

216 NOTRE DAME AVENUE

OXFORD HOTEL

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
Researcher: M. Peterson
April 2019

This building embodies the following heritage values as described in the *Historical Resources By-law*, 55/2014 (consolidated update July 13, 2016):

(a) The Oxford Hotel, opened in 1905, took its place among the growing number of medium-scaled hotels building throughout Winnipeg's rapidly growing downtown;

(b) It is associated with Frances Thomas "Frank" Lindsay, hotelier and developer;

(c) It was designed by well-known local architect Henry Sandham Griffith and built by local contractor Aaron Grey;

(d) The red brick and stone detailed structure is built similar to contemporary downtown buildings;

(e) It is a conspicuous building within its mainly-commercial neighbourhood; and

(f) The building's exterior has suffered little alteration.

216 NOTRE DAME AVENUE – OXFORD HOTEL

The development of Winnipeg's Notre Dame Avenue in downtown Winnipeg began in the fur trade era with the creation of Main Street and Portage Avenue. The former, known variously as the King's Highway, the Garry Road, Garry Street and finally, within Winnipeg, as Main Street, had its beginnings as a trail linking the Hudson's Bay Company's two main forts, Upper and Lower Fort Garry in the 1803s. Portage Avenue, original Portage Trail, was the main east-west route from Fort Garry to the posts strung out across the western prairies.

It would be well into the 1860s before these trails were little more than "a country route with sparse or non-existent roadside development."[1] Notre Dame Avenue originally ran from the Red River, crossing both Main Street and the Portage Avenue (Plate 1) on an angle defined by the river lot boundaries. By the late 1870s, the entire area was beginning to develop, resulting in the surveying and re-organization of many of the rights-of-way. Notre Dame faced a major change as old buildings were removed to allow for the widening of Portage Avenue. By the 1880s, Notre Dame Avenue ended on the north side of Portage Avenue (Plate 2), and began again east of Main Street – referred to as Notre Dame West and East.[2]

Development along Notre Dame Avenue mirrored much of the downtown, early residential development was replaced in the 19th century by commercial structures and warehouses and office high-rises in the 20th century (Plates 3-5).

Notre Dame Avenue development was also the result of the 1904 announcement that the new Winnipeg Post Office was to be built at Portage Avenue and Garry Street and the T. Eaton Company announcement of its massive new department store further west on Portage Avenue. This ensured that Portage Avenue would become Winnipeg's commercial centre and the intersecting streets, including Notre Dame Avenue, quickly filled with modern structures.

---

1 R.R. Rostecki, "Portage and Main. A Short History," report for the Historical Buildings Committee, 2003, p. 1.

2 Ibid., p. 5. Notre Dame Avenue East was renamed Pioneer Avenue in 1959.

In 1905, John Macdonald, local hotelman, built a new hotel, the Oxford, just west of Portage Avenue and across the street from the aging Queen's Hotel (Plate 6).

STYLE

The design of the Oxford Hotel, with its minimal ornamentation, does not fit into any stylistic category of the period. It was built modestly and with few details to reduce cost and to ensure longevity. It is similar in scale and detailing to many downtown Winnipeg hotels.

CONSTRUCTION

Located on the south side of Notre Dame Avenue just west of Portage Avenue, the Oxford Hotel is a solid, clay brick structure resting on a 61.0-centimetre stone foundation, measuring approximately 15.3 x 30.5 metres (see Appendix I for construction information). The front section is four storeys tall, the rear is three storeys. Cost of construction in 1905 was $35,000.[3]

DESIGN

The main (north) façade faces Notre Dame Avenue, the renovated ground floor now covered in a black cladding. The upper three floors display their original dark hued brick walls with regularly spaced windows: square headed openings with wide stone heads and stone lugs sills on the second floor; and arched openings with radiating brick heads and stone lugs sills on the third and fourth floors (Plate 7). Modestly projecting brick pilasters divide the façade on the upper two floors and the building is finished with an unadorned flat roofline, which is a severe alteration to the original, ornate element (Plates 8 and 9).

The northeast corner is angled and holds the main entrance (Plate 10). The east side faces a back lane and includes a metal fire escape and windows in arched openings on all upper floors (Plate

---

[3] City of Winnipeg Building Permit, #775/1905.

11). The building lowers to three storeys at the back of the structure. The south and west façades are party walls.

INTERIOR

It is known that the original hotel offered 52 upper floor suites, the main floor held a rotunda and office, large dining room, bar and kitchen. White pine and oak were used as trim throughout.[4]

The Committee could not gain access to the interior to evaluate the present condition.

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 significant, especially on the ground floor (Notre Dame Avenue façade) and at the roofline.

STREETSCAPE

The hotel, built just west of a back lane, is part of an exceptional downtown streetscape that encompasses both sides of Notre Dame Avenue from Portage Avenue west to Ellice Avenue (Plates 12 and 13). It is major contributor to this streetscape, which has maintained much of its appearance since the pre-World War I era (Plate 5).

