

425 ST. MARY AVENUE – WINNIPEG CLINIC

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
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425 ST. MARY AVENUE – WINNIPEG CLINIC

The Great Depression and World War II were periods of extremely slow growth in Winnipeg's building sector. Mostly small projects were completed, larger structures, the Federal Building on Main Street for instance, were built as a make work project funded by the government in Ottawa.

But some work, of course, did occur and during and after the War, a number of factors led to the construction of many notable structures.

During the 1950s and 1960s (and on a more limited scale in the 1940s), Winnipeg again rose to prominence on the international scene as a leader in modern architecture. As one researcher summed up this period: "Manitoba architectural firms consistently ranked among the best in the country, while Manitoba graduates made important contributions across Canada and abroad," that "Winnipeg played a significant role as an early centre of architectural modernism in Canada," and that there was "…a remarkably vital, plugged-in, and sophisticated architectural scene in Winnipeg in 1953."[1]

But it also became clear that the modernism coming from Winnipeg and its University of Manitoba graduates during this period was not the same as the modernism of other major Canadian centres such as Montreal, Vancouver or Toronto but more closely followed the trends emanating from Chicago and especially the ground-breaking work of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969), one of the period's great designers. It was another link between the development of Winnipeg and Chicago, another example of cultural bond between the two mid-western centres.

The Winnipeg Clinic Building is unique in that it straddles several stages in the development of the modernist style; the original two-storey building (Plate 1) and the 1946 (Plate 2) and 1959-1961 (Plate 3) additions dramatically show the evolution of the style over this relatively short period.

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[1] Kelly Crossman, "North by Northwest: Manitoba Modernism, c. 1950," in Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada, Vol. 24, No. 2 (1999), p. 61.

STYLE

The original, two-storey Winnipeg Clinic building and its tower addition represent one of Winnipeg's finest and rare Art Moderne style structures. Most popular in the 1935-1950 period, the style was a conscious break from historic styles and decoration, utilizing new construction methods and materials. As one observer noted, "...the high-style architects [of the "Roaring Twenties"] were pushed aside in favour of industrial designers."[2]

It is seen as an evolution of the earlier Art Deco style, which was the first modern style of the 20th century.[3] Where Art Deco emphasized the vertical, the Art Moderne style highlighted the horizontal, although elements of both styles were often found in combination on buildings. Design elements include asymmetrical façades, rounded corners with wrap around windows (often filled with glass blocks), smooth exterior surfaces with minimal embellishments, the use of aluminum and/or stainless steel, flat roofs and curved canopies.

Winnipeg's list of Art Moderne buildings is very short: the Toronto-Dominion Bank at the corner of Portage Avenue and Notre Dame Avenue (215 Portage Avenue, built 1951-1952) was demolished in 1990 (Plate 4); and the Technical Vocational School (1555 Wall Street, built 1948 with 1962 addition – Plate 5).

CONSTRUCTION

The Winnipeg Clinic was built in several stages- the original two-storey building was completed in 1942, costing $60,000.[4] The original plans describe a brick and stone structure approximately 7.4 metres high with glass block and regular glass windows, stainless steel accenting and a concrete canopy over the main entrance facing west.

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2 Hänsel Hernández-Navarro, "Art Deco + Art Moderne (Streamline Moderne): 1920-1945," in High Style, http://circaoldhouses.com/art-deco-art-moderne (January 8, 2016).

3 H. Hernández-Navarro, op. cit.; and Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, Historic Resources Branch, 1991), pp. 32-33.

4 City of Winnipeg Building Permit (below as BP), #266/1942.

In 1946, a five-storey addition was built on the east side of the original structure, total cost was $350,000 and the addition measured 23.2 x 19.2 metres.[5] The work also included the construction of a separate powerhouse located just north of the offices (Plate 6).[6] The final major work was the construction of an additional six storeys onto the 1946 tower and a penthouse, completed in 1960 at a cost of $420,000.[7] Rough-cut pink limestone and brick are used to clad the steel frame tower.

DESIGN

The building's original portion is a two-storey limestone-clad rectangular structure, its main façade facing west onto Vaughan Street (Plate 7). Large, single pane windows in rectilinear openings are found on both floors, the main entrance is protected by a curved canopy supported by an illuminated pillar with carved Greek symbol for medicine (Plate 8). A grouping of glass block openings is located above the entrance canopy.

