



**72 LENORE STREET
BELLCREST APARTMENTS**

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee

December 1993

72 LENORE STREET - BELLCREST APARTMENTS

During Winnipeg's most dramatic growth period between 1900 and World War I, the apartment block became a popular residential structure. Overcoming critics across North America who claimed blocks bred immorality and promiscuousness, apartments became a popular method of housing people. But in Winnipeg, this building type was more popular than in any other city in the Dominion.¹ Reasons for this popularity are many.

The population of Winnipeg had a large number of new arrivals with little capital. The apartment suite allowed these people to live close to or on major transportation routes to their places of employment. For many, it was also impossible to own a home upon arrival, making apartment blocks necessary and therefore in high demand.

The large pool of medium-sized investors willing to own blocks was another reason. Businesses flourished during this period, resulting in many a successful entrepreneur with excess capital. Contemporary articles noted that apartment blocks were a safe investment offering a decent rate of return. Many local businessmen heeded this information, purchased land and had apartment blocks built.

A third important factor was the type of block being built. Through by-law restriction, Winnipeg did not see the growth of slums of tenement houses - large, unsafe frame blocks with large tenant populations in cramped quarters. In other North American centres, these buildings gave apartment blocks in general a bad reputation. In Winnipeg, however, a by-law was enacted in November 1909 which virtually prohibited frame apartment blocks and any block over three storeys in height.² This by-law resulted in a much better profile for apartment living due to the quality of blocks it fostered.

¹ See M. Peterson, "The Rise of Apartments and Apartment Dwellers in Winnipeg (1900-14) and a Comparative Study with Toronto," in Prairie Forum, Volume 18, No. 2, (Fall 1993), pp. 155-164.

² Part of the by-law, No. 5850, stipulated that structures over three storeys in height be built of "fireproof construction." Given the exorbitant costs involved in this type of structure, almost all blocks thereafter were three storeys in height.

By World War I, the apartment block was a permanent part of the urban landscape. Even to present times, this building type has remained a vital part of the residential sector. In 1928, the Bellcrest Apartments were built in the midst of an affluent, mature residential neighbourhood in Winnipeg's West End.

STYLE

The Bellcrest Apartments were not designed in a specific, recognizable style. Ornamental features, which often follow a certain style, are noticeably absent from the building's main façades. This may be partially explained by the background of the architect/ contractor, a small-scale local builder whose professional architectural experience probably was extremely limited.

What appears to have been the major impetus for this design was an attempt to mimic or blend with the basic appearance of the Laura Secord School immediately across Wolseley Avenue. Completed in 1913, the school is built of light-coloured brick with limestone trim and rustication.³ The original plans for the Bellcrest Apartments called for a light-coloured face brick with stone and dark brick accents, which would have blended well with the school.⁴ Those plans subsequently were changed, however, and a stone facing of similar colour and finish to the school's was installed instead. If this blending was the designer's intention, as is surmised, then the block is a success.

CONSTRUCTION

This building is located on land legally described as 65 St. James, Plan 951, Block 8, Lots 23 and 24, the northwest corner of Lenore Street and Wolseley Avenue (Appendix I).⁵ It is a solid brick structure with stone facing on the two main façades and no covering on the sand lime brick of the north and west elevations. It sits on a 40.64 cm. (16") concrete foundation. The block is irregularly

³ The Year Past, 1985 (Winnipeg: City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee, 1986), pp. 61-2.

⁴ Original plans, #2973/1928, located at the City of Winnipeg Archives, William Avenue.

⁵ City of Winnipeg Assessment Record, Roll No. 819700 (old No. 14311), Ward 1, PC 19. Below as AR.

shaped (see Appendix I for floor plan), measuring approximately 23.49 x 20.44 x 12.20 m. (77 x 67 x 40').⁶ Ceiling heights and exterior wall thicknesses are found in Table I. The final cost of construction was \$75,000, utilizing 40 cords of stone and 125,000 bricks. Bently Taylor is listed as both the architect and contractor.⁷

DESIGN

The history of this block is unusual in that drawings submitted to the City of Winnipeg immediately prior to its construction show a much different block than the one that stands today. Plans of the front and north façades (Plates 1 and 2) called for face brick, dark brick quoins and few stone accents. Windows throughout did not feature ornamental highlighting and finials were located along the parapet to enliven the roofline. The most noticeable difference was the name on panels above the doorway and on the parapet, "The Biltwell."⁸