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTOR

British born and trained architect H.S. Griffith (1865-1943) was responsible for the design of the Oxford Hotel. Griffith arrived in Winnipeg in 1887 and worked here until a move to Saskatchewan in 1907 (see Appendix II for biographical information). He has been given 10 points by the Historical Buildings and Resources Committee.

---

4 Manitoba Free Press, October 30, 1905, p. 44.

Aaron Grey (1865-1962) was the contractor named in the City of Winnipeg Building Permit. Grey was born in Ontario and came to Winnipeg before 1900.[5] It appears that he began working as a contractor in 1904, either alone or as Grey and Davidson or Grey and Heslip (John). Notable structures built include:[6]

- Oxford Hotel, 216 Notre Dame Avenue (1905)
- Manitoba Club, 194 Broadway (1913)
- All Souls Unitarian Church, 103 Furby Street (1913)
- Canada Bread Company Stables, Burnell Street (1913)
- St. Jude's Anglican Church, 780 Home Street (1914 – demolished)
- St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Oak Street at Kingsway (1916 – demolished)
- Royal Bank Branch, 968 Main Street (1918)

He died in Vancouver, B.C. in 1962.[7]

PERSON/INSTITUTION

The original owner of the Oxford was John Macdonald, who had been associated with the Bank Hotel, 186 McDermot Avenue (Plate 14).[8] Opened in October, the 80-guest Oxford was sold a month later to Frances Thomas "Frank" Lindsay (1854-1940),[9] an Ontario-born businessman who arrived in Winnipeg via Minnesota in 1884 after working as a stagecoach driver in the U.S.[10] Lindsay became the owner of several local hotels by the turn-of-the-century and reportedly paid $100,000 for the new structure. Lindsay would translate the profits from his various development schemes into the construction of the Lindsay Block, 228 Notre Dame Avenue, just west of the Oxford Hotel in 1911 (Plate 15).

---

5 Canada Census, 1901 and 1911.

6 City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books, 1899-1926.

7 Winnipeg Free Press, January 8, 1962, p. 20.

8 Manitoba Free Press, October 30, 1905, p. 44.

9 Manitoba Free Press, November 20, 1905, p. 7.

10 "Lindsay, Frances Thomas," Memorable Manitobans, Manitoba Historical Society, http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/people/lindsay_f.shtml, 2011.

In 1912, Lindsay rented the hotel to P.D. Hills and Harold Matthew, the later a Brandon, MB hotelier who would also operate the Queen's Hotel, across Notre Dame Avenue from the Oxford, by mid-1913.[11] In order to pay the $20,000 annual rent, the pair paid cash and arranged a chattel mortgage on the hotel property. According to a report, by early 1915, competition in the hotel industry had serious negative effects at the Oxford and Hill and Matthew could not pay their rent to Lindsay.[12] A mortgage sale of "valuable hotel chattels" took place in July 1915. In November, Lindsay assumed operations of the hotel and applied for a liquor license in order to "resume business."[13] Lindsay's request was refused by the Licensing Board on the grounds that "there was not…any need of another liquor license in Winnipeg."[14]

By 1917, Lindsay had found new operators, Emma and Dunham, who remodelled the ground floor and opened the New Carlton Café which included a second floor men's smoking room.[15]

In 1923, Lindsay sold the Oxford to J.A. Richardson, president of James Richardson and Sons Limited, grain exporters, founder of Western Canada Airways and director (among others) of the Canadian Pacific Railway, Canadian Bank of Commerce, International Nickel (INCO) and Great-West Life Assurance Company.[16] He owned the hotel into the 1940s.[17] In 1946, the hotel was sold for $60,000 to Alderman Joseph Stepnuk (1898-1972).[18] He owned the property until shortly before his death.

---

11 Manitoba Free Press, November 20, 1912, p. 28 and June 9, 1913, p. 13.

12 Manitoba Free Press, November 25, 1915, p. 4.

13 Manitoba Free Press, November 17, 1915, p. 4.

14 Manitoba Free Press, November 25, 1915, p. 4.

15 Manitoba Free Press, May 19, 1917, p. 3.

16 Canadian Encyclopedia (Edmonton, AB: Hurtig Publishers, 1985).

17 City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls, Roll No. 13-052170000, 1920-1990.

18 Winnipeg Free Press, June 8, 1946, p. 24.

EVENT

During the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike, the hotel hosted the Labor Café, organized and run by Helen Armstrong, a vocal labour leader and president of the Hotel and Household Workers' Union. This food kitchen served hundreds of free meals a day to strikers and their families but was forced to move out of the Strathcona Hotel, 567 Main Street on June 14, 1919 when the owner was pressured by anti-union leaders. The Labor Café closed when the strike came to an end.[19]

CONTEXT

This modest hotel was built just as Winnipeg's downtown, specifically Portage Avenue, began developing as the commercial heart of the City. It witnessed the rapid expansion and modernization of the district and it has adapted as the industry has changed. It is now one of the oldest continuous use hotels remaining in the downtown.

LANDMARK

The Oxford Hotel is located on a busy Winnipeg street and would be well-known in the district.

