

## Winnipeg: The Northern Anchor of the Wholesale Trade

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Résumé de l'article

Après 1882, Winnipeg réussit à s'assurer un rôle prépondérant dans le commerce de gros de l'Ouest canadien. Dans leur progression vers une position dominante sur le vaste territoire qui s'étend des Grands Lacs aux montagnes Rocheuses, les grossistes de la ville créent un quartier d'entrepôts remarquable du point de vue architectural. George D. Wood, C.H. Whitla et J.H. Ashdown jouent à cet égard un rôle important avec le concours du dessinateur en chef, J.H. Cadham. Le présent article tente de situer dans son contexte cette étape importante de l'histoire de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme.

# Winnipeg: The Northern Anchor of the Wholesale Trade<sup>\*</sup>

Leonard K. Eaton

## Résumé/Abstract

*Après 1882, Winnipeg réussit à s'assurer un rôle prépondérant dans le commerce de gros de l'Ouest canadien. Dans leur progression vers une position dominante sur le vaste territoire qui s'étend des Grands Lacs aux montagnes Rocheuses, les grossistes de la ville créent un quartier d'entrepôts remarquable du point de vue architectural. George D. Wood, C.H. Whitla et J.H. Ashdown jouent à cet égard un rôle important avec le concours du dessinateur en chef, J.H. Cadham. Le présent article tente de situer dans son contexte cette étape importante de l'histoire de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme.*

*After 1882, the city of Winnipeg rose to control the wholesaling trade of western Canada. In the process of achieving dominance over the vast territory stretching from the Great Lakes to the Rocky Mountains, the jobbers of the city created a warehouse district of unusual architectural distinction. Men like George D. Wood, C.H. Whitla and J.H. Ashdown should be recognized as major patrons of architecture. Their chief designer, J.H. Cadham, should also be identified as a figure of commanding interest. This article seeks to put this important development in architectural and urban history in its appropriate setting.*

In most respects the warehouse district of Winnipeg, Manitoba, is architecturally the finest on the North American continent. Although the city was incorporated in 1873, its origins go back to the Selkirk colony of 1811-12. This was the project of the Earl of Selkirk, a Scottish nobleman, who was able to buy into the Hudson's Bay Company, and it combined philanthropy and commercial ambition in equal degree. Selkirk wanted to relieve the distress of Scottish crofters, who were being driven from their homes by the enclosure movement, and to resettle them in the fertile valleys of the Assiniboine and the Red River of the North. The difficulties of the enterprise were enormous. The first settlers had to come down the Nelson River from York Factory on Hudson Bay, and they were separated from their fellow countrymen in Ontario by hundreds of miles of wilderness. Furthermore, they had to endure an exceptionally harsh climate and the hostility of the North West Company of Montreal, whose bitter rivalry with the Hudson's Bay Company led to the battle at Seven Oaks in 1816 in which a number of settlers were killed. Subsequently a defensive position and trading post were built by the HBC at Fort Garry. The new settlement survived, but it did not grow rapidly. During the first half of the nineteenth century Manitoba can be understood as a region equally devoted to hunting and to farming. Its historian, W.L. Morton, speaks of a few centres of culture such as the Red River Library, but adds, "around them washed the dull waves of an essentially primitive life, an

economy founded on the hunt and the trapline, a society based on the union of the nomad and the trader."<sup>1</sup> In 1870, the year in which Manitoba joined Confederation, the entire province had a population of approximately 12,000 non-Indians. Of these, about 5,000 were French half-breeds, 5,000 were English half-breeds, and the balance were recent immigrants from eastern Canada and the United States. The frontier was still very close. Lynn Frank's "Dakota Boat," printed in 1872, conveys the atmosphere of the Winnipeg settlement (Figure 1).

When, after intense political manoeuvring, the city of Winnipeg was incorporated in 1873, it united a series of communities near the juncture of the Red River of the North and the Assiniboine. With the act of incorporation secured, a number of urban institutions emerged during the next decade. A hospital, a legal society, and the College of Physicians and Surgeons were perhaps the most noteworthy. A city hall and market were built, board sidewalks were constructed to give pedestrians some relief from the pervasive mud and the streets were surveyed. The most important streets, Portage and Main, followed the routes of the old Red River trails and were given sufficient width to accommodate the famous carts, which travelled in echelon to avoid being mired in the mud. For the builder, the soil conditions of Winnipeg are hideous.

Winnipeg differed from its counterparts in the United States in one important respect: the river front was of minor importance in its economic life. Because of navigational difficulties, steamboating on the Red River was never as significant as it was on the Mississippi and the Missouri. For about fifteen years, sternwheelers ran between the Red River settlement and St. Paul (Minn.), but the traffic was uncertain and expensive. Because

<sup>\*</sup> The author wishes to acknowledge support from the H. H. Rockham Graduate School of the University of Michigan.

*Editor's Note:* This article is a companion piece to an article published in the last issue. See L. K. Eaton, "Warehouses and Warehouse Districts in Mid-American Cities," *Urban History Review*, Vol. XI, No. 1 (June 1982).

