



474 MAIN STREET

DUFFIN BLOCK

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
Researcher: M. Peterson
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474 MAIN STREET – DUFFIN BLOCK

The Canadian Pacific Railway real estate boom in Winnipeg in the early 1880s led to the construction of a number of more substantial buildings in the downtown region. Commercial blocks of all description were built to take advantage of the rising demand for office space or to house new businesses. Often, these blocks were not ornamentally complex, the speculative nature of these buildings, reducing the amount of money spent on decoration.

This was not the case, however, with the new brick block constructed for Simon Duffin and his partner and fellow photographer William Robson. Tenders for the new block were published in the local papers in February 1881, the contract for \$11,860 was let in March and excavation began in May.¹

It opened in 1882 with several tenants, including a drug store and a tobacconist on the ground floor, Steele and Company Photographers on the second floor and Duffin's photo studio on the top level (Plates 2 and 3).² The building, with its extensive Bannatyne Avenue façade and pedimented cornice, was an important part of the downtown streetscape for many decades (Plate 4).

In August 1956, the building was nearly destroyed by fire (Plate 5), the owners at the time deciding to only reconstruct the first floor. Bricking in the arched and square-heading window and door openings along Bannatyne Avenue, the rebuilt retail block was reopened (Plate 6).

STYLE

Today's Duffin Block, is an unadorned retail structure that includes some ornamental detailing along its north wall from its original 1881 construction.

¹ Daily Times, February 25, 1881 and March 11, 1881; and Manitoba Free Press, May 21, 1881, p. 1.

² S.C. Grover, "470 - 474 Main Street, Birt's Saddlery (Former Baker and Duffin Blocks)," report for the Historical Buildings Committee, December 1983, p. 2. The Duffin family lived at the back of the building on the ground floor.

CONSTRUCTION

The 1881 building was of solid brick and measured 9.2 x 21.4 metres (see Appendix I for construction information).

The building has suffered two fires, the first in 1904 when the Bulman Brothers Building (214 Bannatyne Avenue, immediately to the west) was caught fire, damaging the rear of the Duffin Block (and destroying the Ashdown Store across Bannatyne Avenue).³

In February 1956, the owner, H.S. Fashler, had plans drawn up by architect Charles Faurer for renovations to the basement and main floor of the block, adding a mezzanine at the rear of the ground floor for new offices (this was crossed out on the plans), removing interior partitioning, adding new interior wood support posts, renovating the front façade and bricking in some openings on the north side after removing the sidewalk grills and filling in the existing areaways (Plates 7-9). Pencil notes on the plans state that the 2nd and 3rd floors are “abandoned by owner” and a letter from the owner’s lawyers to the City of Winnipeg states the “second floor of the premises are not to be used for any business purposes.”⁴

The more serious fire, in 1956, destroyed the top two floors and rebuilding plans described the replacement of some of the damaged wood beams and posts, a new steel beam along the front wall to support the windows and a new roof.⁵

DESIGN

The front of the present-day Duffin Block features a bank of large display windows which wrap around and continue along the north façade and a door at the north end of the front (east) façade (Plate 10). The remainder of the front elevation is unadorned. The Bannatyne Avenue (north) elevation includes the renovated space at the east end and then the original, 1881 brick walls,

³ Manitoba Free Press, October 12, 1904, pp. 1 and 7. Damage to the building was estimated at \$15,000 and to the contents, \$3,000.

⁴ Architect’s Plans #583/1956, City of Winnipeg.

⁵ Architect’s Plans #3984/1956, City of Winnipeg.

including bricked in square headed and arched openings (Plates 11 and 12), the rear of the elevation includes a small entrance (Plate 13). The arched doorways were originally used to access the upper storey office and work space. The south wall is hidden; the brick rear (west) façade is uninterrupted and includes painted signage (Plate 14).

INTERIOR

The original interior of the Duffin Block was divided into a number of retail stores on the ground floor with both Main Street and Bannatyne Avenue entrances.

Today, after being reduced to one-storey after a fire, the building functions as a retail store. The space includes an old-style sliding metal fire door is found on the south wall (Plate 15), high ceilings and a wood and glass entrance foyer (Plate 16). The basement features exposed rubblestone foundation walls and wood beams and posts and there is an area that extends beyond the front foundation wall underneath the sidewalk (Plate 17).

INTEGRITY

The building stands on its original location and appears to be in good structural condition. The building has significantly changed since its original construction due to fire damage and renovation work.

STREETSCAPE

The block has been an important part of a busy downtown intersection for more than 125 years (Plate 18), although the past 60 years have seen a much less conspicuous presence due to the loss of the upper floors. The structure is located in “Bankers’ Row” several blocks of pre-World War I banking halls in Winnipeg’s Exchange District National Historic Site. All buildings in this district are an essential part of the historic streetscape and as such, the Historical Buildings and Resources Committee has given them 60 points.

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS

The architect for the original building was the City of Winnipeg's Engineer, Thomas H. Parr.⁶ Born in England in 1849, Parr immigrated to Canada in 1871 and two years later had settled in Winnipeg and taken up the position of City Engineer.⁷ It was a period of tremendous growth in the City and Parr was responsible for the overseeing of many large projects including street construction, sidewalks, sewers and other infrastructure. His name is associated with City Hall, Main Street (1876 – demolished), James H. Ashdown House (1877 – demolished), Stobart, Eden and Company Store, Portage la Prairie, MB (1880), Macdonnell and Reynolds Block (1880), Dr. Ferguson House (1880), Dufferin School, Alexander Avenue, (1881 – demolished) and Central Fire Hall, William Avenue (1882 – demolished).⁸

In early 1883, several City councillors sought to have him demoted or fired because he "...had made several important blunders during the past year which resulted in serious financial loss to the City" including "the building of the new City Hall five feet out into the street; the use of inferior cement pipes in laying the sewers on Queen Street, in consequence of which a caving-in took place, necessitating the doing of the work over again at great expense; and the elevating of sundry sidewalks to too great a height."⁹ Parr met with the councillors and explained the issues surrounding these projects and was allowed to continue, but several weeks later, he was demoted to assistant engineer.¹⁰ He is reported to have remained in Winnipeg after this demotion, working as a private civil engineer, contractor and surveyor before moving to British Columbia in 1892.¹¹

The listed contractors for the building were Saul and Herrler.¹²

⁶ Daily Times, March 11, 1881.

