

# Landmarks

## Portage la Prairie's Significant Commercial Heritage Buildings

### **T**he Portage la Prairie Special Places

project was inaugurated in 2012-13, with the first major component being a comprehensive and detailed inventory of 75 commercial buildings (a project focusing on the community's residential and religious sites is in development). Through rigorous analysis and assessment processes suggested to us by the province's Historic Resources Branch, we have identified a handful of buildings that most effectively define and illustrate key aspects of the history and heritage that defines our commercial core – Saskatchewan Avenue. The following list of eight buildings constitutes the Portage la Prairie Heritage Advisory Committee's recommendations and reminders to the community about those places that have major claims for heritage significance as commercial sites:

- Bank of Montreal
- Brown's Stock Exchange
- Cassels Star Bakery
- Hill's Drug Store
- McCulloch Block

- McKillops Funeral Home & Furniture
- Newman Block
- Philip Baron Groceries

Each building is presented on the following pages, with an accompanying Heritage Value Statement that elucidates their key heritage attributes. This kind of short, sharp list will enable the community to focus attention and resources when it undertakes future heritage endeavours, be they a walking tour, community website, school projects, plaquing programs and even designations.

As noted, the development of this short list of significant sites was the result of careful and studied deliberations using standard heritage evaluation criteria, processes and scoring regimes. This work was carried out by the Portage la Prairie Heritage Advisory Committee with assistance from staff of the Historic Resources Branch of Manitoba Tourism, Culture, Heritage, Sport and Consumer Protection. We are grateful to the branch for their generous support and patient attention in this endeavour.

As a collection, these eight buildings sum up key themes in Portage la Prairie's commercial history, and do so through places that are at once significant, but also interesting and attractive. At a time when historic commercial thoroughfares are rapidly disappearing, either through demolition of individual buildings or renovations that completely alter original facades, the sites noted here are all the more important. Together they reveal the kinds of functions that typified many Manitoba Main Streets – a bank, a pharmacy, general stores, a bakery, a furniture operation and a livery stable. The collection also presents very effectively the type of architectural vocabulary used on commercial buildings around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus we see the most common style, Romanesque Revival, with its solid masonry facades carried out with exquisite brick features and details – round-arched windows, pilasters, corbel tables at the roofline, all making for rich and expressive front facades. And originally, when there were so many more, all in a line that made for a truly grand and lively architectural presence – as suggested by the archival images featured opposite and on the following page.



View of Portage la Prairie, looking east, ca. 1900.

Portage la Prairie, Man.

Saskatchewan Ave.



Archival view of Saskatchewan Avenue, on a parade day, ca, 1900.

# Bank of Montreal

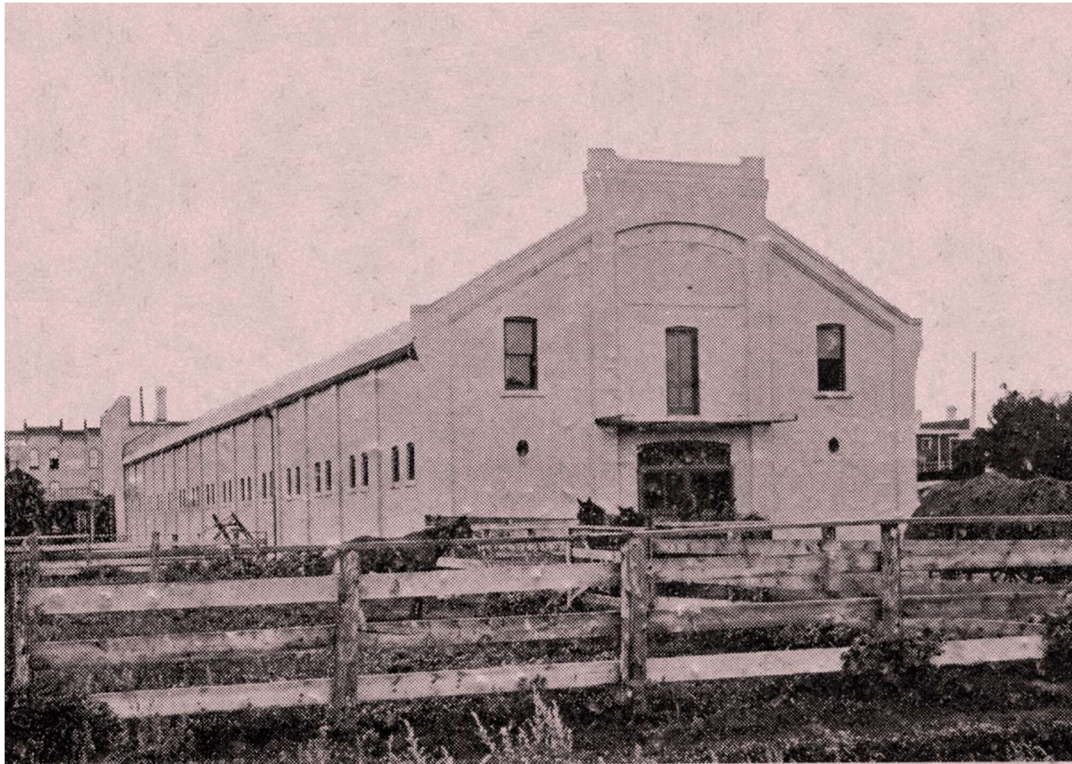


Archival view, ca. 1970.