---

[19] Winnipeg Sun, May 2, 2019, online edition; Winnipeg Western Labor News, Special Strike Edition No. 25, June 14, 1919, p. 1 and June 17, 1919, p. 1; and M. Dupuis, author of The Winnipeg General Strike (Victoria, B.C.: author, 2018) in "Letters To The Editor," Winnipeg Free Press, May 9, 1919, online edition.

Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
THE CITY OF WINNIPEG

APPENDIX I

CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report

Building Address: 216 Notre Dame Avenue

Building Name: Oxford Hotel

Original Use: hotel

Current Use: hotel

Roll No. (Old): 13052170000 (---)

R.S.N.: 154949

Municipality: 12 Ward: 2

Property or Occupancy Code: ---

Legal Description: 1 St. John, Plan 131, Parcels A and B

Location: south side between Portage and Ellice avenues

Date of Construction: 1905

Storeys: 4 & 3

Construction Type: Brick and stone foundation

Heritage Status: ON NOMINATED LIST

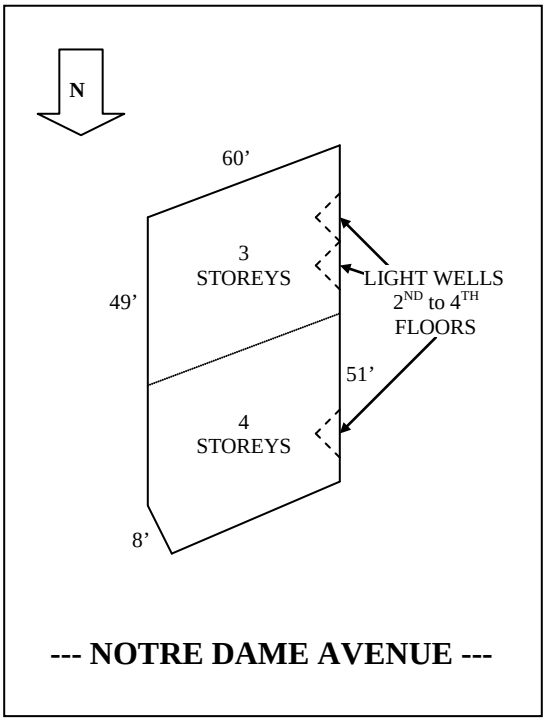
Building Permits (Plans available: **[CS]** Department Storage; **[M]** Microfilm):
- 775/1905 $35,000 (Superstructure); 739/1909 **[CS]** $3,000 (Alterations); 27/1917 **[CS]** $3,500 (Alterations); 665/1938 $3,000 (Alterations); 5311/1947 $6,000 (Alterations); 2868/1958 **[CS]** $3,800 (Alterations); 2343/1963 $2,200 (Repairs); 415/1990 $30,000 (Fire upgrade); 191803/2001 $150,000 (Interior alterations)

Information:

- 100 x 60’

- ceilings: B- 7’; 1st- 11’; 2nd- 10.2’; 3rd- 9.9’; 4th- 9.8’

- wall thicknesses- B- 24” stone; 1st & 2nd- 17” brick; 3rd & 4th- 13” brick



ARCHITECT: H.S. GRIFFITH

CONTRACTOR: A. GREY

APPENDIX II

Henry Sandham Griffith

H.S. Griffith was one of several British architects who immigrated to Canada in the last two decades of the twentieth century and ended up practicing in Winnipeg. Griffith was born in Oxfordshire, England in 1865, the son of Reverend G. S. Griffith. Architectural training took the form of three years of service (1882-1885) to Reading, England firm of Webb and Tubbs. In 1886, Griffith trained as a draftsman with the London District Surveyor's office.[20]

He came to Winnipeg in the spring of 1887 where he found employment with the Northern Pacific Railway and later with the Land Titles Office. Both positions dealt mainly with surveying activities but, in 1893, Griffith opened an architectural practice in the city.[21] Although this practice was relatively small, he designed several buildings across the province. He moved to Saskatoon in 1906 and Victoria in 1907. He stayed in British Columbia for the remainder of his life, designing many residential and commercial buildings. The 1918 collapse of his firm followed its rapid expansion during the 1900-12 land boom. After several years in Victoria, designing many fine homes in some of the most exclusive neighbourhoods, he moved his practice to Vancouver where he continued to work and lived until his death on October 18, 1943.[22]

An incomplete list of his designs includes:

Winnipeg:

Plans for St. John's Park (Main Street), Assiniboine Park (River Avenue) and Victoria Park (Pacific Avenue) for City of Winnipeg Parks Board (1894)[23]
R.E. Young House, Armstrong's Point (alterations and addition - 1894)[24]
G.H. Snow House (1894)

---

20 "A Group of Winnipeg Architects" in Canadian Architect and Builder, January 1897, pp. 5-6.

21 Ibid., pp. 5-6.

22 Compiled from: Ibid., H.S. Griffith (file of the Historic Resources Branch - thanks to R.R. Rostecki), M. Peterson, "Ryan Block - 104 King Street," report for the Historical Buildings Committee; "Griffith, Henry Sandham," Manitoba Historical Society website; and B.C. Archives. Note: Norwood Cricket Club information from The Daily Nor'-Wester, November 2, 1895, p. 1.