The front façade curves around to the south façade, the curved area filled with glass blocks (Plate 9). The south elevation features three thin, glass block filled openings and the visible portion of the east façade includes a large rectilinear window opening on the ground floor and three stained glass filled openings on the second floor (Plate 10). Low limestone planter walls at the southwest corner and along the south side of the building feature carved geometric shapes.

The brick clad north façade features only one window on the second floor; three smaller openings on the ground floor have been bricked in (Plate 11).

The tower portion of the building, completed in 1946 and 1960, is more conspicuous. The north façade (clad in common clay brick) features bands of regularly placed rectilinear window openings with brick sills and continuous concrete heads on all floors as well as slender, glass block filled windows at the west end of the elevation (Plate 12).

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5 Architect's Plans, #1079/1946, courtesy of Winnipeg Archives.

6 BP #1079/1946 (addition) and #1267/1946 (powerhouse), cost $40,000.

7 BP #2867/1959 and #431/1960.

The east façade features a combination of functional windows in rectilinear openings and slender, paired glass block filled openings (Plate 13). The concrete heads of the north façade are carried through on this elevation as well.

The main façades, south and west, give the building its character and notoriety. The Vaughan Street (west) façade is clad in smooth-cut limestone, two slender, glass block filled openings run the entire height of the building (Plate 14). The south façade, also clad in limestone, features delicate metal canopies above the rectilinear window openings (Plate 15). Near the southwest corner, a wall of pink limestone runs from grade to roof (Plate 16) and the canopies continue past the wall, curving out and around the corner (Plates 17 and 18).

INTERIOR

The building was designed and continues to be used as a medical office tower, with floors of reception areas, offices and examination rooms. A great deal of alteration and upgrading has occurred on most floors, there are examples of original layout and finishes, including stair detailing, basement lighting and window accents (Plates 19-22).

INTEGRITY

The building stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition for its age. Alterations to the exterior have been negligible; the building has remained virtually unchanged since completion of the extra storeys to the eastern tower in the late 1950s. The construction of pedestrian overpasses has, however, partially hidden some of the building.

STREETSCAPE

The building has been an integral part of two major downtown thoroughfares since its construction. Part of this effect has, however, been reduced because of the construction of pedestrian overpasses crossing both St. Mary Avenue and Vaughan Street (Plates 23 and 24).

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS

The original Winnipeg Clinic and the five storey addition of 1946 was designed and built by local contractor/developer Frank Reade Lount. Lount was born in 1891 in Whitevale, Ontario. It appears that he and his wife and son came west to Winnipeg sometime after World War I- 1921 Canada Census, lists his 8-month-old daughter Ferne as being born in Manitoba.[8] The same Census has his son, William D. Lount (1914-1997) as being born in Saskatchewan, but the family is not listed in the 1911 or 1916 lists anywhere in Canada. Given that his wife was born in the United States, it may be that they were living there during World War I.

The family lived on Mandeville Street in St. James and Frank Lount established a concrete basement business. A back injury led Lount to shift to building and selling homes. Particularly busy in Tuxedo, he was joined by son William, a trained architect, to form Frank Lount and Son Construction. The company grew into one of the City's major firms and Frank Lount was elected the Winnipeg House Builders' Association's first president in 1937.[9]

After World War II, Lount developed the area of Silver Heights, building houses, a shopping centre and apartment blocks including the Silver Heights Apartments, Park Towers and Park Terrace. The latter two were built using the lift-slab method of construction – a rarity at the time in Winnipeg.[10]

He died in 1976.

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8 Canada Census, 1921.

9 "Lount, Frank Reade," in Winnipeg Architecture Foundation, www.winnipegarchitecture.ca/frank-reade-lount-lount-construction/, no date.

10 History and Walking Tour of Tuxedo (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Historical Society, May 1991).

