



52 - 56 ALBERT STREET

GREGG BUILDING

HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE

23 January 1986

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In 1902, the wholesale firm of George R. Gregg and Company erected this large brick warehouse on the west side of Albert Street between Notre Dame and McDermot Avenues. Originally four storeys in height, the building reflected the scale and prestige of the company that owned it.

Winnipeg architect James H. Cadham designed the Gregg Building. Cadham, a major influence in the city's warehouse district, favoured the strong clear lines of the Romanesque Revival style popularized in the heavy masonry designs of American H.H. Richardson. The style is characterized by its use of mass and scale to convey strength and dignity. The undressed limestone of the foundation and trim supports this image without appearing clumsy or rough. The brick was chosen to pick up the subtle colour of the limestone, rather than contract with it, effectively re-emphasizing the mass of the structure rather than its detailing.

Cadham's treatment of the stone arch, which completely surrounds the door without the use of columns, is also characteristic of the Romanesque style. The archway itself is large, meeting the raised stone foundation a metre and a half above grade. The windows are paired in twos between the brick piers. The windows on the outside bays are large, while those of the centre bay are narrower. Each bay terminates in an eyebrow arch. The window sets are flat-headed, and trimmed above and below with lintils and sills of stone with a brick mullion between. Each window is divided into three sections by a transom in two parts. The original doorway seems to have been two large doors beneath a curved transom, but this has been altered to a single smaller door with sidelights.

The dimensions of the building are 60 feet by 133 feet.¹ The brick cornice, one of the few decorative elements on the warehouse, reached to a height of 60 feet before the fifth floor was added some years later. Cadham employed the large contracting firm known as the Kelly Brothers, later Thomas Kelly and Sons of the Legislative Building fame. Formed in the 1880s as a partnership of brothers, the firm became the concern of Thomas Kelly and his grown children Robert and Charles in 1908. With such major projects as the main Post Office, the Grain Exchange, the Bank of Toronto and the Bank of Nova Scotia to its credit, it was one of the city's largest contracting firms, employing 600

men during the 1912 building season.² The firm dissolved in the scandal that surfaced over payoffs and conspiracy to defraud the Crown in the 1913-14 construction of the new Manitoba Legislative Building. Thomas Kelly retired to the United States in disgrace, but managed to retain a large part of his company's kick-backs that were never recovered.³

At \$26,000, this 1902 warehouse was a routine commission for both architect and contractor. The Gregg Building, completed in 1903, had a stone foundation 26 inches thick resting on concrete footings. The wall widths were reduced from 17 inches on the second floor to 13 inches on the fourth floor.⁴ Two freight elevators serviced either side of the building near the loading docks at the rear. Cast iron columns and heavy wooden joists supported the storage loads which the warehousing of heavy stocks required. The building received its heat from the central steam plant.

The G.K. Gregg and Company was established in Winnipeg by George Gregg in 1897 as a silk and curio importer. Gregg was a salesman and manufacturer's agent who saw a market in Canada for luxurious Japanese silks. The trade grew rapidly and expanded to include other Oriental textiles, fancy chinaware, novelties, mattings and rugs. Curios, toys and fancy items were also imported through a network of buyers using Yokohama, Japan as a base and extended through China and South-east Asia. In 1904, Gregg moved his head office to Toronto, leaving the new Winnipeg warehouse as a branch office, with a second branch opening in Vancouver.⁵ By tapping the Oriental trade very early and offering diverse products, this company was able to carve a large and profitable market for itself in the Canadian luxury trade.

Silks were the G.R. Gregg's most important wholesale product. Before World War I, all fashionable gowns were hand made and most middle class women had their wardrobes sewn by tailors. Ready-to-wear fashions were a product of the 1890s, but consisted mainly of blouses, then called "shirtwaists".⁶ Dresses and skirts were made by small dressmaking operations that could move into the home for a few days and outfit the entire family. It remained a period of extravagant fashions, with flared and trailing skirts and elaborate trimming.⁷ Silks were very popular for afternoon and evening wear, reflecting the prosperity of North American society at the time as well as a rising demand for luxury goods. The company would sell tailor made articles to various retailers, dealt

with the ready-made suppliers, who eventually became the principal buyers of wholesale textiles.

By 1912, G.R. Gregg and Company had four travellers covering western Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan from its Winnipeg office, and was occupying three of the floors of the Albert Street warehouse. Other occupants included the Corticelli Silk Company, Mark Fisher and Sons, a large international wool textile supply company,⁸ and Cole and Deacon, a local agency that handled top British woollens such as Sir Issac Carr Melton and Apperley-Curtis Worsteds.⁹ Nerlich and Company, a fancy goods wholesale, carried on the textile tradition into the 1920s but by then the tenant were more diversified. Fred Rumble Agencies, representing the MacGregor lines, established itself here in the 1920s and remained for several decades as did Leaper Agencies of the Galt Knitting Mill of Ontario. Hochman and Zagrebelna, forerunner of Hochman's wholesale men's furnishings, operated from the Gregg Building for many years as did the Nozick Commission. Smaller manufacturers' agents representing a variety of products have filled warehouse and office space for many years.

