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Petite Perfection: The Inglis Building

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The Inglis building, originally built in 1908, stands at 291 Garry Street just south of Portage Avenue. It is an excellent, well preserved example of the Chicago School of Architecture. The building was given municipal heritage designation on June 27, 2002.

The Chicago School of Architecture was named for pioneering architects from the Windy City, who in the 1880's and 1890's created a new form of architectural design, soaring up lighter and brighter than the previous Gothic and Neoclassical Revival styles that had previously been popular. As always, the aesthetic differences were made possible by the technological advances of construction, such as concrete reinforcing and frames made of steel. There are several examples of Chicago School architecture in Winnipeg, notably the Paris Building on Portage Avenue, the Electric Railway Chambers Building on Notre Dame Avenue, and the Confederation Life Building on Main Street.



The Paris Building, present day.
Built 1915 by Carter-Halls-Aldinger and designed by [John Woodman](#) and [Raymond M. Carey](#).
Source: Manitoba Historical Society



The Electric Railway Chambers Building, present day.
Built 1912 by Carter-Halls-Aldinger and designed by [Ralph B. Pratt](#) and [Donald A. Ross](#).
Source: Manitoba Historical Society



The Confederation Life Building, present day.
Built in 1912 by Carter-Halls-Aldinger and designed by J. Wilson Gray of Toronto.
Source: Manitoba Historical Society

All these buildings are located in highly prominent locations, easy to see and dominating of the landscape due to their size and mass. However, before any of these were built, a small unassuming cafe was built on a little side-street just off of Portage Avenue, which came to be known as the Inglis Building.



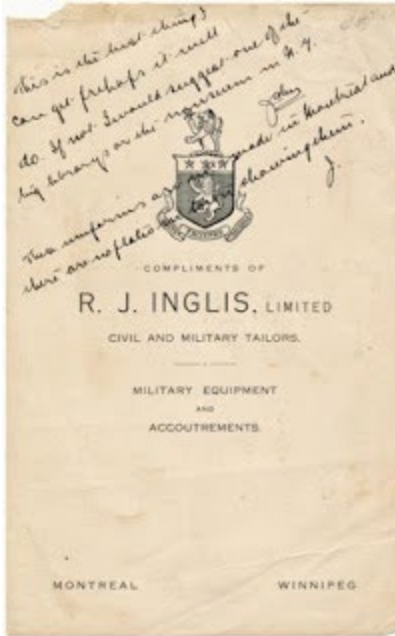
Front facade of the Inglis Building, 2018
Photo: Naomi Brien

The Inglis building was originally built as a small, one-storey cafe on Garry Street. Constructed in 1908 by A. F. Thomas, the little cafe was almost immediately expanded another 16 feet back from the street and a second level was added. In 1914, namesake the R. J. Inglis tailoring firm bought the building and commissioned architect [Herbert Bell Rugh](#), working out of the Union Bank building, to renovate the existing building, including the original bland facade. A couple years later, Inglis added another 40 feet to the back of the building, bringing it to its present-day size.



Detail of the crest on the Inglis Building, 2006
Source: Historic Resources Branch

The most prominent feature of the Inglis building, apart from interior elements like the vault and impressive staircase, is the stunning front facade facing Garry Street. Done in Tyndall stone and white terracotta, the elaborate facade instantly catches the eye. Looking closer, the intricate carved flowers and vegetation on the sides of the building rise alongside smooth columns closer to the centre. Flanking the large carved letters proclaiming "INGLIS" is more terracotta work, and above that, six lions' heads project outwards towards the street. Topping the building is a grand shield and crest, sloping down on either side to flaming urns, finishing the positively regal look of the building. R. J. Inglis Ltd. flourished in Winnipeg as tailors for civilian clothing but also for making and repairing military uniforms, as well as scabbards (sheath for weapon) and badges. They operated out of the building at 291 Garry until 1924, when they moved to new premises.



Note from R. J. Inglis Ltd
Source: Wartime Canada

In 1945, the building was purchased by the North-West Commercial Travellers' Association, which operated in Canada from 1882 to 2014. During the tenancy of the NWCTA in the Inglis building, they covered the large inscribed letters with their own initials. The North-West Travellers' Association was formed for travelling businessmen, to promote their interests and to offer perks like discounted hotel rooms, restaurant meals, and railway tickets. The NWCTA's membership certificate No. 1 went to founding member, Western Canada's first travelling salesman [Thomas Johnson](#). Johnson eventually made his home in Winnipeg at 3 Academy Road (no longer standing).



Inglis Building, 2006: showing the NWCTA sign that labeled the building for many years.
Source: Parks Canada

While the North West Commercial Travellers Association occupied the top floor of the building, the ground floor housed [Monarch Life Assurance Co.](#) from 1946 to 1964, and Fidelity Trust from 1964 to 1976. These companies are linked to two other heritage buildings in Winnipeg - while the North West Commercial Travellers Association had moved into the Inglis building from the [Travellers Building](#), Monarch Life Assurance Co. went on to build the magnificent [Monarch Life Building](#) in 1962. A few years after, in March 1978, the City of Winnipeg threatened to demolish the Inglis building to make way for an exit from the Winnipeg Square parkade, but was defeated by dedicated citizens, architects, and the Manitoba Historical Society (this particular fight was a little early for Heritage Winnipeg, which was incorporated on July 24th, 1978). In the early 1990s, the NWCTA moved out of the Inglis building to a different building on Main Street, and left the building empty.

In 2012, Metric Marketing acquired the Inglis building, and recognized its historic value right away! An undisclosed amount was spent restoring the exterior facade, and another \$250,000 was spend to renovate the interior for commercial use. The results were stunning, and in February 2018, Heritage Winnipeg awarded Metric Marketing, BridgmanCollaborative Architecture, and Alpha Masonry with a Commercial Conservation Award for their joint effort in restoring this landmark building. The restored Inglis Building joins other historic buildings on Garry Street in creating a streetscape dating back to the early 20th century.

The Inglis building, although perhaps not in a prominent location or as monumental as other Winnipeg landmarks, still represents an integral part of Winnipeg's heritage. The height of the

building allows the elaborate decoration on the facade to be viewed easily by passers-by, and likely the distinctive building allowed easy recognition of the businesses lucky enough to be tenants. Luckily for Winnipeggers, that association continues thanks to the efforts of Metric Marketing - *do you know them? They're in the Inglis Building on Garry!*

Written by Natassja Brien for Heritage Winnipeg

Sources:

Heritage Winnipeg Resource Centre and Files

[MHS: Inglis Building](#)

[Historic Places: Inglis Building](#)

[Inglis Civil and Military Tailors](#)