

185 LOMBARD AVENUE

GREAT WEST LIFE BUILDING ANNEX

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
Researcher: M. Peterson
June 2014

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

(a) This block was built in 1900 to meet the demand for modern office space in downtown Winnipeg;

(b) It was associated for many decades with the Great West Life Assurance Company, headquartered next door at 177 Lombard Avenue;

(c) It was designed and built by a short-lived local partnership, George T. Laird and George W. Murray;

(d) N/A;

(e) It continues to be an important element of its Lombard Avenue streetscape; and

(f) The building's exterior, which dates to 1971, has suffered little alteration.

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Lombard Avenue saw tremendous growth and development in the early 20th century, much like the rest of the downtown Winnipeg. At the east end, large warehouses were built to replace the earlier residential structures. These warehouses were built to take advantage of the traffic along the Red River and later the year-round link provided by the Winnipeg Transfer Railway, giving access to the main lines of the Canadian Pacific and Northern Pacific and Manitoba railways (Plate 1). From Rorie Street to Main Street, office buildings provided space for the headquarters of local, national and international companies and commercial property developed. At Main Street were the towering banking halls (Plates 2-4).

In 1900, wealthy Winnipeg banker William F. Alloway had a modest block constructed on the north side just east of Main Street, renting the space out to a variety of commercial tenants (Plate 5).

STYLE

As originally designed, this block was a modest example, Two-Part Commercial Style, popular in retail districts throughout North America from the late 19th century well into the 20th century. The design was used to reflect the varied activities housed in the different areas of the building. The ground floor held the retail spaces, often with recessed entrances and large display windows. A metal cornice or similar feature was often used to visually separate the ground floor from the upper floors, which included banks of large windows to light the office and/or residential space. Access to this upper floor was usually provided by an ornate entrance on the front façade.

Beyond this basic layout, this type of block saw a tremendous variation in materials and ornamentation. They could be small, simple wooden structures or large, multi-storey brick and stone buildings with a wealth of ornamental elements, often depending on the neighbourhood in which they were located and the amount of money available to the developer.

The redesign of the front façade in the early 1970s replaced the two-part design, replaced with a new dark brick cladding and arches that would be associated with the Romanesque Revival style found on many of the warehouses in the Exchange District.

CONSTRUCTION

This block was completed in 1900 at a cost of $13,000.[1] The block measured 15.9 metres wide by 24.1 metres deep, resting on a 61.0-centimetre foundation with 43.2-centimetre brick walls on the ground floor and 33.0 centimetres on the second floor (see Appendix I for more building information).[2] Limestone was used as exterior cladding.[3]

In 1950, a pedestrian bridge was built atop 185 Lombard Avenue[4] to join the buildings on either side of it (191 Lombard Avenue to the west and 177 Lombard Avenue to the east) by Great West Life Assurance Company, which occupied space in all three buildings (Plate 6). The bridge was sealed off in 1982.[5]

In 1954, a two-storey brick addition, used for offices (Plate 7), was built at the rear of the structure. It measured approximately 15.3 x 16.2 on a 36.5-centimetre reinforced concrete foundation.[6] The front façade was redesigned at this time (Plates 8 and 9).

In 1971, major renovations converted the office building into a restaurant and lounge and redesigned the front façade (Plate 10). Cost of the conversion was $162,000.[7]

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1 City of Winnipeg Building Permit, (below as BP), #231/1900.

2 City of Winnipeg Assessment Record, Roll No. 607260-12, PC 33. Below as AR.

3 "Front Elevation," architect's drawing, Plan #2783/1954.

4 BP #1596/1950.

5 AR.

6 Ibid.; and BP #2318/1954 (pilings) and #2783/1954 (superstructure). Total cost of construction was $154,000.

7 BP #200/1971.

DESIGN

As originally designed, this block featured a ground floor divided into three bays; the eastern bays taken up by large display windows and the western bay by a canopied entrance (Plate 5). The second floor boasted three pairs of windows topped by a modest stepped parapet. It was a modestly designed structure whose east and west walls would ultimately be covered by neighbouring buildings.

The 1954 renovations reorganized the front, placing the entrance in the middle bay, replacing all the window units and replacing the parapet (Plate 9).

In 1971, the front façade was completely redesigned with dark brick cladding and attached pilaster. The outside bays feature large window openings, the middle holds the covered entrance (Plate 11). The large second storey windows are arched with radiating brick heads. The metal spandrels were designed for signage and are topped with shallow wrought iron fencing. The building is finished with a modest entablature with wide metal frieze (also holding signage).

The east and west façades of the original building are hidden and the rear includes the plainly designed 1954 addition (Plates 12 and 13).

