

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
JACK'S ROLLER RINK, 224 N. FOURTH ST., GRAND FORKS
HABS NO. XX-##

Location: 224 North Fourth St., Grand Forks, Grand Forks County, North Dakota.

Jack's Roller Rink is located within the "Historic Downtown" historic district of Grand Forks.

Jack's Roller Rink is located at: latitude 47.553584 and longitude -97.020431 W. The coordinate was taken at the center of the building and was obtained through Google Earth (WGS84) in June 2020.

Present Owner: Northridge Construction

Present Use: Vacant, slated for demolition

Significance: Jack's Roller Rink (#32GF796), built in 1907, is a two-story vernacular brick commercial and residential building located on the edge of Grand Forks' historic downtown district. The building was constructed as a roller rink, one of several entertainment venues including an ice skating rink, theatres and an opera house serving the social life of Grand Forks' fast growing population at the turn of the century. Indoor venues provided respite and recreation during the harsh winters experienced in the region.

The building exhibits a symmetrical design with brick pilasters dividing the west-facing façade into three bays. Ground floor access is through the central bay (*Fig. 1*). The building measures approximately 50' x 140' with the two-story section measuring 50' x 50' and the rear section (extending to the east along University Avenue) measuring approximately 50' x 90' with a clear-spanning steel bow-truss roof structure. (*Fig. 2*)

Early Brick Commercial architecture was among the first urban architecture that began to emerge during the 1880s replacing wooden structures. Jack's Roller Rink is a typical example of this style with almost no ornamentation and a relatively unadorned design.

Personnel: Historian: Susan Caraher, Grand Forks Historic Preservation Commission
Architect: Agatha Frisby - Prairie Centre Architecture
Photographer: Wyatt Atchley, Independent

Description: Jack's Roller Rink is an Early Brick Commercial Style building with a flat roof at the front (west elevation) above the residential apartments. The façade is divided into three bays delineated by brick pilasters. It shows different window styles including 1/1 double-hung windows on the top floor apartments, small arched windows located at a mezzanine level beneath the apartments, and larger display windows at ground level. The small arched windows are unique to this building in the historic downtown district (*Fig. 1*).

The original ground floor windows on the front elevation were four 1/1 windows of equal size and layout balancing those on the top floor (*Fig. 3*). Those windows were later

modified to two display windows, each three-panel full-height fixed display window either side of the main door. The ground floor windows and entry now have canvas awnings.

The second story fenestration includes five small equal-sized 1/1 double-hung sashed windows with arched upper sashes capped with a semi-circular brick arch and a reinforced concrete sill. Each aligns with the center of the rectangular window above it on the top floor. They are positioned between what is now the top floor apartment and the lower level, however it is likely they were originally part of a mezzanine floor prior to alterations. Filled windows that continue on the north side of the building further suggest a mezzanine at this level, and the description of a desired spectator platform in the planning for a roller rink provide evidence that this feature was included in the construction.¹ The interior of the north wall shows vertical scars at the level between the filled upper window and the green paint door indicating a possible platform along the wall approximately 9 ft. from floor level (*Fig. 9*).

The top fenestration includes five 1/1 double-hung sash windows with stone sills and reinforced flat concrete lintels and sills. Four of these are arranged with two in each of the side bays while a smaller version is positioned in the center of the middle bay. The four larger windows are aluminum replacements but the window openings are original. The smaller window in the center retains the original wood frame.

The cornice is decorated with a denticulated brick pattern matching the cornice of the Marble Works building adjoining the roller rink.

Fenestration on the north elevation along University Avenue is limited to the apartment access door and the third floor apartment as other windows and doors were bricked in as the building's use changed (*Fig. 2*).

The top floor contains two apartments of equal size. Access is from a side door on the north elevation via a flight of stairs to a common space on a mezzanine. Each apartment is built above the mezzanine accessed from a set of wooden stairs to a common landing (*Fig. 6*). Both apartments face west with the north side apartment benefiting from four windows on the north elevation. The south side apartment directly abuts the Marble Works building.

The original roller skating rink beneath the bow-truss roof has been remodeled to accommodate subsequent retail spaces.

The roller rink building has a reinforced concrete foundation and solid brick exterior walls. The basement has steel support posts throughout (*Fig. 4*). A concrete ramp and freight elevator interrupt the otherwise rectangular space.