23 Manitoba Free Press, March 28, 1894, p. 8.

24 Manitoba Free Press, November 5, 1894, p. 6.

H.S. Griffiths Winnipeg designs, continued:

Ryan Block, 104 King Street (1895) – Grade III
Norwood Cricket Club Pavilion (1895)
House, 175 Donald Street (1895)
Rev. Andrew Stewart House, 239 Colony Street (1896)
Mitchell Building, 211 Rupert Avenue (1896)
Brookside Cemetery Chapel and Vault (1897)
Dyson, Gibson and Co. Warehouse, Cooper Street (1898) – demolished
Central Fire Hall, 110 Albert Street (1899)
Machray School No. 2, 350 Charles Street (1899) – demolished
Leckie Building, 216 McDermot Avenue (1900)
Olafson Block, 216 James Avenue (1901) – demolished
Northwest Laundry Building, 181 Main Street (1901) – demolished
Baker Block (Birt's Saddlery), 468 Main Street (1901)
St. Boniface Normal School, 210 rue Masson (1902) – Grade II
C. Vokes House, 136 Middle Gate (1902)
Criterion Hotel, 214 McDermot Avenue (1903) – Grade II
Manitoba Bridge & Iron Works Factory workshop, 845 Logan Avenue (1903) - demolished
M. Lechtzier's Turkish and Russian Bathhouse, 216 Pacific Avenue (1903) – demolished
Wilkes Stables, McDermot Avenue (1903) - demolished
Winnipeg General Hospital Buildings, Bannatyne Avenue (1903)
Mount Royal (Wolseley) Hotel, 186 Higgins Avenue (1904)
Oxford Hotel, 216 Notre Dame Avenue (1905)
Lendrum McMeans House, 40 West Gate (1907)

Portage la Prairie:

Trinity United Church (Knox Presbyterian), 15 Tupper Street South (1897)
James Cowan Block (1897)
Pratt Opera House alteration (1898)
St. Mary la Prairie Church, 36 Second Street NW (1898-1899)
T. & W. Millar Hardware Store (1899)
A. McKillop Furniture Store (1899)
John Ferriss House (1899)
J. Fulton House (1899)
T.B. Mills Block (1899)
J.R. McDonald House (1899)
Bailey Block (1900)

Manitoba:

Stonewall – two businesses/warehouse blocks (1895)
Minnedosa – bank building (1899)
Morden - P.C. Heckels House (1900)
Westbourne – Episcopal Church (1900)
Belmont – Belmont School No. 411 (1901) – demolished
Carberry – Carberry Methodist Church, Third Avenue (1903)
Neepawa – I.O.O.F. Building, 376 Mountain Avenue (1903)

H.S. Griffiths Manitoba designs, continued:

McGregor – McGregor School No. 240 (1903) – demolished
Neepawa – Neepawa Hospital (1904)
Roland – Roland School No. 902 (1904) – demolished

British Columbia:

Alexis Martin House "Edgecliffe", Victoria (1910)
West Lawn Building, Riverview Mental Hospital Complex, Vancouver (1910-13)
West Pender Building, Vancouver (1912)
Dominion Trust Co. Building (Coulthard-Sutherland Building), New Westminster (1913)[25]
Hon. T. W. Patterson House, Victoria (1914)[26]
Mining Building, Vancouver
Vancouver Board of Trade Building, Vancouver

[25] Information from "Heritage Planning Files, City of New Westminster" found at flickr.com/photos/bobkh/339091100.

[26] Information from Preserve, Vol. 33, No. 3, Autumn 2006, p. 8.