⁷ "Parr, T.H.," in Robert G. Hill, Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada, 1800-1950, online edition, 2009-2014, <http://www.dictionaryofarchitectsincanada.org/>.

⁸ Manitoba Free Press, 1873-1894; Daily Times, 1881-1890. He formed a brief partnership in 1881 with William T. Dalton.

⁹ Manitoba Free Press, March 5, 1883, p. 8

¹⁰ Manitoba Free Press, March 21, 1883, p. 8.

¹¹ "Parr, T.H.," op. cit.

¹² Daily Times, March 11, 1881.

PERSON/INSTITUTION

Simon Duffin (Plate 19) was born in Ireland in 1843 but immigrated to Canada at an early age and settled in Ontario. He came to Winnipeg in 1872 and established a pioneer photography business on Garry Street in 1873.¹³ After several moves, he purchased, according to a local newspaper, “that desirable property on the corner of Main and Bannatyne Streets...”¹⁴ and built a new studio and store (Plate 1). In 1888, Duffin sold his retail business to Steele and Wing (later Steele and Company) to concentrate on selling wholesale photographic supplies from his new premises in the same block (Plate 20), selling cameras, developing materials, back-drops and props for studio work as well as operating a developing laboratory.¹⁵ Duffin died on July 26, 1900¹⁶ and the business was purchased by his son-in-law N.F. Calder, incorporating it as Duffin and Company in 1908 with Calder its president and Duffin’s son its vice-president. This company continued until 1926 when it was sold to Eastman Kodak.¹⁷

The Duffin Block, originally owned by Duffin and William Robson, was owned by Isabella V. Robson (relationship unknown) and the Simon Duffin Estate by 1901 and from 1911 to 1924 by Archbishop Samuel Pritchard Matheson, Judge Alexander Dawson and A.D. Irish, manager of the Mutual Life Assurance Company.¹⁸ By 1929, representatives of Simon Duffin and Isabella V. Robson once again owned the building, selling it in 1946 to H.S. Fashler, merchant and owner of Fifth Avenue Fur and Ladies Wear Shop which had opened in the ground floor of the building only months before.¹⁹

¹³ F.H. Schofield, The Story of Manitoba, (Winnipeg, MB: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1913), Vol. II, pp. 682-85; Pioneers and Early Citizens of Manitoba, (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Library Association, 1971), p. 70; and Manitoba Free Press, November 15, 1873, p. 1.

¹⁴ Manitoba Free Press, July 21, 1877, p. 7.

¹⁵ S.C. Grover, op. cit., p. 1.

¹⁶ Manitoba Free Press, July 30, 1900, p. 4.

¹⁷ “Manitoba Photographers: Simon Duffin (1843-1900),” Manitoba Historical Society website, October 2013, http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/photographers/duffin_s.shtml#20.

¹⁸ City of Winnipeg Assessment Roll, Roll No. 608531-12-2, PC 30 (below as ARo), 1880-1930.

¹⁹ Winnipeg Free Press, August 2, 1956, p. 3.

In 1969, the Duffin Block and the neighbouring Baker Block were purchased by the Birt Saddlery Company.²⁰ This company has had a long history in Winnipeg, organized ca.1907, by James John Murray “John” Birt and headquartered for many decades at 519 Main Street, selling bags, suit cases and “Everything Useful in Leather”²¹ (Plate 21). Birt was born in Newport, Wales in 1875 and came to Canada in 1888, settling in Winnipeg. He worked for the Canadian Pacific Railway as the chief telegrapher operator²² and in 1908, married Lulu Denby Hutchings (1886-1956),²³ the daughter of saddle, harness and leather magnate E.F. Hutchings (1855-1930).²⁴ Birt’s may have been the retail arm of his father-in-law’s wholesale/manufacturing business, Great West Saddlery Company.²⁵

Birt retired from the business in 1934, its management was taken over by J. William (Bill) Thompson²⁶ who came to Winnipeg from Calgary, AB and ultimately purchased the company. In 1935, his son, William Maurice Thompson (1910-1987) left his Edmonton, AB job as Department Manager for Great West Saddlery to join his father operating Birt’s in Winnipeg.²⁷ Together, the long-time St. James residents would grow their clothing and leather goods business from their store at 519 Main Street until the mid-1960s when the entire block was razed for the Centennial Concert Hall complex. The company moved into its new home, the Baker Block and ultimately expanded to take over the Duffin Block (Plate 22). Birt Saddlery, purchased from W.M. Thompson by his daughter and future Winnipeg Mayor Susan Thompson in 1980, remained in the building until the early 1990s.²⁸

²⁰ ARO, 1930-1970.

²¹ Winnipeg Free Press, February 6, 1953, p. 12, cites 1907 as the organization of the company although the first newspaper mention of the company, a small advertisement, is found in Manitoba Free Press, December 23, 1912, p. 6.

²² Winnipeg Free Press, February 6, 1953, p. 12.

²³ Winnipeg Free Press, July 21, 1956, p. 10.

²⁴ Manitoba Free Press, November 30, 1908, p. 8.

²⁵ Winnipeg Free Press, October 2, 1973, pp. 25 and 26.

²⁶ The name also appears as William J. Thompson in other sources.

²⁷ Winnipeg Free Press, February 12, 1987, p. 52.

²⁸ Henderson’s Directory, 1980-2000.

Tenancy in the block has been extremely varied over the years.²⁹ The Main Street retail space was originally occupied by William Whitehead and Company, druggists, the upper floors, which were first numbered 2 Bannatyne Avenue West (and later 204-208 Bannatyne Avenue), were rented out by George W. Searl, photographer, Dr. D. McPhee, dentist, J. McLean, commercial traveller, Willmot (Marcel) and Stewart (George W.), architects, Chesterton and McNichol, architects, Mills and Bannerman, real estate, Pope and Beach, tin roofs and plumbing and A.G.E. Lepper, Governor's secretary. Early records suggest the Duffin family also resided in the block.

