The first one hundred years

Born in Shelburne, Ontario, Charles H. Wilson came to Winnipeg in the fall of 1881 with his brother Robert J. Wilson. They settled on a farm near Dugald but were not successful farmers. C.H. who had apprenticed as a cabinet maker, started in the furniture business in a very small way in 1883 and took in his brother two or three years later.

George A. Wilson started working with his father in November of 1918 and continued with Wilson's for 50 years, serving as President from 1924 until 1966, when he turned over the reins to his sons Dick and Claude.

Dick started at Wilson's in the fall of 1948 and became President in 1966. Claude joined Wilson's in 1966 as Vice President and Secretary Treasurer. J.A. "Sandy" Wilson, Dick's son, started working at Wilson furniture in the fall of 1980.
Wilson Furniture enjoyed considerable success at 15 Market Street from 1885 until August, 1893, when the east wall of the Grand Pacific Hotel fell and flattened the store.

We are indebted to Randy Naszecki for his historical research pertaining to Wilson's.

Bills of Sale tell the tale

A great deal of the early history of Wilson's has been learned from old bills of sale so kindly donated by second and third generation family members who are still using some of the furniture.

After the calamity of 1893, Wilson's moved to the corner of Princess and Market Street where business began to grow apace; they were making their own sofas and chairs and bringing in rail car loads of other furniture from established eastern factories such as Knechtels in Hanover, Ontario.

Award winning displays of their wares in 1894 at the new Winnipeg Exhibition building and in 1895 at the Regina NWT exhibition prompted the release of Wilson's first catalogue dated 1890-97. Business was booming and in 1897 new quarters were obtained on Main Street, close to the McIntyre Building, with warehouse facilities right across the back lane on Albert Street. This ideal situation was short lived, as in February, 1898, the McIntyre Building was gutted in a spectacular fire and a wall fell and again flattened Wilson's store.
In 1898 Wilson's had found a new home at the southwest corner of Princess and William, the Princess block. A proposal earlier in the year to merge Wilson's and Leslie's Furniture never came to pass. Business, both wholesale and retail, grew steadily under the able direction of Fred Humphries.

World War I came along and Charles Wilson's dream of having his two sons in the business was shattered when his oldest son Claude, in the Royal Flying Corps, serving as a pilot, was killed in action. His other son George did join the firm in November, 1918.

The most important thing in the world is good people... and Wilson's have certainly had their share!

Fred Humphries joined Wilson's in 1903 and was general manager from 1908 to 1940.

Margaret Wallace, secretary-treasurer, served 50 years with three generations of Wilsons. (1900-1950)

Ruth Fingland, accounts payable, 42 years.

Harry Tuppeny, sales manager, 30 years.

Gordon Hinde, salesman, 41 years.

Charlie Storey, driver and warehouse foreman, 41 years.

Nora Hinde Lofendale, accounts receivable, 38 years.

Our present employees carry on the tradition...

Tony Cahalin
Chris Dawson
Dorothy Dawson
Sylvia Ellis
Gerry Gosposky
Nel Hopenik
Stanley Janisiki
Margaret Matuszewski
Walter Pastucha
Katherine Reynolds
Dale Scott
Peggy Smith
Verne Tully
Ethel Thyen
Marcel Yaskiw

Wilson's have had many warehouses, including 29 Albert Street, and the corner of Lizzie and Henry with its adjoining stable and cream allowance for the cats!
The most important warehouse for Wilson's was 281 Rupert Avenue. First rented in 1914, it was purchased after the depression from Great-West Life. It was probably the salvation for Wilson Furniture during the depression of the 1930's because of the services carried out from that good old building: moving, storage, renting, shipping, renting tables and chairs for banquets, re-upholstering, re-finishing and a cabinet shop for furniture repairs and refurbishing the trade-ins. It was all needed badly because there sure wasn't a lot of new furniture being sold!

Prior to Wilson's moving in — Manitoba Archives.

Warehouse destroyed.

This ideal building came to a sudden end on February 25, 1958, when Wilson Furniture had their only fire in one hundred years. The building and contents were consumed, destroying most of the Wilson family records and putting an abrupt end to planned festivities for Wilson's seventy-fifth year.

