

THE SECOND TIME AROUND

An Assessment of Recycling Warehouse Structures in Winnipeg

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research  
University of Manitoba

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of City Planning  
in the Department of City Planning

by

Peter Traverso

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"AN ASSESSMENT OF RECYCLING WAREHOUSE STRUCTURES IN WINNIPEG"

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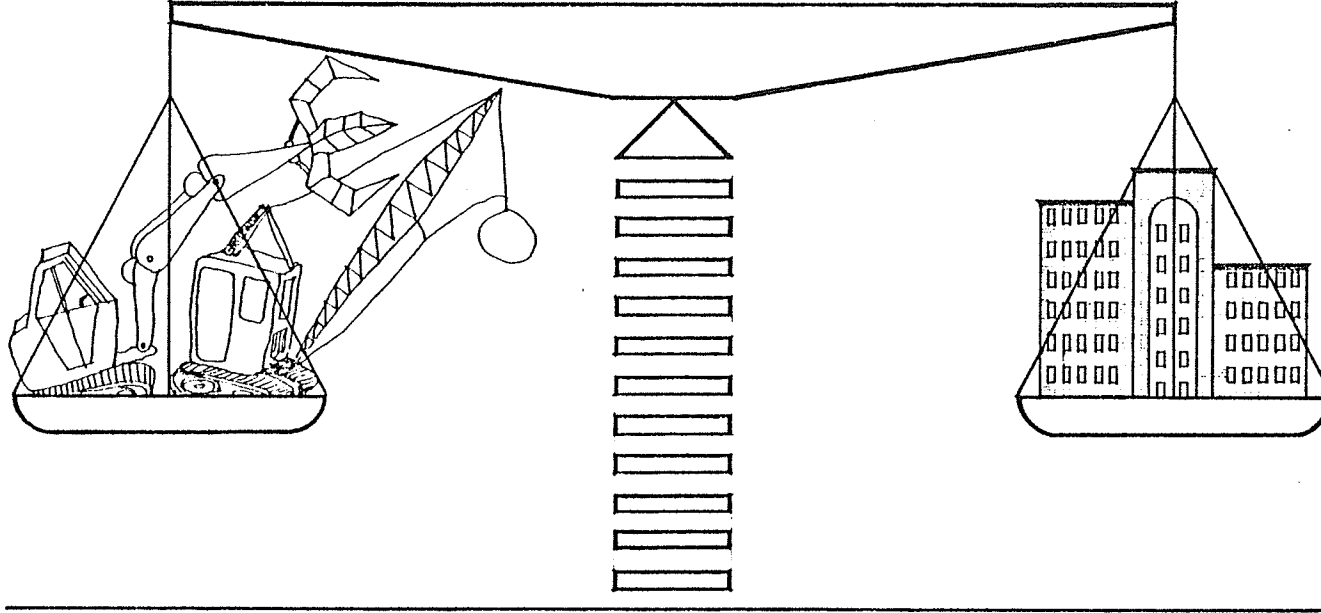
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## THE SECOND TIME AROUND

an assessment of recycling warehouse structures in winnipeg

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## ABSTRACT

For some time I studied lengthy reports and somewhat fascinating urban design proposals and pondered over their search for the catalyst to transform deteriorating downtown areas into active, and therefore, prosperous districts. This issue seemed always to revolve around the same question, namely, if conversion and upgrading could actually emerge in pursuit of a simple formula, why should western cities continue to decline in the face of an ever-expanding suburbia? The purpose of this thesis is not to discover some miraculous solution, because no such diagnosis exists, but merely to throw some light on a rather complex situation.

Winnipeg, with its bright early history as gateway to the developing West and rapid subsequent growth, followed by a sudden decline which left in its wake many sound, but technologically obsolete warehouse structures, provided a good study area. The analysis, which is based on the more quantifiable aspects of an urban design for the warehouse district situated to the east of Main Street, uses five case studies as precedent and examines some of the most common aspects of these proposals in terms of a more comprehensive commitment.