TABLE I -

Wall Thicknesses and Materials and Ceiling Heights
at the Bellcrest Apartments:

LEVEL	WALLS [MATERIALS]	CEILINGS
Basement	40.64 cm. (16") [concrete]	2.52 cm. to 2.75 cm. (8'3" to 9')
First Floor	38.10 cm. (15") [brick and stone]	2.67 cm. (8'9")
Second Floor	35.56 cm. (14") [brick and stone]	2.64 cm. (8'8")
Third Floor	33.02 cm. (13") [brick and stone]	2.47 cm. (8'1")

Source: City of Winnipeg Assessment Records

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ City of Winnipeg Building Permit, #2973/1928.

⁸ The first listing for this block in the Henderson's Directory is for the Bellcrest rather than the Biltwell Apartments.

Another odd fact about the plans is that Bently Taylor, listed in the City of Winnipeg Building Permit as architect and contractor, is named as the "supervisor of specifications and construction" at the top of the first page of blueprints. The word "Architect" appearing next to Taylor's name on this page (bottom right corner) was crossed out. In all likelihood, Taylor had never obtained professional training as an architect. As a result, plans such as these likely would have come from plan books or trade magazines. It was a common practice for contractors to use published plans to build a wide variety of structures, although they were most commonly used for the construction of houses. It could also explain why the term architect was not used to describe Taylor on the blueprints.

To appease critics and appeal to potential tenants, earlier apartments used a variety of floor plans, in the shape of a "U", "W", "H" or "O", and/or a series of porches to provide extra light and air circulation to each suite. It is apparent by the design of this block that these concerns were not as important and that technological advances in heating and cooling had made great strides by 1928. The Bellcrest Apartments feature no porches, balconies or unique floor plan to increase light and air to suites.

The front or east façade is symmetrically designed, faced with rough stone in a broken-course pattern. Smooth stone quoins are located at the corners of the building and around all windows. The rectangular windows on the raised basement, first and second floors feature stone lug sills. The basement windows are topped by a smooth stone belt course. Third-storey windows are bracketed by two smooth stone belts that act as sills and lintels. Some of the windows on this elevation also feature iron railing. The centrally located entrance is unadorned. Topping the structure is a stone-capped parapet and a flat, tar and gravel roof. A penthouse is also located on the roof.

The other main façade, facing Wolseley Avenue, continues the exterior language of the Lenore Street elevation. It too has a single, centrally placed and unadorned entrance, and its windows and roof are similarly finished. The two other façades are finished in brick and their windows are set in plain wooden frames with concrete lug sills. A wooden fire escape is located on the north wall.

The Bellcrest Apartments feature limited ornamentation and occupy almost the entire two corner

lots. This suggests the owner was more concerned with maximizing the return on his investment than with stylistic factors. The block is as large as the land would permit and as plain as could be, given the neighbouring structures.

There do not appear to be any significant alterations to the main façades of this block. Its subdued ornamentation and monochromatic elevations give it a flat, boxy appearance, although the use of stone gives it a warm, friendly image. Except for the use of stone, it is similar to the numerous plain, rectangular, three-storey apartment blocks that can be found in virtually every residential district in the city.

INTERIOR

Matching the exterior, interior finishes of the Bellcrest Apartments are plain and subdued. Green tile covers floors and stairs, with egg and dart molding accents on the staircase. A skylight is located in the third-floor roof above the staircase to provide extra light. The long-term leaking of this element has damaged adjacent walls. Doorways at the north and south ends of the central hallways lead to an exterior fire escape (north) and an interior staircase to the Wolseley Avenue door (south). Service doors to some of the apartments are also located in the southern stairwell.

As with other facets of this block, one feature of the interior contradicts the premise that the owners intended to maximize their investment. The block is divided into 19 suites, four in the basement and 5 on each of the upper three floors. All suites have one bedroom, but many also featured eat-in kitchens, dining rooms and extremely spacious living rooms (Plate 3). If the intent was to optimize profit, smaller, more numerous suites would have been preferred. Even with its relatively plain exterior and interior finishes, the cost per suite of the Bellcrest Apartments was \$3,947.37, higher than any of the apartment blocks designated by the City of Winnipeg (see Appendix II). Although inflation would likely lower the cost per suite of the Bellcrest when compared to pre-World War I blocks, a valid conclusion can still be drawn. This block was built expensively, even with its plain exterior.

