

110 JAMES AVENUE

RYAN BROTHERS BUILDING

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

110 JAMES AVENUE – RYAN BROTHERS BUILDING

Identified in various diaries, books, reports, etc., somewhere near the banks of the Red River between the foot of present-day Bannatyne Avenue and Galt Avenue was located the original settlement of the Selkirk Settlers who arrived in 1813. The Settlers arrived to find the land at "The Forks" (the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine rivers) occupied by the North West Company's Fort Gibraltar. Instead, they chose to locate their post, Fort Douglas, further north, at the south end of a triangular piece of land formed by a meander of the Red River in an area that would become known as Point Douglas. The area was chosen because fire had made clearing the land easier and the fort was begun in 1813.[1]

Known as Victoria Gardens and later Colony Gardens, it was comprised of "a large house...for Governor Macdonnell and Sheriff Spencer; also a storehouse, a farmhouse and several cabins."[2] All these structures except the Governor's House were burned to the ground in early 1815 by Métis but were rebuilt as Fort Douglas in the fall 1815. One historian described the Fort's location being "at the foot of George Street on the south side, at Logan's Creek, which once emptied into the Red River at the foot of Robert Street"[3] (Plate 1). Hislop also states that the bodies of the 21 settlers killed in the Battle of Seven Oaks were buried "under the trees on the bank of Logan's Creek." If this description is correct, the area known today as the East Exchange is near one of Western Canada's most important historic early post-European contact sites.

Settlement occurred around the fort, which was eventually abandoned in favour of land further north (present-day St. John's Park and Scotia Street). The Point Douglas area was home to many of the Settlement's most prestigious political, religious and business leaders. The routing of the main line of Canada's first transcontinental railway, the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), through the heart of Point Douglas in the early 1880s divided the area in north and

---

1 Anne Matheson Henderson, "The Lord Selkirk Settlement at Red River, Part 1," Manitoba Pageant, Autumn 1967, Vol. 13, No. 1, n.p.

2 Mary Hislop, The streets of Winnipeg (Winnipeg, MB: T.W. Taylor Co., 1912), n.p.; see also Anne Matheson Henderson, "From Fort Douglas to the Forks," Manitoba Historical Society Transactions, Series 3, No. 23, 1966-1967 season, n.p.

3 M. Hislop, op. cit., n.p.

south Points, the former continuing its residential development while the latter evolved into an industrial area.

Major development in the late 19th and early 20th century was also occurring south of the Point. The area east of Main Street developed into an extension of the warehouse district that had originally located west of Main Street. It was precipitated by the completion of the Winnipeg Transfer Railway (WTR) in 1892, which ran along the banks of the Red River from present-day William Stephenson Way to Higgins Avenue. This right-of-way, which has now been converted into Waterfront Drive, ran from the CPR in the north to the Northern Pacific and Manitoba Railway in the south and included a number of spur lines running west into the heart of the East Exchange towards Main Street (Plates 2 and 3). It gave the businesses in the area the most modern connection to the manufacturers in Eastern Canada and the commercial markets on the prairies and some of the country's biggest retailers chose sites in the East Exchange over the more established West Exchange.

One of the businesses that took advantage of this modern transportation link was the Ryan Brothers, who built a sturdy warehouse on a corner lot east of Main Street in Winnipeg's Warehouse District in 1910-1911.

STYLE

This warehouse was built with almost no ornamental detailing; the owner choosing a plain design in order to save money and because aesthetic considerations would have been superseded by a need for durability. Lacking are the rounded arches, window detailing and roof ornamentation found in many of this structure's neighbours and many of the warehouses found west of Main Street.

CONSTRUCTION

This four-storey brick and stone warehouse was built in 1910-1911. It rests on 61.0-centimetre rubblestone foundation walls, which rise 1.4 metres above grade (see Appendix I for additional construction information). The clay brick walls of the superstructure are 54.3 centimetres wide.[4]

This warehouse was built using the most common construction method of the time – the mill system – a square timber beam and post support network where beams were attached to the solid brick exterior walls and covered by wood plank flooring and often a hardwood finish. This was a very popular system in warehouse districts throughout North America because of its sturdiness, the ease of adding additional storeys and its ability to suffer fire damage and not collapse. The Ryan Brothers Building is one of many mill construction structures in the Exchange District.

DESIGN

This is another of the many sturdy, unembellished brick and stone warehouses that were built in the Exchange District after 1900. Concern over building strength, its ability to handle heavy loads and rough treatment took precedence over aesthetic concerns. The front (north) façade of the Ryan Brothers Building features familiar elements such as the rusticated and raised basement wall, stone accenting in the form of a belt course above the ground floor windows, as lug sills and brick corbelling to accent an otherwise plain, flat roofline (Plates 4 and 5). Window openings throughout are square headed and plain and have been recently replaced. The raised basement openings on the north and west side have been bricked in. The original recessed entrance on the north wall, also recently renovated, was similarly unadorned.

The brick wall of the east elevation is uninterrupted; a painted sign is located at the roofline (Plate 6). The west façade is similar to the front, squared window openings on all floors, raised stone foundation wall and minimal ornamentation (Plate 7). It too features painted signage from former tenants/owners (Plate 8). A metal fire escape is centrally located on this elevation and the original loading door at the south end has been converted into a pair of windows.

---

4 City of Winnipeg Assessment Record, Roll No. 713640-12-2, PC 50.

The rear of the building originally featured another large, raised central loading door and square headed window openings (Plates 9-10). The ground floor has been altered: the loading door converted to windows and two windows at the east end converted into entrances at grade (Plate 11). Painted signage is also present, original Ryan Brothers advertisement can be seen above the first floor openings (Plate 12).