The research centres largely on the present-day situation and although economics emerges as a very important yardstick, no single factor can be isolated as the catalyst. Trends imply that future situations will include a far greater number of variables related more to human and environmental needs,

and will be less concerned with the dilemma of our monetary balance sheet. Change must become an integral part of our social process, focused on the continuing modification of prevalent circumstances, as a stepping-stone within a process rather than an end in itself.

Human behavioural patterns cannot be predicted with any assured accuracy and by now it should be apparent that our traditional system, which controls by reliance to a great extent on straight-line projections, must change to respond to the actual needs of each community. In the end, society gets what it demands and each urban environment simply reflects the ever-changing value standards of its community.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The city is the physical result of a dynamic society. It consists of physical and non-physical components which make up a complex pattern of internal and external interrelationships reflecting man's social hierarchy. Like an ecosystem in the natural environment, it constantly undergoes change causing certain areas to decay while others develop. Buildings are the products of these forces. Although developments in technology and communication have enabled the yoke of survival to be discarded, economic, political, social and cultural components survive by performance of activities deeply rooted in past tradition. Change can evolve only through understanding, but man is hesitant to acknowledge the dynamics of his present-day situation. The city must be understood in terms of totality, that is, no part is not the city. Its concern is the assessment of the consequences of man's action in his adaptation and manipulation of the environment by substituting one set of conditions for another. Actions are followed by reactions and understanding becomes the focus for the maintenance of relative stability rather than division and isolation in relation to economic product, so that events must be seen in terms of consequences.

The purpose of this study is to examine certain aspects of these underlying forces relating to the re-use of structures in deteriorating urban areas and to evaluate the nature of proposals intent on up-grading the central

environment of Winnipeg. Current literature often generates confusion with claims and counter-claims by opposing groups, each in support of a firm appraisal. Central to this thesis is an assessment of five urban recycling projects, common features of which have been incorporated into a comprehensive plan of a technical rather than design orientation. These aspects have then been tested to measure their validity under present-day conditions.

Buildings frequently become a liability when the function for which they were originally designed becomes obsolete, while existing urban legislation is often amended to allow their replacement by larger and larger structures when a particular part of the city becomes more desirable,<sup>1</sup> inspired by owners seeking greater profits and prestige. Although adequacy of construction and adaptability to new uses make demolition an economic and social loss in many cases, the bias of the building and allied industries towards new work has in the past prevented the consideration of alternative solutions.

The attitude which prevailed earlier seemed to imply that everything new and big was better. The concept of the City Beautiful at the turn of the century and the Urban Renewal programs of the 1950's enhanced this notion by ignoring the underlying forces in their reliance on physical solutions. The planner was called upon to improve environmental aesthetics by the removal of unwanted areas through urban surgery. The last decade saw a dramatic shift in focus where glass tower proposals became increasingly difficult to implement in the face of political opposition. The quantitative values imposed during the

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<sup>1</sup>Ironically, it is often these early structures which made the area desirable, Giorgio Cavagliere, "Plus Factors of Old Buildings," in Economic Benefits of Preserving Old Buildings (Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1976), pp. 53-54.

great influx of the western industrial revolution and the post-World War II construction boom were giving way to emerging qualitative programs more suited to North American cities.<sup>2</sup> Signs were becoming apparent in public programs orientated more towards control through environmental consideration. Western urban systems are today poised between traditional methods on the one hand and the more innovative techniques on the other, where demolition and reconstruction are becoming increasingly demanding on the supply of resources, leading to dramatic increases in the cost of land, labour and materials. The gasoline crisis in the winter of 1973 and the extension of this pattern of price increases into other commodities when western countries were suddenly faced with the doubling in the cost of one of their primary sources of energy, was a clear indication that this pattern could not continue.<sup>3</sup>

Winnipeg, having a large number of sound warehouse structures offering central location with a relatively low occupancy rate, presents a good study area. When present-day demands are examined against this energy orientated background and the high costs of new construction, one wonders why these

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<sup>2</sup>Peter Wolf, The Future of the City (New York: Whitney Library of Design, Watson-Guption Publications, 1974), p. 194.

