

554 MAIN STREET

McLAREN 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) It is one of downtown Winnipeg's most substantial pre-World War I hotels, operating since its official opening in the fall of 1910;

(b) It is associated with Ontario-born brothers The McLaren brothers, Archibald "Archie", John Angus and Alexander Stewart "Ike" McLaren, who owned the business into the 1920s;

(c) It was designed by John Cooke Caldwell and built by local general contractors Charles W. Sharp and Son;

(d) It is designed in the Chicago School style, one of a handful of examples found in the downtown;

(e) It is a conspicuous building on a major intersection in the downtown; and

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

554 MAIN STREET – McLAREN HOTEL

Main Street, north of William Avenue was little more than a mud trail dotted with temporary shacks prior to late 1890s (Plates 1-3). To the south, commercial properties developed around the intersection with Portage Avenue and to the north was the massive Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) station and yards complex that had existed since the early 1880s. This latter development spawned a number of saloons and small-scale hotels along both sides of Main Street near Higgins Avenue, looking to supply goods and services to the de-training visitors and CPR workers.

Of course, Winnipeg's first City Hall had been built near its present location in 1876, the brick structure costing nearly $40,000 to complete (Plate 4).[1] But the structure had been poorly built and the second City Hall, the famous "Gingerbread" building, was erected amid controversy between 1884 and 1886 (Plate 5).

Development late in the 1890s and the first decade of the 20th century transformed this area into a busy commercial district (Plate 6). Added to this was a growing residential component, residing in blocks of new houses being built to the west.[2]

Another of the important commercial developments along Main Street was the hotels. Used for both temporary lodgings and long-term housing for businessmen, tradesmen and "travellers" – the term used for travelling salesmen – hotels were very popular in the downtown until apartment block development occurred later in the first decade of the 1900s. By World War I, the four corners of the intersection of Main Street and Rupert Avenue was the home of three hotels including the Brunswick on the northeast corner, built in 1881 (Plate 7) and the Strathcona, built on the southeast corner in 1905 (Plate 8).

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1 Alexander Begg and Walter R. Nursey, Ten Years in Winnipeg (Winnipeg, MB: Times Printing and Publishing House, 1879), pp. 127-128.

2 D.M. Lyon, "North Main Walking Tour. William Avenue to the Subway," report of the City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee, 1998, pp. 3-4. Below as North Main Walking Tour.

In May of 1910, long-time hotel proprietors and brothers, Alexander S., John and Archibald McLaren announced the construction of another Main Street hotel, reported to be "second only in size in Western Canada to the Royal Alexandra."[3] Opened in September on the southwest corner of Rupert Avenue, the McLaren Hotel with its 160+ rooms advertised as a first-class hotel with rooms for $2.50 per day (Plate 9).[4]

STYLE

Stylistically, the hotel has the design features of a Chicago School style structure, identified by its vertical emphasis, its classical form with detailed base and top floors and modest middle floors, the grid-like arrangement of its many rectilinear windows and its straight clean lines.

The Chicago School was popularized in major centres across North America from the late 1890s to the 1920s and was named after the American city where it was popularized. The style grew from a reaction to rising land prices and the availability of new technologies – especially elevators and steel/reinforced concrete construction methods – to allow designers to build taller structures than ever before. The use of skeletal steel and reinforced concrete was outwardly express by tall structures with flat roofs and a "grid-like organization of windows and wall surfaces."[5] Most often commercial/office structures, the buildings were divided into three sections, the ground floor devoted to large glass windows for displays, a central portion consisting of the bulk of the floors, and an attic or top floor finished with a heavy cornice. The top and bottom floors received the majority of the ornamental treatment, often in sculpted stone or terracotta.[6]

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3 Manitoba Free Press, May 31, 1910, p. 1.

4 R.R. Rostecki, "554 Main Street – McLaren Hotel," in Parks Canada, Canadian Inventory of Historic Buildings, 1976, Vol. III, pp. 38-40.

5 Manitoba Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, Historic Resources Branch, 1991), pp. 22-23 (below as Architectural Styles in Manitoba); and Leslie Maitland, et al., A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1992), pp. 121-124.