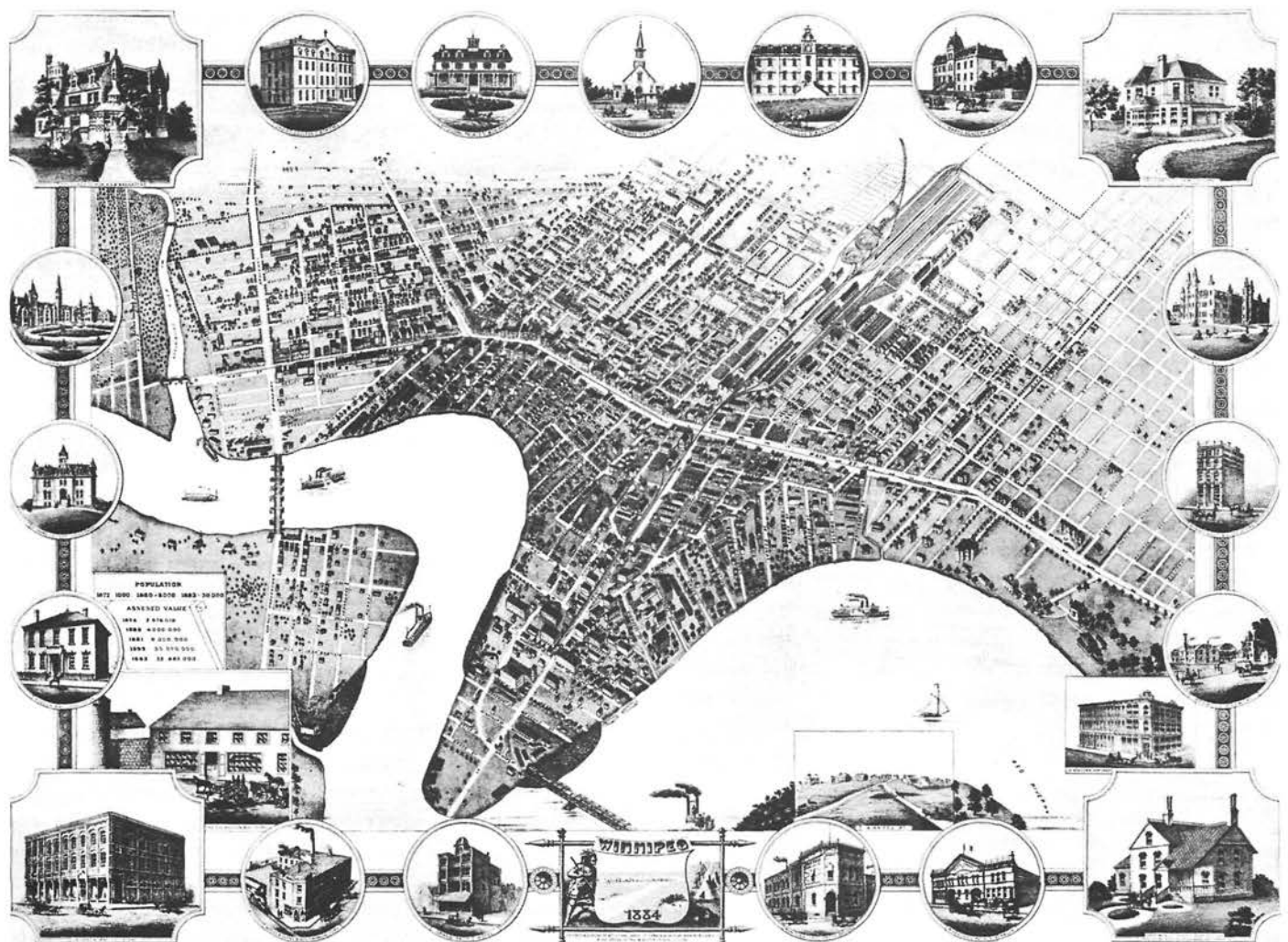
steamboating was so unreliable, a railway connection with the outside world was essential. When the first council took as a civic coat of arms three golden wheat sheaves and a locomotive, they chose well. Manitoba wheat was to become world famous and, when the Canadian Pacific Railway selected Winnipeg as its western headquarters, the city's future was assured. It meant that Winnipeg would become the primary wholesaling centre of a vast and fertile agricultural area encompassing the present provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan and stretching westward into Alberta. This was truly an imperial domain.

To understand the full impact of this decision, one must take into account the traditional extent of government intervention in the large construction projects of Canadian history. The country is enormous, it is thinly settled and rarely has there been private enterprise large enough and daring enough to take the risks of opening and populating virgin lands. The Rideau Canal connecting Ottawa and Lake Ontario was financed in 1832 by the

British government, and the opening of Upper Canada was aided by roads built by the British Army. In the 1860s the Royal Engineers built the first Cariboo Road into the interior of British Columbia. As for railways, the Grand Trunk, the first important Canadian line, was constructed to connect the centres of the St. Lawrence Valley, partly with private money, but also with substantial contributions from colonial treasuries and from cities that wanted to be served. From the beginning, railways were part of the politics of Confederation. Strategic considerations made them imperative; this was illustrated in 1863 when there was a threat of war with the United States and 15,000 British troops had to travel by sleigh from Fredericton to Quebec. In 1871, following the American example, the House of Commons resolved that the railway to the Pacific should be operated as well as built by private enterprise, but there was never any thought that the job could be done without subsidies. There does not seem to have been any realization of just how large those subsidies would become.

FIGURE 2. Winnipeg in 1884

SOURCE: Photo by Ernest Mayer, courtesy of Winnipeg Art Gallery



It was not, however, until 1880 that the Canadian Pacific Railway Syndicate was formed and undertook to complete the line. With the complicated story of the political manoeuvres which brought the road to Winnipeg we need not deal here; it is sufficient to note that, as in the United States, there was tremendous competition from neighbouring municipalities, particularly the town of Selkirk. Winnipeg secured the prize but at great cost: exemption in perpetuity from municipal taxation for the railway, together with right of way and land for station and yards. Selkirk survived only as the river port of Lake Winnipeg. Also extremely important at this time was the protective tariff policy of the recently elected Conservative government under Sir John A. Macdonald. Combined with the building of the transcontinental railway, it diverted trade from its former flow north and south to an east-west direction which still exists today. An exuberant writer in the *Winnipeg Telegram* of September 18, 1906, proclaimed that the city was the key to the whole west and that all business east and west must pass through the Gateway City. Numerous writers used the same imagery.