<sup>3</sup>Freeman points out that North America represents 6% of the world's population and consumes 50% of the resources annually. While projections indicate an even higher future use ratio among western nations, increasing demands from other developing countries will not allow this pattern to continue, Melton M. R. Freeman, People Pollution (Montreal and London: McGill-Queens University Press, 1974), p. 6. About one-third of the world's population consumes about two-thirds of the food production while the net flow of protein is from hungry countries to more affluent nations, *ibid.*, p. 32.



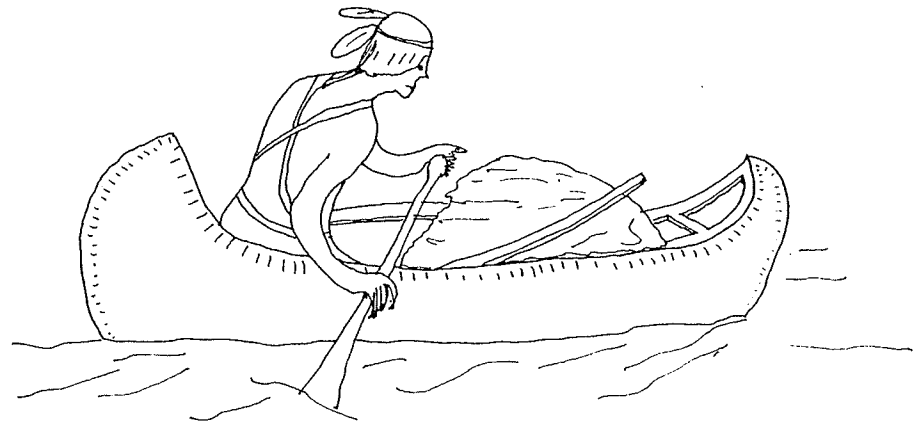
existing structures are not simply recycled in response to the needs of the market place. Herein lies the crux of this topic, in its concern for their re-use as an urban-resource.

The section on historical analysis, although somewhat lengthy, has been directed towards readers who are not familiar with early Prairie development and the author's commitment to a comprehensive analysis as a prerequisite to any significant interpretation.

## 2.0 HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Historically, Winnipeg may be studied within the framework of three distinct periods, namely, the pre-1880 era, the period between 1880 and 1914 and the post-1914 era. The first marks the transition from a fur trading post to a pioneer settlement, the second illustrates the establishment of the City as a gateway to the Western region, while the third represents a gradual change towards its present-day function as a central place in accordance with the development of other centres within its hinterland. The warehouses which were constructed to meet the demands of the wholesale industry, evolved in response to its role as a major distribution centre.

The settlement owes its earlier development to its strategic location at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers when waterways were the only feasible means of transportation. French explorers were the first Europeans to locate on the existing site and establish trade connections with the rich fur bearing region to the north.<sup>4</sup>



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<sup>4</sup>Ruben C. Bellan, "The Development of Winnipeg as a Metropolitan Centre" (Ph.D. Thesis, Columbia University, 1958), pp. 6-8.

After the conquest of Canada by the British in 1763, this trade was taken over by the North West Trading Company which later merged with the Hudson's Bay Trading Company. Although furs were traditionally shipped to London via the lakes, rivers and the Hudson Bay to the north, other routes, particularly to the south, were gaining importance.<sup>5</sup> The prominence of these waterways should be understood by examining their full extent, namely, by connection to the vast Prairie region to the west by means of the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Rivers (via the Red River and Lake Winnipeg), to the eastern seaboard by means of Lake Superior, to the United States and indirectly to the Gulf of Mexico to the south via the Red and Mississippi Rivers and to the Hudson Bay in the north via the Red River, Lake Winnipeg and the Nelson River.