INTERIOR

Built as a modest mixed use structure, the building would likely have been only modestly finished. Its conversion into office space by the Great West Life Assurance Company would have meant more interior changes. In 1971, the building's interior was complete gutted, converted into a "traditional" British pub and restaurant. This décor is present today (Plates 14-16).

INTEGRITY

The building stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition. Both the interior and exterior of the 1900-era building have undergone several major renovations and the building bears little resemblance to the original.

STREETSCAPE

The Great West Life Building Annex is an important part of a heritage streetscape (Plates 17 and 18). It, 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/district and as such, the Historical Buildings Committee has given them 60 points.

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS

Designers of this building were George T. Laird and George W. Murray. This partnership appears in City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books only twice, once as the architect for this building and once as the contractors for a 1900 addition to a stable building on Elgin Avenue. Between 1899 and 1926, they are listed separately, working on a number of smaller projects around Winnipeg including factories, dwellings, hotels and retail blocks of modest size.[8]

Scottish-born George W. Murray (1832-1912) was an early builder in the city, arriving in 1877 and also establishing a sash and door, millwork and lumber business (Plate 19). In 1884, brothers James and John McDiarmid joined with Murray to form Murray & McDiarmid; a partnership lasted until June 1892 and included work on the old Fort Osborne Barracks, the Osborne Drill Hall, rural Canadian Pacific Railway stations and several Winnipeg residences.[9] Murray and his wife Alice lived for many years on Furby Street and the couple was instrumental

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

9 Information from Mr. G. McDiarmid, July 1, 2014.

in the early organization and growth of St. Stephen's Presbyterian Church (now Elim Chapel), 546 Portage Avenue. He died after several years of poor health in 1912.[10]

George Laird was born in 1856 in Ontario, moving to Winnipeg by the late 1880s. By World War I, the family, which included two sons and two daughters, had left the city.[11]

The Historical Buildings Committee has never evaluated these men separately or in partnership.

PERSON/INSTITUTION

The original owner/developer of this property was banker William Forbes Alloway (1852-1930 – Plate 20). Alloway was born in Ireland, immigrating to Canada in 1855 and coming west in 1870 with the Wolseley Expedition. Alloway's early financial dealings were considered by many to be somewhat shady, including contracts for supplies and horses for the Canadian Pacific Railway. In 1879, he established a partnership with Henry Thompson Champion, another Wolseley Expedition participant, creating Alloway and Champion – "bankers, brokers, commission merchants, freighters, traders, and real estate agents."[12]

The institution, which was active in many sectors, was extremely successful, with capital of over $1-million by 1912, making it Canada's largest and strongest private bank. Alloway sold it to the Canadian Bank of Commerce in 1919, but carried on as its president until 1923. Perhaps his greatest achievement was his philanthropy, which included the founding of Canada's first community trust, the Winnipeg Foundation, which over the years he and his wife donated over $2.5-million.[13] He died in 1930.

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10 Manitoba Free Press, August 26, 1912, p. 24.

11 Canada Census, 1901, 1906 and 1911.

12 Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Volume XV (1921-1930), online version, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003-2014.

13 Loc. cit.; and Winnipeg Tribune, November 19, 1910, April 24, 1965, February 27, 1971 and November 3, 1979; and Winnipeg Free Press, March 2, 1930.

Alloway owned the Lombard Avenue property until the mid-1920s, during this time it had been occupied by small-scale retailers such as the Remington Typewriter Company, Franklin Press Limited, Chandler and Fisher Limited (surgical instruments) and the Returned Soldiers Aid and War Widows Association.[14] The building was sold to Great West Life Assurance Company, headquartered next door at 177 Lombard Avenue. The company used the small block for many years as its North Winnipeg Branch. It was converted into Oliver's Restaurant and the Old Bailey's Lounge in 1971 after extensive renovations.[15]

EVENT

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

CONTEXT

This block has been a part of several phases of Winnipeg's growth. Built in 1900, it was an early part of the development of the downtown, the conversion from the old "temporary" structures to more modern buildings that were increasingly needed to house the headquarters of companies locating in the growing regional centre. The modest structures of the early 20th century would quickly give way to larger, more substantial towers that lined many downtown streets, including Lombard Avenue.

Its conversion in the early 1970s into restaurant space is illustrative of the evolution of the downtown. Government programs sought to assist developers in finding new uses for underutilized warehouses and office buildings in Winnipeg's core and the old Great West Life Building Annex is one of the early examples of this effort.

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14 Henderson's Directory, 1900-1920.

15 Ibid., 1920-1990; City of Winnipeg Assessment Record, Roll No. 607260-12-2 (PC 33); and City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls, Roll No 607260-12-2, 1920-1999.

LANDMARK

Built near one of downtown Winnipeg's busiest intersections and used for decades as a restaurant, the Great West Life Building Annex is well known to many Winnipeggers.