INTEGRITY

The block appears to be in good structural condition and is in its original location. The only exterior alterations occurred in 1952 when the stone sills on the rear and north sides of the building were replaced by concrete sills.⁹

STREETSCAPE

The Bellcrest Apartments, located in a residential neighbourhood, fit well with the surroundings. Single-family detached homes, the aforementioned Laura Secord School, other apartment blocks, and small-scale retail buildings fill the adjacent blocks.

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTOR

The architect and contractor of this building, as listed in the City of Winnipeg Building Permit, is Bently Taylor. Taylor came to Winnipeg ca.1905 and worked as a carpenter. By the 1920s, he was listed as the manager of the Bently G. Taylor Construction Company. This firm was listed until the mid-1950s when Taylor retired. By 1963 he was no longer listed in local directories.¹⁰ A review of City of Winnipeg Building Permits between 1900 and 1926¹¹ found only two permits involving Taylor. The first, #2052/1909, was for a small frame house for G. Burdett on Arlington Street. The second, #3909/1912, was for two brick-veneer houses on Lenore Street, #81 and #83, the same block as the Bellcrest Apartments. Taylor was listed as owner, architect and builder. He never lived in either house and owned them only until the next year's records. Taylor owned and rented out another house, 143 Home Street, from 1912-14.¹² Although he does not appear in permit books, Taylor must have been able to make a living as a builder, likely working as day labour on various sites around the city.

⁹ AR.

¹⁰ Henderson's Directory, 1900-1970.

¹¹ After 1926, Building Permits do not regularly list architect and contractor and many of the original permits have been lost.

¹² City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls, 1912-20. Below as ARo.

PERSON/INSTITUTION

The original owner of the block was Sidney T. Jones, secretary-treasurer of the Empire Loan Company of Winnipeg. By 1933, Empire Loan was listed as owner.¹³ Founded in ca.1905, this company grew quickly and by 1928 had authorized capital of \$5 million.¹⁴ Its long-time president and co-founder was Charles Myson Simpson. Born in Lindsay, Ontario on April 6, 1873, Simpson moved to Manitoba in 1899 and spent a year involved in railway construction. In 1900 he moved to Winnipeg and soon became the manager of the Riverview Realty Company, the city's largest owner of residential property. Among his other professional positions were: manager of the Winnipeg Fire Insurance Company; partner in Beck and Simpson, real estate; president and manager of Fidelity Trust Company; life governor of the Winnipeg General Hospital; and president of the Winnipeg Real Estate Exchange. He died in Winnipeg on July 20, 1951.¹⁵

The company's other founder and vice-president was a long-time local contractor, William Brydon (Plate 4). He was born in Guelph, Ontario on October 21, 1847 and at the age of seventeen entered an apprenticeship with a local builder for three years. After a year at business school, Brydon moved to Winnipeg in 1874, and was employed by J.B. Clark. He soon engaged in contracting on his own account and during the winter of 1874 built western Canada's first skating rink. He was also assistant chief in the volunteer fire brigade. He continued as a builder until the early 1910s when he began concentrating on property appraisals and adjustments. Among his other positions were chairman of the Board of Assessment Commissioners of Winnipeg, and director of the Canadian Industrial Exhibition Company.¹⁶

The block was sold in 1957, with the new owner listed as Malick D. Spivak, lawyer in the firm of Rose, Spivak and Spivak. In 1961 the property was owned by Share Enterprises, then from 1962 to

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Henderson's Directory, 1928, pp. 42-3.

¹⁵ Biographical information from G. Bryce, A History of Manitoba, Its Resources and People (Toronto: Canada History Company, 1906), p. 508; and Winnipeg Free Press, July 21, 1951.

¹⁶ F.H. Schofield, The Story of Manitoba (Winnipeg: S.J. Clarke Publishing, 1913), Vol. III, p. 568.

1986, the owners were William H. Pitch and his wife Molly.¹⁷ W.H. Pitch was listed in a local directory for 1970 as a salesman for Globe General Agencies.¹⁸

EVENT

There is no significant event known to be connected with this block.

