

232 MAIN STREET

FORTUNE BLOCK

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee
Researcher: M. Peterson
September 2015

232 MAIN STREET – FORTUNE BLOCK

Main Street, as we now know it, began like all other overland routes in the vicinity of The Forks, first as a trail made by the First Nations groups utilizing the area for trade, for seasonal habitation, for hunting and fishing and for burial.[1] These footpaths were increasingly utilized with the arrival of the Europeans and the advent of the fur trade economy. Many of these well-used trails then evolved into the paired ruts made by the large wooden wheels of the Red River carts travelling along the important "Main highway" between the region's chief trading posts of the mid-1800s – Lower Fort Garry, was built between 1831 and 1839 about thirty kilometres up the Red River from The Forks, and Upper Fort Garry, built 1835-1837 (and expanded 1852-1854)[2] at the south end of what is now Main Street (Plate 1).[3] This was a much-travelled route and the Main Highway quickly became the tiny community's most important overland link.

With the end of the fur trade, the creation of the Province of Manitoba and the incorporation of the City of Winnipeg came a need for more permanent solutions to the dirt streets that turned into "Manitoba gumbo" when it rained. Dirt roads and wooden sidewalks gave way to concrete and asphalt, streetcar tracks and traffic lights in the 20th century.

As Winnipeg's primary road, Main Street saw a great deal of development and commercialization, especially during the early 1880s when the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) through the city and Western Canada caused a real estate boom. During this frantic period, fortunes were gained and lost in the speculation market. In 1882, Winnipeg's population doubled to 25,000

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1 Rodger Guinn, The Red-Assiniboine Junction: A Land Use and Structural History, 1770-1980, Manuscript Report Series #355. (Ottawa, ON: Parks Canada, 1980) cited in R.R. Rostecki, "130 Main Street – Upper Fort Garry Gate," report for the Historical Buildings Committee, June 1991 (below as Rostecki, 130 Main Street), p. 1.

2 The trip between the two posts usually took a full day. William Douglas, "'The Forks' Becomes a City," in Papers read before the Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba, Series III, No. 1. (Winnipeg, MB: Advocate Printers, 1945), p. 66 cited in Rostecki, 130 Main Street, p. 1.

3 Dismantling of the stone walls of Upper Fort Garry began in 1871 with the removal of part of the east wall. The last remnants of the walls and buildings (except for the remaining Gate), were removed by the summer of 1883. Brad Loewen, A History of the Structures at Upper Fort Garry, 1835-1887, unpublished manuscript on file, Parks Canada, Historic Research Section, Prairie Region pp. 95-101; "To Contractors," Manitoba Free Press, January 7, 1880, p. 1; and Manitoba Free Press, July 17, 1883, p 8, all cited in Rostecki, 130 Main Street, pp. 4-5.

and the value of construction hit the $5-million mark.[4] This incredible construction boom caused a shortage of materials and skilled labour and several of the new buildings were cheaply and/or improperly constructed, such as the enlarged City Hall that nearly collapsed in 1883 only months after the addition was completed and was demolished later that year (Plate 2).[5]

This increased population necessitated the construction of many commercial blocks and many business owners chose Main Street to sell their wares. Business blocks of all sizes and descriptions lined both sides of the street north of the old fort, and by the beginning of the 20th century, there were few empty lots between the fort and Portage Avenue. The magnificent Cauchon Block was constructed in 1881-1882 at the southeast corner of Main Street and York Avenue as an elegant residential/commercial complex (Plate 3). The east side of Main south of Notre Dame filled with many brick veneer buildings that replaced small dwellings and "peanut stands" (Plates 4-6).[6]

The Fortune Block was one such boom time project, completed in 1882. Built, according to contemporary accounts, "where the itinerant showman pitched his tent and the boarders at the Dominion Hotel disported themselves of an evening,"[7] the block has occupied an important corner location for over 125 years, making it one of the oldest downtown Winnipeg buildings.

STYLE

The Fortune Block is designed in the High Victorian Italianate style, very popular in the 19th century and used mainly on commercial buildings.[8] A picturesque style, buildings displayed a wealth of ornamentation, especially evident around window and door openings and at the roofline. The use of the segmental arch was extensive, and the buildings could be either symmetrical or asymmetrical, accented with pronounced mouldings, quoins, eaves and other

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4 "Winnipeg! Its Wonderful Growth in the Year 1882," The Winnipeg Sun, December 29, 1882.

5 Alan F.J. Artibise "Winnipeg's City Halls, 1876-1965," in Manitoba Pageant, (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Historical Society), Spring 1977, p. 7.

6 "Main Street," Manitoba Free Press, December 30, 1882.