APPENDIX I

CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report
Assessment Record

Building Address: 185 Lombard Avenue

Building Name: Great West Life Building Annex

Original Use: offices

Current Use: restaurant

Roll No. (Old): 607260 (10027)

Municipality: 12 Ward: 2

Property or Occupancy Code: 33

Legal Description: 6/7 St. John, Plan 32971, Lots 9: 11 (Original: 6 St. John, Plan 2, part Lot 27: 28)

Location: north side between Main & Rorie streets

Date of Construction: 1900

Storeys: 2

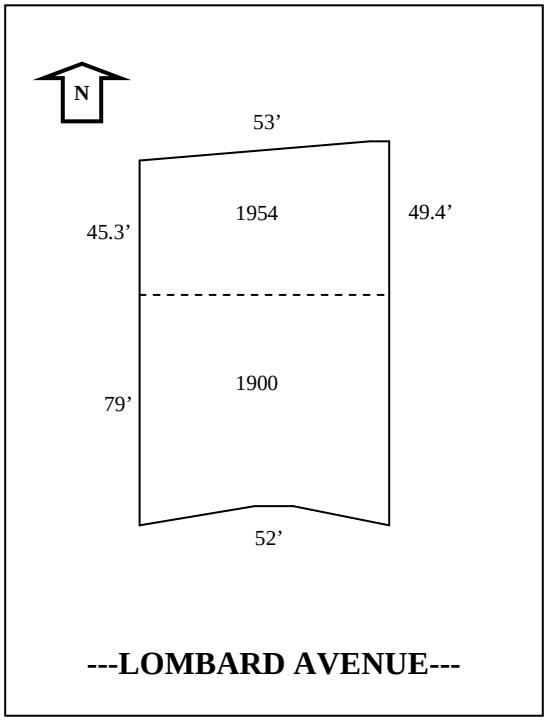
Construction Type: Stone foundation and brick

HERITAGE STATUS: ON NOMINATED LIST

Building Permits (Plans available: **[CS]** City Storage):
- 231/1900 $13,000 (original); 374/1928 $18,000 (alteration); 297/1934 $10,000; 1596/1950 **[CS]** (alteration); 2318/1954 **[CS]** $4,000 (pilings for addition); 2783/1954 **[CS]** $150,000 (addition); 200/1971 **[CS]** $162,000 (alteration); 9820/1988 $8,000 (alteration to restaurant); 106860/2010 $17,740 (interior alteration); 172796/1913 $145,855 (interior alteration)

Information:

- 52 x 79 x 39+ = 261,482 cu. ft.
- Heavy ornamental wood entrance doors
- Wall thickness – 17” brick to 13” brick
- Basement – 24” stone (1954 addition has 14” reinforced concrete basement walls)
- Feb/68 – Re. Permit for fire – minor fire at rear, main floor - repaired
- Permit 8494/71 – garburetor compactor installed
- 1982 – walkover link to Great West Life - sealed
- 10/06/87 – Small kitchen fire – contained in stove
- 1990 – Heating system converted to a gas boiler that heats the whole building
- Permit 7614/1990 Interior alteration for steam plant