In 1921, the building escaped with only water damage to its basement when the Dingwall Building just north of it suffered a devastating fire.¹⁰ The Gregg Building shares a party wall with the Royal Albert Hotel on the south side but a small tailor shop plus a parking lot on its north side separate it from the Dingwall Block.

In 1922, the G.R. Gregg Company employed local architect Frank Evans to add a fifth storey to the building. This addition is barely discernable because it continued the lines of the original building perfectly. The eyebrow arch over the bays was lifted and repeated, and the design of the original cornice maintained. A slight shading in the brick on the side and rear walls is the only evidence of this alteration. Test bores for pier footings made in 1922 showed a soft brown clay immediately beneath the structure which required the new piers to be sunk more deeper down to firm blue clay.¹¹ At this time, there was a sprinkler system in the building.

Frank Evans was an architect of relatively low profile. He established his practise in Winnipeg in 1899 and, while advertising that he had designed a large variety of building types, seems to have

concentrated on residential design and appraisal work. His known commercial projects include the Foley, Lock and Larson Building and the Paulin Chambers Building.¹²

There have been several alterations to the interior of the Gregg Building, only some of which have been documented. An assessor's report in 1969 found the exterior of the warehouse in its original condition and superficial changes made in the interior. Naturally the partitions have been altered, floors covered and ceilings dropped in various areas.¹³ Portions of the original interior of warehouse and office space can presumably still be found. A steel walkway connects the rear of the fourth floor across the lane to the Merchant's Building Annex, now Silpit Industries.

The Gregg Company survived into the mid 1950s, but on a greatly reduced scale from its zenith. During the 1940s and 1950s, the company sold scarves and handkerchiefs through a lone agent before it disappeared altogether. The principal occupants of the Gregg Building at present are Al Sprintz and Sons clothing merchandisers, All Pro Sportswear, Nozick Brothers Ltd. womens' clothing, and the Surgical Elastic Co. Ltd.

A sturdy and attractive warehouse, the Gregg Building typifies the history of Winnipeg's warehouse district. Its heavy masonry construction and demonstrated adaptability reflect the quality of its period design, and the building is essential to the Albert Street streetscape. Its history traces the city's early dominance in the commerce of the developing west, especially as a wholesale distribution centre. Founded in Winnipeg, the G.R. Gregg Company relocated to Toronto after 1904, leaving a branch office to handle its western trade. From silks to British woollens to MacGregor socks, the textile or dry goods industry has been the main trade from this building, with the present clothing manufacturers upholding the 84-year tradition.

FOOTNOTES

1. City of Winnipeg Building Permits No. 474, 30 June 1902.
2. "Thos. Kelly and Sons", Winnipeg Saturday Post, 8 June 1912, p. 35.
3. W.L. Morton, Manitoba a History, University of Toronto Press, 1957, p. 343-344.
4. Fire Insurance Plans, The Western Canadian Fire Underwriters' Association (Winnipeg) 1919, Map No. 201.
5. "G.R. Gregg & Co. Ltd.", The Winnipeg Telegram, 18 September 1906, p. 60.
6. Haute Couture Royal Ontario Museum, University of Toronto Press, 1969, p. 65.
7. Ibid, p. 6.
8. "Trade of the West Revolves Round City", Manitoba Free Press, 4 February 1921, p. 3.
9. "Wholesalers and Retailers Do Good Trade", op.cit., p. 20.
10. "Fireman McIlhagga Loses Life in Fire", Manitoba Free Press, 4 February 1921, p. 3.
11. Permits, op.cit., No. 990, 10 May 1922. The contractors and engineers were Wyatt - Ireland Ltd. and the cost was \$21,000. Permits No. 1136, 1625, 1645 and 1667 for 1922 all refer to various stages of this same addition.
12. "Beautiful Buildings are a Feature of City", Telegram, 1909, op. cit., p. 13.
13. Selwyn Carrington et al Early Building in Winnipeg, Volume IV, Canadian Inventory of Historic Building Manuscript Report 389, 1978, p. 22-23.

Also consulted:

Frank Schofield, The Story of Manitoba, Vol. II. The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company (Winnipeg), 1913, p. 351-2.

"G.R. Gregg & Company, Ltd.", The Winnipeg Saturday Post, 8 June 1912, p. 51.

APPENDIX A

James H. Cadham

J.H. Cadham was one of the self-trained architects who learned his profession from years in the building trade. He was born in London, Ontario, in 1850 and trained as a carpenter. As a young man, he came to Winnipeg in 1870 and joined Wolseley's historic Red River Expedition in the confrontation with Riel.¹ He remained in the city, where he worked for over twenty years as a contractor. Since 1895, he worked almost exclusively as an architect, primarily on the construction of large warehouses and stores.² From the following partial list of Cadham's designs it is clear that his influence was formative to the appearance of Winnipeg's warehouse district. He died in 1907.