Other Main Street retail tenants included: William Roberts and Company, tobacconists (1899 and 1891); Charles F. Hasselfield, druggist (1901); Connell and Company, druggists (1905, 1911 and 1919); and 20th Century Barber and United Cigar Store (1929-1949). Later occupants of the upper floors included: Dr. R.R. Dalglish, dentist (1884 and 1895); Steele and Company, photographers (1891-1911); Mrs. W.M. Saxton, artist (1904); James A. Kelly, clothes cleaner (1911); Babcock-Wilcox and Goldie-McCulloch, boilers, engines and pumps (1930-1943); and Peerless Carbon (1930-1943).

EVENT

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

CONTEXT

The Duffin Block, even in its reduced state, is still representative of the early development of Winnipeg. The real estate and construction boom of the early 1880s, caused by the construction of the first transcontinental railway, the Canadian Pacific Railway, had an effect on Winnipeg's downtown that is still felt today. The Duffin Block was built to supply a demand for modern office and retail space and was located on one of the city's major intersections. It continues to be a part of the retail property found along Main Street.

LANDMARK

Many Winnipeggers are familiar with this small building on its busy downtown corner site.

²⁹ Tenancy lists compiled from Henderson's Directory and City of Winnipeg Assessment Roll.



APPENDIX I

CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report Assessment Record

Building Address: 474 Main Street (472-74)

Building Name: Duffin Block (Birt's Saddlery)

Original Use: offices

Current Use: retail

Roll No. (Old): 608531 (10059) – same Roll No. as 468 Main from 1969 until present

Municipality: 12

Ward: 2

Property or Occupancy Code: 30

Legal Description: 6/7 St. John, Plan 4, Lot 3, Lot 7 (Original: 6 & 7^W St. John, Plan 3, Lot 6)

Location: southwest corner Bannatyne Avenue

Date of Construction: 1880

Storeys: 1 (originally 3)

Construction Type: Ordinary – brick

HERITAGE STATUS: ON NOMINATED LIST

Building Permits (Plans available: [CS] City Storage):

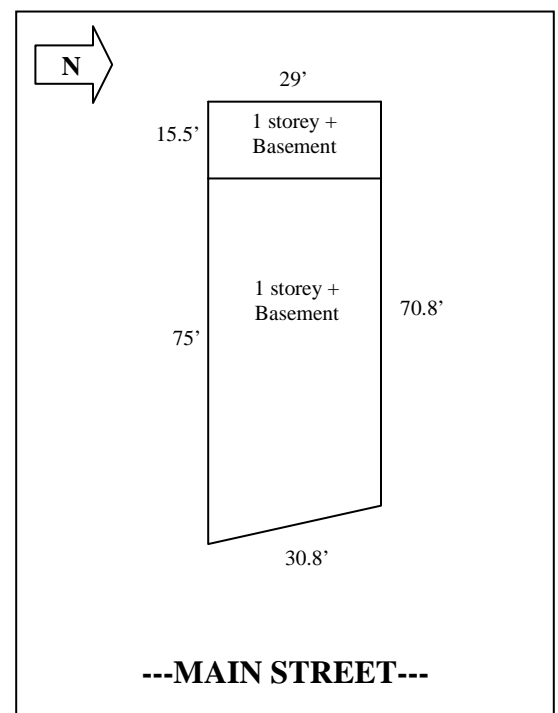
- 429/1938 \$700 (alterations); 6110/1954 [CS] \$2,000 (alterations); 583/1956 [CS] \$4,000 (alterations & repairs to first floor); 3984/1956 [CS] \$5,000 (repairs after fire); 486/1958 \$1,500 (roof sign); 6524/1965 \$450 (store alterations);

Information:

- 29 x 73 x 23 + = 49,725 cu. ft.
- Exterior – walls solid brick
- 10/22/57 – Building repaired & renovated after fire. Top two storeys removed and roof put on 1st. New wall lining and ceiling
- 1965 – Basement floor in poor condition; balance of store in good condition
- Permit 6524/1965 – cut doorway between #468/70 and #472/74
- 1990 – Heating system converted to force-air gas

ARCHITECT: T.H. PARR

CONTRACTOR: SAUL & HERRLER



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Plate 1 – West side of Main Street south of Bannatyne Avenue, late 1870s. Simon Duffin’s photography studio is seen on the right and would be taken down in 1881 to make way for his new brick building. ([University of Alberta Archives, 74-169-15-69.](#))

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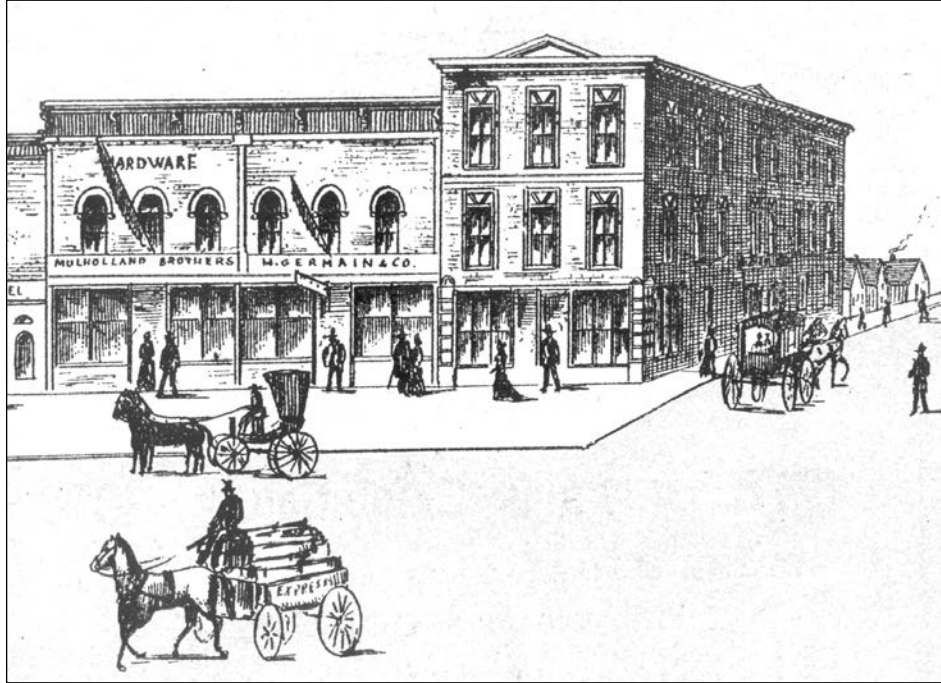