CONTEXT

In terms of the neighbourhood, this apartment block is a late arrival. The entire Wolseley area was built up during the 1900-12 growth period. During this stage of its maturation, Winnipeg developed residential suburbs removed from the downtown which was filling with business blocks, banking halls, office buildings, and warehouses. The developing West End was split by Portage Avenue into two separate parts: the northern section, with a high concentration of Icelandic residents and small, functional homes; and the southern half, the Wolseley district, with its large homes, opulent apartment blocks and influential families. The type of community in which this block was located explains, in part, the reason for the large, luxurious suites. Early tenants of the block included barristers, managers, druggists and accountants.¹⁹

The Bellcrest is another example of the popularity of the apartment block in Winnipeg. Apartment living had become firmly entrenched as a lifestyle in the late 1900s and early 1910s. Winnipeg was a leader in the country in the construction of apartment blocks and the Bellcrest indicates that this type of structure and tenancy continued to be popular well past World War I.

¹⁷ ARo, 1950-86.

¹⁸ Henderson's Directory, 1970.

¹⁹ Ibid., 1930-40.

LANDMARK

The Bellcrest Apartments are located on a busy neighbourhood intersection. The lack of dramatic ornamentation or styling reduces the visual impact of the block.

APPENDIX I

Building Address: 72 Lenore Street

Building Name: Bellcrest Apartments

Original Use: apartment block

Current Use: apartment block

Roll No. (Old): 819700 (14311)

Municipality: 12

Ward: 1

Property or Occupancy Code: 19

Legal Description: 65 St. James, Plan 951, Block 8, Lots 23 and 24

Location: northwest corner Wolseley Avenue

Date of Construction: 1928

Storeys: 3 and basment

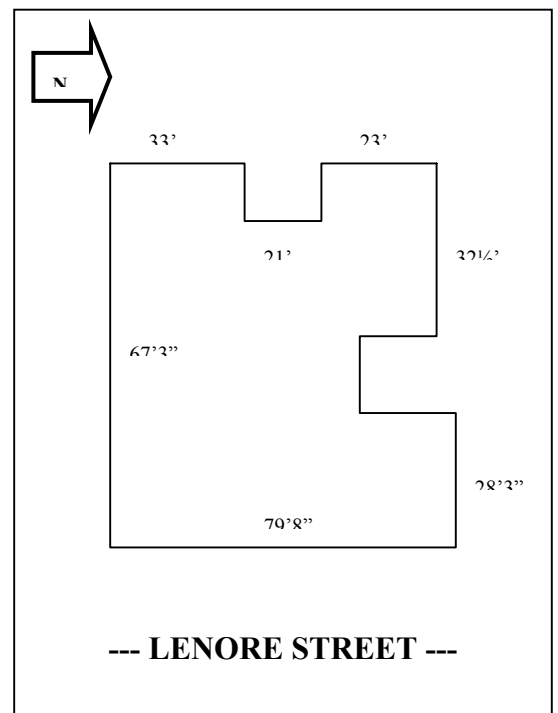
Construction Type: brick, stone and stone/concrete foundation

Building Permits (Plans available: [A] Archives; [M] Microfilm; [V] Vault):

- 2973/1928 \$75,000 (original) [A], 325/1943 \$200 (penthouse alteration); 6987/1952 \$1,000 (repairs); 10121/1978 \$10,000 (alteration and fire upgrade)

Information:

- 77 x 67 x 40 = 195,740 cu. ft.
- 1971 fire; penthouse = 40 x 34
- 19 suites: B- 3 @ 4 rms. & 1 @ 3 rms.; 1st to 3rd- 1 @ 5 rms., 2 @ 4 rms. & 2 @ 3 rms.
- stone parapet, sand lime brick (rear and north sides)
- rear & north sides had brick sills replaces by concrete in 1952
- “building is too elaborate in construction and has too few suites for this location” (quote from assessor’s notes in 1960)



APPENDIX II

List of apartment blocks designated by the City of Winnipeg's

Historical Buildings Committee (as of June 30, 1993)

ADDRESS	NAME	DATE BUILT	COST	COST PER SUITE	GRADE	DATE LISTED
55 Hargrave Street	Tremblay Apartments	1905	\$9,000	----*	III	August 1989
379 Hargrave Street	Ambassador Apartments	1909	\$157,000	\$3,925	III	May 1986
272 Home Street	Thelma Apartments	1914	\$50,000	\$3,333	III	January 1993
220 Hugo Street	Pasadena Apartments	1912	\$65,000	\$2,708	III	December 1988
828 Preston Avenue	Rothesay Apartments	1912	\$100,000	\$2,778	III	March 1991
366 Qu'Appelle Avenue	Warwick Apartments	1908	\$150,000	\$2,206	II	August 1983
300 River Avenue	Congress Apartments	1910	\$90,000	\$3,103	II	November 1988
6 Roslyn Road	Lilly Apartments	1914	\$20,000	----**	III	February 1987

* This building was originally a single-family dwelling.

