

NORTHWEST NOTES

Branch Office of THE CANADIAN ARCHITECT AND BUILDER,
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The progress of the many building propositions continues apace. Contractors on every hand are making the most of the excellent run of fine weather we have recently had, and had it been possible to have obtained a full supply of materials, greater headway would have been made and much more satisfaction to all sections of the community have resulted. As it is, however, building operations are sadly in arrears of the positive necessities of the immediate demands. Offices, warehouses and dwellings are alike pressing their needs to the front and vying with one another for first attention.

Office space in any desirable location is almost impossible to obtain, and in the event of any office being vacated plenty of occupants are readily forthcoming, and rents are consequently going up with leaps and bounds. The conveniences, too, of many of these buildings are sadly deficient, and no attempt is being made to give attention to the many modern and necessary improvements which in most other cities are considered part and parcel of an office equipment.

The new Union Bank Building, which is now well on in its construction, is looked to as providing a decided relief in both these respects. Besides placing at disposal a large number of additional offices, it will also have the advantage of being thoroughly up-to-date, and on this account many firms have secured space and are leaving offices which they have occupied for a great while, and the inconveniences of which have had to be endured.

We should judge there never was a better opportunity than the present for experienced and enterprising men to make capital for themselves and at the same time confer a distinct benefit on the hundreds of business firms which are looking to the West for development of their commerce, by the erection of buildings of the most modern type and adapted to the conditions prevalent in the district. And this would apply not only to the class of buildings just mentioned, but to all buildings for which there is a demand. There is clearly manifest on every hand a great tendency to erect buildings sadly deficient in their details of construction and finish. The mad rush of buyers has brought on the market a number of men whose sole endeavor is to get a building together at as little cost as possible, even though it be at the sacrifice of, what should be, necessary details, the number of people seeking dwellings making it an easy matter to secure purchasers. It is true many of these men are "small" men, and act as their own architects, but the real injury is certainly not minimized on that account, but rather increased, as they have neither the reputation of the architect at stake, nor the stability of a sound builder to fall back upon.

"A straw will show which way the wind blows," and there are already whispers that the capitalists are beginning to limit their advances on certain classes of properties and in order to complete sales builders have had to take certain risks on the mortgage—a clear indication that present values are questionable.

The foregoing remarks will, of course, apply more particularly to houses built expressly for sale, but inasmuch as the prosperity of Winnipeg has come to stay, it is of the first importance to see that its buildings are such as will become a sound investment and not a source of trouble.

There is really no reason why there should be any difficulty in this respect. Winnipeg possesses at the present time as competent a staff of architects and contractors as could be desired; it would therefore be an easy matter for a prospective buyer to obtain a concise and accurate report of any building, from a man of professional repute, for a charge that would be infinitesimal compared to the immense advantage of such a certificate. At the present time, however, it would appear that all these necessary precautions are at a discount—so great has been the boom, and so eager the purchaser, that their best interests have been neglected.

The need of a precaution of this nature becomes the more apparent when the fact is taken into consideration that the "by-law" which governs the erection of buildings is considered to be of a most unsatisfactory nature, leaving as it does the interpretation of what a "foundation" really is according to the by-law as uncertain and vague as it could well be, so that the unscrupulous builder can steer well within the letter and still miss the real benefits which it is meant to confer, and the evils it was intended to remove. As long as he lays a simple stone or cement footing upon which to erect his structure, he is well within the "by-law," the question of going deep enough to strike the solid blue clay being left entirely to the discretion or whim of the builder himself. And this too within the protected limits of the city.

In our last issue we pointed out one of the peculiarities of the soil here in this city, and with this before the mind it can easily be seen the great danger that exists where a proper solid foundation is not reached.

A man building for his own holding will, of course, be amply protected by his architect, and there is little danger in that case; but for the buyer from a speculative builder a certificate from a professional man becomes an absolute necessary precaution.

We understand that a revised by-law is under consideration which will fully meet this unsatisfactory condition, but in the meantime property is being rushed forward, and too great care cannot be exercised in a thorough examination before purchasing.

We note with satisfaction that the authorities are doing all in their power under the present by-law to secure the stability of all new buildings, within the First and Second limits, and are also extending such limits from time to time as occasion requires, thus giving the greatest protection possible to the city proper.

The "First" limit practically includes the whole of the business centre, whilst the "Second" limit comprises the residential section immediately adjoining.

Buildings within the "first" limit are required to be either stone, solid brick, or iron throughout.

Buildings within the "second" limit must be either brick-veneer, metal-clad, or rough-cast.

All roofs in both limits to be of "incombustible" materials or shingles laid in "half inch" of lime mortar.

As an indication of the proportions reached by the enormous influx of population, it might be instructive to note the prices recently reached in real estate values, as compared to those prevailing within a reasonable time.

In the west part of the city, a district which is fast gaining in popularity as a residential section, small plots which last autumn could have been readily bought for \$350 have recently changed hands at \$550. This is in part owing to the belief that it is at this point that the G.T.R. is likely to locate itself.

In the south advances have been even more marked, the city having pushed out in that direction in a decided manner, and also on account of the close proximity of two public parks. Here the values have risen from \$50 per foot to \$100 within the twelve months.

In the city proper the advances have been beyond all expectations; property which could not move an offer at \$380 per foot last year, has recently been sold at \$1,000 per foot. This in itself may be a special instance, but at the same time it is quite reasonable to fix the average advance at an easy 75 per cent. over last year.

A distinctive mark of Winnipeg and one which gives it its character is its essentially "commercial" aspect. The many buildings which are rising up on every hand carry with them the clear lines of warehouses or stores, and present somewhat of a contrast to the heavy factory buildings of many other cities. It is a "commercial" city more of necessity than of design, and there are few, if any, natural advantages which would warrant the supposition that it would ever become a manufacturing centre of any importance. It can easily be seen, therefore, that it is