From its earliest days, control over the settlement was exercised by one or more of the emerging power groups. This pattern was to remain until the end of the second historical period. The Hudson's Bay Trading Company owned the greatest amount of real estate and governed for most of the pioneer period. The land for the first settlement under Lord Selkirk in 1812 was purchased from this company for the sole purpose of growing agricultural products to feed the employees of its widely dispersed trading posts<sup>6</sup> and became known as the Red River Colony.<sup>7</sup> Free traders were able to operate within the territory of

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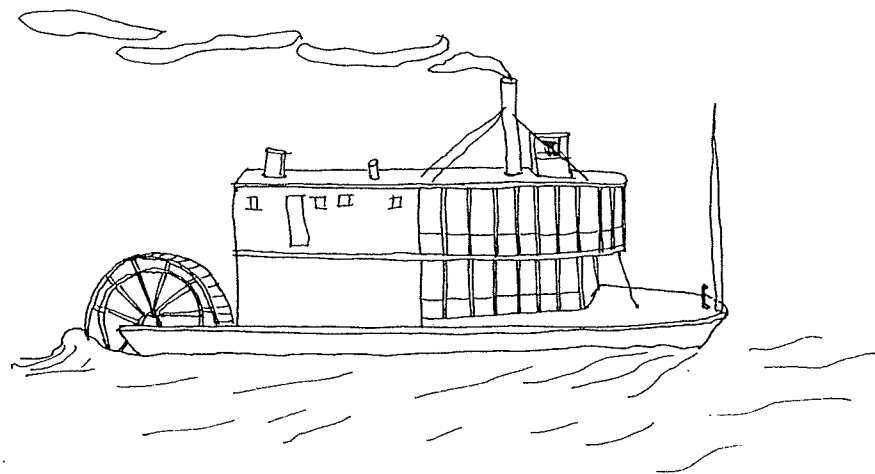
<sup>5</sup>M. L. Hartsough, The Development of the Twin Cities as a Metropolitan Market" (University of Minnesota Press, 1924), p. 21.

<sup>6</sup>Alan F. J. Artibise and Edward H. Dahl, Winnipeg in Maps, 1816-1972 (Ottawa: National Map Collection, Public Archives of Canada, 1975), p. 3.

<sup>7</sup>The name "Winnipeg" was first applied in 1866 to distinguish a certain M. McKenney's Store and surrounding buildings from the remainder of the Red River Community. Ibid.

Minnesota instead of through the Hudson's Bay Company as before. The effect was the development of a transportation technology directed towards the south rather than the waterways to the north.

The end of the pioneer period was marked by developments which involved rapid expansion from a hamlet serving the Red River Colony to an urban settlement. The first steamboat arrived in 1859 and marked the end of a long era of isolation.<sup>8</sup> By 1862 it had become the chief means of communication and by 1878 the number had increased to fifteen.<sup>9</sup> Winnipeg was then supplying not only its own needs but also the requirements of newly establishing agricultural hamlets in surrounding hinterland.<sup>10</sup>



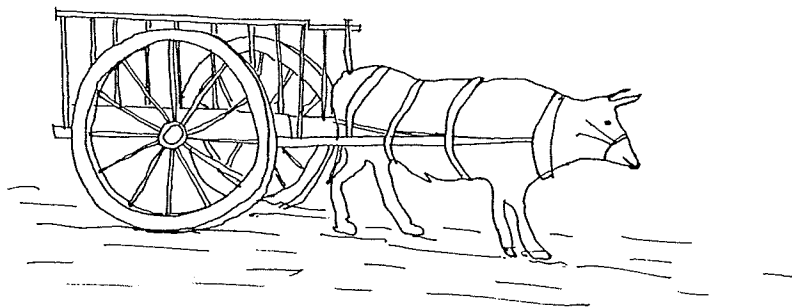
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<sup>8</sup>F. C. Lucas, An Historical Souvenir Diary of the City of Winnipeg, Canada (Winnipeg: Cartwright and Lucas, 1923), p. 96.

<sup>9</sup>Margaret McWilliams, Manitoba Milestones (Toronto: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1928), p. 115.

<sup>10</sup>A steamboat could carry about 350 tons of freight and 200 passengers. Hans A. Hosse, "The Areal Growth and Functional Development of Winnipeg from 1875 to 1913" (Master's Thesis, University of Manitoba, 1956), p. 40-45 citing A. Begg and W. R. Nursey, Ten Years in Winnipeg (Winnipeg: Times Printing and Publishing Company, 1897).