A list of major works for the firm would include:

House, 120 Handsart Boulevard (1929)
House, 137 Handsart Boulevard (1932)
Sures House, 1021 Wellington Crescent (1933)
House, 131 Grenfell Boulevard (1935)
House, 139 Grenfell Boulevard (1935)
Winnipeg Clinic, 425 St. Mary Avenue (1942, 1946)
Powell House, 221 Park Boulevard (1949)
Silver Heights Development – houses, shopping mall, three apartment blocks (1949+)
Silver Heights Gates, Mount Royal Road at Traill Avenue (1950-1951)

The construction of the 1959-1961 addition was supervised by local architectural firm Waisman and Ross.[11]

PERSON/INSTITUTION

This building was opened as the Winnipeg Clinic in 1942 by Dr. Paul Henrik Thorbjorn Thorlakson (1895-1989) – Plate 25. Thorlakson was born at Park River, North Dakota but grew up in Selkirk, Manitoba. He served in World War I and upon returning to Manitoba, finished his medical degree at the Manitoba Medical College in 1917. He entered surgical practice in Winnipeg in 1923 in the Maclean-Gunn Clinic.[12] Three years later, this private practice was enlarged and renamed the Maclean-Thorlakson Clinic, with Dr. Thorlakson taking on the role of "general manager".[13] Operating out of the Medical Arts Building, 404-406 Graham Avenue, the Clinic flourish, surviving the Great Depression years and by the late 1930s Dr. Thorlakson began to plan its expansion. He purchased the land on St. Mary Avenue in 1938 for $14,000 and as part of the venture's planned expansion, the practice was renamed the Winnipeg Clinic.[14]

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11 "425 St. Mary Avenue, Winnipeg Clinic," in Winnipeg Architecture Foundation, www.winnipegarchitecture.ca/425-st-mary-avenue-2/, no date.

12 T.A.J. Cunnings, The Saga of Doctor Thor (Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press, 1986), p. 33. The clinic partners were Dr. Neil John Maclean (1870-1946) and Dr. John Alexander Gunn (1878-1960).

13 Ibid., pp. 36-37.

14 Ibid., pp. 38-44.

With financial support from several local citizens including Mrs. James A. Richardson and John A. MacAulay, K.C., construction on the two-storey clinic building began in 1939 (Plate 26). When World War II began, the resulting manpower shortage and controls on materials and equipment put the project in jeopardy – Dr. Thorlakson even wrote to Ottawa and offered to cancel the project. But the federal government allowed the project to continue, albeit slowly. By the fall of 1942, the building was occupied, with 10 full-time partners, 4 part-time doctors and 20 support staff.[15]

But even before it was completed, Dr. Thorlakson was looking at expansion. Plans in 1944 to expand the partial basement to full were themselves expanded into a five-storey addition on the Clinic building's east side and a separate heating plant north of the original building. Again, members of Winnipeg's business community came forward to secure the funds necessary to finance the expansion.[16]

Dr. Thorlakson's contributions were found beyond the Clinic as well. In the 1940's he proposed the creation of the Manitoba Medical Centre (now known as the Health Sciences Centre) and was the organizer and chairman of the corporation that promoted this project. He served as president of many medical organizations, was active in Icelandic affairs at home and abroad and served three terms as the chancellor of the University of Winnipeg. He died in Winnipeg on October 19, 1989 at the age of 94.[17]

Today, the Winnipeg Clinic remains one of Canada's largest multispecialty clinics.

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15 Ibid., pp. 49-51.

16 Ibid., pp. 60-64. The addition was built with a foundation that could carry 12 storeys for future expansion.

17 Biographical information from Winnipeg's Citizens Hall of Fame website, 2007; Winnipeg Clinic website, 2008; and J.M. Bumstead, Dictionary of Manitoba Biography, (Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press, 1999), pp. 250-251.

EVENT

There is no known important historical event connected with this building.

CONTEXT

This building, constructed in stages, is part of the pre- and post-World War II development in downtown Winnipeg that saw tremendous growth and the completion of a number of modern high-rise office structures, replacing much of the aging building stock that dated to the pre-World War I era.

LANDMARK

This is one of Winnipeg's most recognizable and signature buildings, known affectionately as the "Jetson Building" comparing its space age look to the buildings found in an early 1960s cartoon about the future.

Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
THE CITY OF WINNIPEG

APPENDIX I

CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report

Building Address: 425 St. Mary Avenue

Building Name: Winnipeg Clinic

Original Use: professional

Current Use: professional

Roll No. (Old): 12093698000 (---)

RSN: 143783

Municipality: 12 Ward: 1 Property or Occupancy Code: --

Legal Description: 1 St. John, Plan 129, Block 3, Lot 826/828

Location: northeast corner Vaughan Street

Date of Construction: 1942+ Storeys: 2, 11 & 12 **Heritage Status: NOMINATED LIST**

Construction Type: brick and concrete

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

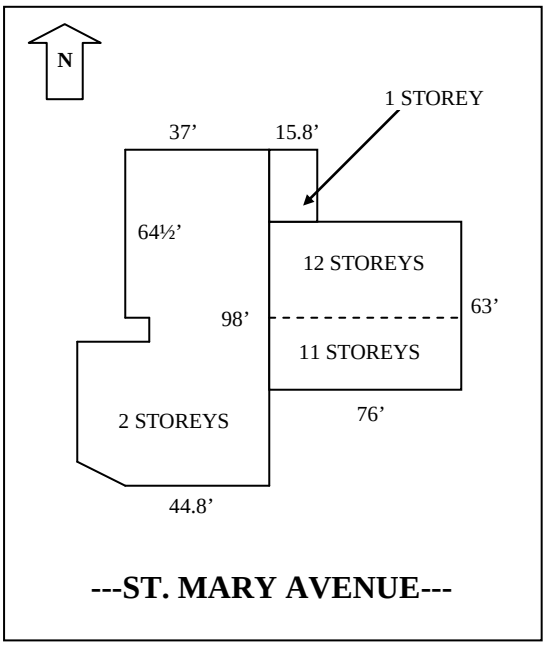
SEE NEXT PAGE

Information:

- 82,296 sq. ft. of floor area above grade

- walls: B- 12 in. concrete; 1st- 12 in. stone; 2nd – 12th- 6 in. conc. block, 8 in. brick and 4 in. stone; Penthouse- 6 in. conc. block, 8 in. brick and 4 in. stone; Powerhouse- brick

- ceiling heights: B- 16 ft.; 1st- 9.9 ft.; 2nd – 12th- 10.3 ft.; Penthouse- 10.7 ft.; Powerhouse- 10.0-11.0 ft.



ARCHITECT – F.R. LOUNT & SON CONSTRUCTION (1942 & 1946); WAISMAN & ROSS (1959)

CONTRACTOR – F.R. LOUNT & SON CONSTRUCTION (1942 & 1946); UNKNOWN (1959)

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

YEAR	NO.	PLANS	AMOUNT	DESCRIPTION
1942	266	**A**	$60,000	Superstructure (2 storeys)
1944	3055		$3,000	Alterations
1945	969		$2,000	Addition
1946	1079	**A**	$350,000	Addition (east building – 5 storeys)
1946	1267	**A**	$40,000	Powerhouse
1946	6002		$1,500	Fuel tanks
1952	3477		$3,500	Addition and alterations
1959	2867		$395,000	Add 6 storeys and penthouse
1960	431		$25,000	Extra to Permit 2867/1959
1962	4197		$4,000	Alterations
1962	6597		$7,000	Addition
1973	4888	**M170**	$6,000	Alterations
1981	4606	**CS**	$20,000	Interior alterations
1984	1797		$70,000	Interior alterations
1989	878		$50,000	Interior alterations
1989	4647	**CS**	$122,000	Interior alterations
1990	10052	**CS**	$60,000	Interior alterations
1991	7841	**CS**	$20,000	Interior alterations
1992	4957		$144,000	Interior alterations
1994	4496	**CS**	$98,000	Interior alterations
1998	3644		$120,000	Repairs to overhangs
1998	3672	**CS**	$70,000	Interior alterations
2001	164142		$120,000	Interior alterations
2007	156678		$127,000	Interior alterations (6th floor)
2010	133574		$25,000	Interior alterations (7th floor)
2010	143331		$185,000	Interior alterations (2nd floor)
2015	174903		$350,000	Interior alterations (main floor)