The excitement of the crucial years 1880-82, when the town was essentially a staging area for the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway across the Prairies, resulted in a frenzied boom. Real estate values soared, and within these two years the population almost doubled. In a bird's-eye view of Winnipeg in 1884 the population stood at about 16,700, and the impact of the railway is clear (Figure 2). Its tracks and roundhouses dominate Point Douglas Common. Industry is beginning to move in (Ogilvie Flour Mills), and log booms are visible next to some of the sawmills. Portage Avenue, then called Queen Street, leads off to the northwest, and its intersection with Main Street, which will become the commercial centre of the city, has already developed a moderate density. Housing is expensive, and most dwellings are modest structures; as yet the exclusive homes along the Assiniboine have not been built. The view shows some startling contrasts with the straggling village and trading post of "Dakota Boat." The Hudson's Bay Company store has become a three-storey structure (shown at lower left) and J.H. Ashdown's hardware enterprise (lower right) has also done very well. The wholesale district will develop in a roughly triangular shape on both sides of Main Street just to the east of the intersection with Portage.<sup>2</sup>

The coming of the railways launched the city on a period of sustained but uneven growth. The boom years of 1880-82, however, were not repeated. In fact, after the completion of the transcontinental railway in 1885, development seems to have proceeded at a slow and steady pace until the late 1890s, when the population reached 42,000. Several factors were undoubtedly responsible for this relatively slow growth. The second Riel rebellion in Saskatchewan in 1885 made people hesitant. Then too the

difficulties of farming on the open plains were substantial; the Mennonites, who were accustomed to the Russian steppes, showed the way, and it took time for the lessons they taught to be absorbed. Perhaps most important of all, good farm land in the United States was available for homesteading until 1900, when the best that the country could offer had been taken up.

At the end of the century, a series of events combined to stimulate interest in the Canadian west. Among these were the discovery of gold in South Africa and the great strike in the Yukon in 1897. These discoveries meant increased gold backing for the world's currencies and additional money available for investment in railway stocks, government bonds and farm mortgages. Also important were a series of bumper crop years which called the Prairie provinces, last of the great agricultural frontiers, to the world's notice. Until the eve of World War I immigrants poured in from eastern Canada, from the United States and from Europe. At the federal level this movement was furthered by the forceful policies of Clifford Sifton, an attorney from Brandon, Manitoba, who became minister of immigration in the government of Sir Wilfrid Laurier. Sifton reformed what had previously been a rather haphazard operation. He set up offices in Europe and the United States and his policies met with great success. By 1912 Winnipeg had a population of 160,000 and was often referred to in the press as a Canadian Chicago. This spectacular growth meant enormously increased opportunities in the jobbing trade. Most of the businessmen who led the way had come in the Ontario migration of the 1880s. Now they expanded and consolidated their operations. They established ranches in towns like Brandon, Saskatoon, Regina, Calgary and Edmonton, and they made additions to their buildings in Winnipeg. The physical growth of the city is immediately apparent in a rare print of the city in 1912 (Figure 3). By this time the wholesale district is shown as a series of large buildings on both sides of Main Street. It is laced with railway spurs, the most important of which runs parallel to Princess Street. On the left side of the picture can be seen the imposing passenger terminal of the Canadian Pacific Railway and a few blocks away the conical towers of the Fort Garry Hotel. The north end, a polyglot district of recent immigrants and industrial workers stretches away at the top of the picture. Not shown is the recently finished Wellington Crescent with the mansions of the wholesaling magnates.

Since the character of the commercial élite that built the warehouse district has been well studied elsewhere, it is unnecessary to comment on it here.<sup>3</sup> We may note, however, that their attitude toward architecture is problematical. Indeed, no substantial analysis has ever been made of the character of the men who have commissioned industrial buildings in any context. It is probable that the Winnipeg wholesalers displayed the same split in



FIGURE 3. Winnipeg in 1912

SOURCE: Randy Rostecki

architectural taste as the men who commissioned the famous automobile factories of Albert Kahn. Whether or not Henry Ford, Walter P. Chrysler or Henry B. Joy cared about their plants as architecture we do not know. We do know that the automobile manufacturers wanted their buildings to be supremely efficient containers for the industrial process and that they turned to the Kahn office because of its ability to solve the problem of function. Their residences, only a few of which were done by Kahn, did not show any predilection for advanced architecture. A biographer remarks that Kahn himself liked pre-1870 music and impressionist painting, felt that Marcel Duchamp deserved ridicule, and rejected the important European architecture of the 1920s. He adds that Kahn's clients would have agreed with his preferences.<sup>4</sup>

In one respect the warehouse client was in a different position from the builder of automobiles. The structure he erected was essentially a more public building than a factory. Contemporary descriptions make clear that the warehouse was at least in part a civic monument. Time and time again the phrase recurs that a building is "a credit to the city." Furthermore, the jobbing trade was fiercely competitive and highly concentrated in area, so it was desirable for the building to present an image of strength and stability. These qualities were required in the buildings themselves. Finally, many of the wholesale concerns were family enterprises. The merchants hoped that their sons would take over when they themselves passed from the scene. The warehouse, therefore, had something of the quality of an emblem or a coat of arms. Their owners were in all probability conservative in their tastes in music and art, but their architectural programmes were well defined and they built some magnificent

structures. The buildings illustrated in this article are simply the finest of an exceptional group.

**G.F. & J. Galt, Wholesale Grocers  
Charles F. Wheeler, 1887**

With its distinctive pattern of economic development, it is not surprising that the best buildings in Winnipeg's warehouse district were built within a limited time span, approximately 1897 to 1912. The Galt building, which was finished in 1887, foreshadows the type that was to flourish in the great years after 1900. It was recognized as a landmark by a column in the *Morning Call* of August 22,