Plate 2 – West side of Main Street at Bannatyne Avenue, 1881. The Duffin Block is three storeys with a small pediment on the right. (Archives of Manitoba, “Winnipeg-Streets-Main 1881-1”.)



Plate 3 – Duffin Block, 1892. (Archives of Manitoba, “Winnipeg-Streets-Main 1892-1”.)

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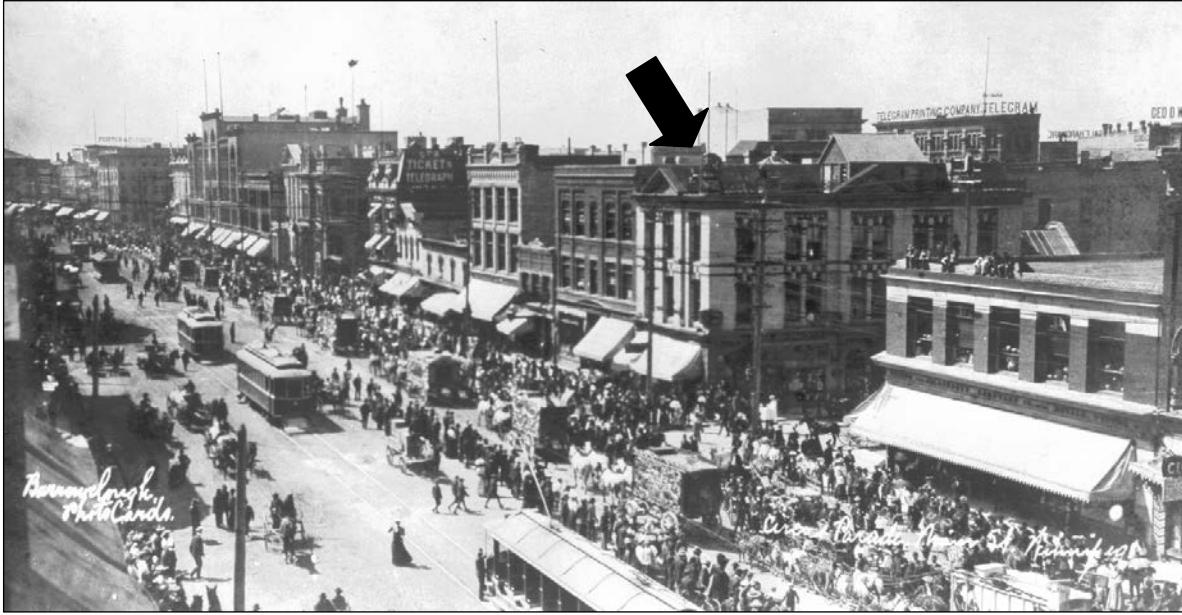


Plate 4 – Circus parade on Main Street, ca.1903. The Duffin Block is at the arrow. (Archives of Manitoba, “Winnipeg-Streets-Main c1903-3”.)

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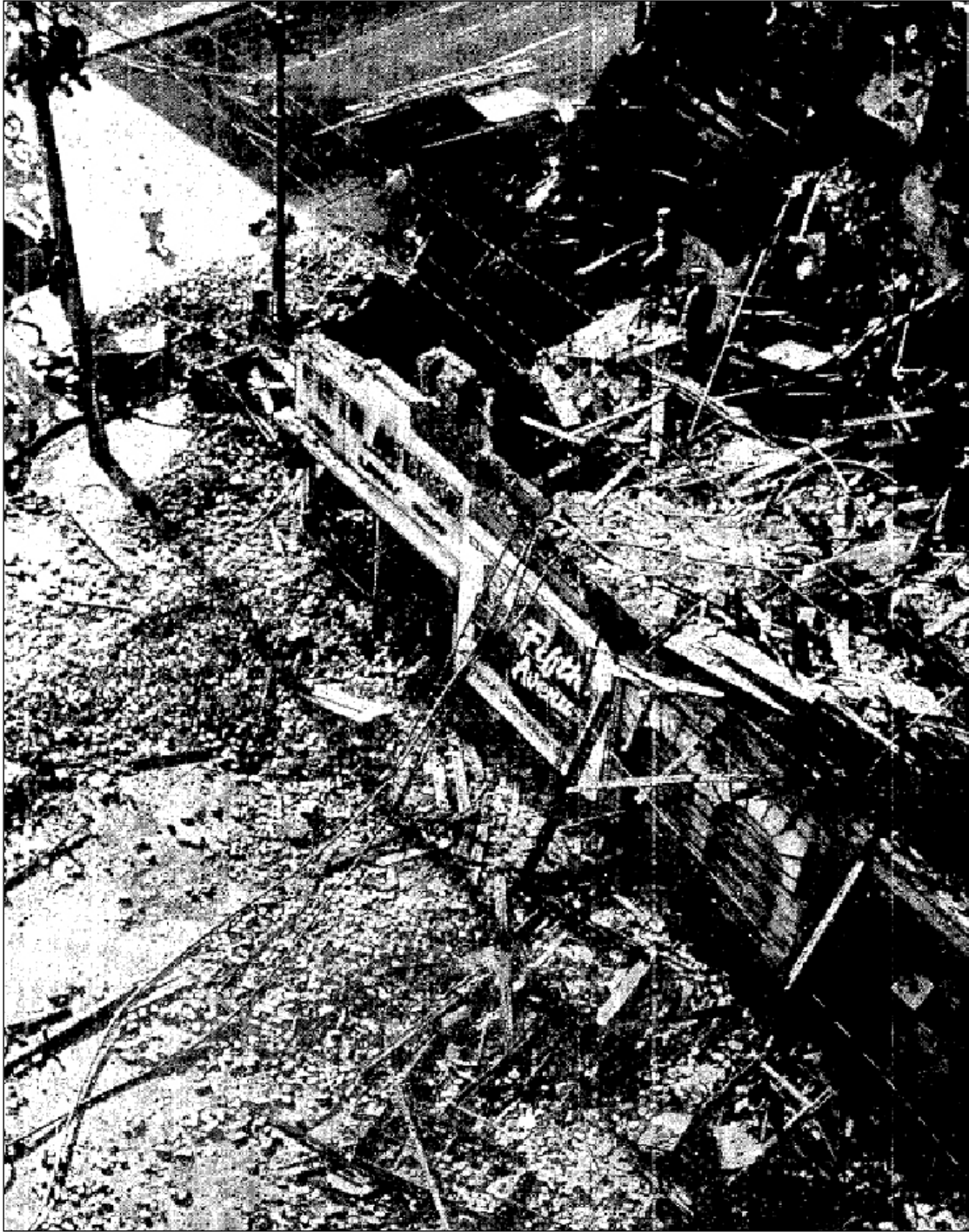