As mentioned previously, a number of changes have been made to the exterior including the closure, renovation or re-purposing of original openings and the replacement of the building's original window units.

INTERIOR

The original layout for the warehouse was simple: the basement held the boiler and fuel rooms and a vault with stairs in the northeast corner and an elevator in the southwest (Plate 13); and open upper floors. The ground floor featured a large entrance hall with pressed tin ceilings up a short flight of stairs from the entrance vestibule. A public counter separated this space from the four offices and large vault located in the building's northwest corner. The remainder of the main floor was taken up by a Sample Room and loading area with elevator on the west side and a warehouse on the east side (Plate 14).

At present, the building has been renamed The James at District Condos and the interior has been renovated into residential condominiums (Plates 15 and 16).

INTEGRITY

The building stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition. Changes to the building's exterior have been extensive, openings have been closed and altered on three of four façades and all original windows have been replaced.

STREETSCAPE

The Ryan Brothers Building stands on a corner lot and as such, defines and is an integral part of two separate streetscapes – James Avenue and Bertha Street (Plates 17 and 18). This warehouse, along with the other buildings in the district, has been recognized as a National Historic District by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. All buildings in the Exchange District are an essential part of the historic streetscape and as such, the Historical Buildings and Resources Committee has given them 60 points (Plate 19).

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS

Victor W. Horwood (1878-1939), a British-born and New York City trained designer was responsible for this warehouse (Plate 20). Horwood came to Winnipeg in 1904 and was appointed Manitoba's Chief Architect in 1911 (see Appendix II for biographical information). He has been given 20 points by the Historical Buildings and Resources Committee.

Contractor for the warehouse was local builder W.J. Palmer.

PERSON/INSTITUTION

The original and long-term owner/tenant of this building was the Ryan Brothers Company. Formed by James Ryan Jr. and George Russell Ryan, the firm was another successful company with the Ryan name.

Thomas Ryan (1849-1937), a native of Perth, Ontario who came to Winnipeg in 1874 where he entered the shoe-making trade that grew to become the regional retail and wholesale enterprise, Thomas Ryan, Boots and Shoes, stretching from Lake Superior to the West Coast.[5] Three of his brothers – Michael (1856-1934), James (1852-1937) and George (1859-1948) – also eventually joined the business and when Thomas decided to concentrate on the wholesale trade, he sold the

[5] M. Peterson and D.M. Lyon, "492 Main Street (131-133 Albert Street) – Former Macdonald Shoe Store (Formerly Banfield Block; originally the Ryan Block)," report for the City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee, January 1996, pp. 12-13.

retail branch to George in ca.1889, who operated a store at 492 Main Street and then after 1900, next door at 494 Main Street.[6]

James Ryan (1852-1937[7] – Plate 21) came to Winnipeg in 1879 and co-founded Ryan and Fares with William H. Fares. The successful livestock company operated one of Canada's largest ranches near Gleichen, Alberta. He also operated a boot and shoe store at 678 Main Street in the late 19th century and then with son James Jr. (1880-1950)[8] in the early 1900s.[9]

But James Jr. and brother George Russell Ryan (1883-1955)[10] decided to start their own business in 1906,[11] an offshoot of their father's livestock venture, Ryan Brothers, wholesalers and brokers of butchers' and packers' supplies. Originally occupying part of the ground floor of the James Avenue warehouse for their showroom (the space was shared with Ryan and Fares offices), the firm also advertised itself as a manufacturer of refrigerators, with a factory on Alexander Avenue (Plate 22). The firm continued to occupy space in the warehouse into the 1950s but when G.R. Ryan died in 1955, the firm ended.

The upper storeys of the warehouse on James Avenue were, from the beginning, rented out to various tenants including: Philip Carey Co., roofing manufacturers (1913); Joseph Tetley & Co., tea importers (1913); Smith Davidson & Wright, wholesaler paper dealers (1923); Brandram-Henderson, wholesale paints (1933-1949); and Quaker Oats Ltd. (1933). With the closing of Ryan Brothers, Great West Electric & Radio Co. took over tenancy of the building and used it as a

---

6 Ibid., p. 13.

7 Winnipeg Free Press, May 13, 1936, p. 5, February 16, 1937, p. 20 and August 26, 1937, p. 16.

8 Winnipeg Free Press, October 21, 1950, p. 29.

9 Henderson's Directory, 1895-1905. R.R. Rostecki Armstrong's Point. A History (Winnipeg, MB: Heritage Winnipeg Corporation, 2009), p. 122. Interestingly, father & son lived next to each other for many years at 93 & 99 Middle Gate respectively (originally 51 & 55 Central Avenue) A bell/buzzer system was installed to connect the two houses electronically.

10 Winnipeg Free Press, February 11, 1955, p. 44.

11 Loc. cit.

repair shop and warehouse for over two decades. The Kern-Hill Furniture Company used the building as general storage space in the 1990s and then the building stood vacant.[12]

This building, and several other nearby warehouses, was bought by the Peter Nygård International Partnership in 2005 with ambitious plans for an $80-million "fashion village" that sought to create a mixed retail/residential space that included a covered atrium (Plate 23).[13] The scheme was abandoned in 2007. In 2010, this building was sold to developer Streetside Development Corporation (part of the Qualico Group of Companies) and converted into 19 residential condominiums. It is known as District Condominiums, along with the other Streetside converted buildings: 130 and 132-134 James Avenue and 133, 139 and 145 Market Avenue.