FIGURE 4. The G.F. and J. Galt Building in 1900.  
Architect: C.F. Wheeler

SOURCE: Manitoba Archives

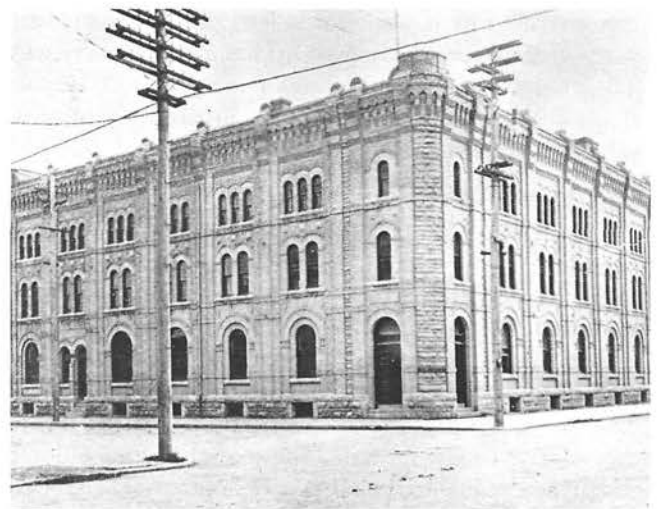






FIGURE 5. Princess Street in 1900

SOURCE: Manitoba Archives

entitled "A splendid structure." Like American cities, Winnipeg was always conscious of the symbolic value of solid, well-built structures in brick and stone. The era of log cabins and mud huts was, after all, well within the memory of a great many citizens. It is, then, the earliest of the important wholesale houses (Figure 4).<sup>5</sup>

The exterior is done in an attractive red brick with stone trim. Its most notable feature is the fine series of interrelated arches, which, as in H.H. Richardson's Marshall Field building, 1885-86, have a profoundly musical quality. None the less, I do not believe that this is a Richardsonian building. It is rather an example of the Romanesque revival which was important in several European countries in the late nineteenth century, especially Germany. The style was less common in England, but there are some notable examples in the warehouse area of Bristol. The *Morning Call* termed the building "English

baronial," a probable reference to the elaborate corbelling and pointed arches. The granite trim was Bedford stone from Indiana; the quarries at Tyndall, which were to supply so much fine material for the district, were not discovered until 1895. The corner was rounded with two entrances which form a single porch; shipping and receiving doors are placed at the side, opening on to a block paved courtyard. A view of Princess Street in 1900 gives a good idea of the building's relationships to its neighbours (Figure 5).

Many pains were taken with this building. The basement was done in stone, and was well lighted and drained, unusual qualities in Winnipeg at that time. An interesting feature was the butter vault which was connected with the ice-house above. The building was framed in heavy timber, and the ground floor was divided into general and private offices, a large sample room, fireproof vault,



FIGURE 6. The G.F. and J. Galt Building in 1977

SOURCE: Henry Kalen

liquor store, bonded warehouse and packer's office. Wide stairways and an elevator gave access to the second and third floors, which were fitted up to meet the needs of a large and increasing business.

In 1904 the grocery trade had so expanded that the owners asked J.H. Cadham to add a storey to the building. A recent photograph (Figure 6) indicates that he did so in excellent taste, showing that respect for the work of his predecessor which was so common among the architects of his generation in Winnipeg. Though sadly defaced by signs, the building is still in excellent condition, and stands as a memorial to one of the most prominent families in the history of the city.

#### George D. Wood Warehouse J.H. Cadham, 1896

In all probability the George D. Wood Warehouse of 1896 was the first major work of J.H. Cadham after he turned from contracting to architecture (Figures 7, 8).<sup>6</sup> It was also the first of the real giants among the Winnipeg warehouses. The Wood building has four storeys, a basement and a street frontage of 73 by 132 feet, giving it adequate floor space for a really immense stock of shelf and heavy hardware. The layout is ingenious. The ground was

treated as a single space and used for storage of heavy merchandise. The photograph reveals a large receiving dock on the south side, and two additional arched openings which ran straight through the building to make shipping possible in all weather conditions. The offices were on the second floor; particular attention was paid to the problem of visibility for management so that customers could be greeted as they entered. The third and fourth levels were for the storage of lighter goods. The structure was steam heated, and the elevators were electrically powered. The roof pitch was calculated to carry the rain water away in two four-inch pipes. In terms of practicality, the George D. Wood warehouse, like most of its neighbours, was a success.

The structure of the building is an extremely heavy timber frame with massive impost blocks at the meeting of post and beam. This frame is expressed in the nicely proportioned grid of pier and spandrel. The base of the walls to a height of seven feet above ground is rough cut stone from the quarries at Selkirk but, as in the Galt building, the trim is Bedford limestone. Above this strong base the walling is the local common brick, originally a creamy white in color. Most of the major structures in the warehouse district were done in this material, and they have generally weathered to a handsome dark gray.

The architects and their clients seem to have avoided any showy or elaborate materials. There is none of the moulded brick or terra cotta that one encounters in the United States. On the contrary, the effect is sober and restrained. This may not be a Canadian style, but it is certainly a Winnipeg manner.

F.W. Stobart, Sons & Company, Ltd.  
J.H. Cadham, 1903

The early years of the century witnessed a spectacular increase in the jobbing trade of Winnipeg. Aided by favourable rates from the Canadian Pacific, which were also soon granted by other railways, the wholesalers expanded their operations enormously. At the height of the city's prosperity, nineteen rail lines connected the city to the rest of Canada and the United States. Thus the Grand Trunk, ultimately a part of the Canadian National, ran north through the fertile valley of the Assiniboine to Saskatoon, and the Duluth and Winnipeg, one of the manifold enterprises under the control of James J. Hill, gave the city a connection to the foremost American port on Lake Superior. Contemporary observers noted that the long freights rolled into the yards day and night; the city was the supply point for the settlement of all of western Canada. In these circumstances it is not surprising that the warehouse district underwent a construction boom. Among the finest of the new warehouses was that of F.W. Stobart, Sons & Company on the corner of King and McDermott streets (Figures 9, 10, 11).

Its description in the *Commercial* for November 1903 is given here to show the thoroughness with which the press reported on new buildings in Winnipeg. This coverage is surprising and surely indicates an awareness of the impor-



FIGURE 8. George D. Wood Warehouse in 1977

SOURCE: Henry Kalen

tance of new buildings of excellence for the city. It is noteworthy that for the most of the period 1900-12 each paper produced a special issue which reviewed the activity of the city's building industry for the past year. In such an issue of the *Winnipeg Telegram*, dated September 18, 1906, a reporter discussed the achievements of the city's leading architects, their fees and their role in making the city into a distinctive and beautiful place. We may well conclude that the level of consciousness of architecture was high. In a rather sneering way, the English poet Rupert Brooke made this point in 1913 when he wrote that the citizens had "a sort of gauche pride" in their architecture. In contrast, the reporter for the *Commercial* on November 21, 1903, had nothing but admiration for Stobarts and their building.