ARCHITECT: LAIRD AND MURRAY

CONTRACTOR: LAIRD AND MURRAY

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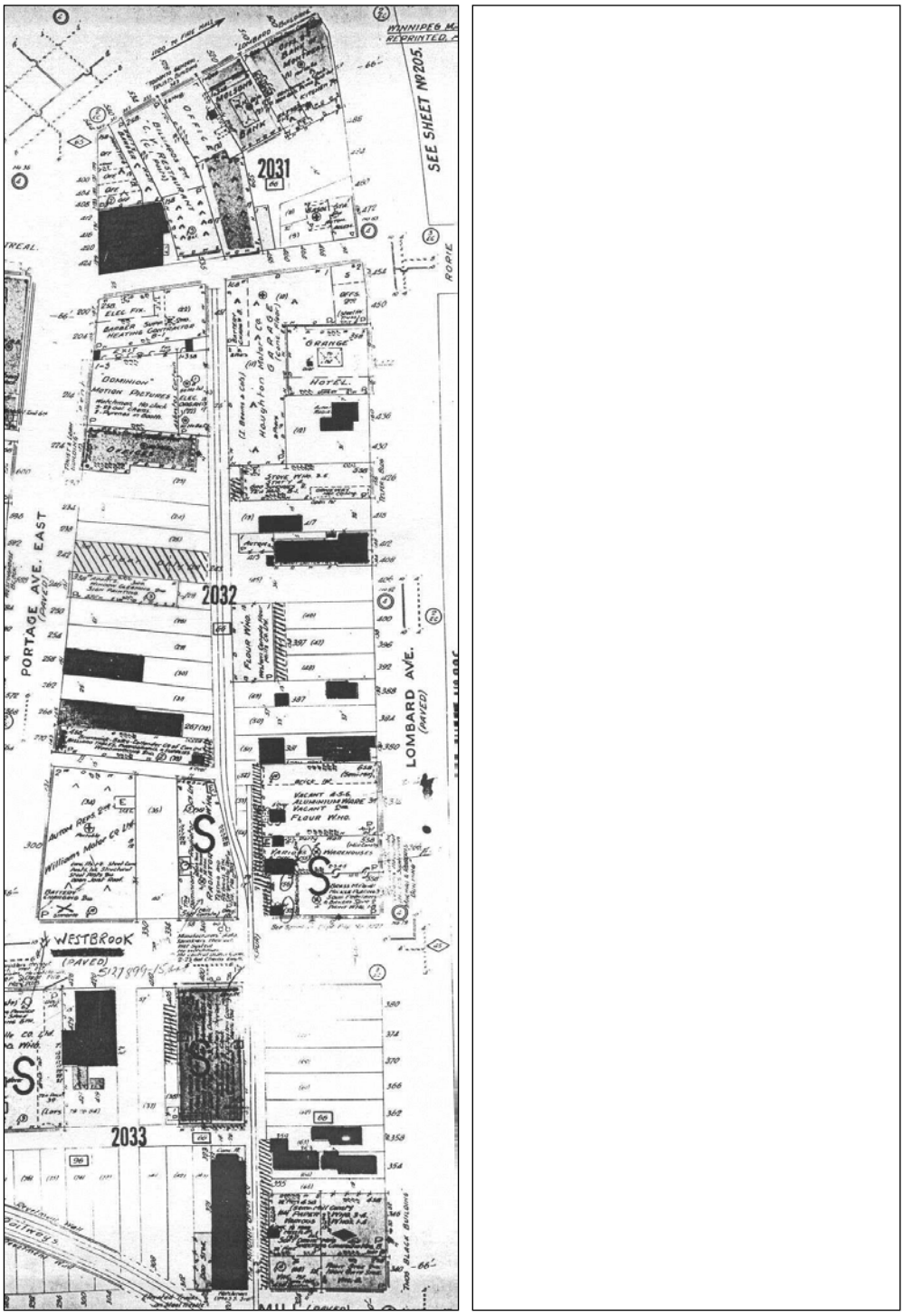


Plate 1 – Fire Atlas of Winnipeg, Volume II, Lombard Avenue, south side between Mill and Main streets (left, Sheet 203) and north side east of Rorie Street (right, Sheet 206), 1923. Note that there is still residential property on both sides of the avenue. (City of Winnipeg Archives.)

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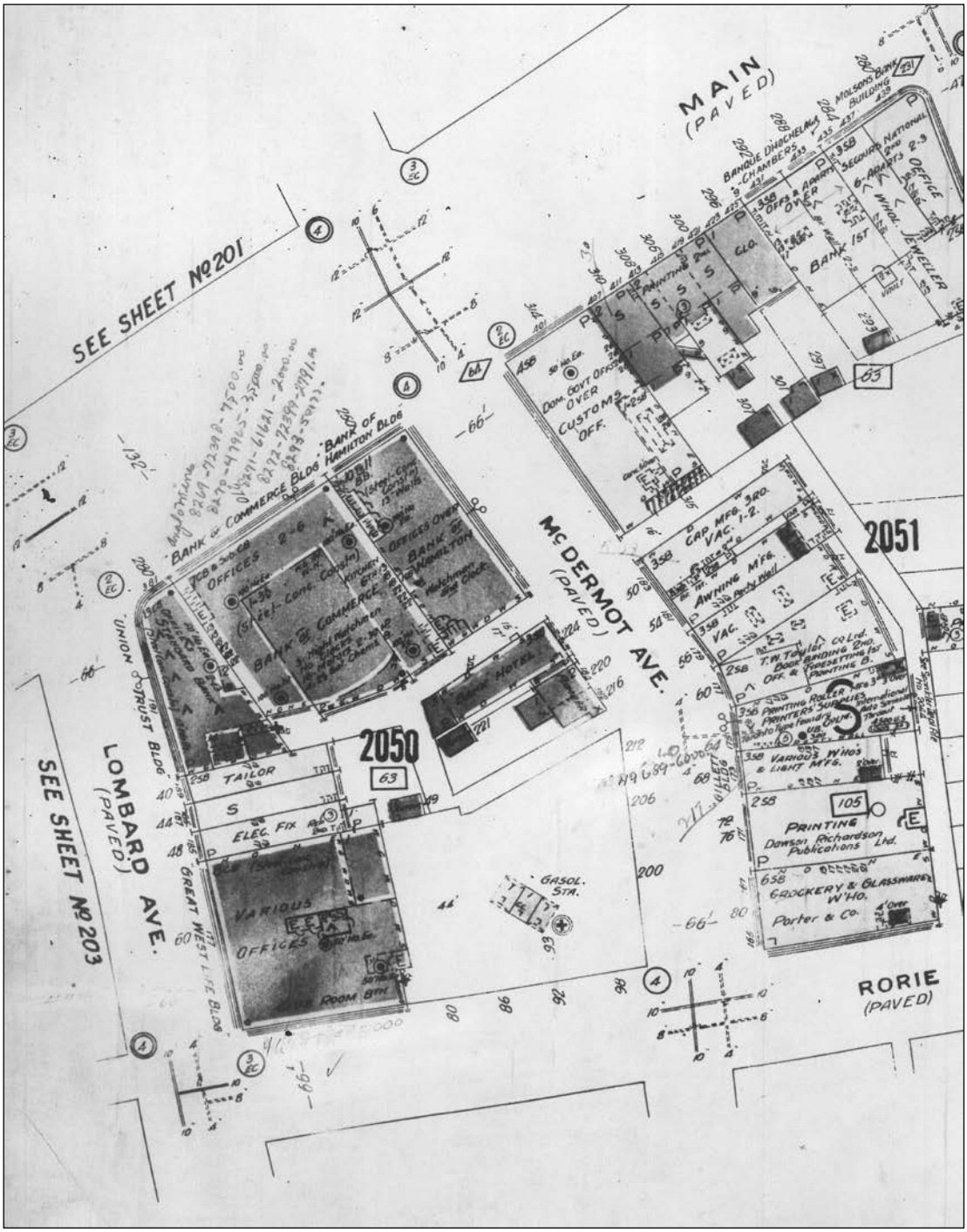