EVENT

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

CONTEXT

This warehouse was completed at the zenith of Winnipeg's pre-World War I growth period, when it gained national and international interest from corporations and financial institutions. It was the centre of Western Canadian growth through its banks and its warehouses, which took the manufactured goods from Eastern Canada and assembled them into orders for retail concerns across the West. Businesses of all description organized to take advantage of Winnipeg's position and many chose to build their own modern facilities, like this one at James Avenue and Bertha Street.

LANDMARK

This building is located at an intersection at the eastern end of the Exchange District. Located near Waterfront Drive, this structure's minimal ornamentation and scale lessen its conspicuousness.

---

12 Henderson's Directory, 1940-1990.

13 Nygård International Partnership, online, http://corporate.nygard.com, 2005.

APPENDIX I

CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report
Assessment Record

Building Address: 110 James Avenue

Building Name: Ryan Brothers Building

Original Use: warehouse

Current Use: residential condominiums

Roll No. (Old): 713640 (12069)

Municipality: 12 Ward: 2

Property or Occupancy Code: 50

Legal Description: 7/9 St. John, Plan 33296, Lot 2 (Original: 9^{E} St. John, Plan 45, W of RLY Lot 68: Lot 69)

Location: southeast corner Bertha Street and James Avenue

Date of Construction: 1910

Storeys: 4

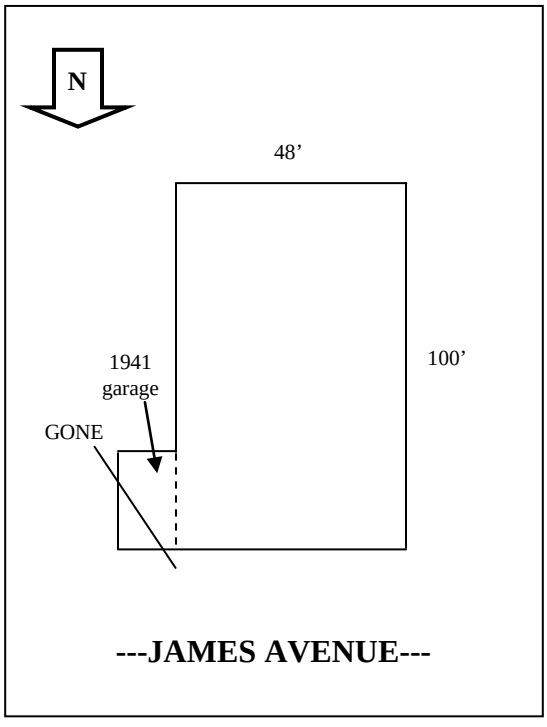
Construction Type: stone and brick

HERITAGE STATUS: ON NOMINATED LIST

Building Permits (Plans available: **[CS]** City Storage):
- 2975/1910 **[CS]** $35,000 (original - 48' x 100'); 482/1945 $500 (repairs); 10604/1953 $1,000 (alteration to shop & warehouse); 7704/1994 (alteration to warehouse); 150402/2010 $106,050 (exterior alterations); 159128/2011 $3,000,000 (interior alterations)

Information:

- 48 x 100 x 60+ = 56,484 cu. ft.
- Cut stone foundation to 4' 8" above grade. Balance clay brick
- Wall thickness – 21" brick, basement – 24" rubble stone
- 1941 – Lean-to garage – wood floor, poor condition
- Permit 482/1945 – concrete footing placed under front 3 posts, office modernized, paneling and plasterboard
- 1947 – good appearance to office
- Permit 10604/1953 – partitioning to front
- 1961 – Building in good shape. Used for warehouse space - new roof and gas boiler 1960
- 1966 Assessment – "fair condition". Appears unchanged
- 1971 Inspection– no changes, building fairly good condition
- 1996 – Inspection – building locked. Appears to be used for storage by Kern-Hill



ARCHITECT: V.W. HORWOOD

CONTRACTOR: W.J. PALMER

APPENDIX II

Victor William Horwood

V.W. Horwood was born in Frome, Somersetshire, England on February 27, 1878 and came to Canada in 1884, settling with his family in Prescott, Ontario.[1] Horwood's father, a stained glass artist, is credited for having installed the decorative glass in the House of Commons Building in Ottawa. Victor Horwood studied art in New York City, after which he worked in Ottawa in a local architectural firm. In 1904, he came to Winnipeg and set up his private practice.

A partial list of his private contracts includes:

St. Boniface City Hall, 219 Provencher Boulevard, 1905 (Grade II)
St. Paul's Presbyterian Church, Notre Dame Avenue, 1906 (demolished)
Chaffey and Verhoeven Building, 289 Garry Street, 1906
Moxam Court, 280 River Avenue, 1907
Rev. C. Mackinnon House, 114 Balmoral Street, 1907
Waldron Court Apartments, 544 Broadway, 1909 (demolished 1979)
Ryan Brothers Building, 110 James Avenue, 1910
C.D. Stovel House, 6 Ruskin Row, 1910
Macmillan Court Apartments, 421 Kennedy Street, 1910
Haselmere Apartments, 559 Ellice Avenue,
Collegiate Institute, Virden, Manitoba

His designing of the St. Boniface City Hall caused much controversy, as the finished product was considerably different from the original design and the project was marred by a number of cost overruns – the original $40,000 total increased to $60,000 by its completion in April of 1906.[2]

In 1911, he was appointed assistant to the provincial architect, Samuel Hooper, and assumed the head position upon Hooper's death only a few months later.[3] As the province's chief architect, Horwood controlled the office during one of its most productive periods and oversaw the construction of some of Manitoba's most spectacular buildings including: Brandon's Normal

---

1 F.H. Schofield, The Story of Manitoba (Winnipeg: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1913), Vol. II, p. 664.