7 Loc. cit.

8 M. Whiffen, American Architecture Since 1780 (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1969), p. 99.

detailing. Window openings were often paired and bays and towers were common features on residential structures where the style was most popular.[9]

In Winnipeg in the early 1880s, the combination of British-trained architects, available capital and the popularity of the style produced a number of fine Italianate structures. Extant buildings include: the Benson Block (146 Princess Street), the Bawlf Block (150 Princess Street), the Harris Block (154 Princess Street) and the Telegram Building (70 Albert Street), all built in 1882. All these examples are found within the Exchange District, the Fortune Block represents one of the few remaining buildings of its style in downtown Winnipeg outside the Exchange District.

CONSTRUCTION

The Fortune Block is a three-storey solid brick building resting on a stone foundation measuring approximately 15.3 x 21.4 metres and is located on the southwest corner of Main Street and St. Mary Avenue. It reportedly cost $35,000 and stood out as one of south Main Street's largest blocks at time of construction.[10] Wooden beams and posts supply interior structural support for the floor joists and are tied into the exterior brick walls. It shares a party wall with the Macdonald Block, 226-230 Main Street, to the south (see Appendix I for addition construction information).

Ceiling heights in the building measure 2.4 metres in the basement, 4.3 metres on the ground floor, 3.7 metres on the second floor and 3.4 metres on the top floor. The flat roof is covered with tar and gravel.[11]

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9 Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, Historic Resources Branch, 1991), pp. 12-13.

10 "Winnipeg Boom," Winnipeg Sun, August 31, 1882, p. 3.

11 City of Winnipeg Assessment Record, Roll No. 12-092979000.

DESIGN

The Fortune Block boasts two highly ornate façades, east and north; the latter has maintained more of its original design. Photographic evidence suggests that the original ground floor of the block was designed with large display windows and multi-pane transoms, set in either cast iron or wood frames wrapping around the northeast corner of the building and running a short distance along the St. Mary Avenue façade (Plates 7-10). Upper floor access was gained via an entrance at the south end of the east façade (now boarded up). Above the windows was an ornamental cornice, likely tin, with protrusions along its length. These elements had been removed by 1926 (Plate 9). Numerous renovations have been made to this area of the building as new tenants renovated to suit their needs (Plates 11 and 12).

The second and third floors display many of their original elements. The polychromatic brickwork of the upper storeys is clearly evident today (Plate 13). A series of brick pilasters divide the upper floors into a number of windowed bays. Each bay holds thin window openings on each floor: round-headed with some paired under larger segmental brick arches on the second floor; and pointed headed, either single or triple openings, with layered brick arches on the top floor (Plate 14). Openings on both floors feature continuous brick sills. An unadorned brick parapet has replaced the original metal cornice that finished the building above the corbelled brick band.

On the north façade, the western bays of the ground floor hold small, arched windows set high up in the wall; the four sets of paired windows on the second floor are round-headed and set under larger segmental arches. The third storey windows are triplets with pointed heads. A metal fire escape is also found on this elevation (Plate 15).

The south wall is a part wall; the west façade has been partially covered by a one-storey addition completed in 1957 (Plate 16). Still visible are several windows on the upper floors (partially bricked in), a metal fire escape and painted signage.

INTERIOR

A bar and live music venue now occupies the northern retail space and features high ceilings with the original ornamental tin cladding. A sign manufacturing business occupies the southern space as well as the 1957 addition (Plate 17).

A wide staircase from the Main Street entrance gives access to the second floor and is finished with wood paneling (Plate 18). This main staircase is the focal point of the interior and includes burlap walls, an ornate wooden banister and a skylight (Plates 19-21). A rear staircase from the second floor leads to the back lane (Plate 22).

Wide, high-ceilinged corridors give access to the small rooms on each floor (Plates 23-25). The basic layout of the floors, along with many of the doors and hardware on both floors appear to be original, including the transom windows. Much of the original decorative wood moulding is still in place around windows and doors (Plate 26). Failure of sections of the roof membrane has damaged finishes on the third floor and other finishes show signs of distress due to the prolonged vacancy (since the late 1970s).

INTEGRITY

The building stands on its original site. Evidence on both the exterior and interior of the building suggest there are structural issues and that the building is unevenly shifting. The loss of grouting around the exterior brick has also become an issue. The exterior has seen several changes including the removal of the original cornice and the alteration of the ground floor retail entrances. The upper floors, however, remain much as they have since the building was completed on both the north and east façades.

STREETSCAPE

South Main Street has seen many changes since the construction of the Fortune Block. At present, most of the pre-World War I buildings have been removed, replaced by more modern structures including the new Sports Manitoba structure to the south (200 Main Street) and the

new Hampton Inn and Suites to the north, 260 Main Street (Plates 27 and 28). This having been said, the block north of 200 Main Street today is a rare example of an intact streetscape dating to the pre-1890 era (Plate 29).

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTOR

Charles Mancel Willmot and George W. Stewart designed the Fortune Block.