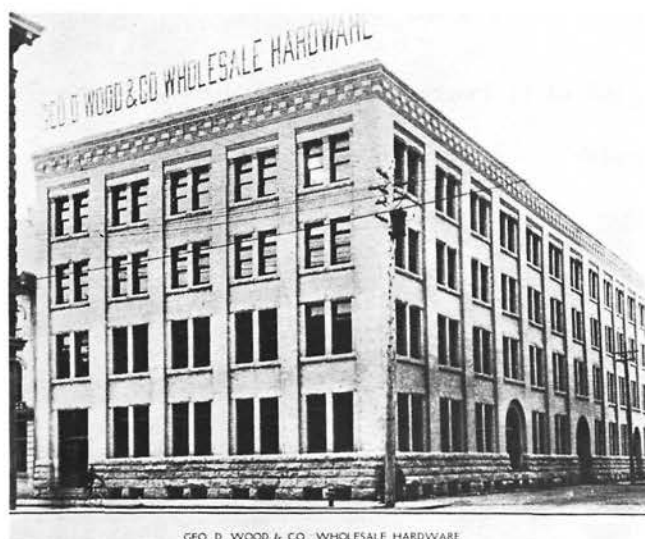


FIGURE 7. George D. Wood Warehouse in 1900.  
Architect: J.H. Cadham, 1896

SOURCE: Manitoba Archives



FIGURE 9. F.W. Stobart Warehouse.  
Architect: J.H. Cadham

SOURCE: Manitoba Archives





FIGURE 10. F.W. Stobart Warehouse in 1977

SOURCE: Henry Kalen

#### A FINE WAREHOUSE

Among the many fine warehouses which have been erected in Winnipeg this year, perhaps the most conspicuous as regards size, appearance and location is the handsome building erected by Stobart, Sons & Company, Ltd. The warehouse is not fully completed yet, but the work has so far progressed as to allow occupancy of the building. This warehouse is located on the corner of McDermot and King streets, which is about as central a position in the wholesale quarter as could be secured. The frontage on McDermot is  $91\frac{1}{2}$  by 132 on King. There are six floors, including the basement, giving in all 70,200 feet of floor space. The basement floor is well lighted as this part of the building has been carried up well above ground. In fact good light throughout is one of the features of the building, light being obtained on three sides, from the public lane in the rear as well as the two street frontages. The main entrance at the corner, through the immense oak doors which swing on ballbearing hinges, is particularly striking. The two doors are each ten feet high, nearly four feet wide and four inches thick, and handsomely panelled.

The ground floor is especially attractive in appearance. The offices extend along the McDermot street front, and are finished in oak, with panels of bevelled plate glass. There are two private offices and the general office. Also two vaults. The main portion of this floor is filled with great piles of

staple goods, such as prints, flannelettes, shirtings, etc. The shipping room is cut off by partition wall. There are separate doors for receiving and shipping goods. Also a separate room for cloak and wash room, etc.

The second floor is filled with woolens, dress goods, and house furnishings, including carpets.

The third floor is one of the most interesting sections of the building. The fancy goods and small ware departments are located here, including a great variety of goods. Ladies ready-to-wear lines are also carried here.

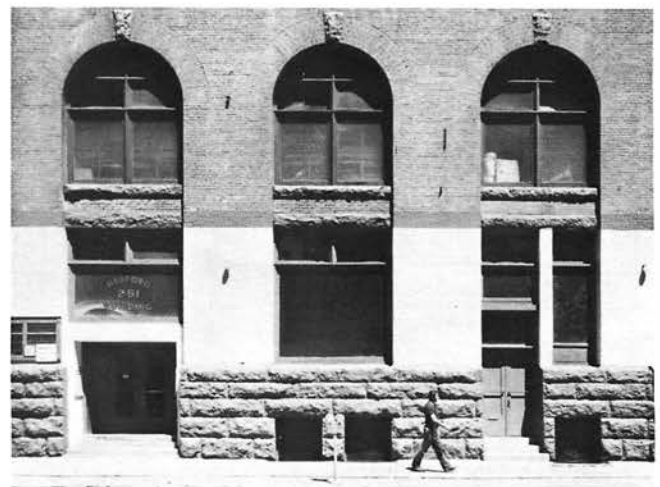
The fourth floor is given up to men's furnishings entirely. There is a division wall across this floor, dividing the fancy from the more staple lines. Shirts, neckwear, etc., are carried on one side and underwear, overalls, smocks, etc., on the other. The latter goods are stored in racks. The company has recently established a factory for making overalls and smocks, so that their own make of goods in this line is now carried. The factory is in a separate building on King street adjoining the warehouse.

The fifth or top floor is divided into two apartments. One side is the entry and packing room, where goods are packed and carried by the elevator to the shipping room. The remaining portion of this floor is used for storing surplus stock of the lighter kinds and for travellers sample room, etc.

This fine warehouse throughout is fitted up in the most modern style. The lighting is by gas. It is one of the most up-to-date warehouses to be found anywhere in Canada, and is in every sense a credit to the company who own and occupy it. The illustration herewith gives a very fair idea of the appearance of the structure.

FIGURE 11. Exterior detail, F.S. Stobart Warehouse

SOURCE: Henry Kalen



In planning, construction and design this warehouse is typical of J.H. Cadham, to whom it was credited in another contemporary account; according to this report the exterior of the building was plain and dignified, and the interior was designed especially for the purpose for which it was used. One half of the main floor was for offices and the rest of the building was groaning beneath the weight of general dry goods.