2 "219 Boulevard Provencher, L'Hôtel-De-Ville de Saint Boniface (St. Boniface City Hall)," report for the City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee, 1981, p. 2. Below as "219 Boulevard Provencher."

3 F.H. Schofield, op. cit., p. 664; and Manitoba Free Press, November 1, 1911, p. 5.

School; Stonewall's Town Hall; Agricultural College, Tuxedo (Winnipeg); and Winnipeg's Law Courts.[4]

As with the St. Boniface City Hall, Horwood became embroiled in controversy over his role in the Legislative Building scandal. It was Horwood's suggested changes to the structure's foundation in 1913 that allowed contractors to embezzled from the government. Subsequent Royal Commission hearings and court proceedings determined that Horwood had not only known about the illegal activities, but had perjured himself as part of an early cover-up attempt.[5] Horwood, however, bargained with the courts and was not charged in return for testimony that placed the blame on Premier Rodmond Roblin and three of his cabinet ministers. After the affair, Horwood was dismissed as provincial architect.[6]

Horwood would return to private life, in later years he authored and illustrated many books about life in Manitoba. He died at his home in Matlock, Manitoba on March 15, 1939.[7]

---

4 Various Public Buildings (Winnipeg: Manitoba Department of Public Works, 1912).

5 W.L. Morton, Manitoba: A History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), pp. 341-342.

6 "219 Boulevard Provencher," p. 3.

7 Winnipeg Tribune, March 15, 1939, p. 1.

110 JAMES AVENUE – RYAN BROTHERS BUILDING

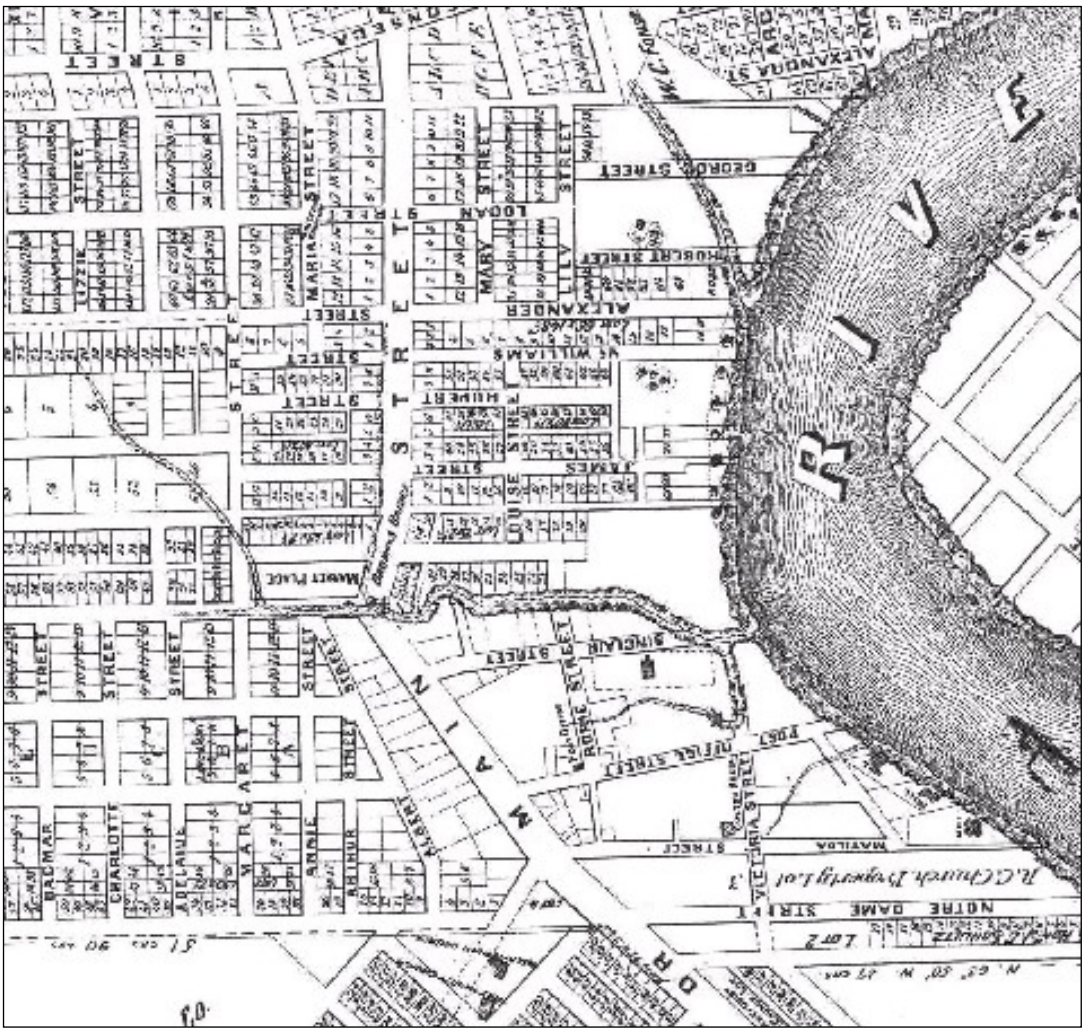


Plate 1 – Portion of J.D. Parr's Map of what would become downtown Winnipeg and the Warehouse District, 1874. Note the extensive surveying of lots on both sides of Main Street and the creeks running into the Red River including Brown's Creek (south) and Logan's Creek (north) (City of Winnipeg.)