6 Architectural Styles in Manitoba, p. 22.

Many examples of the style, both more and less ornate, can be found in the city.

CONSTRUCTION

The seven-storey building is constructed of steel frame and reinforced concrete with Menomonie brick exterior walls and stone accenting. It measures approximately 20.1 x 40.0 metres and cost $165,000 to complete in 1910, making it the tenth largest City of Winnipeg Building Permit of that year (of the nearly 3,300 taken out).[7]

DESIGN

The building's two main façades face east onto Main Street and north onto Rupert Avenue. The ground floors are clad in smooth-cut stone interrupted by classical detailing including attached columns, a modest cornice and ornately finished doors, two on the east side and one on the north (Plates 10-12). The upper floors, finished in dark brick, are divided into six bays by pilasters boasting stone bases and capitals. Rectilinear window openings within the bays are regularly spaced embellished with stone lug sills (Plate 13). A complete entablature with heavy overhanging medal-clad cornice supported by oversized brackets finishes the flat roofline (Plate 14). A flagpole is located at the northeast corner of the roof. The rear (west) façade is finished in clay brick, is interrupted by arched window openings on all levels and includes a metal fire escape and painted signage (Plate 15). The south façade is uniquely designed with a pair of deep light wells to provide increased natural light and ventilation to the suites. This elevation also includes windows in arched openings on all levels and painted signage and a mural (Plates 16 and 17).

INTERIOR

As one of Winnipeg's premier hotels of the pre-World War I era, there was much interest in its interior design and finishes. The large rotunda (Plate 18) included white oak, pillars, ceramic

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7 City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books, 1910.

mosaic tile floors, concrete stairs, Spanish burlap walls and brass fittings.[8] A writing room with 12 desks was located off the rotunda, as was the large bar with its mahogany and marble counter and spacious dining room. The basement held much of the machinery of the building, as well as a pool and billiards room and a barber shop. There were 165 guest and staff rooms on the upper six floors with shared bath/washroom facilities on each floor.

Upgrades and renovations have occurred throughout the history of the hotel. Today, the basement still holds machinery, although the original massive boiler has been replaced (Plate 19). The ground floor is heavily renovated with the lobby (Plate 20), bar (Plate 21), restaurant and barber shop. The upper floors have not seen significant alteration (Plates 22-24).

INTEGRITY

The building stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition for its age. It has not suffered extensive exterior alteration to its design, materials or ornamental detailing.

STREETSCAPE

This large, imposing structure has been an important part of two downtown streetscapes for over 100 years and contributes to the historical continuity of the area (Plate 25).

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS

The named architect for this building was John Cooke Caldwell.[9] Very little is known at this time about Caldwell, he does not appear in Canada Census records for Winnipeg during this period and this is the only City of Winnipeg Building Permit associated with him from 1899-

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8 Manitoba Free Press, September 16, 1911, p. 17.

9 City of Winnipeg Building Permit #2288/1910.

1926. According to one report, he was a civil engineer in the employ of the general contractor as their construction superintendent when he designed this building.[10]

The general contractors were Charles W. Sharp and Son. C.W. Sharp (Plate 26) was born in 1853 in Southampton, England, immigrating to Canada in 1873 and arriving in Winnipeg and setting up a plastering business with James W. Smith as Smith and Sharp.[11] Early projects included St. John's Boys' College, Main Street (1884- demolished) and St. Mary's Church, 353 St. Mary Avenue (1896). The firm continued to grow in the 20th century, large contracts included the Carnegie Library, 380 William Avenue (1905), Canada Permanent Building, 298 Garry Street (1909), Great West Life Building, 177 Lombard Avenue (1909), Farmer Building (Victory Building), 333 Main Street (1910- demolished), M.P. Blair House, 25 West Gate (1911), Ryan Block, 104 King Street (1912- partially demolished) and F.H. Wiley House, 64 Middle Gate (1913).[12] In the fall of 1924, Sharp went to Saskatoon, SA to inspect buildings, slipped and fell and died there on September 30, 1924.[13]