Willmot (1855-1936) was born in the Village of Yorkville, Canada West (now Ontario), the second oldest of five children of Edward, born in Somerset, England and Elize, Born Isle of Jersey (nee Langeworthy) Willmot.[12] He apprenticed with the noted Toronto architect, William G. Storm (1826-1892) from 1874 to 1875.[13] In Toronto, he designed the Cottingham Street School (1877). He spent the early years of the 1880s in Winnipeg before returning to Toronto, where he oversaw alterations to the interior of the Don Jail and designed a laundry (now known as the Don Jail Annex) on the west side of the complex in the late 1880s. Wilmot also prepared the plans for a separate residence for the Governor of the Don Jail in 1888 and an addition to the Yorkville Fire Hall (1889).[14] Willmot, according to contemporary accounts, was one of the founding members of the Ontario Association of Architects in March 1889.[15] Also in 1889, he designed the Deer Park Elementary School in Toronto (demolished).[16] In the 1920s Willmot assisted the architectural partnership of Forsey Page and Stanford Warrington by supervising the construction of St. Clement's Anglican Church in North Toronto.[17]

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12 Family information from www.ogs.on.ca/ogspi/199/q1999l00.htm, no date.

13 "558 Gerrard Street East: Governor's House, Don Jail, Heritage Property report for Heritage Toronto (City of Toronto By-law 411-2000), no date, at www.app.toronto.ca/heritage/.

14 Ibid.

15 Canadian Architect and Builder, Vol. 2, Issue 4 (April 1889), p. 40.

16 "Architectural Index for Ontario," found in http://archindont.torontopubliclibrary.ca/, no date.

17 "558 Gerrard Street East: Governor's House, Don Jail, Heritage Property report for Heritage Toronto (City of Toronto By-law 411-2000), no date, at www.app.toronto.ca/heritage/.

His partner, George W. Stewart, was a civil engineer and Dominion Land Surveyor who continued his multi-disciplinary practice in Winnipeg until 1887 and then moved to the United States where he is known to have had commissions in Dallas, Texas, Atlanta, Georgia and St. Petersburg, Florida.[18]

Grant and Gelley was a small-scale contracting firm that was responsible for immigration stations in Winnipeg (1881-1882) and Brandon (1882-1883). J.E. Gelley also operated on his own and helped build the Legislative Building on Kennedy Street, the Winnipeg Post Office (1886) and the Birtle Immigration Sheds (1886).[19]

INSTITUTION

Mark Fortune (1847-1912) was born in Canada West (Ontario) and moved to San Francisco, California in 1868 to pursuit a contracting career. By 1874, he had settled in Winnipeg, working a variety of jobs including furniture dealer, cattle salesman and contractor. In 1878, Fortune and a partner began dealing in real estate, beginning a successful career lasting over 25 years. Fortune was one of the few who did not lose his accumulated wealth when the railway boom of the early 1880s ended and it was Fortune who was first to capitalize on the development of Portage Avenue as a major thoroughfare. Fortune undoubtedly used real estate profits to build the speculative Fortune Block on Main Street and for many years he maintained a real estate office in the building.

Fortune served on city council for the years 1879, 1880 and 1881 and was prominent in social and sporting circles around Winnipeg (Plate 30). On a return trip from Europe in 1912 Fortune, his wife and four of his six children boarded the *Titanic* on April 10, 1912. He and his son Charles Alexander, aged 19, were lost at sea, his wife and three daughters survived.[20] His home at 393 Wellington Crescent has been listed as a Grade III building by the City of Winnipeg (Plate 31).

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18 Henderson's Directory, 1882-1888; and D. Lyon, "Macdonald Block – Short Report," report of the City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee, July 1990, p. 2.

19 R.R. Rostecki, "Fortune's and Macdonald's Blocks, 226-34 Main Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba," report for the Historical Buildings Committee, November 1989 (below as Rostecki, 226-34 Main Street), p. 9.

20 Information from Encyclopedia Titanica (www.encyclopedia-titanica.org), 1996. 2005.

The Fortune Block continued for many years as a mixed-use facility, Holman Brothers butchers were long-time tenants, as was grocer Thomas Jobin. The upstairs space was used as both office and residential space over the years. In the late 1970s, the owner was faced with major fire and safety upgrades for what had become a boarding house (Plate 32). Rather than completing these required upgrades, the owner chose to close the upper floors, which have not been used since that time.[21]

EVENT

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

CONTEXT

The Fortune Block stands as one of Winnipeg's dwindling number of early 1880s structures (see Table 1). It was built during the frantic real estate boom brought on by the construction of the CPR and the subsequent opening of the West to immigration. This event brought national and international attention to the small community of Winnipeg and was the beginning of its evolution into a prominent city on the global scene. Because of the boom nature of the period, many of the buildings of this era were built with questionable materials and unskilled labour and many of the buildings had to be demolished due to structural concerns. The Fortune Block remains standing and remarkably still boasts many of its original elements on its two main façades.

LANDMARK

This is one of the oldest buildings on south Main Street and although it is not heavily utilized, its construction, ornamentation and highly visible corner location give it an increased level of conspicuousness.

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[21] Interview with George Landes, June 2, 2006.