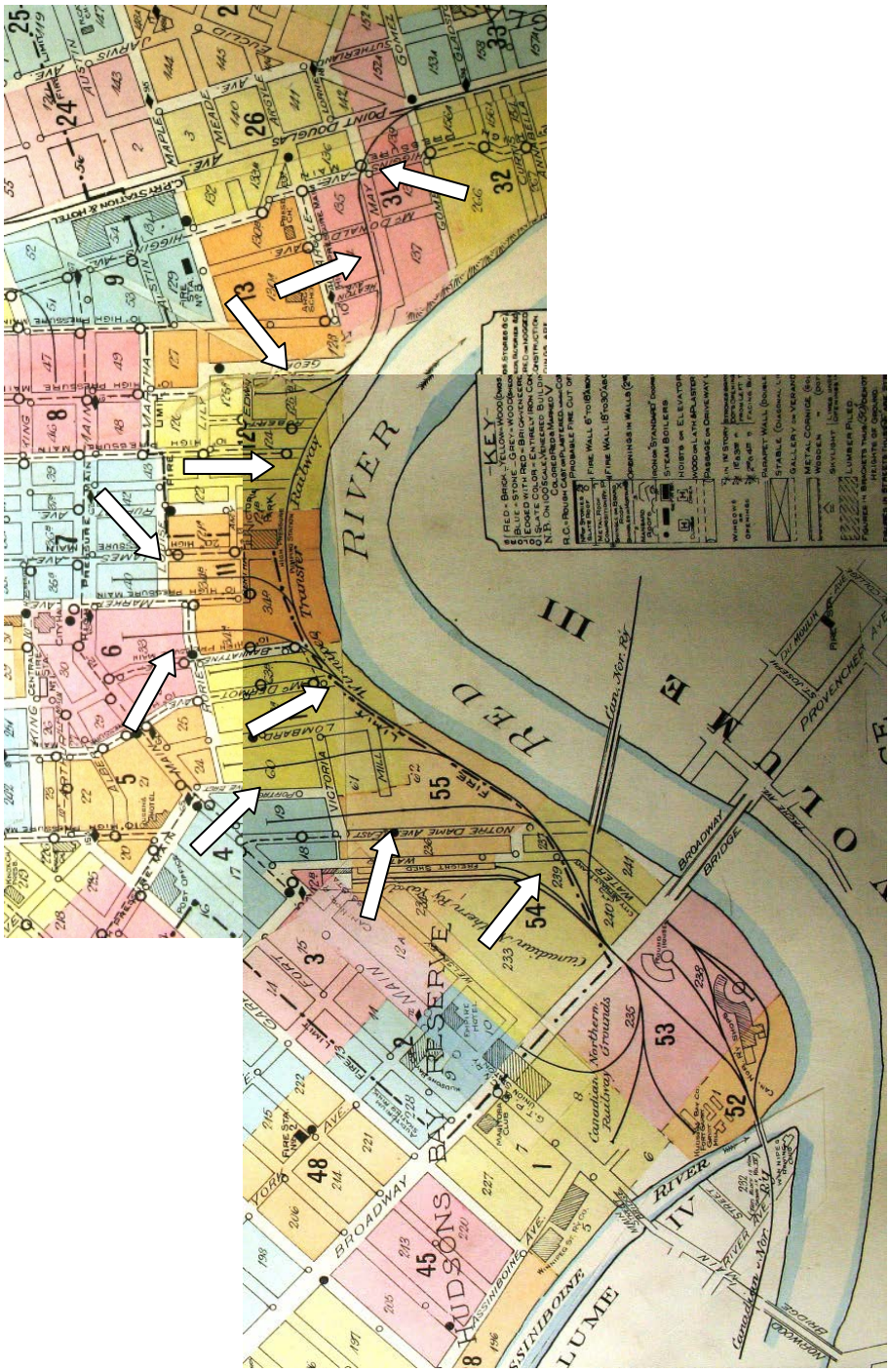


Plate 2 – City of Winnipeg Fire Atlas, Overview Map, 1906-1914. The completed Winnipeg Transfer Railway and its many north-south spur lines into the warehouse district runs from Water Avenue to Point Douglas Avenue (arrows). (City of Winnipeg.)

110 JAMES AVENUE – RYAN BROTHERS BUILDING



Plate 3 – Portion of McPhillip's Map of the City of Winnipeg, 1911, showing the Warehouse District. The spur line running behind the Ryan Brothers Building, James Avenue, is at the arrow. (City of Winnipeg.)



Plate 4 – Architect's plan #2975/1910, "Front Elevation". (Courtesy of the City of Winnipeg.)

110 JAMES AVENUE – RYAN BROTHERS BUILDING



Plate 5 – Ryan Brothers Building, 110 James Avenue, front (north) façade, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

110 JAMES AVENUE – RYAN BROTHERS BUILDING



Plate 6 – Ryan Brothers Building, 110 James Avenue, east façade, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)



Plate 7 – Ryan Brothers Building, 110 James Avenue, front (north) and west façades, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

110 JAMES AVENUE – RYAN BROTHERS BUILDING



Plate 8 – Ryan Brothers Building, 110 James Avenue, front (north) and west façades, 1962. (City of Winnipeg.)