During this period it was practically cut off from the remainder of Canada and goods were transported mainly by means of the waterways and newly constructed railroads to the United States in the south, while access to the developing Western region was often limited to transportation by Red River Wagon in summer and the sled in winter. The development of the bordering United States territories and the flow of immigrants along these lines of communications aroused serious concern that the influence might spread across the border should Canada not itself develop the territory. After the incorporation of the Red River Colony into the Canadian Confederation in 1870, rapid expansion took place populated mainly from Britain and Ontario.<sup>11</sup> The impact of this course of action which totally changed the nature of the early settlement<sup>12</sup> can best be gauged by the dramatic increase from a population of about 100 persons in December 1870 to 3700 in 1874.<sup>13</sup>

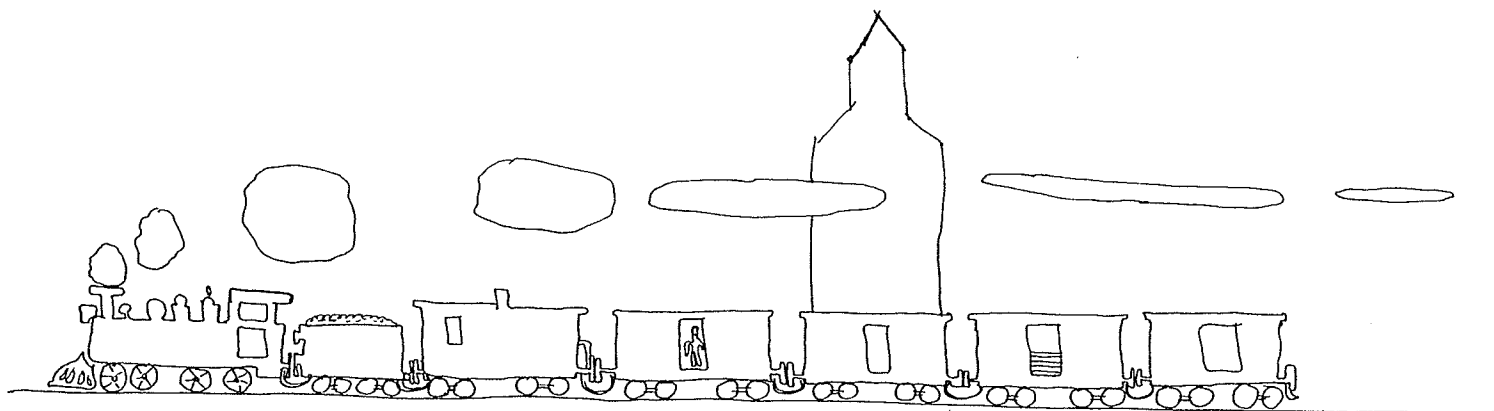


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<sup>11</sup>P. H. Wichern, Jr., ed., "The Development of Urban Government in the Winnipeg Area," vol. 1 (Department of Urban Affairs, Province of Manitoba with the co-operation of the Department of Political Studies, University of Manitoba, 1970), p. 5.

<sup>12</sup>Winnipeg was incorporated as a City in 1873 under the Provincial Government of Manitoba, *ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup>W. L. Morton, Manitoba: A History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), p. 166.