TABLE 1 – EXTANT PRE-1890 BUILDINGS IN DOWNTOWN WINNIPEG[22]

ADDRESS	BUILDING NAME	YEAR BUILT	HERITAGE STATUS
Main St., 214	Winnipeg Hotel	1873	Nominated List
Main St., 466	Woodbine Hotel	1879	Grade III
Main St., 474	Duffin Block	1880	Nominated List
McDermot Ave., 175	Toronto Foundry Building	1881	Grade III
Albert St., 70	Telegram Building	1882	Grade II
Bannatyne Ave., 137	Swiss Building	1882	Grade III
Main St., 232	Fortune Block	1882	Nominated List
McDermot Ave., 177	T.W. Taylor Building	1882	Grade III
McDermot Ave., 246	Sures Building	1882	Grade III
Princess St., 146	Benson Block	1882	Grade III
Princess St., 154	Harris Building	1882	Grade III
Main St., 226	Macdonald Block	1883	Nominated List
McDermot Ave., 221	Bate Block	1883	Grade II
Princess St., 150	Bawlf Building	1883	Grade III
Princess St., 72	Oddfellows Hall	1883	Grade III
Smith St., 256	Holy Trinity Church	1883	Grade II
Princess St., 104	Princess Street Warehouse	1885	Grade III
William Ave., 294	Massey Building	1885	Grade II
McDermot Ave., 173	Grange Building	1886	Grade III
Princess St., 103	Galt Block	1887	Nominated List
Princess St., 86-88	Miller, Morse Warehouse	1887	Grade III

[22] Compiled from "The Exchange District. Part 1: A Property Survey" and "Winnipeg's Downtown: A property survey," reports of the Historical Buildings Committee (February 2001 and June 2003 respectively).

Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
THE CITY OF WINNIPEG

APPENDIX I

CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report

Assessment Record

Building Address: 232 Main Street (#232-234)

Building Name: Fortune Block

Original Use: retail

Current Use: retail

Roll No. (Old): 12-092979000 (---)

R.S.N.: 138297

Legal Description: 1 St. John, Plan 24135, Lot 15

Location: southwest corner St. Mary Avenue

Heritage Status: ON NOMINATED LIST

Date of Construction: 1882

Storeys: 3 + basement

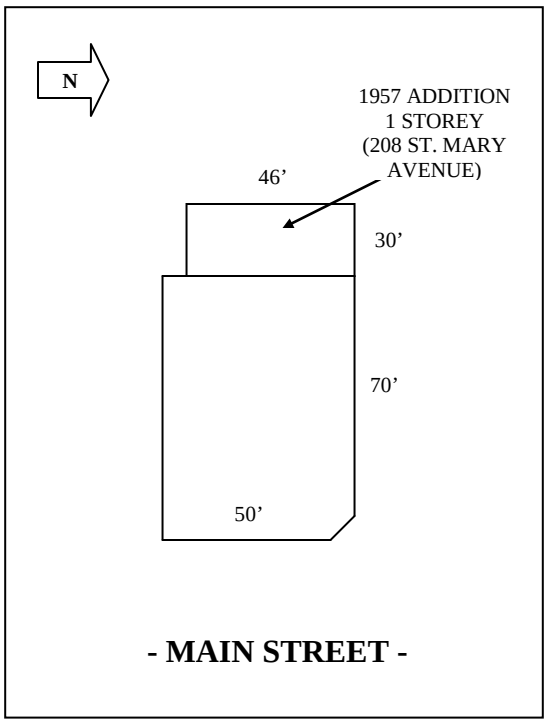
Construction Type: brick and stone foundation

Building Permits (Plans available: **[CS]** City Storage; **[M]** Microfilm):
- 6661/1954 $1,200 (interior alterations); 3402/1957**[CS]** $8,000 (interior alterations to #234); 1184/1980 $3,000 (interior alterations); 1304/1982 (information missing); 5889/1987 $15,000 (interior alterations); 940/1995 **[CS]** $72,500 (interior alterations to #232)

Information:

- Plan area- 3,648 sq. ft.; floor area above grade- 12,324 sq. ft.; total floor area- 15,972 sq. ft.

- ceilings- Basement- 7.8 ft.; 1st- 14 ft.; 2nd- 12 ft.; 3rd- 11 ft.



ARCHITECT: WILLMOT & STEWART

CONTRACTOR: GRANT & GELLEY

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Plate 1 – The location of Upper Fort Garry in relation to Main Street and Broadway. (Reproduced from Lincoln Park Gallery, http://www.lpgallery.mb.ca/fort_garry/aerial.html, no date).