216 NOTRE DAME AVENUE – OXFORD HOTEL

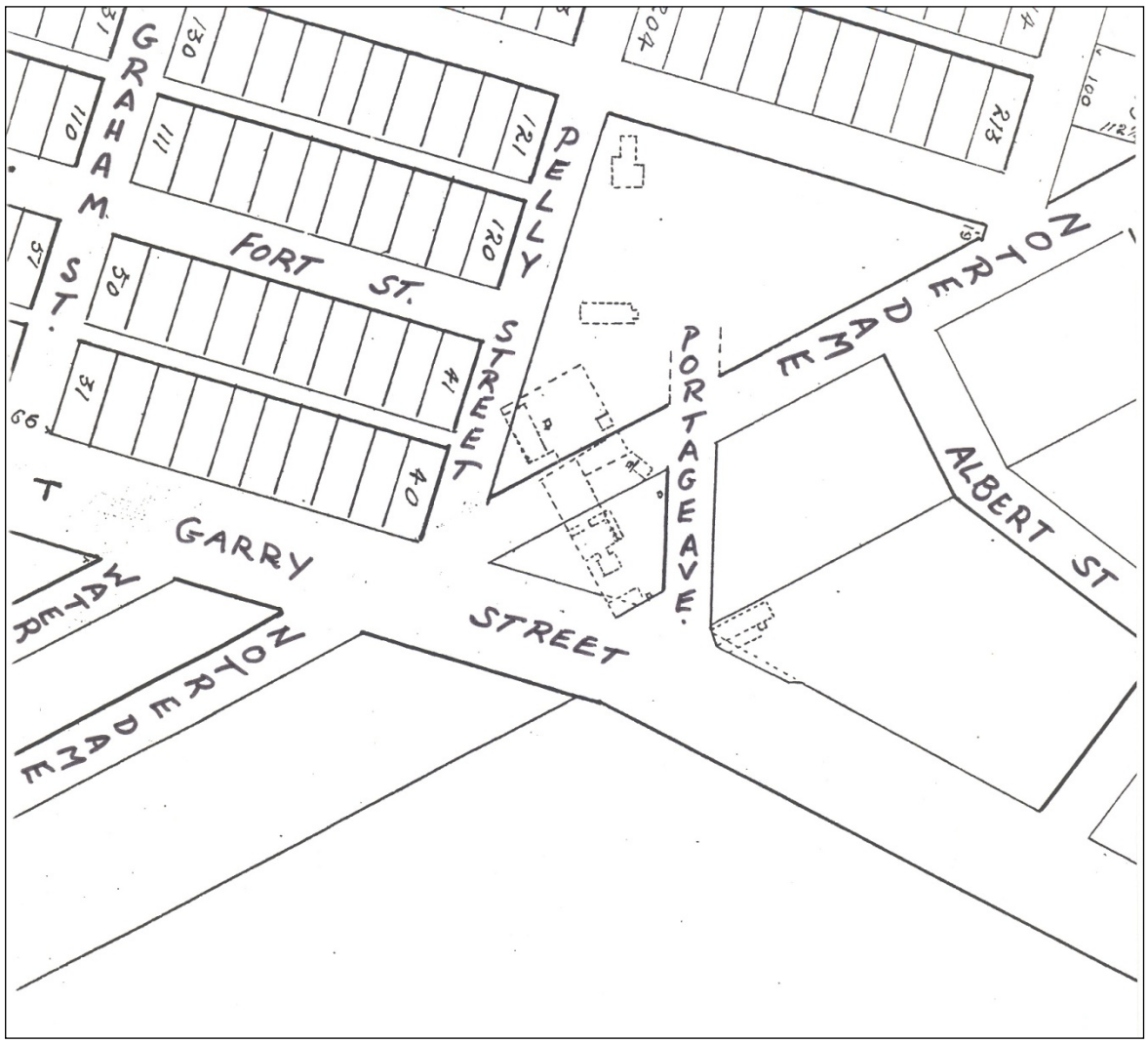


Plate 1 – Detail, Plan 18, showing streets and buildings, southwest corner Main Street and Portage Avenue, 1872. Notre Dame Avenue is shown running across Main Street ("Garry Street") and Portage Avenue, along with a narrow Portage Avenue prior to its widening. (City of Winnipeg, Surveys Branch.)