Plate 2 – Fire Atlas of Winnipeg, Volume II, Sheet 205, Lombard Avenue north side between Rorie and Main streets, 1923. (City of Winnipeg Archives.)

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Plate 3 – Looking west on Lombard Avenue towards Main Street, ca.1910. (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba, "Winnipeg-Streets-Lombard 1", N1429.)

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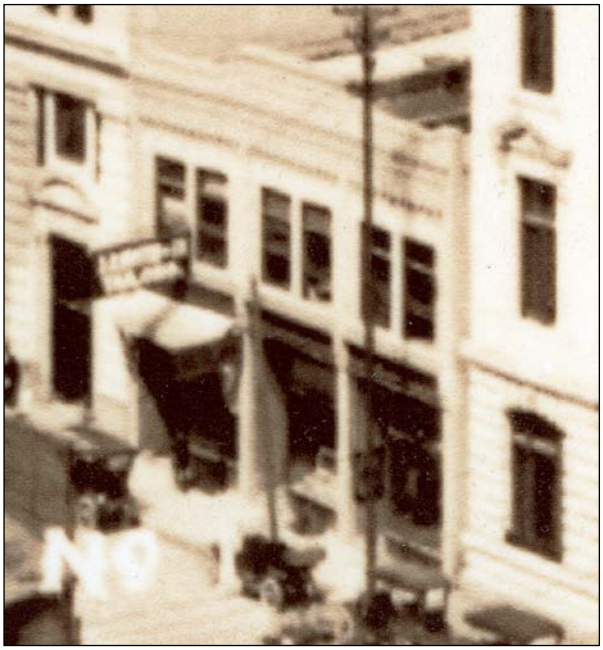


Plate 4 – Lombard Avenue looking east towards Main Street, ca.1928. (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba, "Winnipeg-Streets-Lombard 6", N1434.)

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Plate 5 – Lombard Avenue, 1913, 185 Lombard Avenue at arrow and enlarged below. (City of Winnipeg.)