Plate 5 – The fire damage to the Duffin Block, 474 Main Street, 1956. (Reproduced from the Winnipeg Free Press, August 2, 1956, p. 3.)

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Plate 6 – Duffin Block, 474 Main Street, front (east) and north façades, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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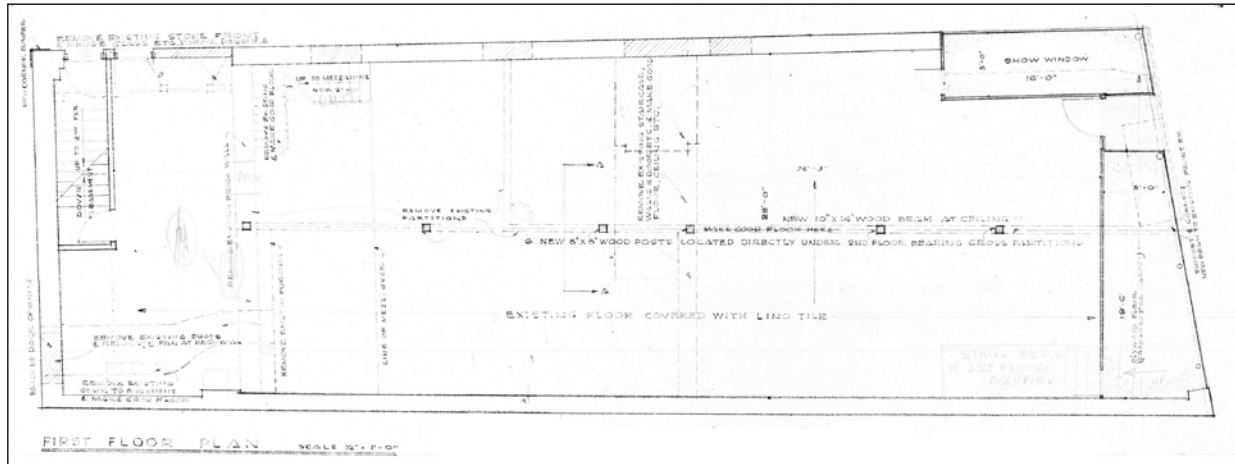
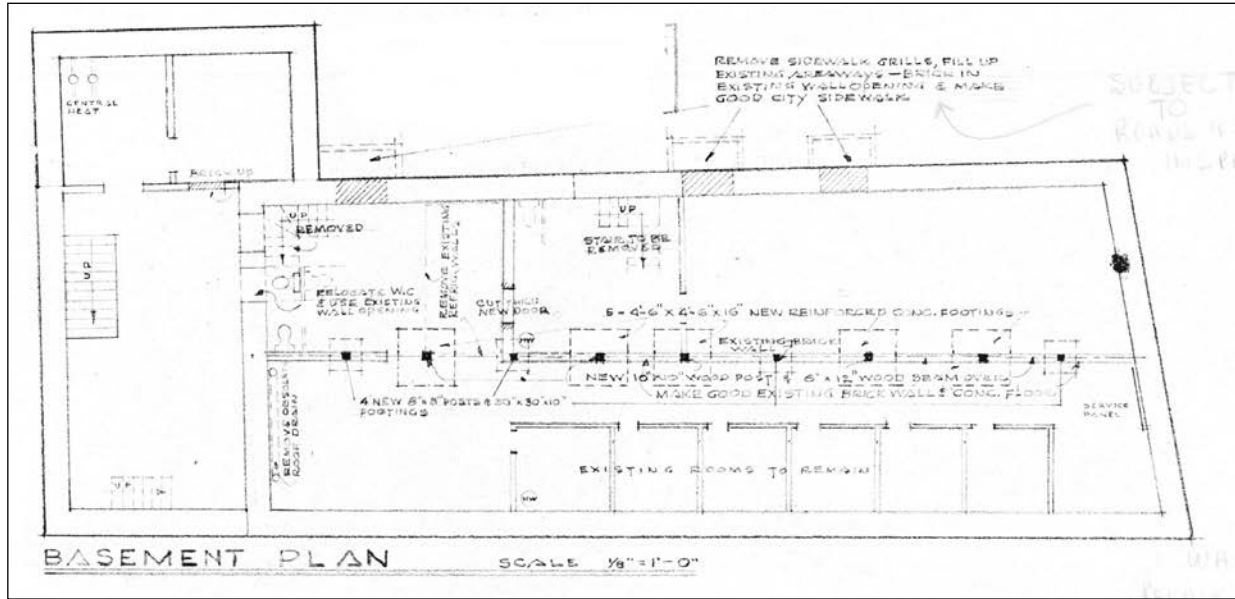


Plate 7 – “Basement Plan” and “First Floor Plan”, architect’s drawing, Plan #583/1956. (City of Winnipeg.)