Interior. 281 Rupert, circa 1922.
Home of Wilson Furniture from 1920 to 1974

The months following World War I were not happy ones. A general depression, spotlighted by riots, was accompanied by dropping prices. Wilson’s had built up stock anticipating increased demand but the pendulum swung the other way; and when the furniture factories appointed their own travellers to sell direct to the dealers (the practice still followed today), the wholesale furniture business was doomed.

Wilson’s salvaged what they could from their stock and moved into 352 Main Street in February, 1920 as retailers only. Things ran relatively smoothly for Wilson’s until 1930 when the depression struck. The factories decided to back George Wilson and his associates and Wilson’s survived.

The flood of 1950 saw 352 Main Street with five feet of water in the basement for almost six weeks. A major underpinning job was required as well as steel reinforcing beams for the upper floors. A new store front followed a few years later.

In August, 1970, an expropriation notice was delivered to Wilson’s at 352 Main Street. In November, 1974, the City served an eviction notice, but settlement was not reached until May, 1977.

Building demolished, 1974.

Parades were major events in Winnipeg’s early days and Wilson’s took advantage to advertise their new location at 352 Main Street.

Wilson’s had one lorry for big jobs, but most of their hauling was still done by horses in 1920.

Experts in Furniture for Thirty-Seven Years

Wilson's have always made a perfect buy, every purchase is backed by their guarantee. They have always been a source of pride to every household and the reputation is well known in the City of Winnipeg. In 1920, Wilson's moved to 352 Main Street and have maintained their position as one of the largest furniture stores in the city. Their stock is always fresh and new, with a wide selection of styles and designs. The store is open from Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm, and Saturday, 9 am to 1 pm. Existing customers are offered discounts and promotions, with a special sale every month. Wilson's is the go-to furniture store for any homeowner in the City of Winnipeg.

WILSON FURNITURE COMPANY
352 MAIN STREET · WINNIPEG
"You'll Be Better At Wilson."
The roaring 20's...

Furniture selected from our worthwhile assortments will reflect your good taste to your friends.

BEDROOM SUITES

Beds, Dressers, Washstands, etc. All complete sets in solid wood, any size, $125.00 to $350.00.

DINING ROOM SUITES

Dining tables and chairs, any size, $100.00 to $300.00.

Special Values

Cots For The Kiddies

Special Values

Bunk beds, including mattress and bedding, $12.75.

Cots, including mattress, $11.00.

Bedding Specials

All sizes of sheets, blankets, quilts, and mattress covers, starting at 75c.

Colored Border Scrin

Mattresses

Granite Ortnmore Simmons' Beds

A Saving on Oriental Rugs

To make room for a new stock, we are offering a few of the well-known makes of Oriental Rugs at substantially reduced prices:

- A Rug, 3 x 4 ft. $150.00
- A Rug, 4 x 6 ft. $135.00
- A Rug, 6 x 9 ft. $440.00
- A Rug, 8 x 10 ft. $600.00
- A Rug, 10 x 15 ft. $900.00

Furnishing Your Honeymoon Home

From the time when years for the Honeymoon Home are mementos forever, up to the time when decades our memories, our store can be a great service to the new bride and groom.

Dining Room

LIVING ROOM

Dining Room Furniture

Living Room Furniture

Beds, Dressers, Washstands, etc. All complete sets in solid wood, any size, $125.00 to $350.00.

Dining tables and chairs, any size, $100.00 to $300.00.

A Saving on Oriental Rugs

To make room for a new stock, we are offering a few of the well-known makes of Oriental Rugs at substantially reduced prices:

- A Rug, 3 x 4 ft. $150.00
- A Rug, 4 x 6 ft. $135.00
- A Rug, 6 x 9 ft. $440.00
- A Rug, 8 x 10 ft. $600.00
- A Rug, 10 x 15 ft. $900.00

The Picnic

Taken in 1925, this photo shows a gathering of Wilson employees and their relations, probably at Lockport, Manitoba. The big furniture van provided the transportation for many of these outings.

The Social Club

You needed one of these for the get-togethers at 352 Main Street.

The Truck

One of Wilson's first trucks. Note the chain drive and hard rubber tires.
Another milestone!

The depression put a crimp in any celebrations for Wilson's 50th Anniversary, but this booklet was printed in 1943 to commemorate our 60th year.