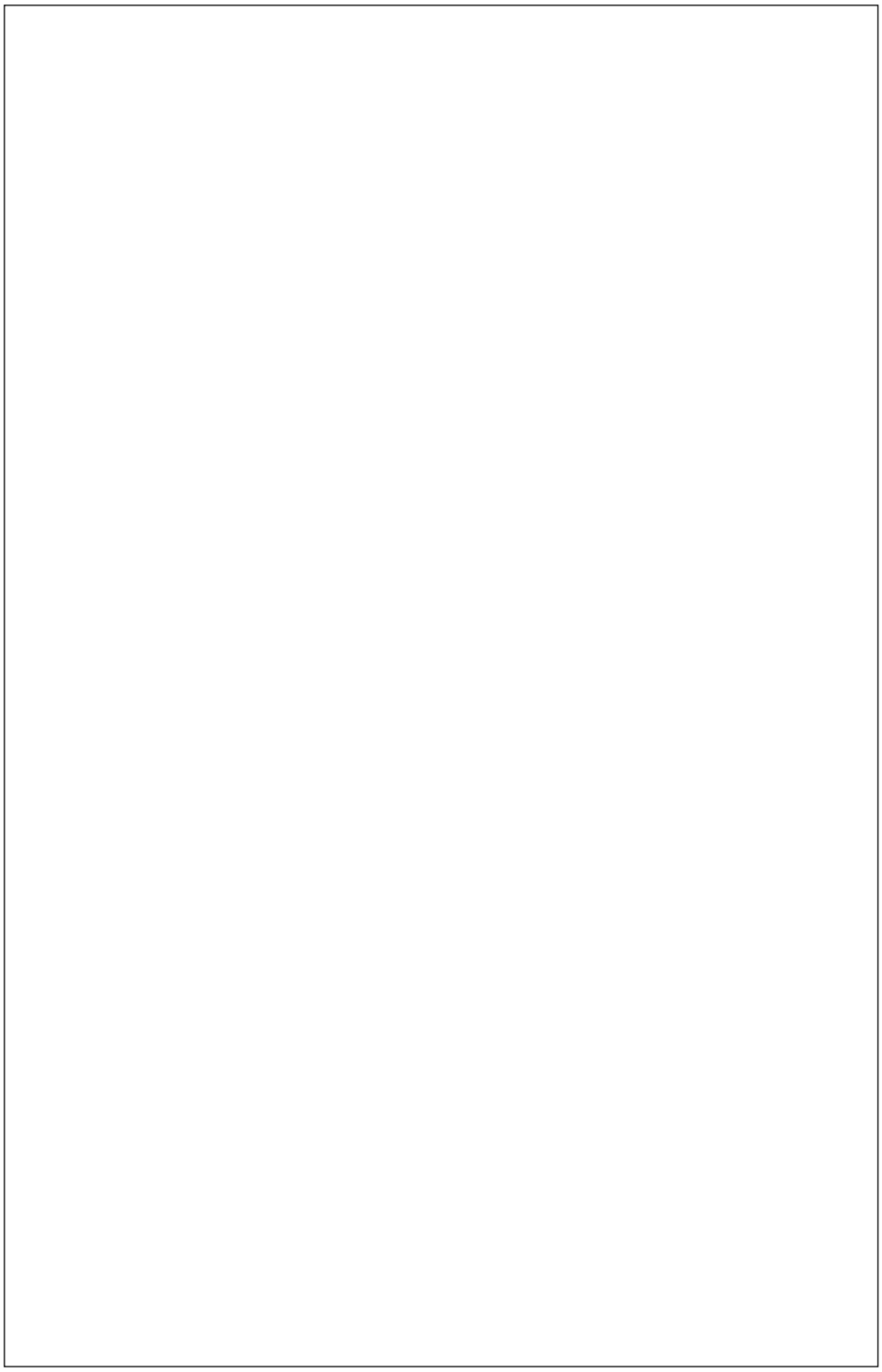


Plate 6 – “Second Floor Plan”, pedestrian bridge connecting 177 and 191 Lombard Avenue, Plan #1596/1950. (City of Winnipeg Archives.)