Like most of the important Winnipeg warehouses the Stobart block was not a symmetrical building. The site was more extensive on King than on McDermott, so Cadham designed three additional bays on the long side. As in the George D. Wood building, the base consists of rough faced ashlar about seven feet high. The same material is used for window trim, but the rest of the walling is brick. The Stobart block has a corner site, and Cadham handled the entrance in much the same way as John Root in his headquarters for the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company in Chicago. In neither structure is there a trace of historicism. They are simple, direct, almost brutal, solutions to the warehouse problem. If buildings reflect the personalities of the architects and their clients, then Frederick W. Stobart and James H. Cadham must have been memorable men.

#### **The Gault Block J.H. Cadham, 1900 and 1906**

In the spring of 1899, Alexander F. Gault, a senior partner in the firm of Gault Brothers Limited in Montreal, travelled to the west coast on an American railway and returned east on the Canadian Pacific. While in British Columbia he and his companion, an executive named Rodgers, visited the Kootenay country, where the Gaults had mining investments. The real purpose of the trip, however, was to select a location somewhere in the west for a branch. With this object in mind, they visited Vancouver and Victoria, but, wrote a reporter for the *Commercial* on June 6, 1899, in an obviously exuberant bit of journalism, they were particularly pleased with the business outlook in Winnipeg. They had, in fact, decided to recommend it for the proposed western branch, showing their confidence by purchasing a site in the heart of the wholesale district between King, Albert and Bannatyne streets. The reporter for the *Commercial* wrote that the house of Gault Brothers was one of the oldest and best-known wholesale concerns in Canada and that the establishment of a branch of such a house in Winnipeg would add to its importance as a jobbing centre.

After this auspicious beginning events moved rapidly. A little more than a year later, the *Manitoba Free Press* carried a substantial article on the completion of the Gault Building. It included the usual extensive description of the interior and called particular attention to the greatly increased choice of goods which would be available to re-

tailers. The stock of the Winnipeg house would almost duplicate the holdings of the parent house in Montreal. Hence the retailers would soon learn the advantages of obtaining goods close at hand and would make Winnipeg their buying headquarters. The city's claim to be considered the wholesale centre of Manitoba and the entire northwest would then be stronger than ever.

Gaults was a good example of the Anglo-Canadian corporation. With headquarters in Montreal, it imported textiles from its own mills in Manchester; these were brought to Winnipeg by rail where the shipments were broken up and distributed. Twelve or fifteen agents travelled the circuit for Gaults between Winnipeg and the Rocky Mountains. West of the Rockies business was handled by a Vancouver branch.

We can obtain an idea of the importance of the wholesale trade to the Manitoba city by an analysis of the employment structure of 1911, when its population was 136,035. It had a high percentage of the population in the work force (45.7), a relatively low percentage of the labour force in manufacturing (17.8), a high percentage in trade (24.9), transport (13.7) and construction (17.2). The high point of its power and influence was probably reached in 1912, when it controlled grain marketing, wholesaling and finance from the Great Lakes to the Rockies. Like many other observers, the English novelist Edgar Wallace thought that it was destined to become a Canadian Chicago.

For their architect Gaults selected J.H. Cadham, who had done so much important work in the surrounding area. It is worthy of note that the warehouse district was built almost entirely by local men, whereas outside firms did a good deal of work on Portage Avenue for financial institutions. Darling and Pearson of Toronto did several important banks, and the Bank of Montreal employed McKim, Mead, and White. The Gault building is another of Cadham's handsome essays in local brick with a base in quarry faced ashlar (Figure 12). It shows a variation of his customary treatment in the delicate window surrounds of the arched openings, but it retains the rough block of Manitoba granite for the sills. The frame of the building was a combination of metal and timber. It can also be seen in the Stobart and Fairchild blocks and portions of the Whitla building. A recent photograph shows it in an excellent state of preservation – testimony to the soundness of its construction and its possibilities for adaptive re-use (Figure 13).

#### **The R.J. Whitla Block J.H. Cadham (1899 and 1906) and J.H.G. Russell (1911)**

The success of R.J. Whitla in jobbing dry goods can be gauged by the fact that the building of 1899 shown here



FIGURE 12. Gault Brothers Company Limited Block.  
Architect: J.H. Cadham

SOURCE: Manitoba Archives

was the third he constructed in the wholesale district. The first was on Main Street and probably resembled the pioneer store of J.H. Ashdown. The second was on Albert Street and was later used by the *Winnipeg Telegram* in 1882-84. For the third he turned to J.H. Cadham, the



FIGURE 13. Gault Brothers Company Limited Block  
in 1977

SOURCE: Henry Kalen

warehouse specialist, and that designer gave him the first of his structures which, with its beautifully proportioned arches rising to the sixth level, could reasonably be called Richardsonian (Figure 14). Cadham, of course, retained the vocabulary of heavy base courses and window sills in Manitoba granite, so striking in a recent photograph (Figure 15). Slabs of Tyndall stone emphasize the grid of pier and spandrel which is such an excellent expression of the heavy timber frame. Cadham built a substantial addition in 1906, and J.H.G. Russell<sup>7</sup> erected an adjoining structure in 1911 so that the entire block is about 185 by 100 feet. In this last portion, cast-iron framing was used,

FIGURE 14. R.J. Whitla Building.  
Architect: J.H. Cadham

SOURCE: Manitoba Archives



FIGURE 15. R.J. Whitla Building in 1977

SOURCE: Henry Kalen



but the expression is the same. Thus the building does not have the same unity as the Woods and Stobart blocks, but it is none the less extraordinarily fine.