A STATEMENT OF POLICY

Wilson Furniture Limited have operated for 60 years on a policy built on good faith and honest and fair dealings with our customers. We have prove
that giving value for the money received is the secret of lasting business success. We know that this can only be achieved by selling furniture that is good value. We believe that furniture brought to meet standards of high quality, good design and built to last, at prices that are as low as possible is consistent with good value. Thus, we do not sell cheaply-constructed furniture, built to meet cut-rate prices — furniture that will look nice for a time and then go to pieces or become worn and shabby. We will not sell cheaply-constructed furniture at bargain prices. We follow this policy for the protection of our customers, and because it has proved to be the fairest and most economical way to serve the public. This policy guarantees to the 60 years since Wilson Furniture Limited was founded. It has enabled us to become the Oldest and Largest Exclusive Furniture Store in Western Canada.

"You'll Do Better at Wilson's"

The War Years

1939 through 1945 were the World War II years and they were very contro
cled ones for the furniture industry. Limited production for house
holds meant quotas and the Wartime Prices & Trade Board dictated pricing. Sofas without any springs were common and Wilson's relied on trade-ins as demand outstripped supply. It took several years to get back to normal.

A statement of policy

Wilson Furniture Limited have operated for 60 years on a policy built on good faith and honest and fair dealings with our customers. We have proved that giving value for the money received is the secret of lasting business success. We know that this can only be achieved by selling furniture that is good value. We believe that furniture brought to meet standards of high quality, good design and built to last, at prices that are as low as possible is consistent with good value. Thus, we do not sell cheaply-constructed furniture, built to meet cut-rate prices — furniture that will look nice for a time and then go to pieces or become worn and shabby. We will not sell cheaply-constructed furniture at bargain prices. We follow this policy for the protection of our customers, and because it has proved to be the fairest and most economical way to serve the public. This policy guarantees to the 60 years since Wilson Furniture Limited was founded. It has enabled us to become the Oldest and Largest Exclusive Furniture Store in Western Canada.

"You'll Do Better at Wilson's"
MANY HAPPY RETURNS
WINNIPEG!
WE ARE GROWING WITH WINNIPEG
THIS IS OUR 66TH ANNIVERSARY

We are proud of our sixty-six years' association with the citizens of Winnipeg. Through three generations we have maintained a steadfast policy of selling only quality furniture—reasonably priced.

We look back over our sixty-six years and we feel a deep sense of gratitude to the loyalty and confidence of our many friends who have made our business a success.

Serving Winnipeg Homemakers for Three Generations

In 1910, when Winnipeg was still a small prairie town, Charles H. Wilson moved from Brandon, Man., and with the aid of a small fund borrowed at 7% interest, purchased the residence of G. W. Atkinson on Fort Street. These were the hardy days when business was slow and sales were few. But despite the obstacles, the business began to grow. After engaging three partners, Wilson's moved to the Regina Block, at 245 Main Street in 1915. In 1920, it was moved to the central business area of St. Vital Warehouse, the home of W. M. Wilson, Mr. John H. Wilson, and Mr. John A. Wilson, where it was located until 1945. Today it is the most conveniently located furniture store in the city.

A LETTER OF THANKS...

We wish to take this opportunity, on behalf of the staff of Wilson Furniture Limited, to extend our congratulations to you, the citizens of Winnipeg. We are indebted to you, our friends and customers, who have proved your loyalty and confidence in our business through the years.

Our policy of selling quality furniture, furnishings, and appliances at reasonable prices, started by our founder will continue to be our guide for sound merchandising. Once again we say "Thank you" Citizens of Winnipeg.

George Wilson  George R. Wilson
Wilson Furniture Limited

DID YOU KNOW WILSON'S ARE
84 YEARS OLD... OR CARE?

Lots of people care about good quality and good service. And, that, as they say, is the story of our life.

In 1883, Charles Wilson (George's father, Dick and Claude's grandfather) started Wilson Furniture at a location on Market Street.

In the following 84 years, there was the Boer War, the end of Queen Victoria's reign, World War I, the Winnipeg Labor Strike, the 'swinging twenties', the crash of '29, the sad thirties, World War II, the Winnipeg Flood of 1950, the end of the Woolsey elm, sputnik, the coming of age of the Manitoba Theatre Centre, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra and Winnipeg grew to be a city of 500,000 furniture users.

During those same years, Wilson's took care to sell only better furniture and to provide good service along with it. The result was people came to trust us. We survived and thrived, becoming one of the oldest retailers in the area.