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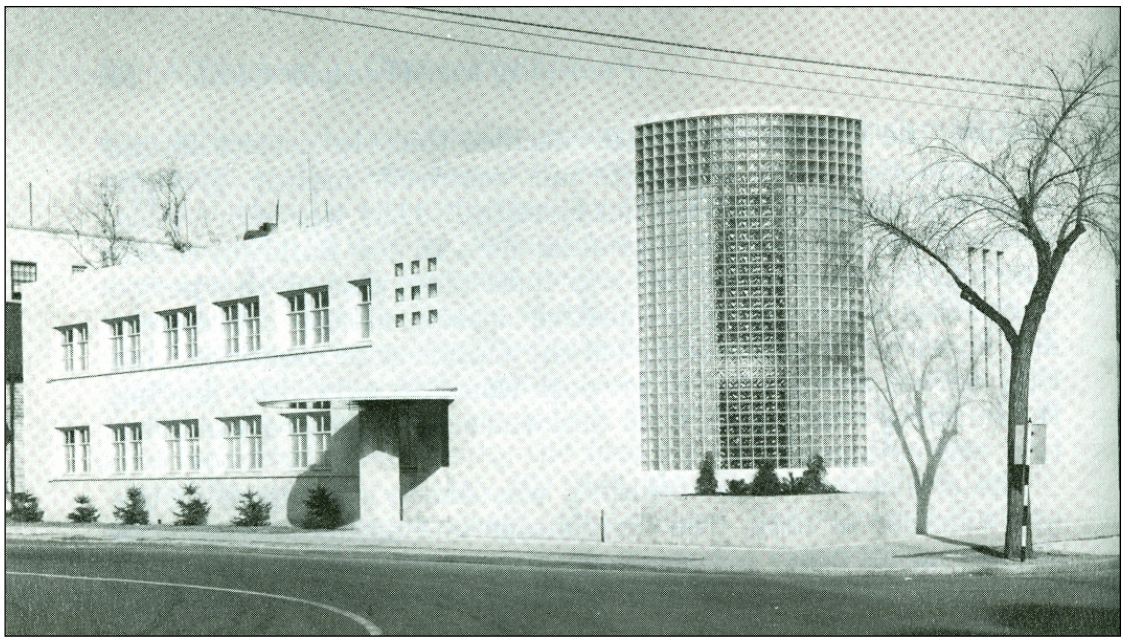

Plate 1 – Winnipeg Clinic, 425 St. Mary Avenue, 1942. (Reproduced from T.A.J. Cunnings, The Saga of Doctor Thor [Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba, 1986], p. 52.)



Plate 2 – Winnipeg Clinic, 425 St. Mary Avenue, ca.1950. (Archives of Manitoba, "Winnipeg-Buildings- General- Winnipeg Clinic 1".)



Plate 3 – Winnipeg Clinic, 425 St. Mary Avenue, west and east façades of 1946/1959 addition, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)



Plate 4 – Toronto Dominion Bank, 215 Portage Avenue, 1952. (Reproduced from University of Manitoba, Tribune Collection, PC 18-6495-18-5610-002.)



Plate 5 – Technical Vocational School, "Tech Voc", 1555 Wall Street, n.d. (Reproduced from Winnipeg Architecture Foundation, www.winnipegarchitecture.ca/1555-wall-street/.)



Plate 6 – Winnipeg Clinic Powerhouse, Vaughan Street, west façade, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)



Plate 7 – Winnipeg Clinic, 425 St. Mary Avenue, original building, west and north façades, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)

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Plate 8– Winnipeg Clinic, 425 St. Mary Avenue, 2016. This carved symbol, located in the pillar at the front entrance, is a combination of the traditional Greek symbol for health and medicine, the Rod of Asclepius (a single snake entwined in a rod) and a caduceus (two entwined snakes and wings). (M. Peterson, 2016.)



Plate 9 – Winnipeg Clinic, 425 St. Mary Avenue, original building, southwest corner and south façade, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)