### The Fairchild Block J.D. Atchison, 1907

This building shows a sharp break with the type developed so successfully by J.H. Cadham, and it is, in fact, the work of an architect who came directly out of the Chicago tradition. Instead of the heavy rustication at grade level, there is ample fenestration; farm machinery, unlike dry goods, was a public attraction. Instead of the unornamented elevation so common elsewhere, there are dramatic swatches of terra cotta, very much in the manner of Louis Sullivan. Instead of the local white brick, we have a pressed brick in a soft shade of buff imported from the Twin Cities. J.D. Atchison<sup>8</sup> also took advantage of the metal frame to open up the rear of the building in a manner which would become conventional twenty years later. (This is one of those startling architectural experiences which reward those who take the trouble to walk all the way around buildings.) The section and the plans show that the structure had six floors and basement and that the entire first floor was given over to machinery display. Hence it represents something entirely new in the wholesale district. Once again the decision of the agricultural implement makers and their jobbers to see a



FIGURE 16. F.A. Fairchild Block in 1977

SOURCE: Henry Kalen

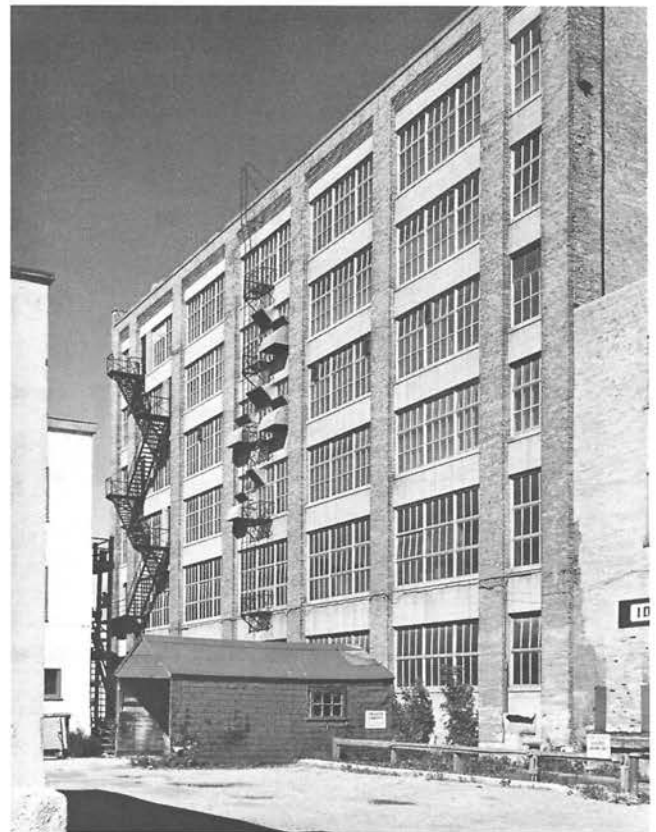


FIGURE 17. Rear Elevation, F.A. Fairchild Block

SOURCE: Henry Kalen



FIGURE 18. Ornamental detail, F.A. Fairchild Block

SOURCE: City of Winnipeg



handsome show-case for their wares was a decisive factor for the architectural design (Figures 16-20). Within a year after its completion, Hodgson W. Hutchinsons, managing director of Fairchilds sold out to Deere and Company, which used the building until 1954.

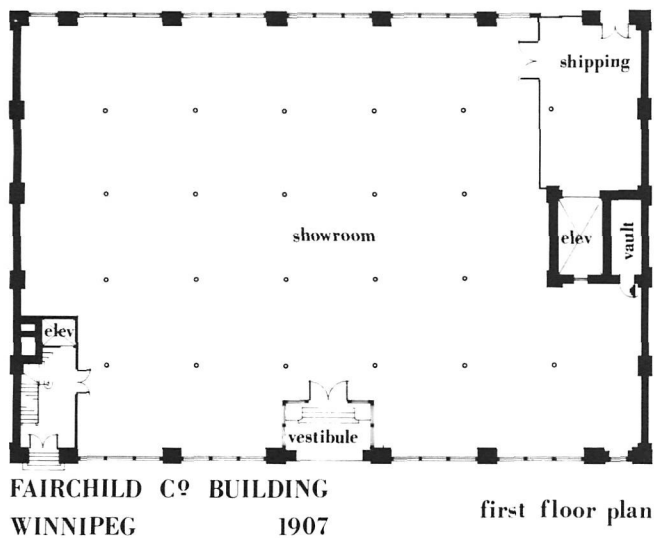


FIGURE 19. First floor plan, F.A. Fairchild Block

SOURCE: Drawing by Robert Daverman

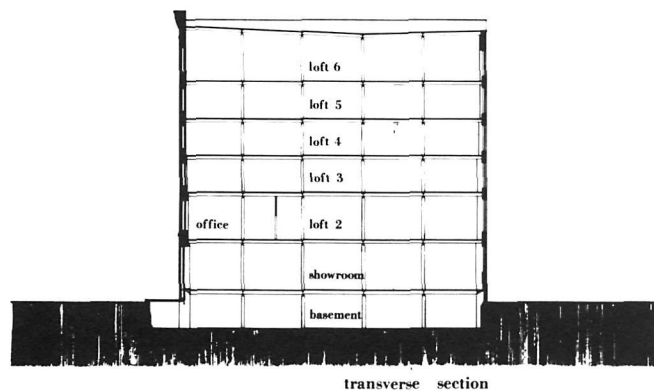


FIGURE 20. Transverse section, F.A. Fairchild Block

SOURCE: Drawing by Robert Daverman

### J.H. Ashdown Block J.H. Cadham and J.H.G. Russell, 1899-1911

James H. Ashdown was perhaps the leading Canadian merchant prince of his generation, and this building is a fitting memorial. About 1871 he located his hardware business at the corner of Bannatyne and Main. A sketch of the premises is so descriptive that it does not require comment (Figure 21). From the early 1870s, however, Ashdown's business grew steadily and his need for better facilities increased accordingly. His second building,

probably from the early 1880s, is shown in an inset of the birdseye view of 1884 (Figure 2). The third of 1896 was a really large building and represents the leap in urban scale which was common in the late nineteenth century (Figure 22).