Last year, we received a letter from Miss Wilma Fisher of Shoal Lake, Manitoba, whose parents were early customers of Wilson's. Miss Fisher wished to donate back to us, simply for our own edification, an oak bedroom group sold to her mother and father on June 20, 1892, taken to the Fisher homestead and used right up to the present day! The bedroom set is now back in Wilson's store and on display for the Centennial. Not only that—Miss Fisher also forwarded us the original bill of sale!

You'll get a kick out of seeing how the Fisher's prairie home was furnished with Wilson quality furniture for only $67... sideboard ($12) - extension table ($8.50) - 4 chairs ($5) - bedroom set ($37) - oak rocker ($4.50)

Then—a month or so back—Mrs. Hill Rodgers of Winnipeg sent along to Dick Wilson a bill of sale dated December 7, 1910 "which I have kept all these years. We still have the first item shown—a mahogany bedroom chair $2.55. The brass bed went to a lake cottage and the 3 washstands sold for $3 a piece. I still enjoy your talk on TV and decided it was your father or grandfather we did business with in 1910."

SAME WILSON-FAMILY OWNERSHIP 1883-1967

George Wilson  Dick Wilson  Claude Wilson
Founder's Son  Grandson  Grandson
Wilson's Better Furniture Store—352 Main Street South

WINNIPEG'S BETTER FURNITURE STORE—352 MAIN STREET SOUTH

352 MAIN STREET (Just South of Portage Avenue) PHONE 925 168, WINNIPEG

"YOU'LL DO BETTER AT WILSON'S"

- Free Press, May 28, 1943

15

— Tribune, June 30, 1967
‘New quarters for old furniture firm’

Wilson’s had moved into 280 Main Street in November, 1974, before renovations were completed, so the official opening was held in January, 1975.

Lieutenant Governor Jack McKeog, assisted by Victoria A. Wilson, widow of George A. Wilson, cutting the ribbon to officially open the new store.

Dawn McKeog, Lieutenant Governor Jack McKeog and Dick and Claude Wilson enjoy the opening.

Claude Wilson, on behalf of Wilson Furniture, presents a picture of the 1888 Winnipeg City Council to the City of Winnipeg, accepted by Mayor Robert Steen. C.H. Wilson, founder of Wilson’s, was a member of that council.

Re-creating the past...

Wilma Fisher of Shoal Lake, Manitoba, found an invoice dated 1892 when her father had purchased furniture from C.H. Wilson. She donated the invoice to Wilson’s and a few years after arranged for Wilson’s to obtain the bedroom suite listed on that invoice. This suite formed the nucleus of our 100th Anniversary display, where we recreated late Victorian settings with a strong Winnipeg flavor.

Bedroom: featuring the Fisher bedroom pieces.

Parlor: featuring platform rockers, roman lounge, and organ by Bell Piano.

Dining Area: featuring oak and elm table, 200 year old clock, and 1894 Winnipeg Exhibition Award to C.H. Wilson.

Den: featuring a Winnett’s Steam Furniture Factory secretarial desk, Oriental Hotel shot glass and N.W.T. plate.

A collection of Wilson Furniture and family memorabilia.

These displays were designed and set up by Dale Scott, I.D.L.M. of Wilson’s. All the needlework was done by her grandmother and great grandmother.
Did you ever ride in this elevator?

Thousands did! Lots of folks with gleeful delight, some with butterflies in the tummy and a few just because it wasn’t closed in. Installed shortly after the turn of the century, it was one of the oldest continually operating elevators in North America. When 352 Main was demolished in 1974, we saved the cage as a part of Wilson’s and Winnipeg’s history.

Wilson’s last move was only a block south to the corner of Graham and Main Street; the Cadomin Building. Air conditioned, centrally located with incandescent lighting in the displays, it provides an ideal showcase for quality furniture.

Radio controlled and fully equipped, this large furniture van provides first class furniture delivery.

Our newest addition is our attractively painted service van.
Our Goals

Adherence to those business principles and ethics that are the hallmark of Wilson's most treasured asset...trust.
Continuance of the search for quality furniture.
Flexibility to meet customer needs as the market changes and expands.

We look forward to serving you as we enter our Second Century.

A special thank you to our staff, past and present, our suppliers, particularly those factories who supported Wilson's in the 30's and the 70's, and most of all, our customers, without whom nothing would have happened.