** This building was originally a duplex.

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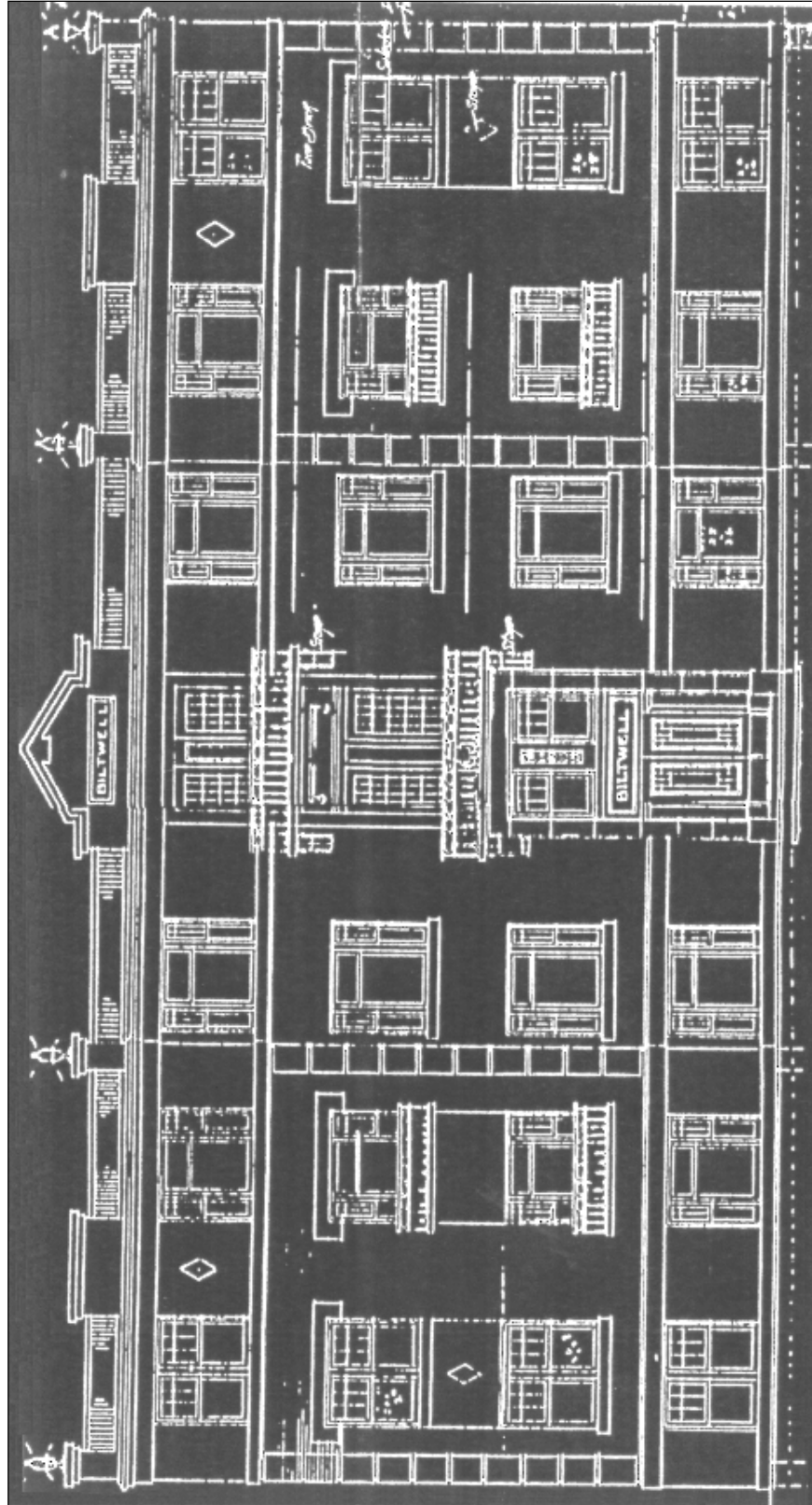


Plate 1 – Plans for the "Biltwell" (Bellcrest) Apartments, 72 Lenore Street; built in 1928, supervising architect and builder, Bently Taylor; "Lenore Street Elevation." (Reproduced from Plans 2973/1928, held at the City of Winnipeg Archives, William Avenue.)