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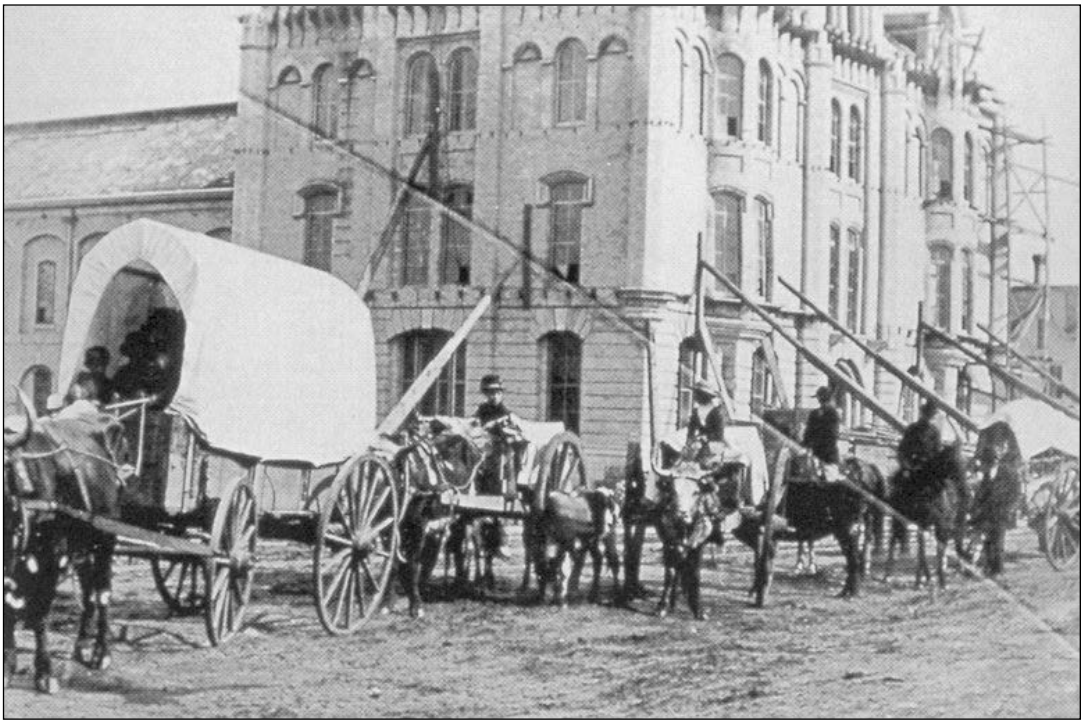

Plate 2 – Propped up City Hall, Main Street, ca.1883. (M. Peterson Collection.)



Plate 3 – Cauchon Block (Empire Hotel), 171 Main Street, no date. (City of Winnipeg, Planning Department.)

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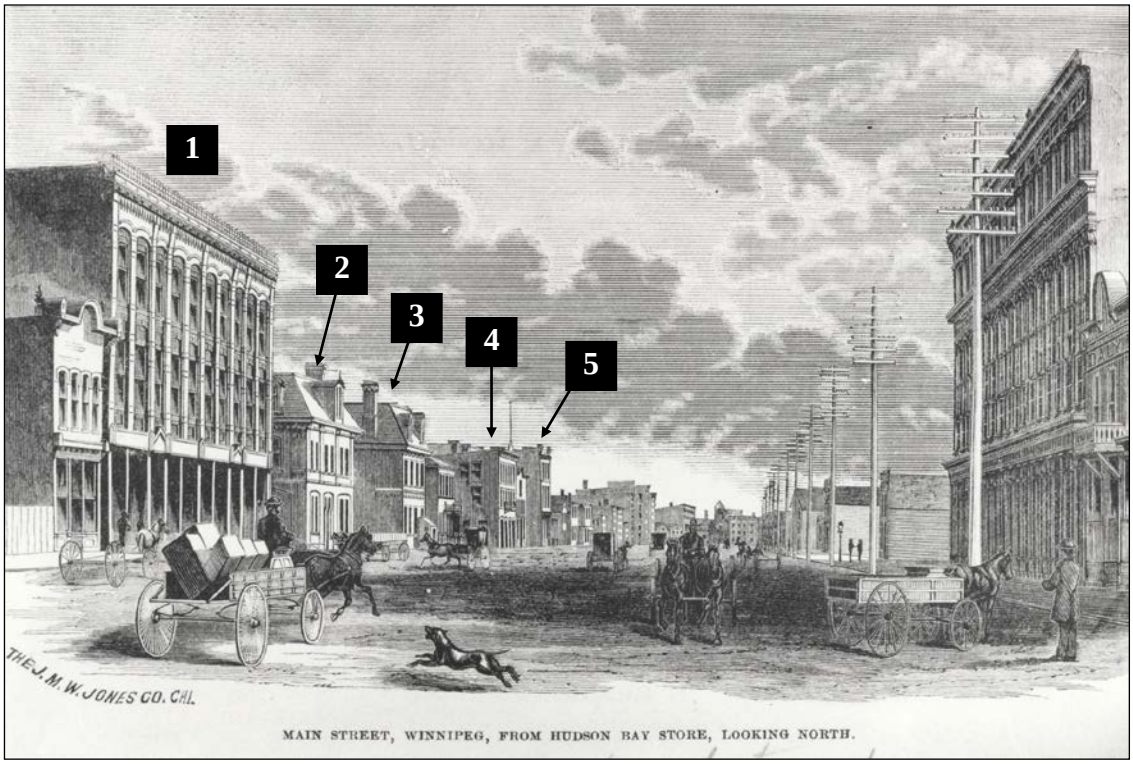

Plate 4 – Main Street, Winnipeg, looking north from Broadway, ca.1883. The large building on the right is the Cauchon Block, buildings on the left include the Hudson's Bay Company Store (#1), Customs House (#2), Dominion Lands Office (#3), the Winnipeg Hotel (#4) and the Commercial Hotel & Fortune Block (#5). (Archives of Manitoba, "Winnipeg-Streets- Main c1883- 2".)