According to a local newspaper report, other contractors included: A.J. Sloan, decorator; United Electric Co., electrical; and C.E. Gate and Sons, plumbing.[14]

PERSON/INSTITUTION

The McLaren brothers, Archibald "Archie" (1856-1918), John Angus (1860-1912) and Alexander Stewart "Ike" (1866-1921), owned and operated this hotel until the early 1920s (Plate 27). The brothers were born in Perth, Ontario and came west to Winnipeg in 1878, operating a number of boarding houses, an important residential facility for a city that was witnessing a large population growth. John's early years were spent running hotels in Selkirk and Brandon, while Archie and Ike built (1881) and operated the Brunswick Hotel, 571 Main Street. The three

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10 North Main Walking Tour, p. 26.

11 Manitoba Free Press, August 3, 1882, p. 4. The firm dissolved on August 2, 1882.

12 Historical Buildings and Resources Committee files.

13 Manitoba Free Press, October 2, 1924, p. 7.

14 Manitoba Free Press, September 16, 1911, p. 17.

brothers then combined to purchase and renovated the Cauchon Block at the south end of Main Street, opening it in 1905 as the luxurious Empire Hotel, 171 Main Street.[15] Their next major development was the purchase of the Strathcona Hotel, 565 Main Street.

All three brothers had died by 1921 and the hotel was sold to John J. Gray. F.W. Dangerfield in the 1940s and 1950s and Bert Mooney in the 1960s and 1970s were also proprietors of the McLaren,[16] which is now home to long term residents instead of short-term guests.

A barbershop and news stand were original businesses operating in the hotel; Wagner's Taxi (1940s and 1950s) and the Bank of Nova Scotia (1950s to the 1990s) were two long-time commercial tenants on the ground floor (Plates 28 and 29).[17]

From 1913-1941 (except for 1915), the McLaren Hotel was the residence of Reginald Buller (1874-1944), called one of the University of Manitoba's "…earliest, and certainly most colourful [sic], builders" (Plate 30) and for whom the Buller Science Building, opened in 1932, was named. Buller, a specialist in the study fungi, was one of the first six professors hired by the University in 1904 and became a fixture at the hotel for many decades.[18]

EVENT

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

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15 Manitoba Free Press, June 18, 1909, p. 2. The brothers sold the Empire to the Canadian Northern Railway backers, William Mackenzie and Donald Mann, in 1909.

16 City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls, Roll No. 13-071419000, 1920-1980.

17 Henderson's Directory, 1915-1990.

18 G. Goldsborough, "Reginald Buller: The Poet-Scientist of Mushroom City," in Manitoba History, No. 47, Spring/Summer 2004.

CONTEXT

The pre-World War I period of Winnipeg's history was one of tremendous growth, in all facets of its economy. Hotels, which had been an important part of the urban landscape beginning in the 1880s, continued to be an important part of the local economy through this growth period. They provided much-needed accommodations for all classes of workers, businessmen, politicians and dignitaries and the McLaren would have seen them all.

The McLaren was the most expensively built Winnipeg hotel between 1900 and 1915 except for the two railway hotels: the CPRs Alexandria Hotel, Main Street and Higgins Avenue; and the Hotel Fort Garry on Broadway.[19]

It has continued, to the present, to provide downtown residential space.

LANDMARK

This building's size, design, materials and location make it a very conspicuous structure that most Winnipeggers would be familiar with.

[19] City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books, 1899-1915.

APPENDIX I

CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report
Assessment Record

Building Address: 554 Main Street

Building Name: McLaren Hotel

Original Use: hotel

Current Use: hotel

Roll No. (Old): 13071419000 (12086)