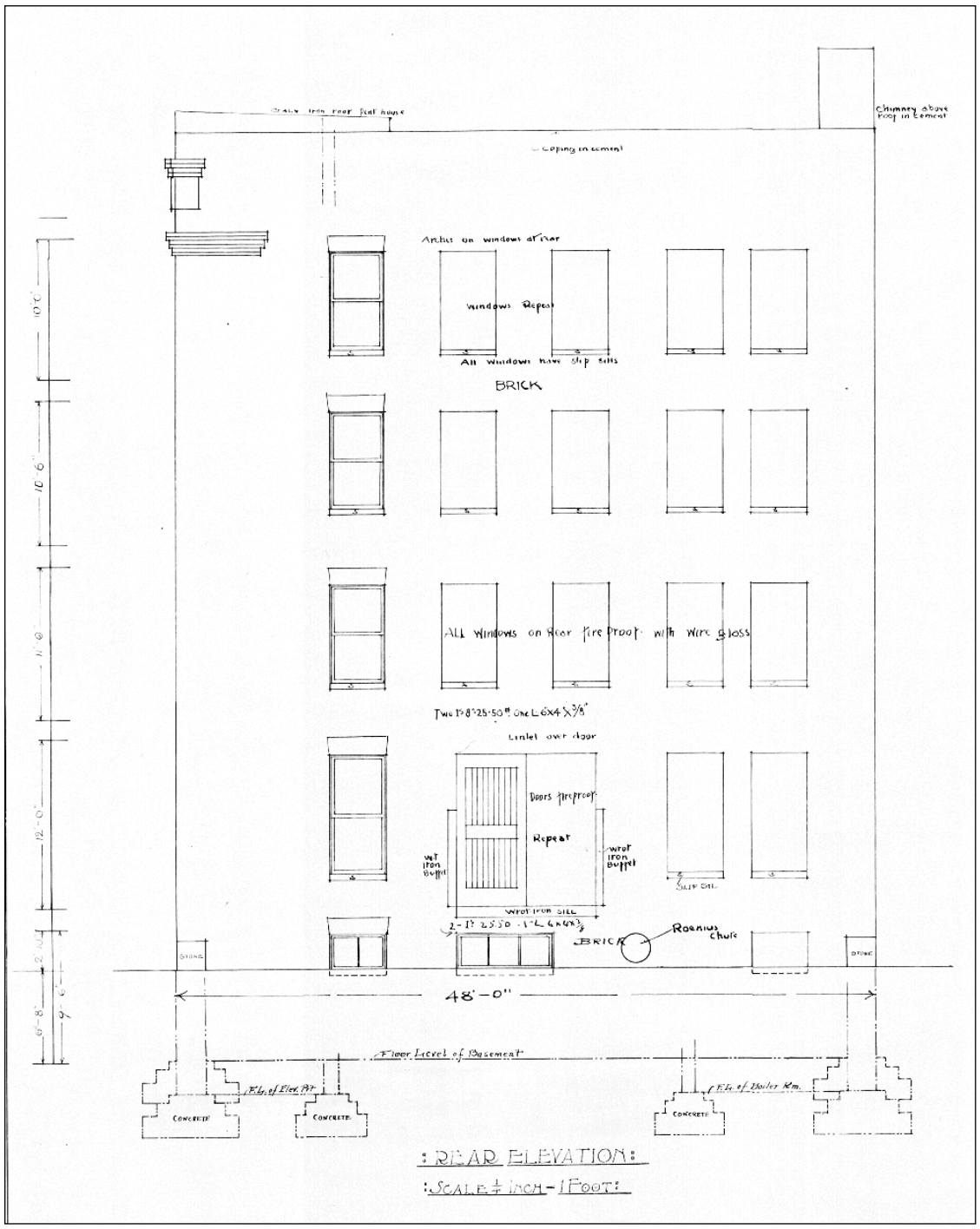


Plate 9 – Architect's plan #2975/1910, "Rear Elevation". (Courtesy of the City of Winnipeg.)

110 JAMES AVENUE – RYAN BROTHERS BUILDING



Plate 10 – Ryan Brothers Building, 110 James Avenue, rear (south) façade, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

110 JAMES AVENUE – RYAN BROTHERS BUILDING



Plate 11 – Ryan Brothers Building, 110 James Avenue, rear (south) façade detail, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)



Plate 12 – Ryan Brothers Building, 110 James Avenue, rear (south) façade "Ryan Brothers" painted signage, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