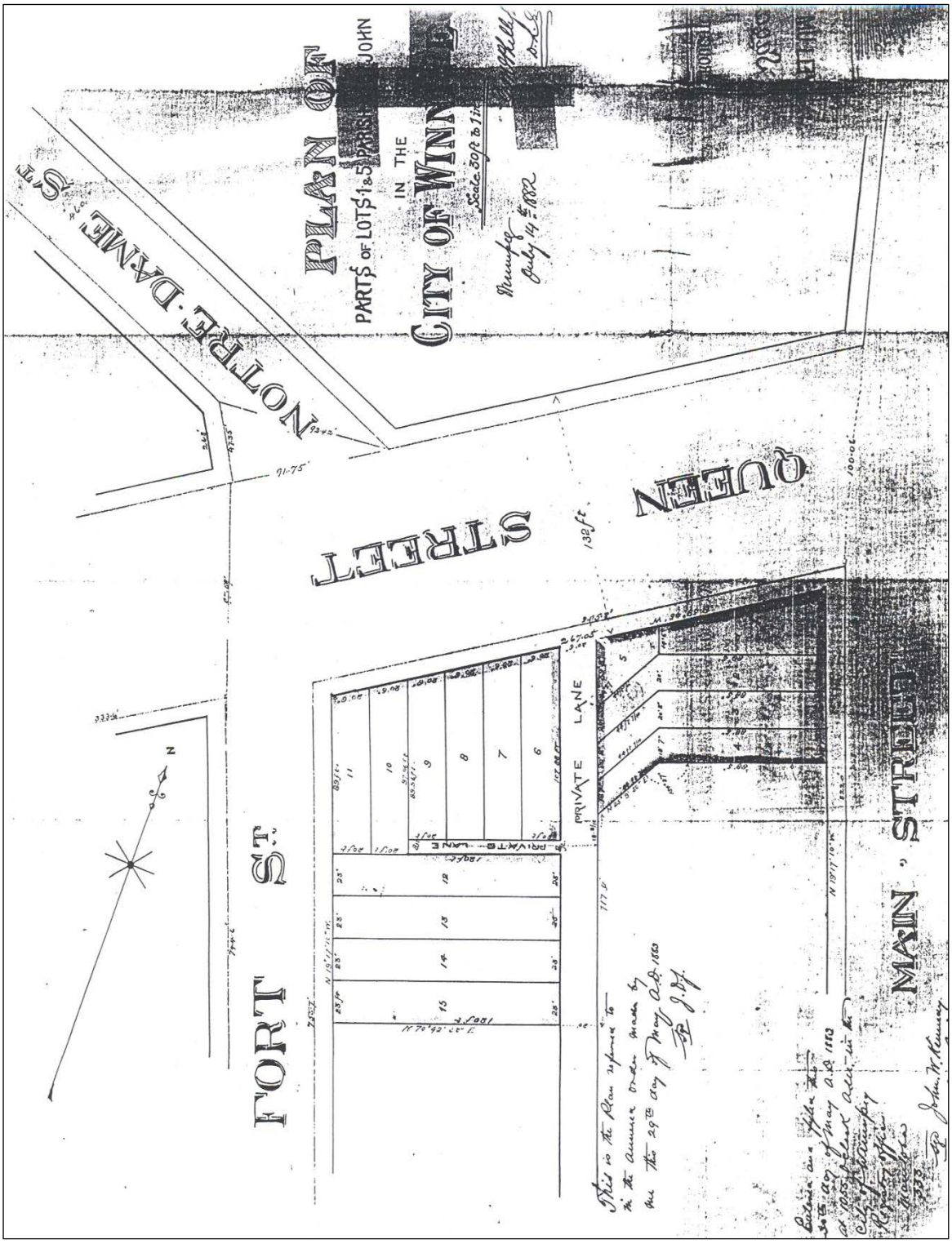


Plate 2 – Plan of Parts of Lots 1 and 5, Parish of St. John in the City of Winnipeg, November 1882 (Plan 333). This plan shows the reorganization of the area, the widening of Portage Avenue ("Queen Street"), the removal of Pelly Street and the ending of Notre Dame Avenue at Portage Avenue. (City of Winnipeg, Surveys Branch.)