RSN: 154161

Legal Description: 9^{W} St. James (west of Main Street), Plan 45, Lot 6

Location: Southwest corner of Rupert Avenue

Date of Construction: 1910

Storeys: 7 and basement

Heritage Status: **NOMINATED LIST**

Construction Type: Reinforced concrete, stone and brick

Building Permits (Plans available: **[PPD]** Department Storage):
SEE NEXT PAGE

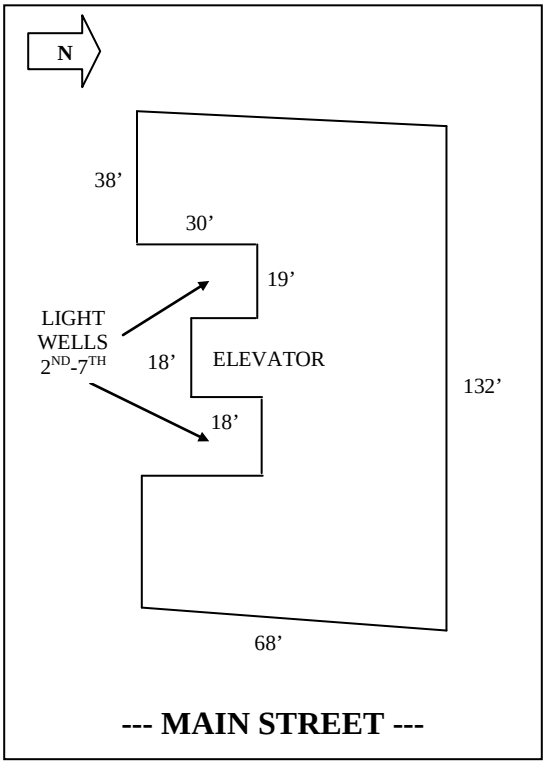
Information:

- 68 x 76 x 85' + = 647,700 cu. ft.

- walls: B- 30" stone; 1st- 26" brick/stone; 2nd & 3rd- 21" brick; 4th & 5th- 17" brick; 6th & 7th- 13" brick

- ceilings: B- 8-11'; 1st- 16'+; 2nd-7th- 9'+

- fires on July 9, 1983, October 13, 1984, 1986, September 10, 1997, March 18 and 23, 1998



ARCHITECT: CALDWELL, J.C.

CONTRACTOR: C.W. SHARP & SON

City of Winnipeg Building Permits
(Plans available: PPD- Department Storage; R- Microfilm Roll; M- Microfiche):

YEAR	NO.	PLANS	AMOUNT	DESCRIPTION
1910	2288	PPD	$165,000	Superstructure
1948	1429		$20,000	Alterations (basement & beer parlour)
1949	13	PPD	$5,000	Alterations (bank)
1950	407		$1,400	Repairs and room renovations
1950	952		$1,500	Repairs and room renovations
1950	5908	PPD	$3,333	Repairs and alterations
1951	6498		$3,000	Marquee over Rupert St. entrance
1951	6211		$3,000	Alterations (Salisbury Food Bar)
1953	8484		$5,000	Alterations
1955	4220		$3,000	Enclose elevator shaft
1957	1726		$200	Areaway slab
1960	1447		$1,700	Alterations
1961	4866	PPD	$900	Alterations to restaurant
1962	7723	PPD	$5,000	Alterations
1963	1753	R-853	$600	Alterations
1967	909	R-402	$5,000	Alterations
1971	5531	R-115	$5,000	Alterations
1975	9727		$8,000	Alterations
1992	702	M		Interior alterations
1993	3642	M		Interior alterations
2001	184446	PPD	$5,000	Exterior alterations (wheelchair ramp on north side)
2004	318477	PPD	$2,000	Interior alterations to barber shop/hairdressers
2007	109212	PPD	$5,000	Interior alterations to restaurant