History: A December 1906 article in the Evening Times, Grand Forks, reported that a prominent citizen was giving serious consideration to building a roller rink for the City of Grand Forks to compliment the public seasonal ice rinks and was seeking a business partner. Both Fargo and Crookston had already made such an investment, and there was

¹ *The Evening Times, February 6, 1907, p.5*

confidence that the project would be successful from the beginning.² By the following month, a partner was found in Crookston who recognized the potential for a similar recreation venue for Grand Forks. While it was not the first roller rink for the city, Grand Forks had not had such a venue for several years.

North 4th Street was not the first location considered for the roller rink. The nearby three story Woolen Mill was unoccupied at this time and it was thought to provide the space needed. With modifications including new floors and the removal of the third floor except for a spectator platform, it could be a multipurpose entertainment venue. The existing Mill machinery proved too great of an obstacle and ultimately a new building was constructed across the street.

W.R. Jack's Roller Rink was designed by architect Bert D. Keck of Crookston, Minnesota, and built by Dinnie Brothers of Grand Forks for a cost of \$15,000.00 at 224 N. 4th Street.³

Jack's Roller Rink was one of several entertainment venues in the downtown area built during the early decades of the city's growth. Built in 1907, the vast flexible space was also used as a dance hall, and it became a temporary venue for church services when the nearby St Michael's Church suffered a fire and worshippers relocated to Jack's for almost two years (*Fig. 3*).⁴ The roller rink could also accommodate a full orchestra for entertainment during rink sessions, and was also utilized for events such as wrestling exhibitions.⁵

The building is noted on the 1912 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map as housing the marble works in the basement, roller skating and dancing upstairs as well as auto storage with the capacity to store up to 50 vehicles.⁶ The ramp in the basement suggests that vehicles may have been stored there, presumably during the winter months. The 1916 Sanborn Map labels the building as Jack's Auditorium with an office and confectioner, as well as auto storage and dance hall. The Marble Works appears on the 1912 Sanborn map as being located in the basement of the Roller Rink, and by 1916 it had relocated to the adjoining building, and pulleys in the rear attest to the need to move large, heavy items.⁷

The Roller Rink underwent several remodels during more than a century of use. Building permits show it was remodeled in 1948 by Forx Motor Sales with a new elevator and changes to the front, perhaps to create a showroom. Subsequent businesses occupied the space including new retail space at the front with the longest owner and occupant being retailer, Dakota TV and Appliance. A freight elevator in the rear of the building provided convenient access to the basement for oversized appliances such as refrigerators (*Fig. 8*).

According to the building's previous owner when it was an appliance store, Jack's was one of five buildings in the downtown area identified as a fallout shelter in the 1950s owing to the 18" concrete and steel floor between the main floor and the basement. About one third of the basement was used for storage of possible necessities such as chemical

² *The Evening Times*, 6 February, 1907, 5.

³ *Improvement Bulletin*, 23 March, 1907, 26.

⁴ *Tweton* 2005, 72.

⁵ *The Evening Times*, 19 December, 1913, 10.

⁶ *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Grand Forks, Grand Forks County, North Dakota, 1912.*

⁷ *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Grand Forks, Grand Forks County, North Dakota, 1916.*

toilets. Even though he was the building owner, he had no say in whether or not it would be used for that purpose.⁸

The building and inventory suffered damage in the historic 1997 Red River flood, and while the owners rebuilt their business in a south end location, they maintained ownership of 224 N. 4th Street. County property records show that the storefront received a significant remodeling in 1998 as well as a major roof repair in 2017. It was occupied by a bridal store until 2018. In December 2018, Northridge Construction, having purchased Jack's and the adjacent three buildings, announced plans for a six story multi-use development.

Architect

Architect, Bert D. Keck lived in Crookston, Minnesota between 1902 and 1917, designing some of the most important public buildings in the town including the neoclassical Carnegie Public Library (#84001646), three local schools and the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception (#98001219) among others. He also designed several homes including his own in the Arts and Crafts style.⁹

Keck moved to Grand Forks in May 1917 where he continued to shape the city's skyline designing commercial and public buildings in the fast-growing city including a drug store and theatre, and the Vermont Apartment building on Alpha, now First, Avenue N.¹⁰ His office was located in the First National Bank, now St John's Block at the corner of DeMers Ave and 3rd Street, according to classifieds listings in the Grand Forks Herald.