216 NOTRE DAME AVENUE – OXFORD HOTEL

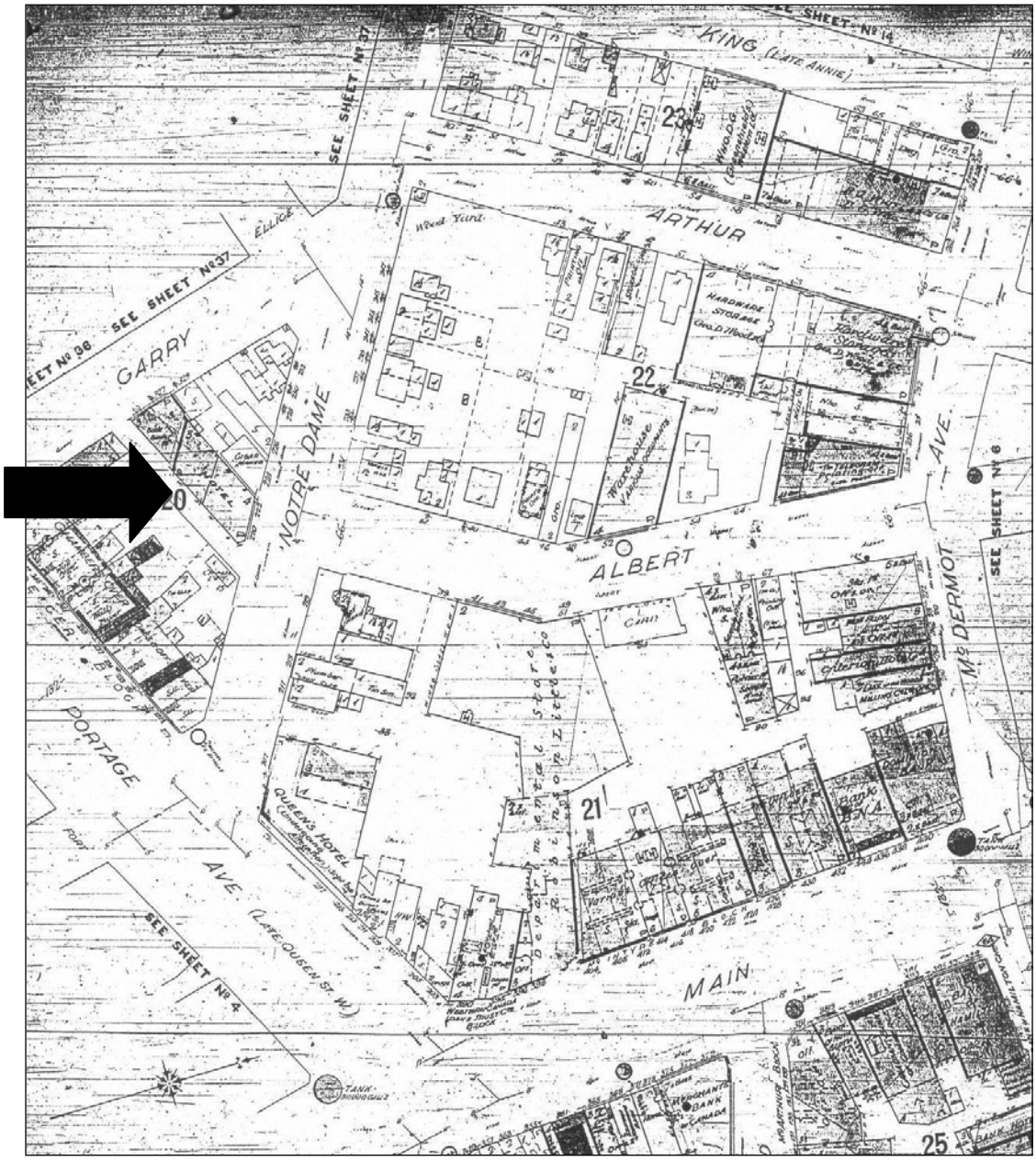


Plate 3 – Charles Goad, Fire Atlas of the City of Winnipeg, Sheet 5, 1895 (revised 1905). The newly completed Oxford Hotel is shown (arrow), with old residential development to the west and north. (City of Winnipeg.)

216 NOTRE DAME AVENUE – OXFORD HOTEL

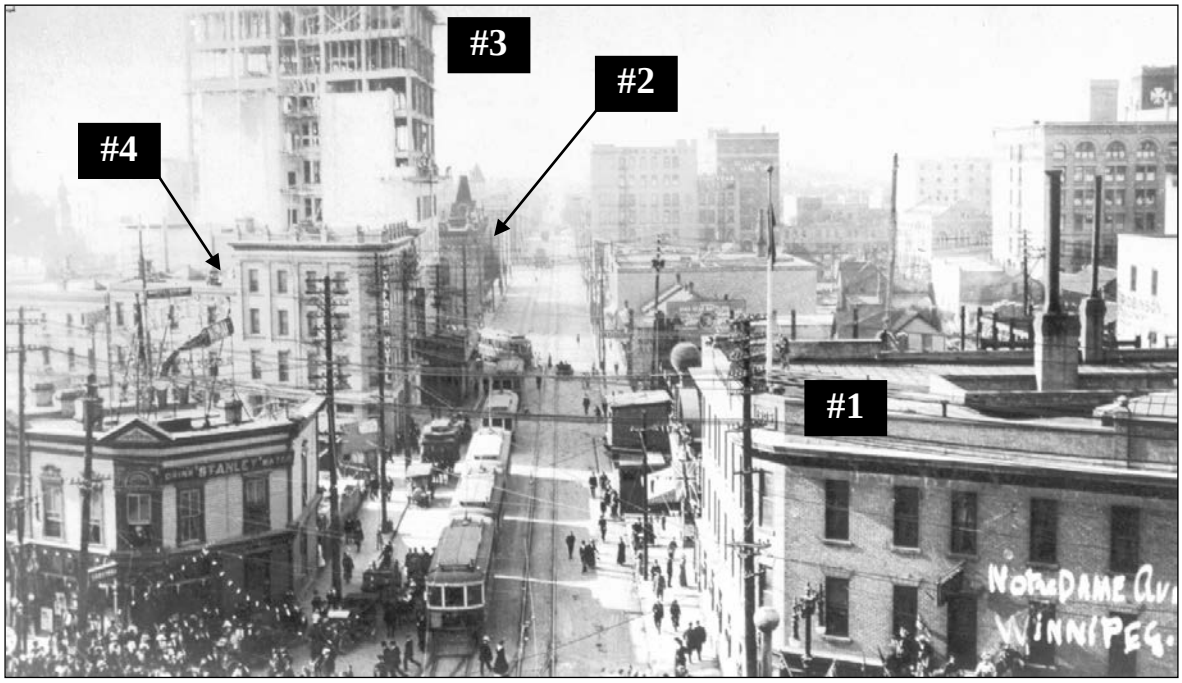


Plate 4 – A very busy Notre Dame Avenue, 1911. Pictured are: #1- Queen Hotel, Portage and Notre Dame, built 1879, demolished ca.1950; #2- Grace Methodist (United) Church, Smith Street, built 1900, demolished 1956; #3- Lindsay Building, 228 Notre Dame Avenue, under construction; and #4- Oxford Hotel. (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba.)