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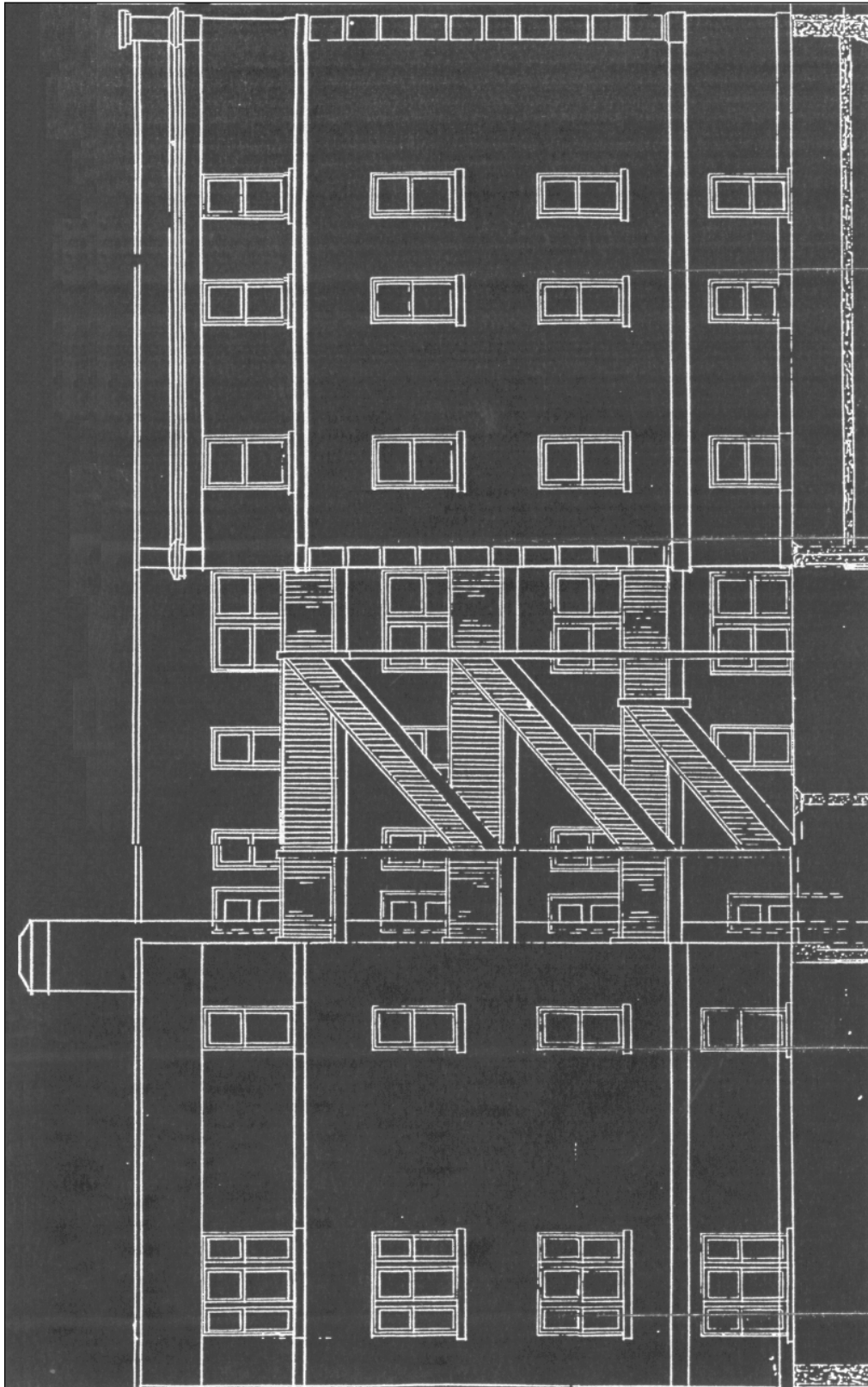


Plate 2 – Plans for the north elevation of the "Biltwell" (Bellcrest) Apartments, 72 Lenore Street.
(Reproduced from Plans 2973/1928, held at the City of Winnipeg Archives, William Avenue.)