## Heritage Value Statement

The Bank of Montreal (1907) is a fine example of the kind of small-but-impressive building many banks were putting up in towns across the west in the early-20<sup>th</sup> century, as they strove to develop corporate identity and convey a sense of solidity in a time when a failing bank would take the community's savings with it. Details such as the classical doorway, with its triangular pediment and coat of arms, the corner pilasters with lion's head capitals, and the prominent limestone keystones, dentilled cornice, and banded rustication of the lower level were all intended to create associations with a classical tradition that had lasted several millennia. Some elegant interior details also survive.

## Brown's Stock Exchange



Archival view, ca. 1910.

### **Heritage Value Statement**

Brown's Stock Exchange (1902-3) is an extremely unusual surviving example of a brick commercial stable from the early-20th century. The stable was home to a winning string of trotting horses for several years. Brothers J. and E. Brown bought and sold horses out of this building—one could even order a horse through the mail—as well as selling carriages, engines and farming implements. The building was later repurposed as a bus depot. As reflected by the rows of small windows in the side walls, the interior of the long, gable-roofed building was lined on either side with horse stalls separated by a central corridor. Though quite plain, its gable ends are enlivened by a central parapet and brick framing. Shallow vertical piers separate pairs of windows on the side elevations, and articulate the entrance.

## Cassels Star Bakery



### Heritage Value Statement

Cassels Star Bakery (1892) is a fine example of a small-scale brick Victorian commercial building with an apartment above – a typical mixed use of the period. For many years the building was home to one bakery or another. Although this is basically a utilitarian building, the Victorians were fond of ornament, and the builders did not miss out on the chance to decorate the parapet with lively checkerboard, sawtooth and meander patterns, executed in red brick. The ground-floor storey has been altered, but it retains the basic pattern of a Victorian storefront, with a recessed entranceway and large display windows. Buildings of this type once lined Saskatchewan Avenue. Now, this attractive little building is the last of its kind in the row, though other survivors are hiding behind newer facades.

## Hill's Drug Store



Archival view, ca. 1900.

### Heritage Value Statement

Hill's Drug Store (1901) is an important surviving landmark of Saskatchewan Avenue's Victorian commercial heyday, with its eye-catching round-arched second-storey windows on both street fronts. The commercial Romanesque Revival building is executed in buff brick, with ornamental brickwork at the second-storey level in checkerboard, meander and sawtooth patterns setting off the row of double-arcaded arched windows. The tall parapet creates an illusion of greater height, giving the building a solid presence in this prominent corner location. Built for pharmacist J.K. Hill, the building has been home to a drug store for well over a century.

## McCulloch Block



### Heritage Value Statement

The McCulloch Block (1908) is a very good example of a small Edwardian commercial building. It is quite plain in contrast to the city's surviving Victorian examples, with their fancy brickwork, but the elegant proportions and large central display window make for an attractive building in a restrained style. The recessed entrances, with steps leading up to them at either side, give the building a sense of occasion out of proportion to its modest size. The building was built for J.J. (Jake) McCulloch, who had recently purchased the *Conservative Semi-Weekly News*, for which he became both editor and manager. The locally-born McCulloch had learned type-setting in the office of the *Manitoba Liberal*, where he worked for seven years as a printer, and the McCulloch Block served as a print shop as well as the newspaper's headquarters.

## McKillops Funeral Home & Furniture



### Heritage Value Statement

McKillops (1899) is an attractive example of a Victorian commercial building in brick. Although the main floor has been much altered, the second storey, with its four slightly-recessed arched windows separated by narrow piers, is intact. The decorative brickwork—perhaps the best surviving in the city—includes an unusual openwork arcaded parapet, flanked on either side by a little pinnacle with a pyramidal roof. Beneath this is a classical cornice, with a dentillated course topping a garlanded frieze in zinc or tin. Brick basketwork and a meander row complete the ornament. The building was for a long time home to McKillops Funeral Home and furniture store – a common combination of that era.

## Newman Block



Archival view, ca. 1900.

### Heritage Value Statement

The Newman Block (1902) is a landmark reminder of the appearance of Victorian Saskatchewan Avenue in its architectural heyday. It was built by the C. Jeffrey firm, which brought Wilbert Jeffrey, a stonemason, from Ontario to work on it. Its decorative brickwork and the bevelled corner entrance topped by a curved pediment, with the date and building name incised in Tyndall stone, make it a striking building still today despite the heavy reworking of the main floor. The Newman Brothers were prosperous grocers and liquor merchants, and F.L. Newman served as mayor in 1892-93. This building, known as Newman's East, was a retail store, while Newman's West was a wholesale outfitter.

# Philip Baron Groceries



## Heritage Value Statement

Built in about 1892, Philip Baron Groceries is a small but substantial brick commercial building. Large display windows light the main-floor commercial space, approached through a recessed entrance, while a second door at the east end leads to the apartment above via a steep stairwell lit by a tall transom. The building appears quite plain at first, but closer examination reveals segmental-arched windows and also decorative wooden brackets at the second floor and original roof level; a more recent third storey addition probably covered over or caused the removal of a decorative parapet. Philip Baron was an early arrival amongst a group of Russian-born Jewish immigrants who settled in the city between 1906 and 1915. Like Baron, a number became merchants, initially catering largely to the Ukrainian immigrant community, who appreciated the ability to communicate in their mother tongue.