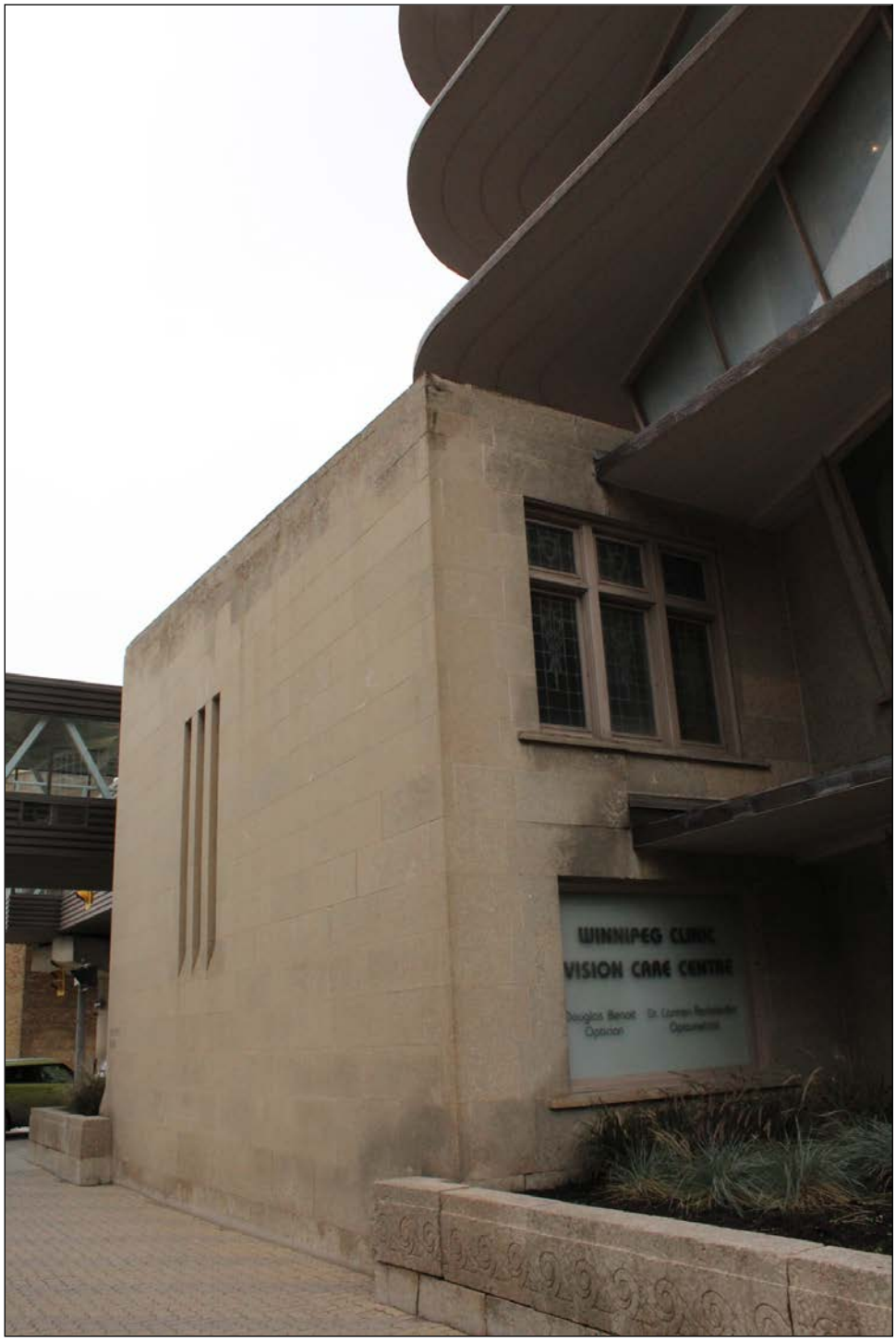

Plate 10 – Winnipeg Clinic, 425 St. Mary Avenue, original building, south and partial east façades, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)



Plate 11– Winnipeg Clinic, 425 St. Mary Avenue, original building, north façade, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)



Plate 12 – Winnipeg Clinic, 425 St. Mary Avenue, tower, north façade, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)

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Plate 13 – Winnipeg Clinic, 425 St. Mary Avenue, tower, east façade, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)

425 ST. MARY AVENUE – WINNIPEG CLINIC



Plate 14 – Winnipeg Clinic, 425 St. Mary Avenue, west façade, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)