110 JAMES AVENUE – RYAN BROTHERS BUILDING

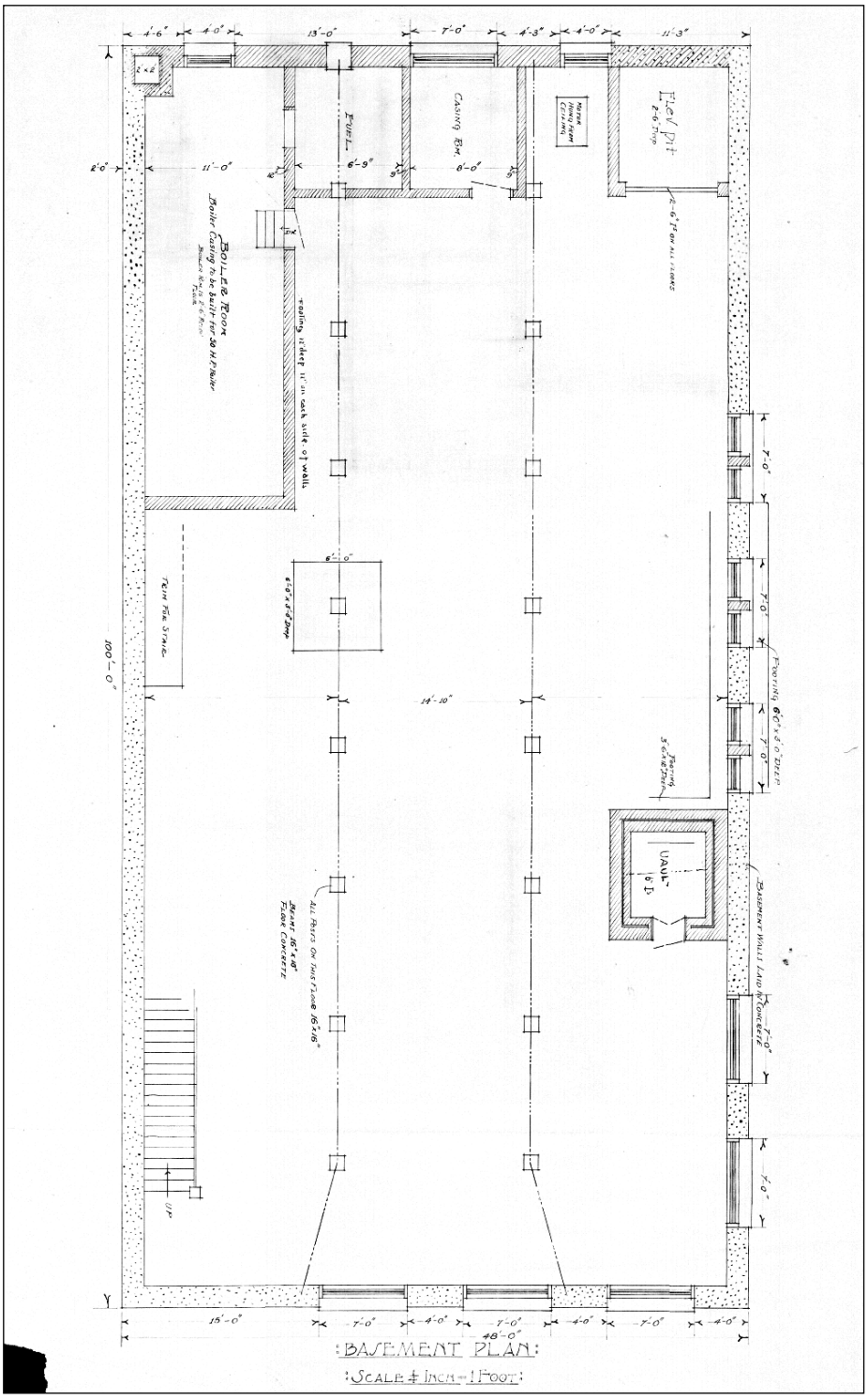


Plate 13 – Architect's plan #2975/1910, "Basement Plan". (Courtesy of the City of Winnipeg.)