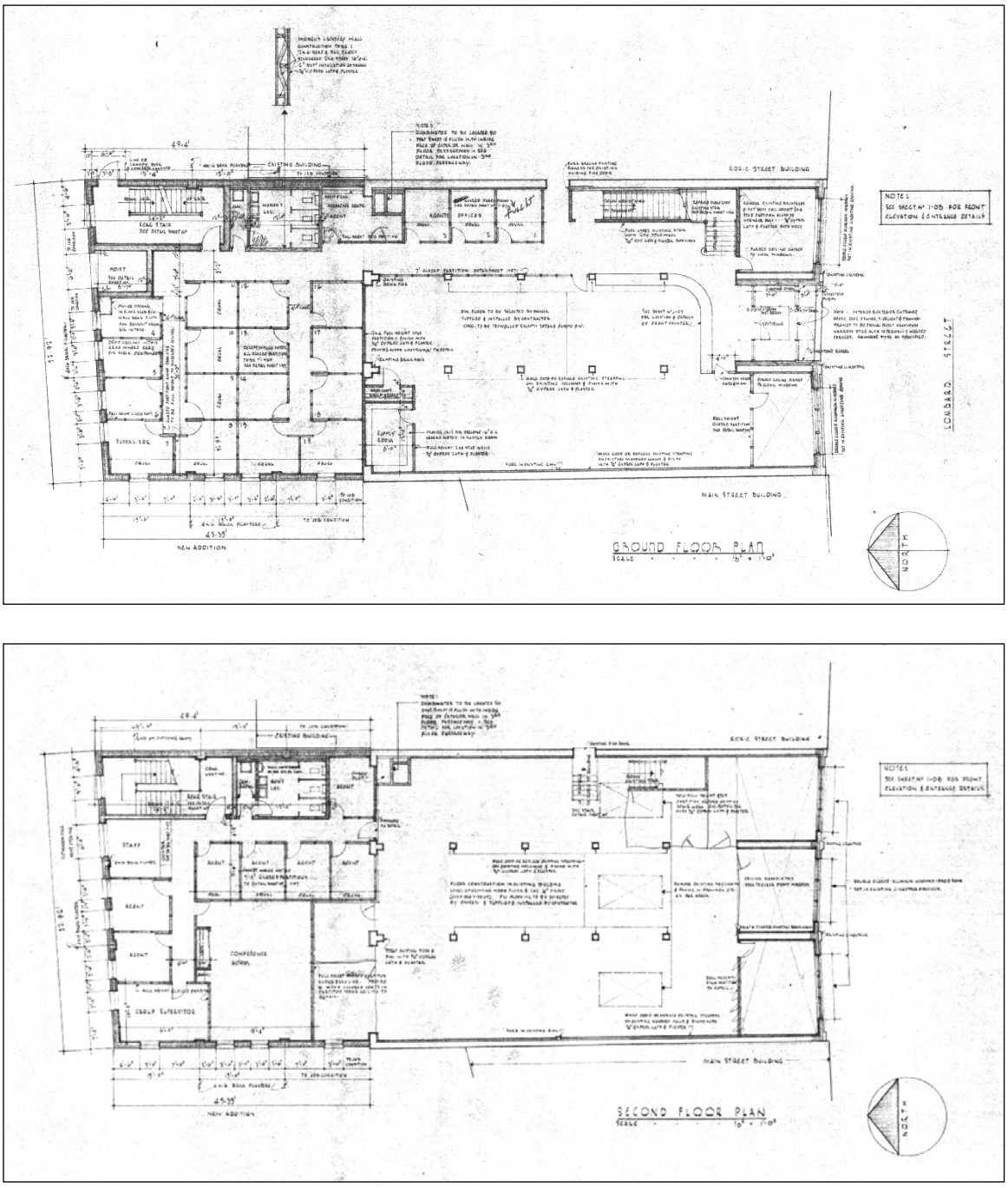


Plate 7 – "Ground Floor Plan" (top) and "Second Floor Plan" (bottom), 1954 addition and interior alterations to 185 Lombard Avenue, Plan #2783/1954. (City of Winnipeg Archives.)



Plate 8 – "Front Elevation," renovation to the front façade of 185 Lombard Avenue, Plan #2783/1954. (City of Winnipeg Archives.)

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Plate 9 – Lombard Avenue, 1969. Renovations to the Great West Life Building Annex have replaced the window units and minimized the roof treatment. (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba, Architectural Survey, 1969.)