For stylistic reasons it is tempting to attribute this structure to J.H. Cadham. The rough base of Tyndall stone, the mullions in the same material and the brick detailing of the cornice are characteristic of him. Further, Cadham's obituary remarked that he looked after building operations for Ashdown, so there is some reason for the attribution, though no signed drawings or notices in the press exist. In any event, the building did not remain as shown in the earlier photograph for many years. On the night of October 11, 1904, the wholesale district suffered the worst fire in its history, and Ashdown's losses amounted to over \$400,000, the entire stock of goods for the Christmas trade. Immediately rebuilding and expansion began, this time under the direction of J.H.G. Russell, who was also responsible for additions in 1906 and 1911, when the structure reached its present 207 by 140 feet and a height of seven storeys (Figures 23, 24). In view of this complicated building history the continuity of the design is remarkable. The same structural system, a heavy timber frame, is used throughout the complex, and the different parts relate to each other so handsomely that the additions can hardly be distinguished from each other. The architectural vocabulary is the same throughout: a heavy granite base, common brick walling, and sills and window mullions of Tyndall stone. The detailing of the brick around the arches is especially fine. In its dignity and monumental scale the building is among the best works of industrial architecture produced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Its completion came at the very moment that Winnipeg's commercial dominance was at its height and Ashdown himself was at the summit of his power.

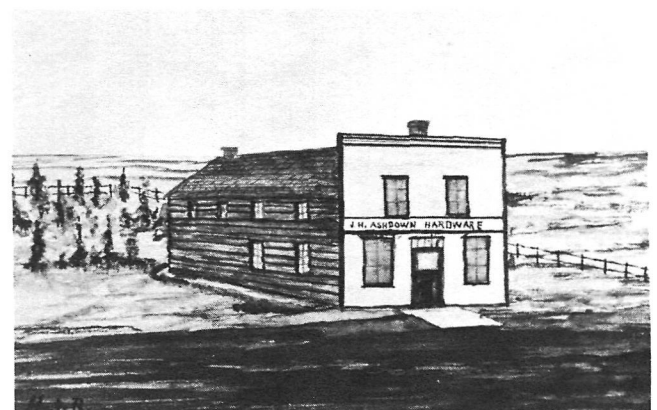


FIGURE 21. J.H. Ashdown Building at Bannatyne and Main in the 1870s, by H.J. Robertson

SOURCE: Manitoba Archives



FIGURE 22. J.H. Ashdown Building. Probable  
Architect: J.H. Cadham

SOURCE: Manitoba Archives

#### NOTES

1. W.L. Morton, *Manitoba: A History* (Toronto, 1967), p.90. This book has well-deserved reputation as a classic.
2. The scale on this map, the original of which measures  $31\frac{1}{2}$  by  $40\frac{1}{2}$  inches, is not given in the original but has been computed to be 1 inch equals 44 feet 7 inches. It is registered by W.G. Fonseca, lithographer, Ottawa, and a copy is in the Public Archives of Canada, National Map Collection.
3. See Alan F.J. Artibise, *Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth* (Montreal, 1975).
4. Grant Hildebrand, *Albert Kahn: Architect to Industry* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), pp.86, 218.
5. The architect, Charles F. Wheeler, was born in England and came to Winnipeg in the 1880s. He designed the Galt Warehouse and the Holy Trinity Episcopal Church, a sophisticated example of the Gothic revival style. He soon gave up architecture, however, and became a prominent figure in the musical life of Winnipeg.
6. On James Henry Cadham, the major biographical source is his obituary in the *Manitoba Free Press*, December 11, 1907. Cadham, architect and master builder, was born in 1850 near London (Ont.), where his father managed a sash and door factory. He left school at sixteen to learn the carpenter's trade and at twenty moved west to settle in Manitoba.  
Like most men of his age and background in Winnipeg, he enlisted for service under General Wolseley during the 1870-71 rebellion led by Louis Riel, and was discharged with the rank of sergeant. From that time he was active in the building field in Winnipeg, first as a contractor and after 1895 mostly as an architect. His obituary remarked that his operations had been confined principally to stores and warehouses and that he was responsible for many of the edifices in the warehouse district. Particularly notable was his work for J.H. Ashdown and R.J. Whitla.



FIGURE 23. J.H. Ashdown Block in 1970

SOURCE: Henry Kalen



FIGURE 24. Exterior detail, J.H. Ashdown Block

SOURCE: City of Winnipeg

7. John Hamilton Gordon Russell was born in Toronto in 1862. He was educated in that city and gained his first architectural experience in the office of H.B. Gordon, a prominent local practitioner. In 1882 he came to Winnipeg but did not remain in the city. Rather, he moved south, working at various times during the next decade in Chicago, Spokane, Tacoma and Sioux City. This extensive travelling may well have been an excellent educational experience. It certainly gave him a good chance to observe a number of important buildings then under construction in the American west. He returned to Winnipeg in 1893, and when he opened his own office in 1895, he was immediately successful. In addition to his work with Cadham, his commissions included several churches and private residences. He was the first Manitoba architect to become president of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (1912-13). Aside from his strictly professional activities, Russell was also a director of the Canadian Finance and Securities Company and of the Winnipeg Mercantile Trust. He held stock in a variety of other local enterprises and was known for his good business judgement. He was also a great joiner of fraternal organizations. He was a Scottish Rite Mason, grand secretary of the Masonic Lodge of Manitoba and so active in the Rotary Club that he was known all over the province as "Uncle John."
8. J.D. Atchison was born in 1870 in Monmouth, Illinois. He was educated in the public schools of Chicago and also attended the school of the Art Institute in that city. His most important professional experience was in the offices of Jenney and Mundie, where he worked in the early nineties, and, after a brief interlude in the architectural office of the World's Fair, until 1895. William Le Baron Jenney, the senior partner, was the designer of the first true skyscraper, the Home Insurance Building of 1884, and was one of the best-known designers of commercial buildings in the city. His

name has a notable place in any history of the Chicago School of Architecture. With the work in Jenney's firm as experience, Atchison opened his own office in 1895 and practised in Chicago until 1905 when he was called to Winnipeg on business. He located there in July, and soon had as much work as he could handle. Among his works are the Union Trust and the Great West Life Insurance Company buildings. In these structures he used a version of the neoclassic style which was handled so elegantly by McKim, Mead, and White. In the Fairchild Block he stayed much closer to the Jenney tradition. Atchison became a thoroughly assimilated Canadian. He was a member of the exclusive Manitoba Club, and according to his biographer never had any reason to regret his decision to settle north of the border.