Cadham adopted a heavy masonry style for his buildings which drew their influence from H.H. Richardson of the eastern United States. He repeated the use of massive forms and plain materials to give impact, choosing window and door details to compliment this effect.

This is an incomplete list of Cadham's Winnipeg buildings:

- 1898 - Merchants Bldg., 250 McDermot (originally George D. Woods Bldg.)
- 1901 - G.F. Stephens Warehouse on Market
- 1902 - Gregg Bldg., 52-56 Albert, 204-212 Princess Street, McLaughlin Carriage Bldg.
- 1903 - addition to Gaults Ltd., 92-104 Arthur Street, Kemp Manufacturing Building, 111 Lombard; Stobbart, Sons & Co., 275 McDermot.
- 1904 - Miller Morse Bldg., 317 McDermot; Scott Block on Main; addition to Whitla Bldg., 70 Arthur; addition to Galt Bldg., 103 Princess
- 1905 - University of Manitoba Medical College on Bannatyne; addition to McLaughlin Carriage on Princess.
- 1906 - Frost & Wood Bldg., 230 Princess; Kemp Mfg. addition; McIntyre Block addition, Main.
- Also: Rat Portage Lumber Co.; Prairie Lumber Co. warehouse & the Champion Bldg.

Footnotes

1. Frank Schofield, "Frederick Todd Cadham, M.D.", The Story of Manitoba, Vol. II, The S.J.Clarke Publishing Co., Winnipeg, 1913, p. 331.
2. "J.H. Cadham Died Today", Manitoba Free Press, 11 December 1907.

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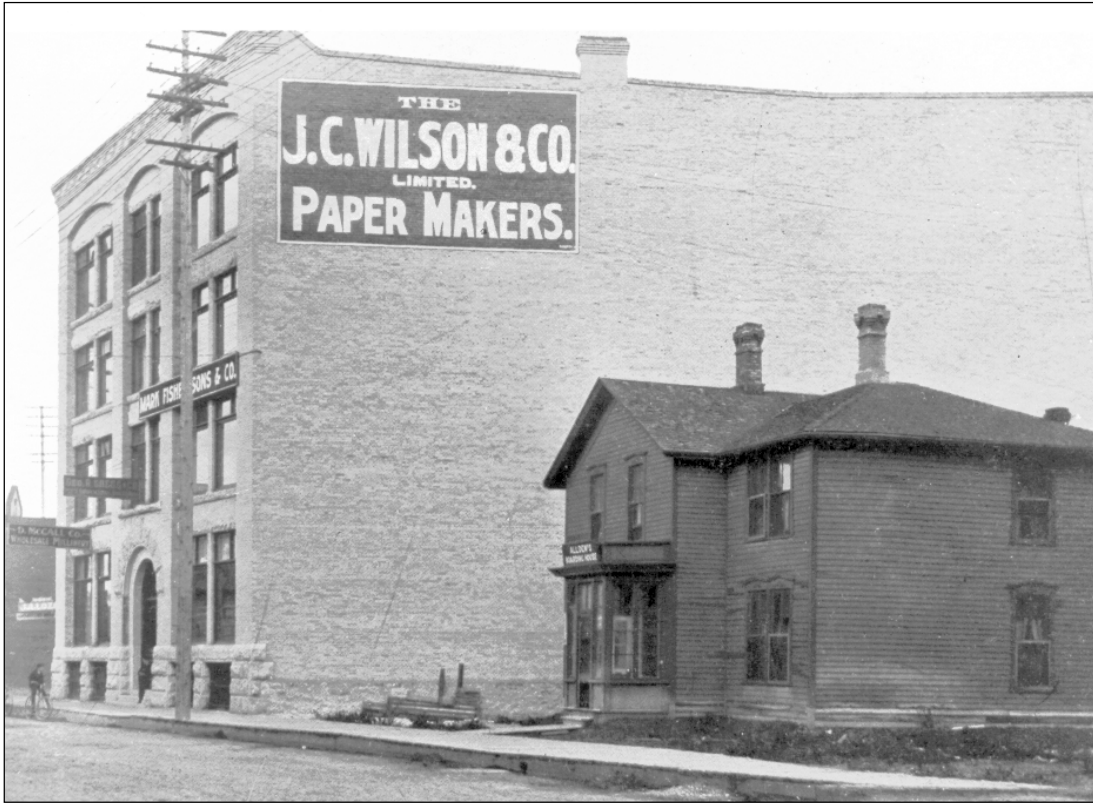


Plate 1 – The Gregg Building, shortly after completion in 1903. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N9044.)

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Plate 2 – Aftermath of February 1922 fire, the Gregg Building is on the left, the Dingwall Building, 62 Albert Street, is in the middle of the picture. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Foote Collection #221.)

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Plate 3 – Gregg Building, no date. (Courtesy of the City of Winnipeg, Planning Department.)