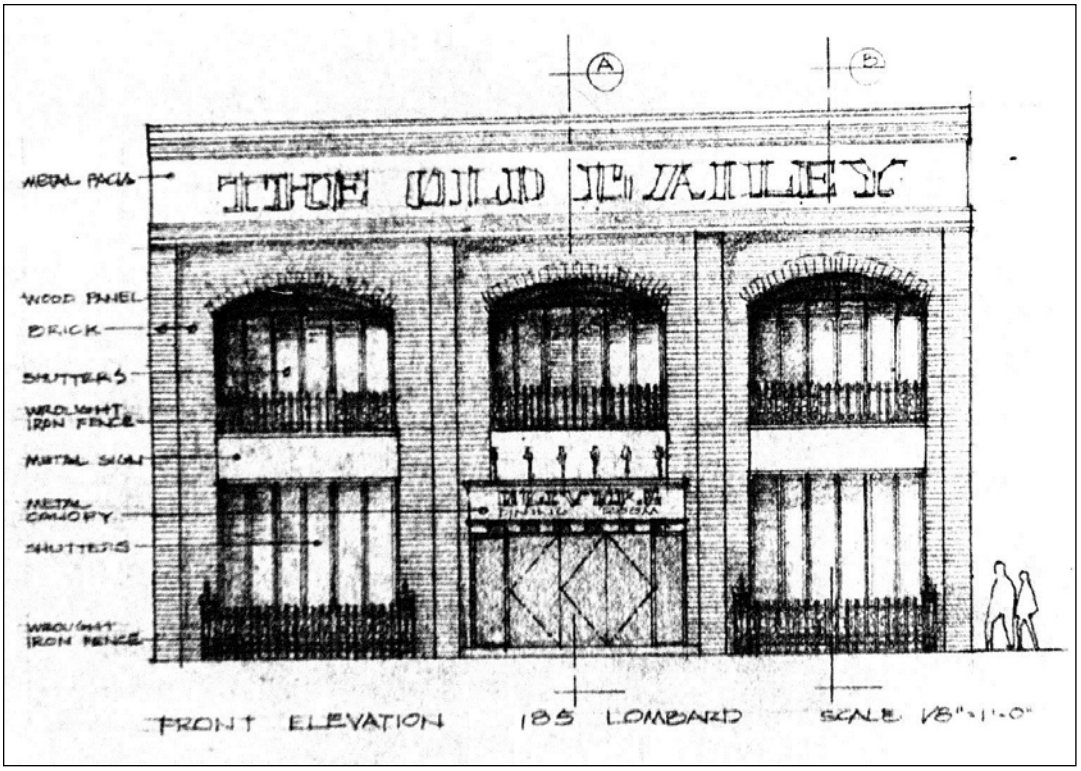


Plate 10 – "Front Elevation," renovation to the front façade of 185 Lombard Avenue, Plan #200/1971. (City of Winnipeg Archives.)



Plate 11 – 185 Main Street, Great West Life Building Annex, front (south) façade, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)



Plate 12 – 185 Main Street, Great West Life Building Annex, east side of rear (north) addition, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)



Plate 13 – 185 Main Street, Great West Life Building Annex, north and west façades of rear (north) addition, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 14 – 185 Main Street, Great West Life Building Annex, ground floor foyer, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)



Plate 15 – 185 Main Street, Great West Life Building Annex, ground floor pub area, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 16 – 185 Main Street, Great West Life Building Annex, second floor restaurant space, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

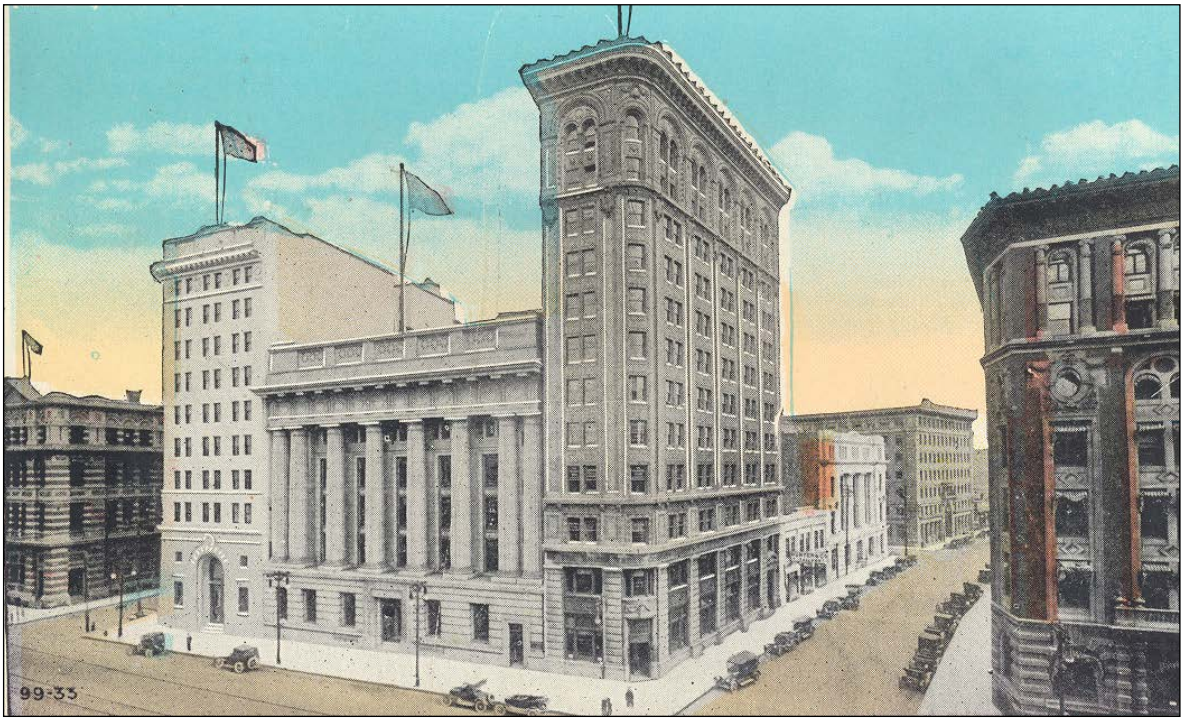


Plate 17 – This 1925 postcard shows Main Street and Lombard Avenue. (M. Peterson Collection.)

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Plate 18 – Lombard Avenue looking east from Main Street, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

Plate 19 – George Murray, ca.1911. (Reproduced from the Manitoba Free Press, March 4, 1911, p. 19.)



Plate 20 – William Forbes Alloway, no date. (Reproduced from Winnipeg Foundation.)