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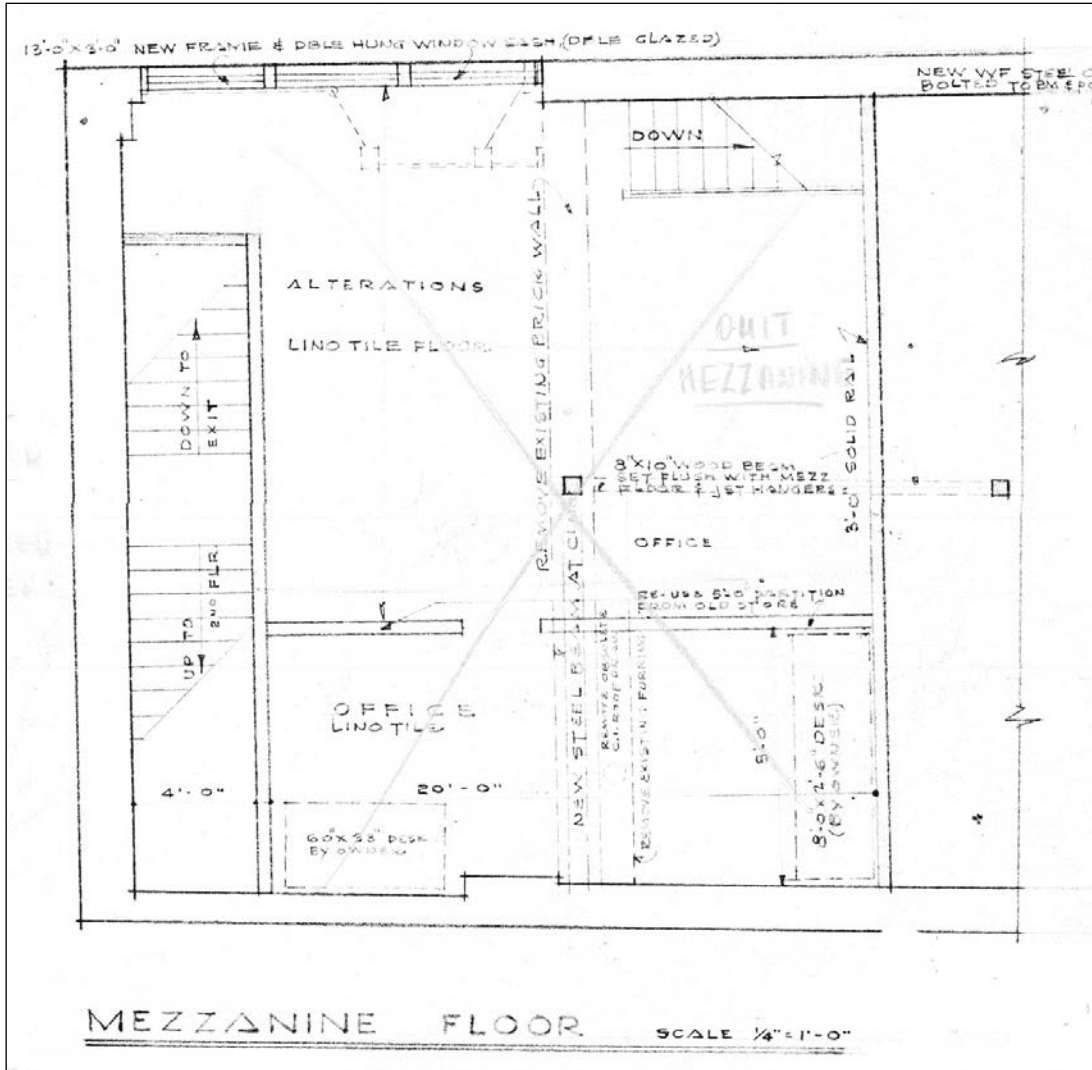


Plate 8 – “Mezzanine Floor”, architect’s drawing, Plan #583/1956. An “X” and the words “Omit Mezzanine” have been pencilled in on the original plans. (City of Winnipeg.)