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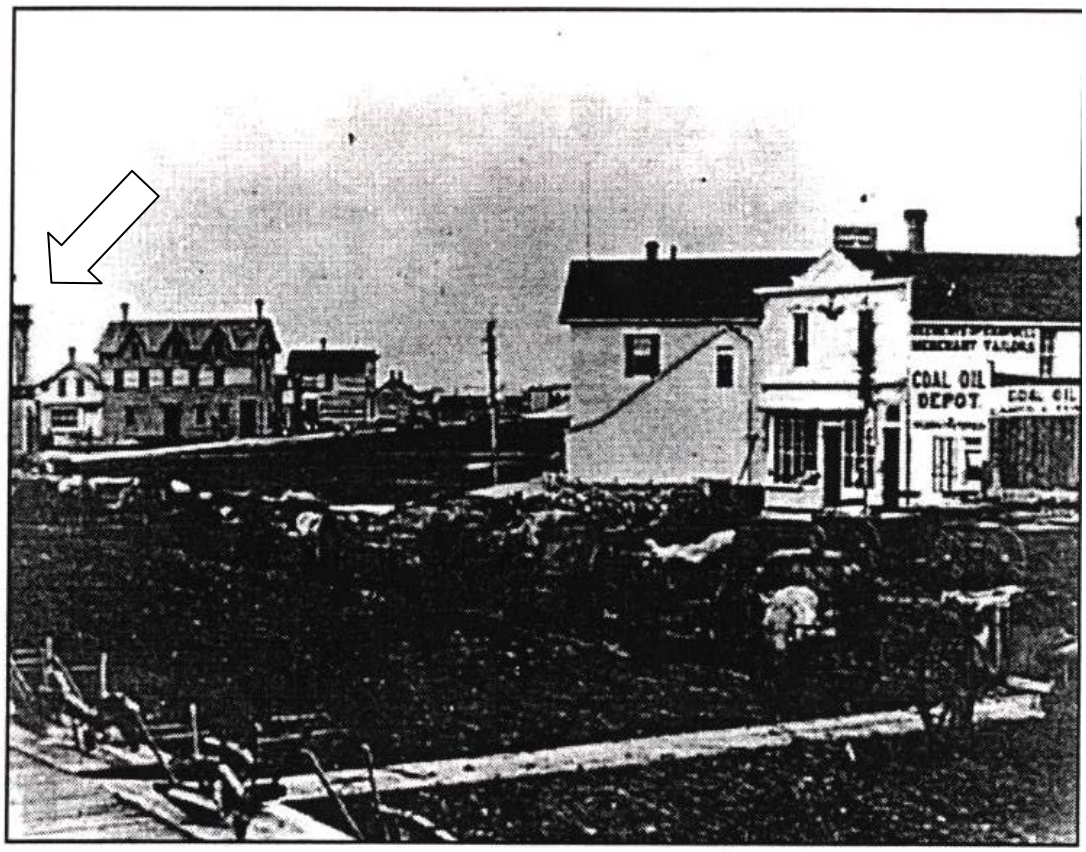


Plate 1 – Main Street north from Bannatyne, ca.1878. The corner of City Hall is found at the left side of this photograph (arrow). (Archives of Manitoba, Swinford Collection, Winnipeg-Streets-Main, c.1878-#1.)

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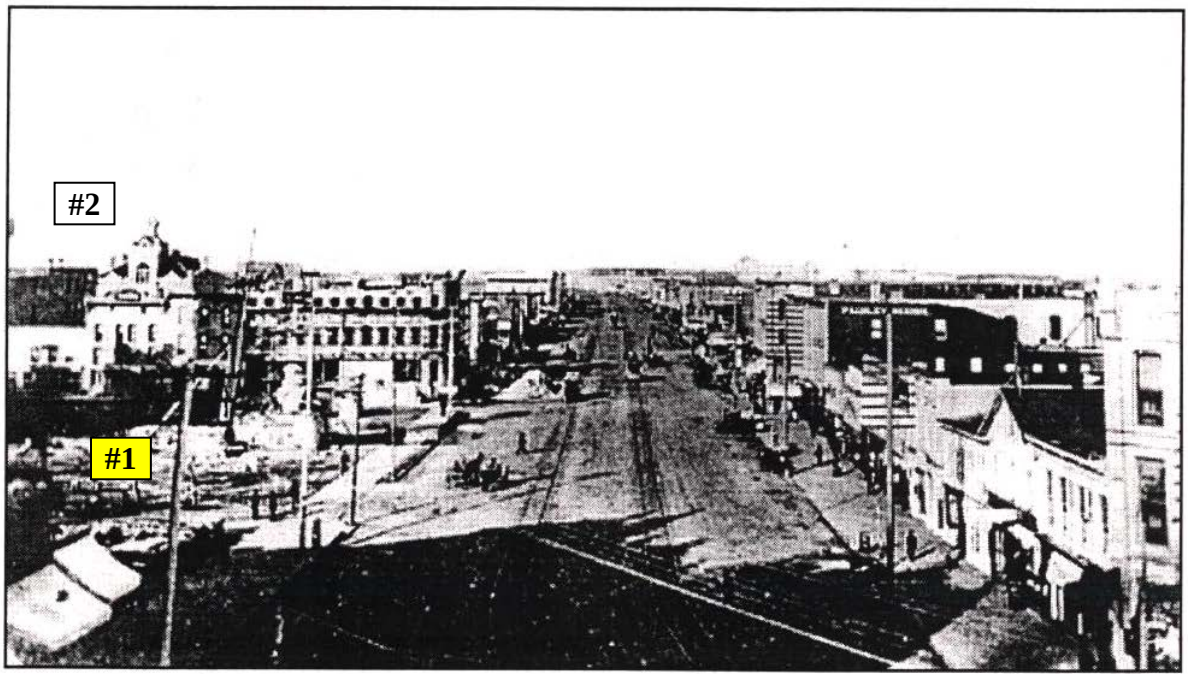