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Plate 5 – West side of Main Street between York and St. Mary streets, 1892. Note the lack of empty lots as far as the eye can see north. Buildings on the left from south to north are: Dominion Lands Office; Trust and Loan Co. of Canada; Winnipeg Hotel; Dominion Hotel; Commercial Hotel and the Fortune Block. (Archives of Manitoba, Victor Acker Collection- 2, N842.)

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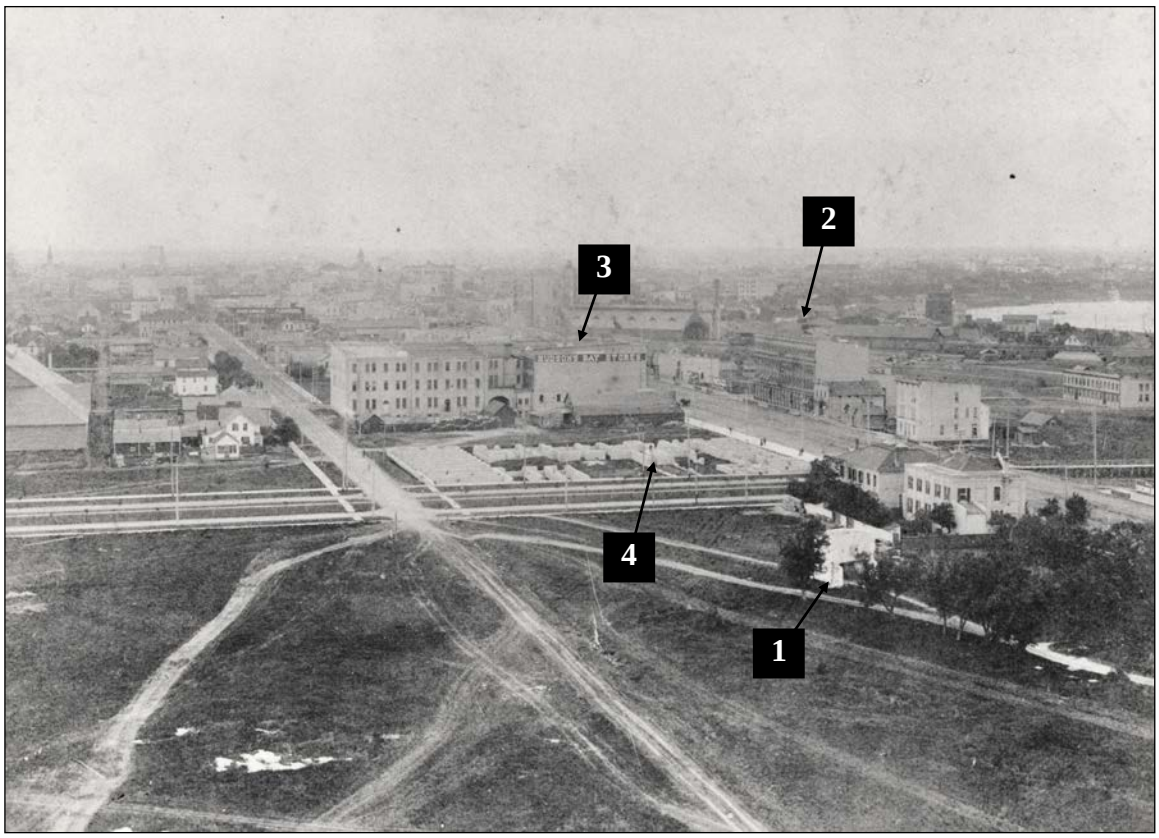

Plate 6 – A view of Main Street, 1902. Visible are the Upper Fort Garry Gate (#1), the Cauchon Block (#2) and the Hudson's Bay Company Building (#3). The foundation work has begun for the Fort Garry Court Apartments, northwest corner Main Street and Broadway (#4). (Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg- Views c1900- 5, N4555.)

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Plate 7 – An 1884 drawing of the Macdonald and Fortune Blocks, Main Street. Note the familiar retail front of the ground floor with its large display windows. The entrances do not appear to be recessed. (Archives of Manitoba.)

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Plate 8 – Fortune Block, 232 Main Street (right) in 1892 still featuring the original retail layout on the east façade. (Archives of Manitoba, Victor Acker Collection- 2, N842.)