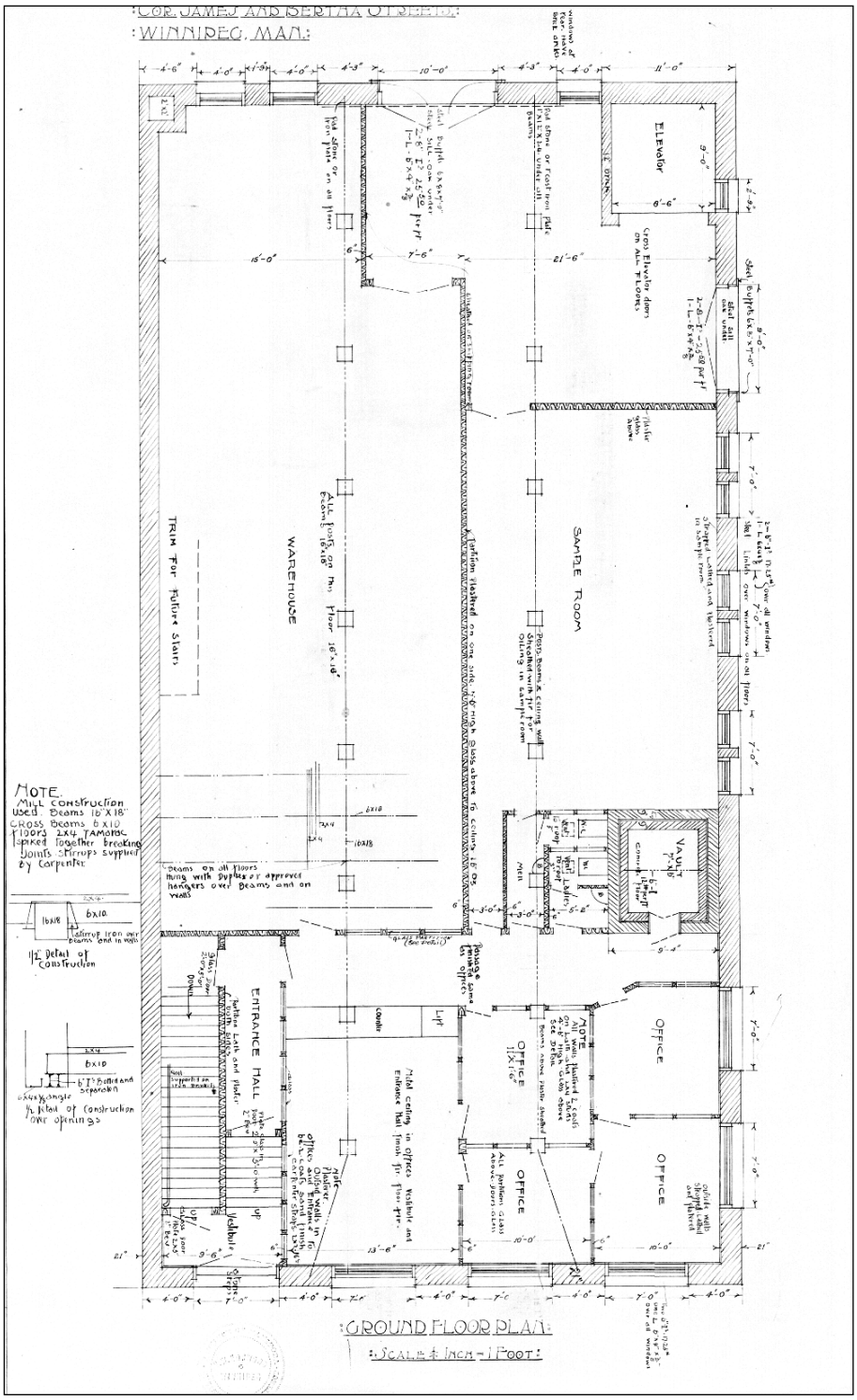


Plate 14 – Architect's plan #2975/1910, "Ground Floor Plan". (Courtesy of the City of Winnipeg.)

110 JAMES AVENUE – RYAN BROTHERS BUILDING



Plate 15 – Ryan Brothers Building, 110 James Avenue, ground floor suite, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

110 JAMES AVENUE – RYAN BROTHERS BUILDING



Plate 16 – Ryan Brothers Building, 110 James Avenue, upper floor suite, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

110 JAMES AVENUE – RYAN BROTHERS BUILDING



Plate 17 – James Avenue, looking west from Waterfront Drive, 2014. James Avenue pumping station is on the right. (M. Peterson, 2014.)



Plate 18 – James Avenue, looking east from Lily Street, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

110 JAMES AVENUE – RYAN BROTHERS BUILDING



Plate 19 – Looking north in the East Exchange District from Bannatyne Avenue, 1970. Landmarks include: #1- Amy Street Steam Plant, 15-21 Amy Street (smokestacks demolished 1992, building 2001-2002); #2- Winnipeg Transfer Railway spur line between Market and James avenues; and #3- Ryan Brothers Building, 110 James Avenue. (City of Winnipeg.)



Plate 20 – Victor W. Horwood, ca. 1913. (Reproduced from F.H. Schofield, The Story of Manitoba [Winnipeg, MB: S.J. Clarke, 1913], Vol. II, p. 664.)

110 JAMES AVENUE – RYAN BROTHERS BUILDING



Plate 21 – James Ryan, ca.1937. (Reproduced from the Winnipeg Free Press, February 16, 1937, p. 20.)

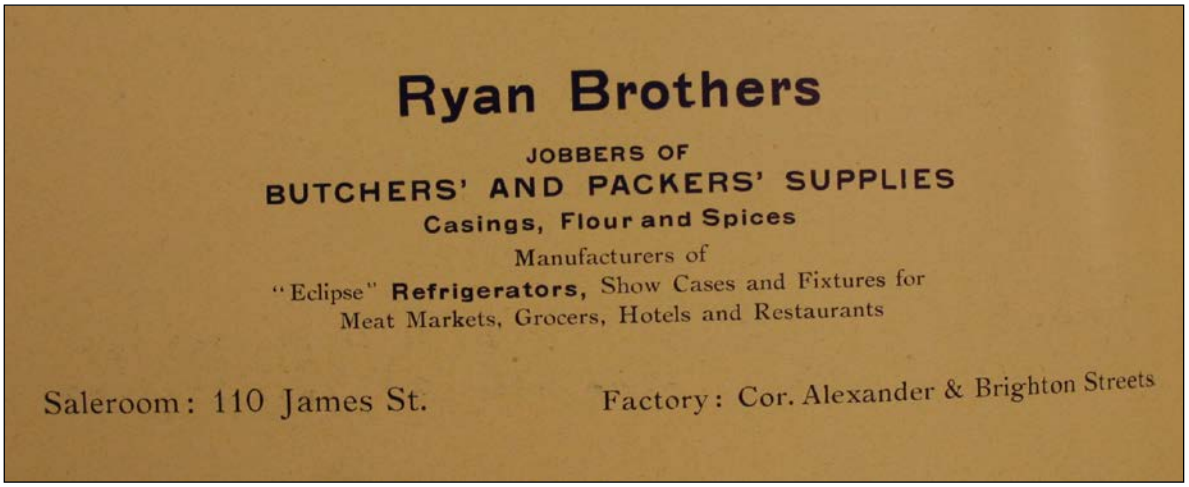


Plate 22 – Early advertisement for Ryan Brothers. (Reproduced from Henderson Directory, 1913, p. 176.)

110 JAMES AVENUE – RYAN BROTHERS BUILDING



Plate 23 – Artist's rendition of Nygård Village with the atrium over what was the back lane (Elgin Avenue) between the buildings on the north side of Market Avenue and the south side of James Avenue, 2005. (Reproduced from Nygård International Partnership, online, http://corporate.nygard.com/scf/News.aspx?id=305, 2005.)