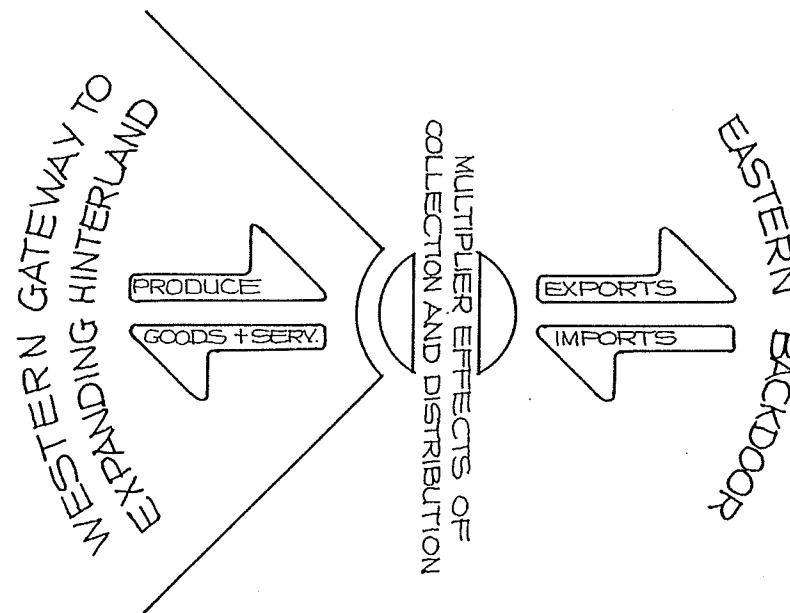


The middle period between the years 1880 to 1914 represents the most important era in the history of the City, centred upon the somewhat premature construction of the transcontinental railroad.<sup>14</sup> Winnipeg's role was fast becoming that of the back door to the east and gateway to the developing west.

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<sup>14</sup>The development of the Western provinces hinged on a transportation technology. The American transcontinental system to the south which could adequately have served this Region would have had an adverse effect on its development, Ruben C. Bellan, "The Development of Winnipeg as a Metropolitan Centre" (Ph.D. Thesis, Columbia University, 1958), pp. 25-26, citing Beckles Wilson, Lord Strathcona, The Story of His Life (London, 1902), p. 181.

The final decade of the pioneer period saw the transfer of power from a single source to an evolving power elite who were to govern for the next thirty-four years. The federal government was firmly committed to the construction of a railroad and it became clear that a major gateway city favourably located somewhere between Lake Winnipeg in the north and the United States border in the south, at the narrow eastern periphery of these plains which lacked the technology of a transportation media towards the west, would inevitably be required for the distribution of goods and services.



Winnipeg's development as an urban centre must be attributed more to socio-political forces than strategic geographic significance, for it was both isolated from other established centres and removed from the more fertile lands of the West.

Winnipeg's location was not thought to be suitable for a great city. It was said to be muddy and swampy and far too far east from choice lands, and "unfortunate in its surroundings", but the finger of destiny and the energy and confidence of its citizens all pointed to its being the chosen city of the prairies.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Alan F. J. Artibise, Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth, 1874-1914 (Montreal and London: McGill-Queens University Press, 1975), p. 6, quoting George Bryce, Illustrated History of Winnipeg (1905).

Although the City dominated the other Red River Settlements and had become the natural seat of government following the proclamation of the Manitoba Act of July 1870,<sup>16</sup> other centres, particularly Selkirk to the east, were more favourably situated for the location of the proposed transcontinental railroad and service yards. The governing power elite saw the railway as the key to success without which Winnipeg's dominance as a commercial centre would fall. In their determination to see no other centre challenge their regional importance, the attraction of the railroad through Winnipeg took precedence over all other considerations. These businessmen gave priority to growth and economics usually to the detriment of the settlement. Fear of failure was the driving force, for they realized that growth could only be maintained by the multiplier effects of attracting more people and that nearby settlements could easily capture their markets.

Economic and political considerations eventually overruled the obvious physical benefits of Selkirk and by 1881, through heavy public commitments and concessions virtually giving the railway authorities a free hand to locate throughout the city with almost no control, the main line was not only directed through Winnipeg, but it was also to have the workshops and service yards. An outstanding aspect was that the head of the Canadian Pacific Railway syndicate was also a majority shareholder of the Hudson's Bay Company, which was probably the largest single holder of real estate in the City and stood to make immense profits should Winnipeg be selected as a terminal point.<sup>16a</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>16a</sup>Artibise also points out that the City might have gained selection as a terminal point in any event and might even have been able to exercise a certain degree of restraint in the location of the tracks and service yards; Alan F. J. Artibise, Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth, 1874-1914 (London and Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1975), pp. 71-76.