Plate 2 – Looking north on Main Street from William Avenue, 1886. Pictured here are: #1- the second City Hall; and #2- Police Courts, James Avenue. (Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg-Streets-Main, 1886-#1.)



Plate 3 – Looking north from the roof of City Hall, ca.1895, from the roof of City Hall. (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba.)

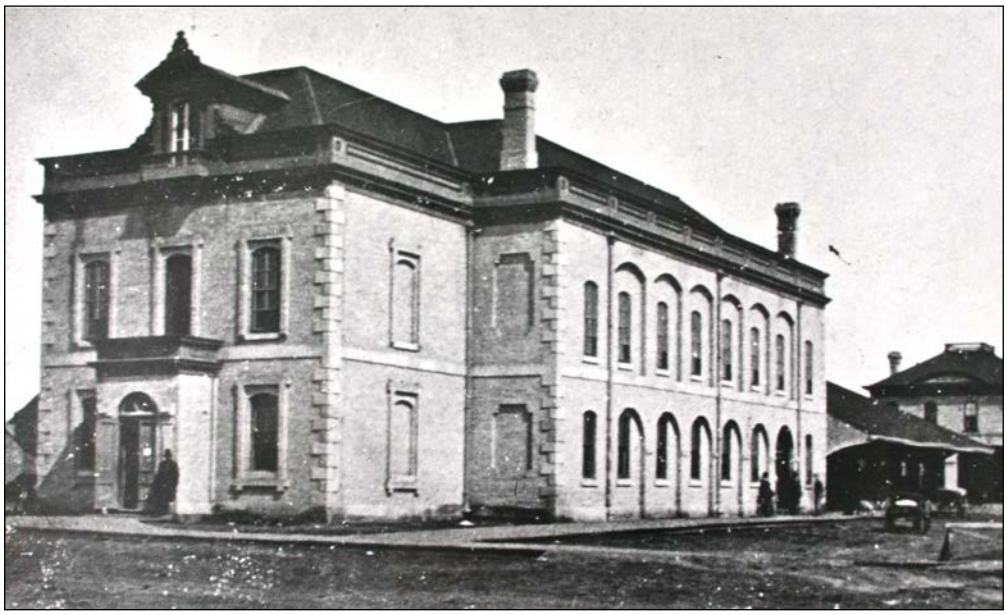


Plate 4 – Winnipeg's first City Hall, Main Street, ca.1877. (Archives of Manitoba-Winnipeg-Buildings-Municipal-City Hall (1875)-1, N118.)



Plate 5 – Winnipeg's second City Hall, Main Street, ca.1902. (Archives of Manitoba-Winnipeg-Buildings-Municipal-City Hall (1886)-7, N9088.)

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Plate 6 – Main Street looking south from Higgins Avenue, ca.1904. (Archives of Manitoba, Stovel Advocate Collection #192.)