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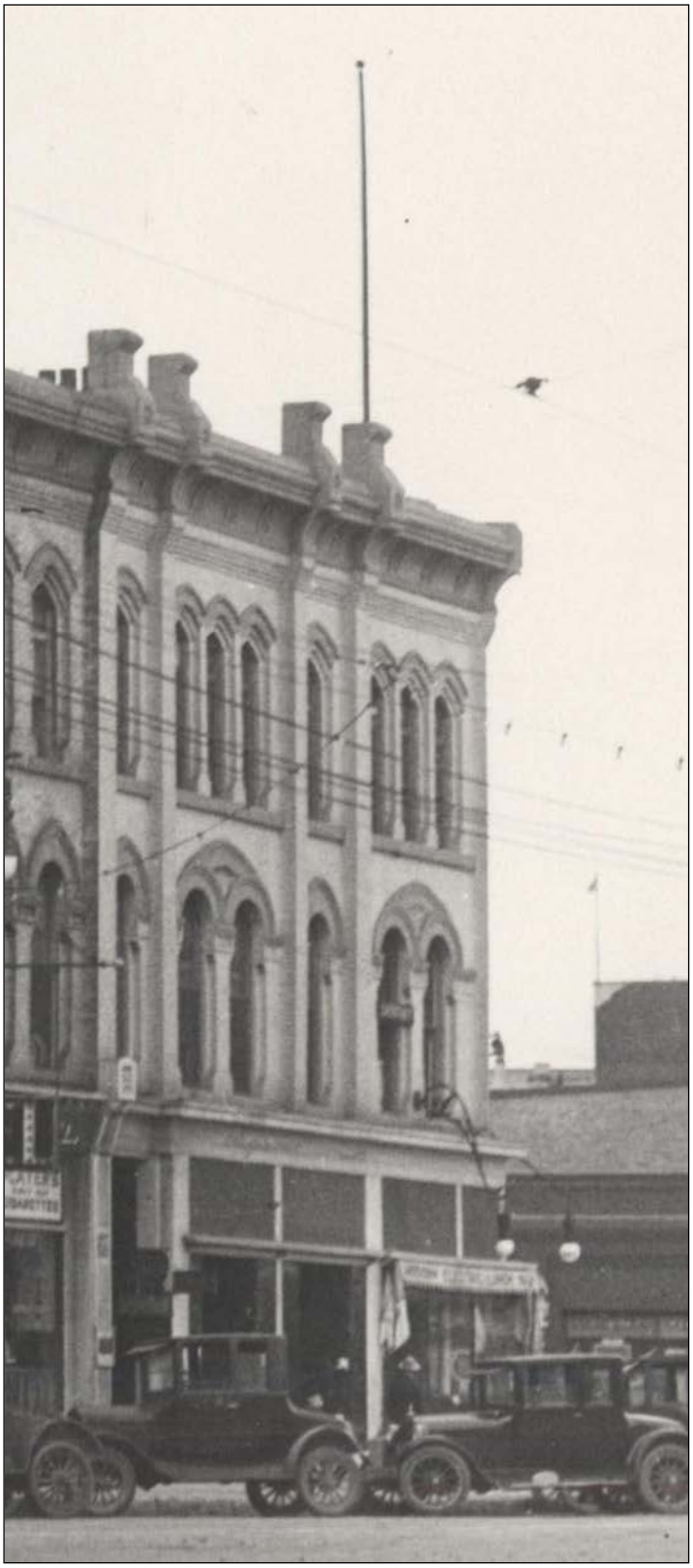

Plate 9 – Fortune Block, 232 Main Street, 1926. Elements of the cornice have been removed. (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba, Thomas Burns Collection- 542.)