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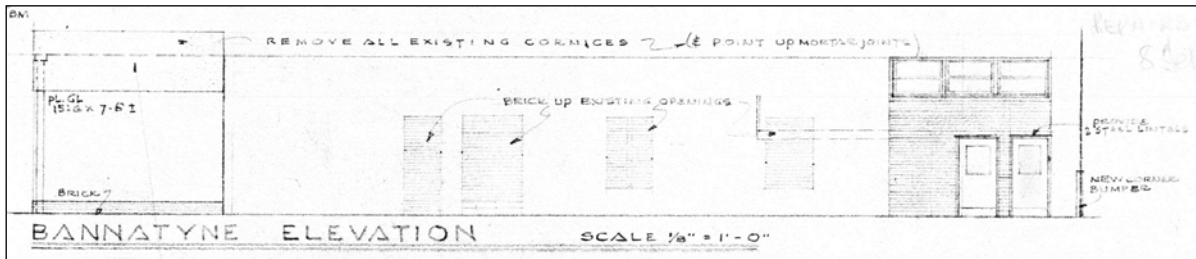
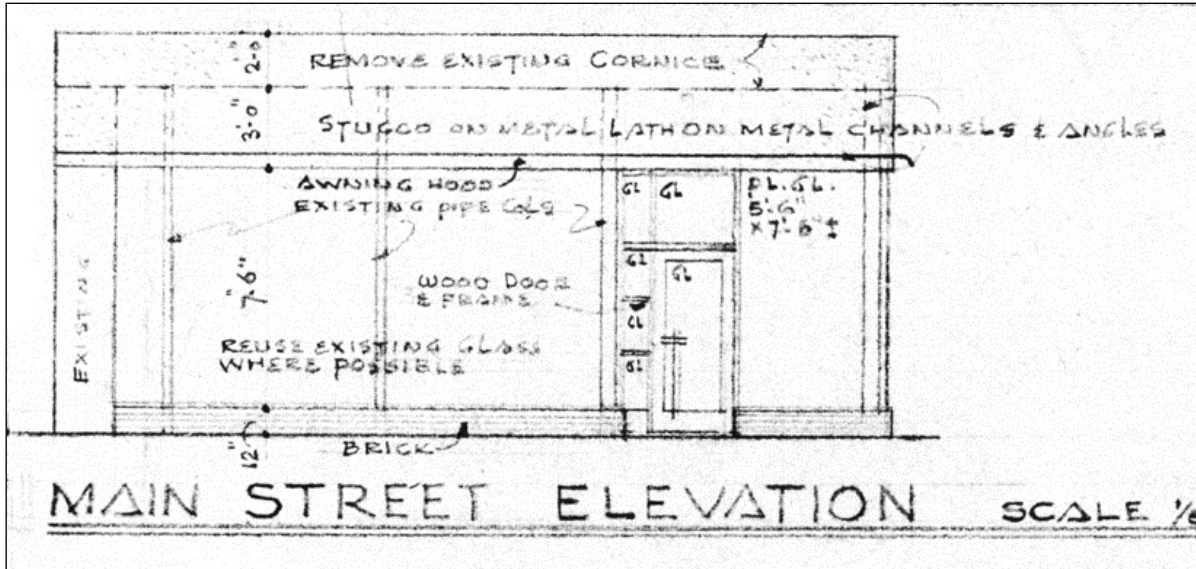


Plate 9 – “Main Street Elevation” and “Bannatyne Elevation,” architect’s drawing, Plan #583/1956. (City of Winnipeg.)

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Plate 10 – Duffin Block, 474 Main Street, northeast corner, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)



Plate 11 – Duffin Block, 474 Main Street, north façade, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 12 – Duffin Block, 474 Main Street, detail of north façade, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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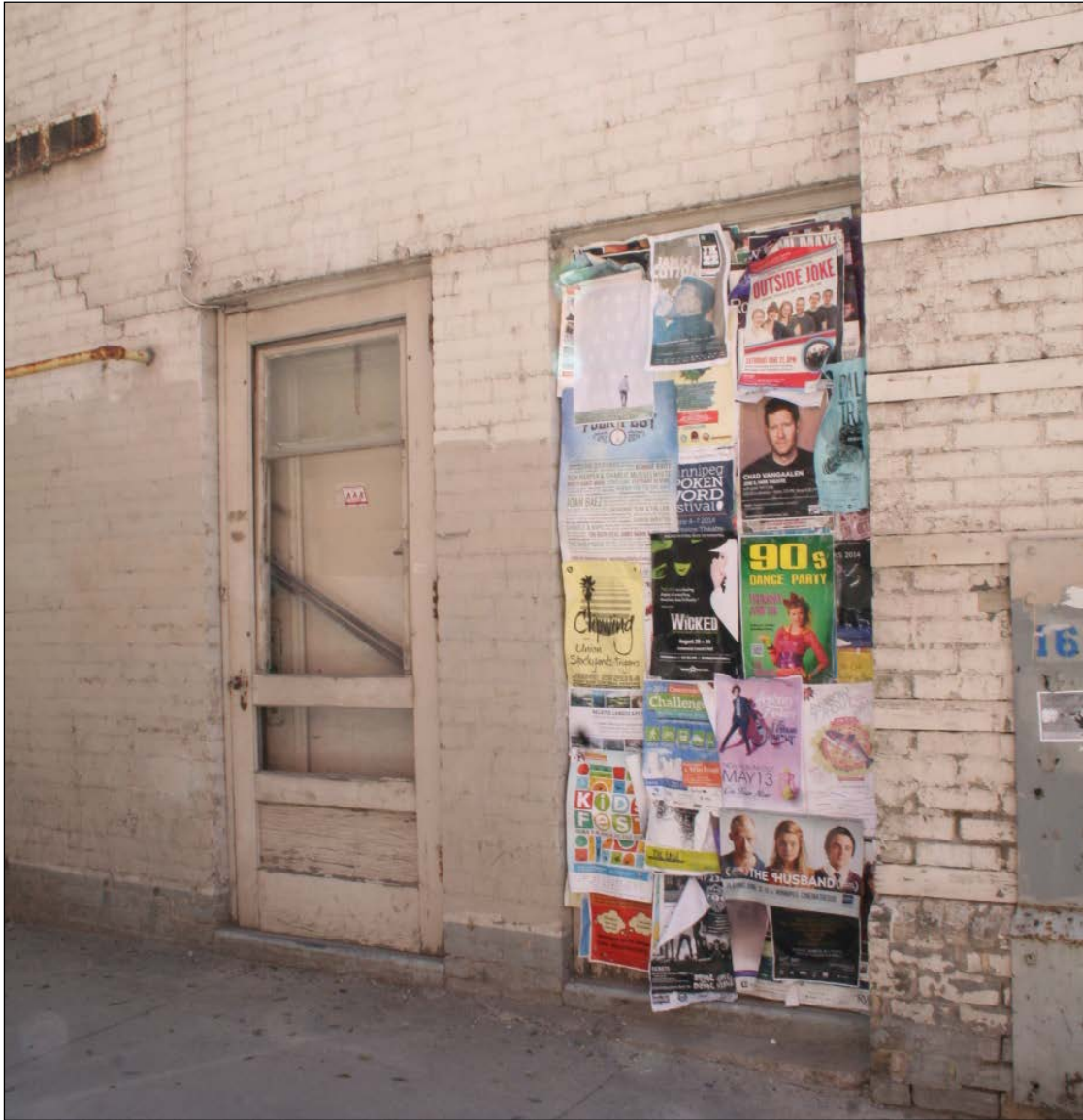