425 ST. MARY AVENUE – WINNIPEG CLINIC

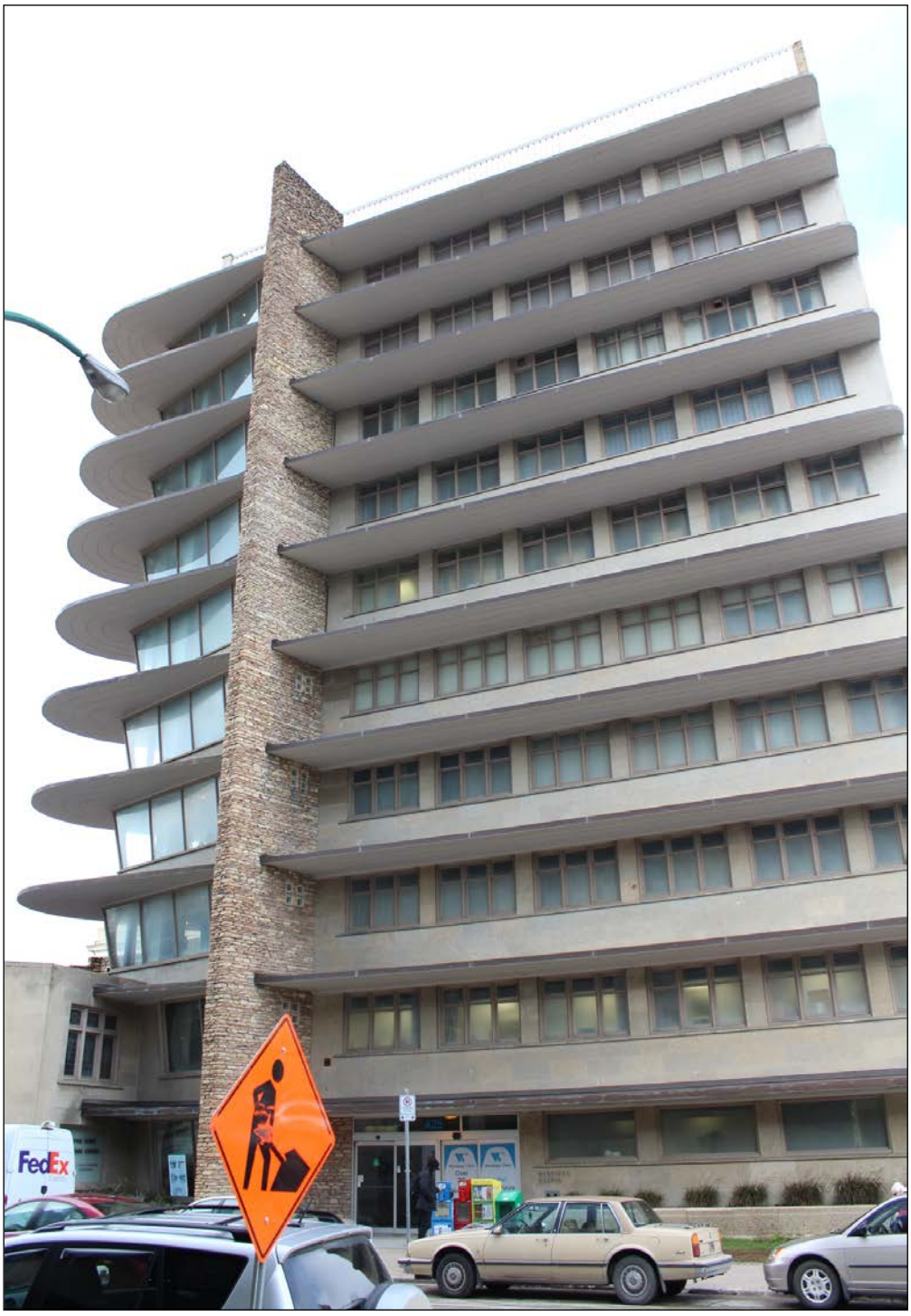

Plate 15 – Winnipeg Clinic, 425 St. Mary Avenue, tower, south façade, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)