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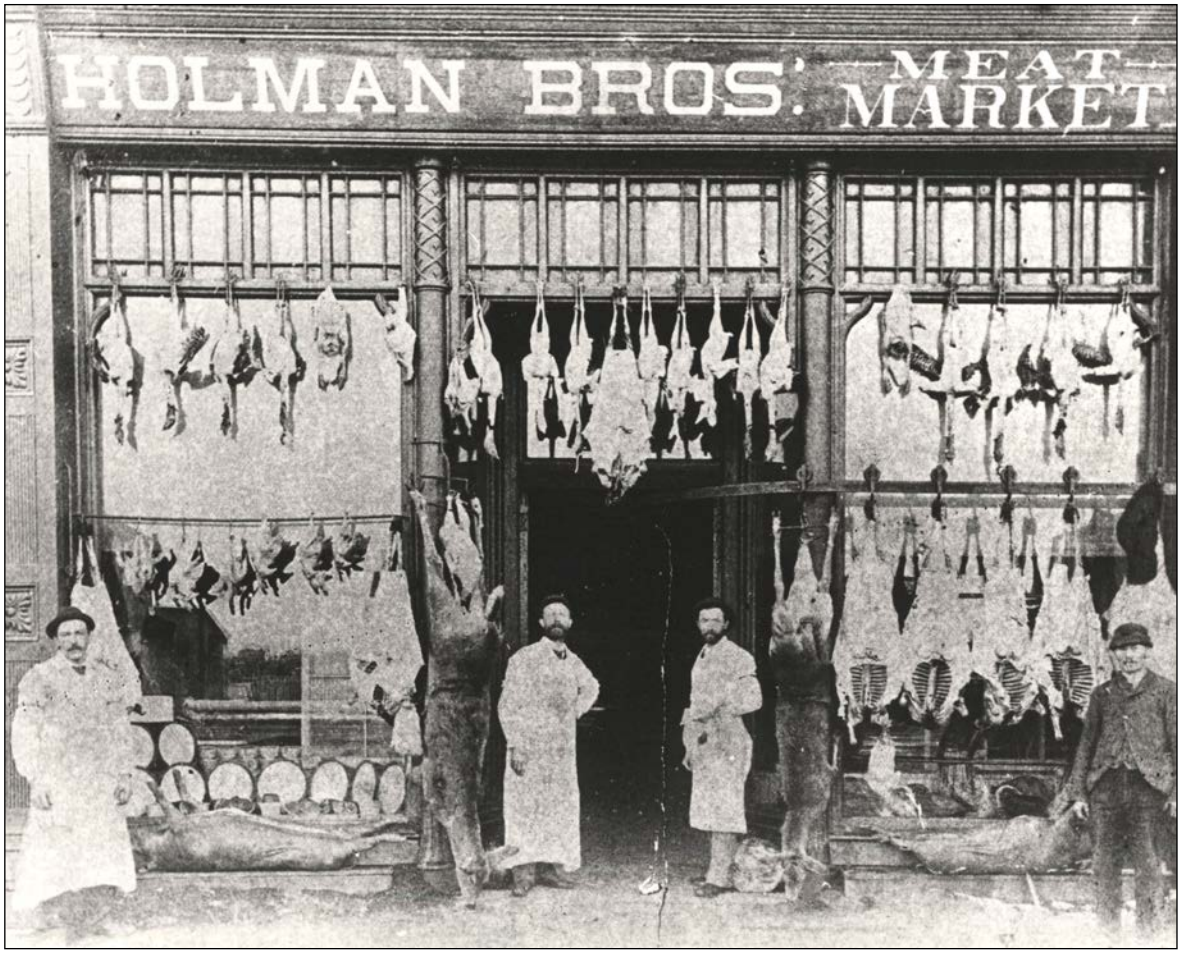

Plate 10 – Fortune Block, 232 Main Street, close-up of the ground floor, 1890. (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg- Buildings- Business- Butchers- 232 Main Street- Holman Bros.- 2.)

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Plate 11 – Fortune Block, 232 Main Street, detail of ground floor, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)



Plate 12 – Fortune Block, 232 Main Street, detail of ground floor, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

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Plate 13 – Fortune Block, 232 Main Street, detail of brickwork, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

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Plate 14 – Fortune Block, 232 Main Street, east façade, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)



Plate 15 – Fortune Block, 232 Main Street, north façade, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

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Plate 16 – Fortune Block, 232 Main Street, rear (west) façade, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

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Plate 17 – Fortune Block, 232 Main Street, south side retail space (left) and north side bar (right), 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

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Plate 18 – Fortune Block, 232 Main Street, south end staircase giving access from Main Street to second and third floors, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

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Plate 19 – Fortune Block, 232 Main Street, second floor staircase, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

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Plate 20 – Fortune Block, 232 Main Street, detail of second floor staircase, 2006. (M. Peterson, 2006.)



Plate 21 – Fortune Block, 232 Main Street, third floor skylight (now closed), 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

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Plate 22 – Fortune Block, 232 Main Street, rear staircase, 2006. (M. Peterson, 2006.)

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Plate 23 – Fortune Block, 232 Main Street, detail of second floor hallway, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

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Plate 24 – Fortune Block, 232 Main Street, second floor room with door and transom, 2006. (M. Peterson, 2006.)

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Plate 25 – Fortune Block, 232 Main Street, third floor room, 2006. (M. Peterson, 2006.)

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Plate 26 – Fortune Block, 232 Main Street, detail of window moulding, 2006. (M. Peterson, 2006.)



Plate 27 – Main Street looking south, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

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Plate 28 – Main Street looking north, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

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Plate 29 – This 1926 photograph shows the Fortune Block with its neighbours, from left to right, the Winnipeg Hotel, the former Dominion Hotel (severely altered, it became the Blue Note Café and then the Fat Angel Bistro), and the Macdonald Block (renovated and operating as the Commercial Hotel). (Archives of Manitoba, Thomas Burns Collection-542.)

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Plate 30 – A 1908 caricature of Mark Fortune. (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba.)



Plate 31 – Fortune House, 393 Wellington Crescent; 2004; built 1911, designed by W.W. Blair. (M. Peterson, 2004.)

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Plate 32 – The Fortune and Macdonald blocks, 1961. (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg- Buildings- Business- National Auto Supply-2.)