Plate 13 – Duffin Block, 474 Main Street, west end of north façade, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 14 – Duffin Block, 474 Main Street, rear (west) façade, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)



Plate 15 – Duffin Block, 474 Main Street, fire door on the south wall, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 16 – Duffin Block, 474 Main Street, front entrance foyer, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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Plate 17 – Duffin Block, 474 Main Street, basement, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

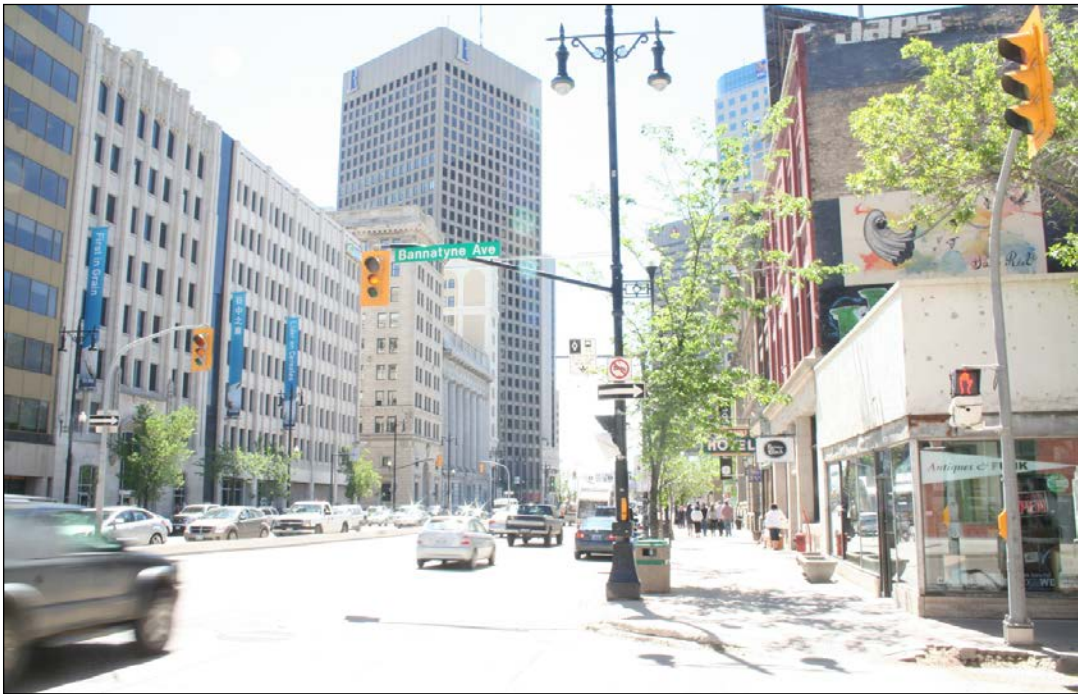


Plate 18 – Main Street looking south from Bannatyne Avenue, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)

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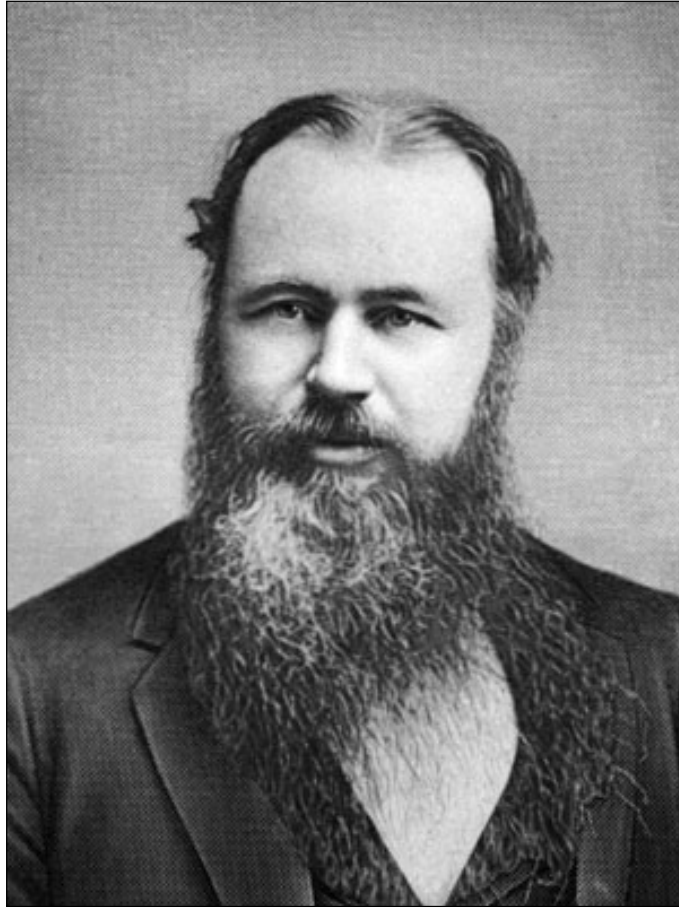


Plate 19 – Simon Duffin (1843-1900), ca.1913. (Manitoba Pictorial and Biographical, Volume 1
[Winnipeg, MB: S. J. Clarke Publishing, 1913], p. 99.)

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Plate 20 – The Duffin Block on the far right, with the Baker Block (470 Main Street) beside it, ca.1903. Steele and Company Photographs, a tenant of the Duffin Block, took the shot. (Archives of Manitoba, “Winnipeg-Streets-Main c1903-1”.)

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Plate 21 – Main Street north of Market Avenue, 1964. The Birt Saddlery Company occupies 519 Main Street, the four-storey corner building on the right. The block was built in ca.1892 for the E.F. Hutchings Saddlery Company (which became Great West Saddlery Company) and demolished in the mid-1960s to make way for the Centennial Concert Hall/Museum of Man and Nature/Planetarium complex. ([University of Manitoba Archives, Winnipeg Tribune Collection, PC 18/1486/18-1486-002.](#))

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Plate 22 – Birt Saddlery Building, 468-474 Main Street, 1970. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Architectural Survey.)