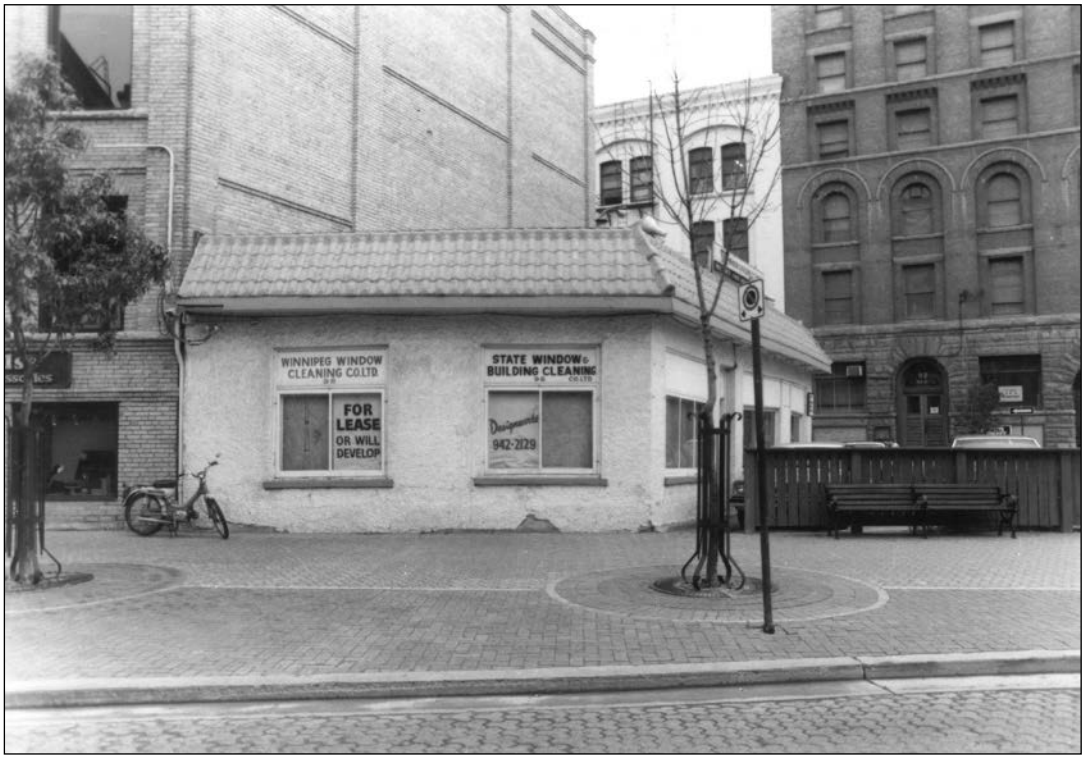


Plate 21 – 98 Albert Street, State Window and Building Cleaning Company Building, 1984. (City of Winnipeg.)

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Plate 22 – 98 Albert Street, renovated restaurant space, ca.1999. (City of Winnipeg.)