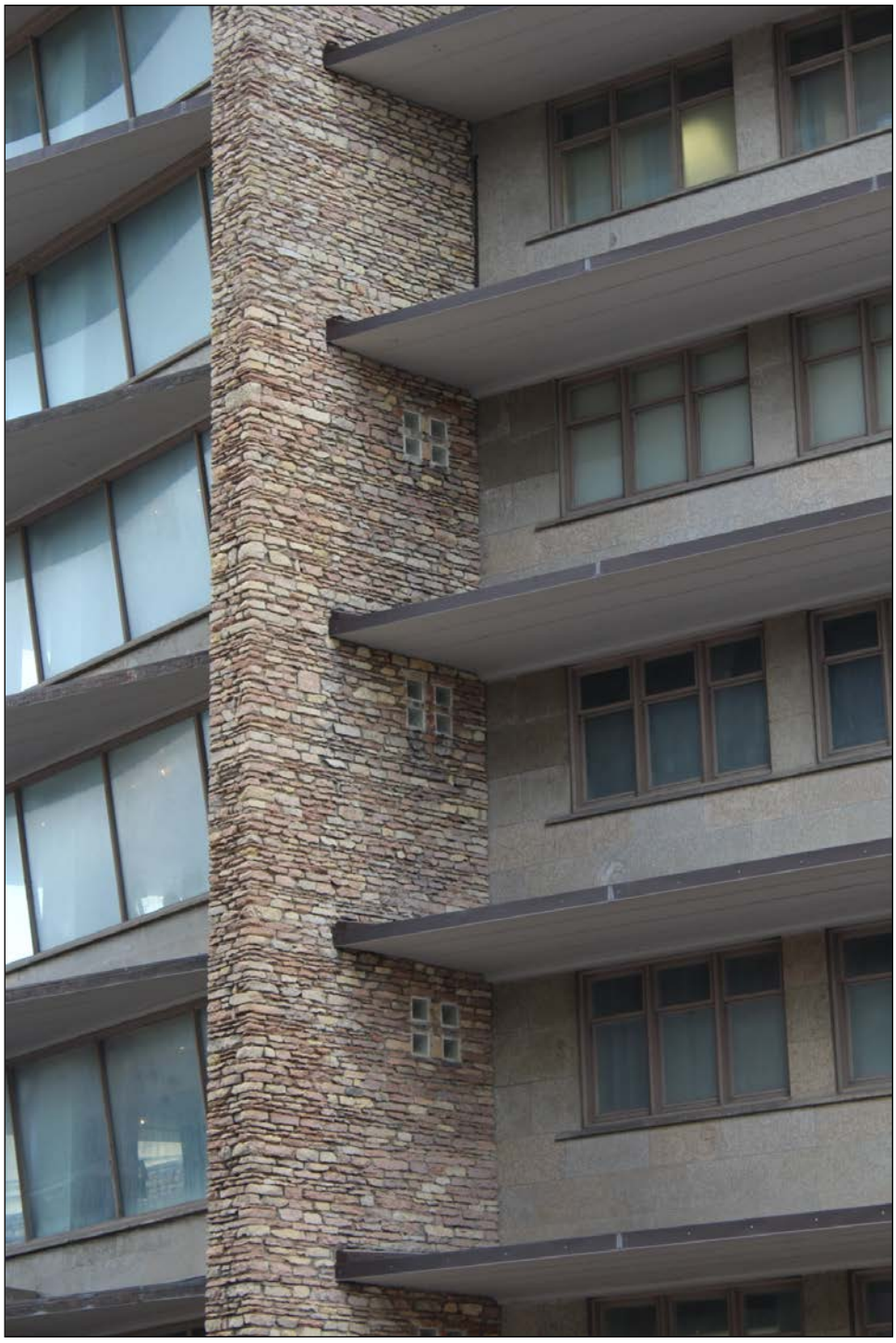

Plate 16 – Winnipeg Clinic, 425 St. Mary Avenue, tower, detail of south façade, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)



Plate 17 – Winnipeg Clinic, 425 St. Mary Avenue, tower, southwest corner, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)

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Plate 18 – Winnipeg Clinic, 425 St. Mary Avenue, tower, southwest corner, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)



Plate 19– Winnipeg Clinic, 425 St. Mary Avenue, detail of stairs, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)

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Plate 20 – Winnipeg Clinic, 425 St. Mary Avenue, basement lighting, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)



Plate 21– Winnipeg Clinic, 425 St. Mary Avenue, 12th floor dining room, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)



Plate 22 – Winnipeg Clinic, 425 St. Mary Avenue, 3rd floor window detailing, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)



Plate 23– St. Mary Avenue looking east from Memorial Boulevard, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)



Plate 24 – St. Mary Avenue looking west from Edmonton Street, 2016. (M. Peterson, 2016.)



Plate 25 – Dr. Paul H.T. Thorlakson, ca. 1935. (Reproduced from T.A.J. Cunnings, The Saga of Doctor Thor [Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba, 1986], n.p.)

425 ST. MARY AVENUE – WINNIPEG CLINIC



Plate 26 – Sod turning at the Winnipeg Clinic, 425 St. Mary Avenue, 1941. Left to right: Dr. Thorlakson, C.S. Gunn (real estate and financial advisor) and F.R. Lount (architect/contractor). (Reproduced from T.A.J. Cunnings, The Saga of Doctor Thor [Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba, 1986], p. 48.)