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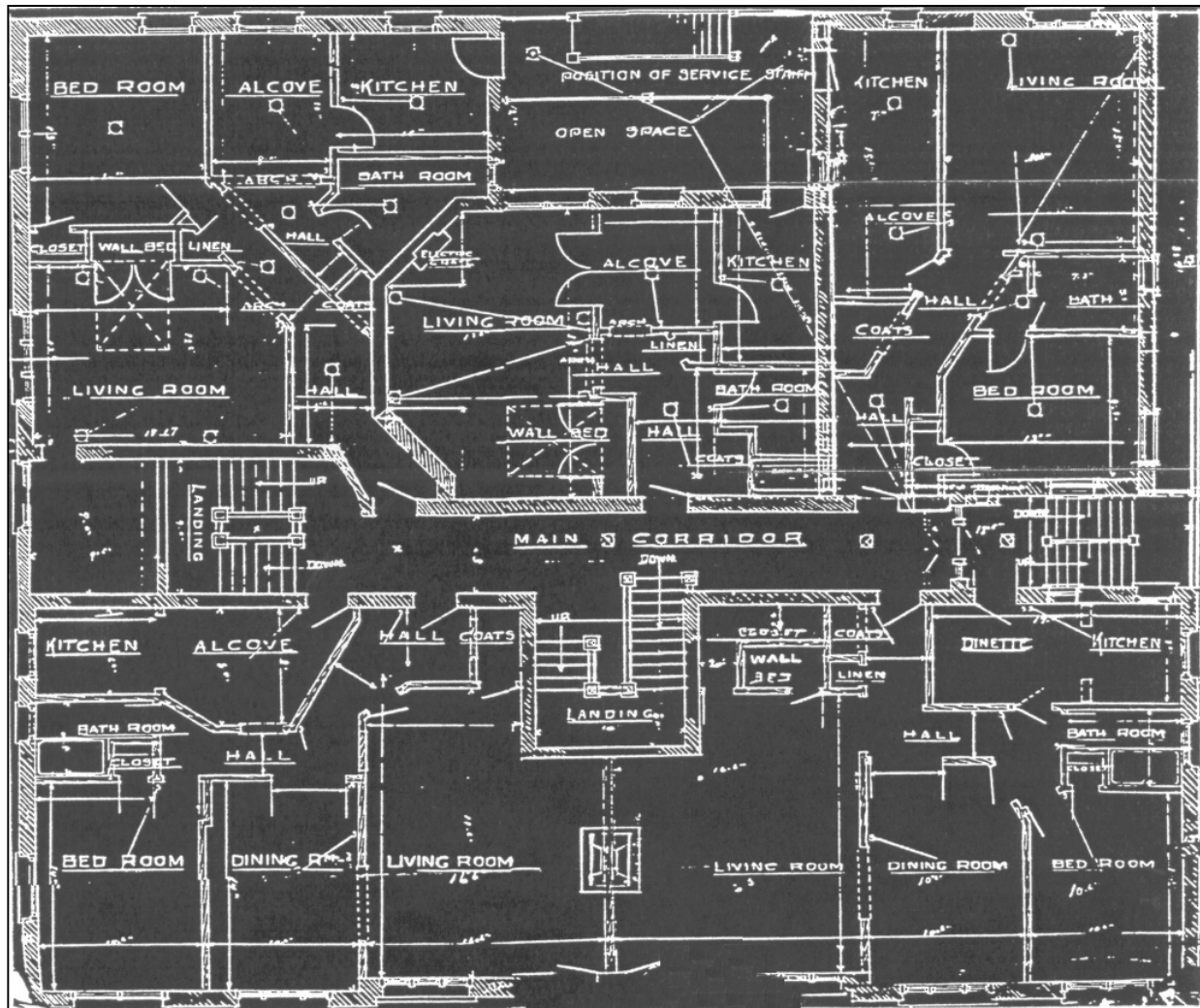


Plate 3 – Plans for the "Biltwell" (Bellcrest) Apartments, 72 Lenore Street; "Typical Floor Plan."
 (Reproduced from Plans 2973/1928, held at the City of Winnipeg Archives, William Avenue.)

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Plate 4 – William Brydon (1847-?), co-founder and vice-president of the Empire Loan Company and local contractor; 1906. (Reproduced from F.H. Schofield, The Story of Manitoba [Winnipeg: S.J. Clarke Publishing, 1913], Vol. III, p. 569.)