Plate 7 – The Brunswick Hotel, 571 Main Street, built 1881, original owners McLaren Brothers, demolished ca.1960. (Reproduced from William A. Martel and Sons, An Illustrated Souvenir of Winnipeg [Winnipeg, MB: Author, 1903], p. 184.)

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Plate 8 – Strathcona Hotel (later the Cornwall), 565 Main Street, built 1905, original owner Jacob Rosenthal. (Reproduced from Manitoba Museum website, "Occupy Main Street," http://manitobamuseum.ca/main/occupy-main-street, 2015.)

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Plate 9 – McLaren Hotel, 554 Main Street, ca.1910. (Archives of Manitoba, N10799.)

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Plate 10 – McLaren Hotel, 554 Main Street, east façade, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)

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Plate 11 – McLaren Hotel, 554 Main Street, detail of east façade, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 12 – McLaren Hotel, 554 Main Street, south door, east façade, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 13 – McLaren Hotel, 554 Main Street, north façade, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)



Plate 14 – McLaren Hotel, 554 Main Street, northwest corner, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)

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Plate 15 – McLaren Hotel, 554 Main Street, northwest corner, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)

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Plate 16 – McLaren Hotel, 554 Main Street, east and south façades, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)

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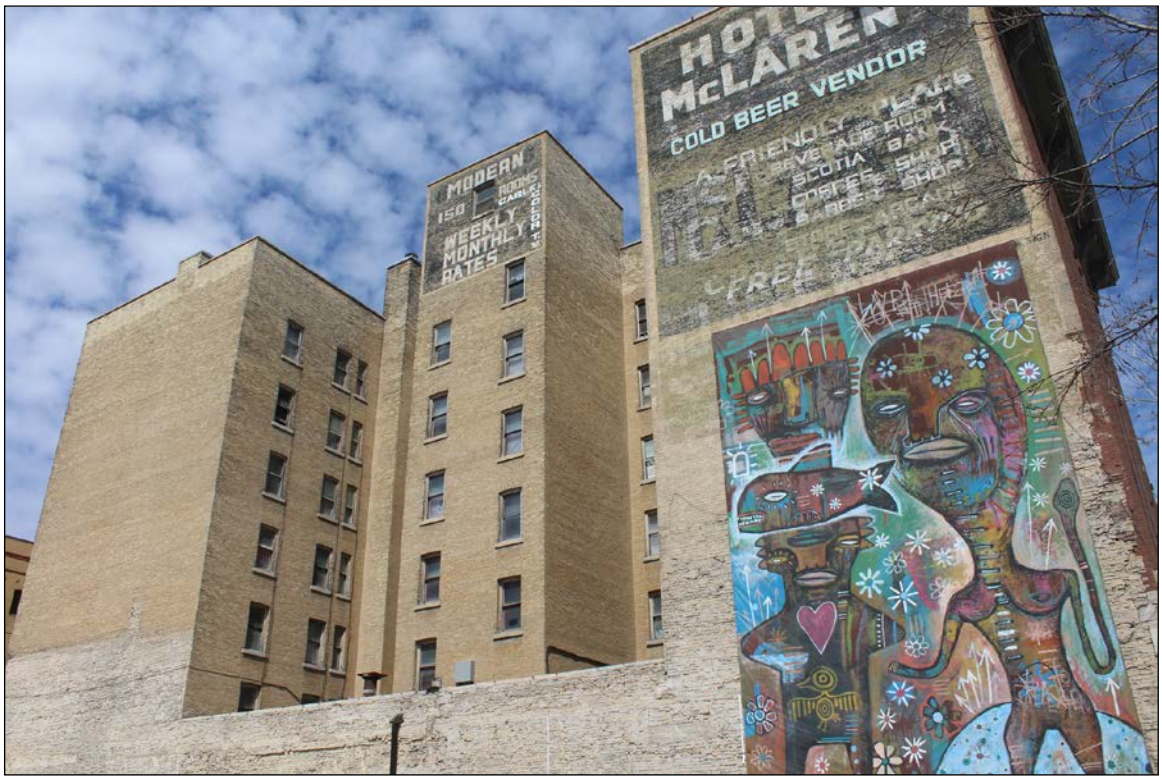


Plate 17 – McLaren Hotel, 554 Main Street, south façade, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)

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Plate 18 – McLaren Hotel, 554 Main Street, rotunda, no date. (Winnipeg Public Library, Rob McInnes Postcard Collection, WP1071.)