216 NOTRE DAME AVENUE – OXFORD HOTEL

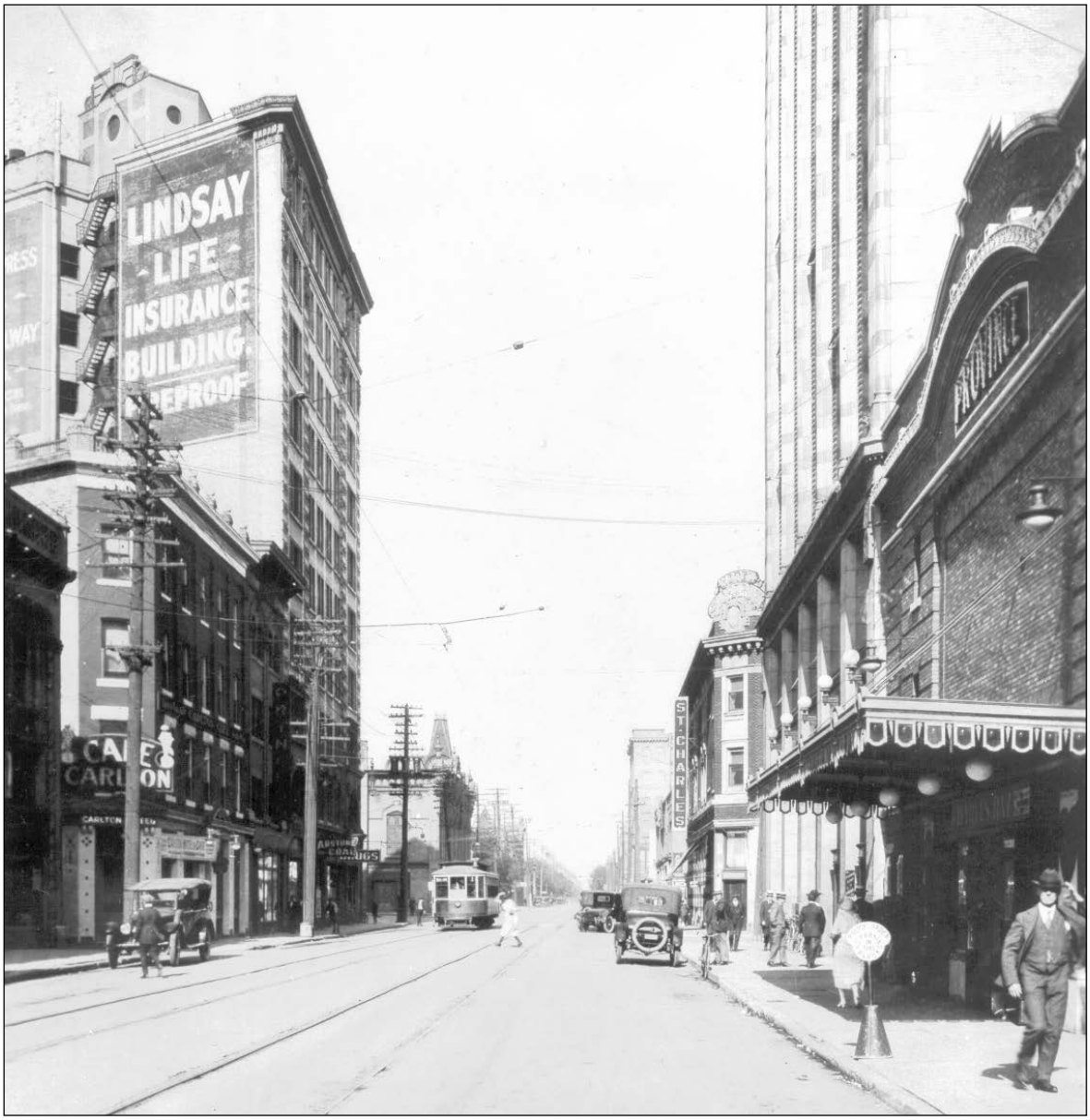


Plate 5 – Looking north on Notre Dame Avenue, ca.1927. To the left are the Oxford Hotel, Argyle Block, Lindsay Building and Grace Methodist Church in the background. On the right are the Province Theatre, the Winnipeg Electric Railway Chambers and the St. Charles Hotel. Of these, only the theatre and the church are not still standing (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba.)

216 NOTRE DAME AVENUE – OXFORD HOTEL



Plate 6 – Advertisement for the newly completed Oxford Hotel, 216-220 Notre Dame Avenue, 1905. (Reproduced from Manitoba Free Press, December 9, 1905, p. 18.)

216 NOTRE DAME AVENUE – OXFORD HOTEL



Plate 7 – Oxford Hotel, 216 Notre Dame Avenue, front (north) façade, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

216 NOTRE DAME AVENUE – OXFORD HOTEL



Plate 8 – Oxford Hotel, 216 Notre Dame Avenue, detail of roofline, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)



Plate 9 – Detail of original Oxford Hotel roofline, 1911, which included cornice and ornate parapet. (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba.)

216 NOTRE DAME AVENUE – OXFORD HOTEL



Plate 10 – Oxford Hotel, 216 Notre Dame Avenue, northeast corner, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

216 NOTRE DAME AVENUE – OXFORD HOTEL



Plate 11 – Oxford Hotel, 216 Notre Dame Avenue, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)



Plate 12 – Notre Dame Avenue looking west from Portage Avenue, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)



Plate 13 – Notre Dame Avenue looking east from Ellice Avenue, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

216 NOTRE DAME AVENUE – OXFORD HOTEL



Plate 14 – Bank Hotel, 186 McDermot Avenue, no date. (Reproduced from Winnipeg Public Library, Pastforward, Rob McInnes Postcard Collection, No. WP0610.)

216 NOTRE DAME AVENUE – OXFORD HOTEL



Plate 15 – Lindsay Building, 228 Notre Dame Avenue, no date. (City of Winnipeg.)