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Plate 19 – McLaren Hotel, 554 Main Street, decommissioned boiler in basement, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)

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Plate 20 – McLaren Hotel, 554 Main Street, main lobby, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)



Plate 21 – McLaren Hotel, 554 Main Street, bar, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)



Plate 22 – McLaren Hotel, 554 Main Street, second floor hallway with terrazzo flooring, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)

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Plate 23 – McLaren Hotel, 554 Main Street, 6th floor, staircase, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)

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Plate 24 – McLaren Hotel, 554 Main Street, 7th floor hallway, 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)

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Plate 25 – Main Street looking north (top) and south (bottom), 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)

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Plate 26 – Charles W. Sharp, ca.1924. (Manitoba Free Press, October 2, 1924, p. 7.)



Plate 27 – McLaren Brothers, 1905. (Manitoba Free Press, February 4, 1905, p. 9.)

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Plate 28 – McLaren Hotel, 554 Main Street, ca.1967, with the Bank of Nova Scotia and Salisbury House Restaurant occupying the ground floor commercial space. (City of Winnipeg.)

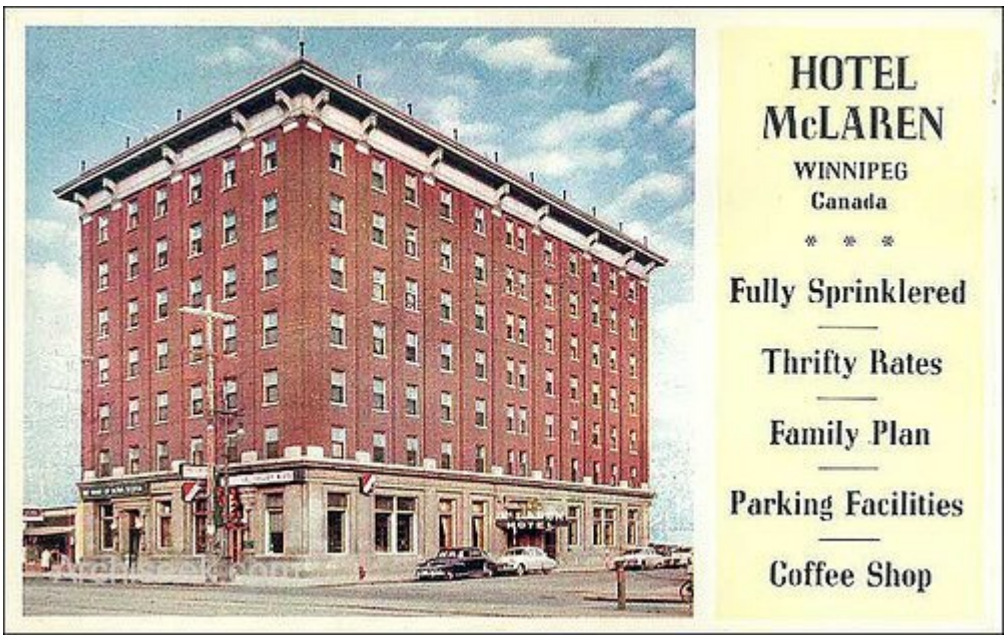


Plate 29 – Colour postcard of the Hotel McLaren, ca.1950. (Reproduced from Archiseek.com, 1996-2014.)



Plate 30 – Reginald Buller (1874-1944), ca.1904, about the time of his arrival in Winnipeg. (Buller Memorial Library of Cereals Research Centre, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Winnipeg, in G. Goldsborough, "Reginald Buller: The Poet-Scientist of Mushroom City," *Manitoba History*, No. 47, Spring/Summer 2004.)