He is also known for designing a school in Argyle, Minnesota considered to have been one of the most modern in the region.¹¹ In 1924, Keck and his family moved to Florida where he continued to design public buildings, private residences and resorts. He passed away in Palm Beach, Florida in 1962.¹²

Sources:

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⁸ File notes from 2005 phone conversation with former Historic Preservation Commission Coordinator.

⁹ Dinkel, 2017

¹⁰ *Grand Forks Herald*, 5 August, 1916; *Grand Forks Herald*, 27 June, 1917

¹¹ *Grand Forks Herald*, 18 April, 1917

¹² Dinkel, 2017

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FIGURES



Fig. 1: West (front) elevation of Jack's Roller Rink. Photographer facing east.



Fig. 2: North elevation showing the rear of the building, from University Ave facing south-west. Most original openings have been filled in.



*Fig. 3: Photo taken c. 1907 showing the original ground floor window arrangement. The building was used for church services after nearby St. Michael's Catholic Church suffered fire damage.
Photo courtesy of St. Michael's Catholic Church.*



Fig. 4: Jack's Roller Rink basement with ramp at top right and freight elevator at top left, facing east.

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Fig. 5: Jack's Roller Rink ground floor retail space. Photographer facing east.



Fig. 6: Ground floor rear of building behind the retail space. Photographer facing north.



Fig. 7: Mezzanine level between retail space and apartments showing interior view of arched windows. Photographer facing west.



Fig 8: Stairs to apartment from the mezzanine level with a storage room to the left. Photographer facing south.



Fig 9: Truss ceiling of Jack's Roller Rink. Photographer facing south.



Fig. 10: Freight elevator likely installed when the building became an appliance retailer to move large appliances to and from basement storage. Photographer facing north.



Fig. 11: Vertical scars running horizontal along the north wall approximately every 18 inches, above the green paint indicate where a spectator platform once stood. The windows along this wall (partially visible in the top right) were filled in with brick.

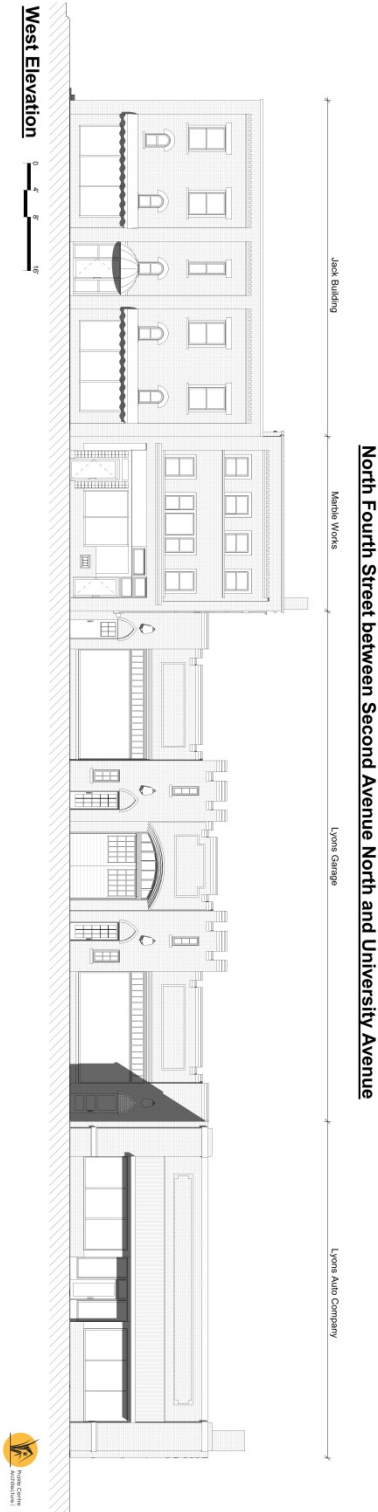


Fig 12: West elevation of (L-R) Jack's Roller Rink, Marble Works, Lyons Garage and Lyons Auto Supplies, Grand Forks, 2020. Note: the brick pattern on the Roller Rink and the Marble Works is not representative of the actual brick pattern. Source: Prairie Centre Architecture PLLC.

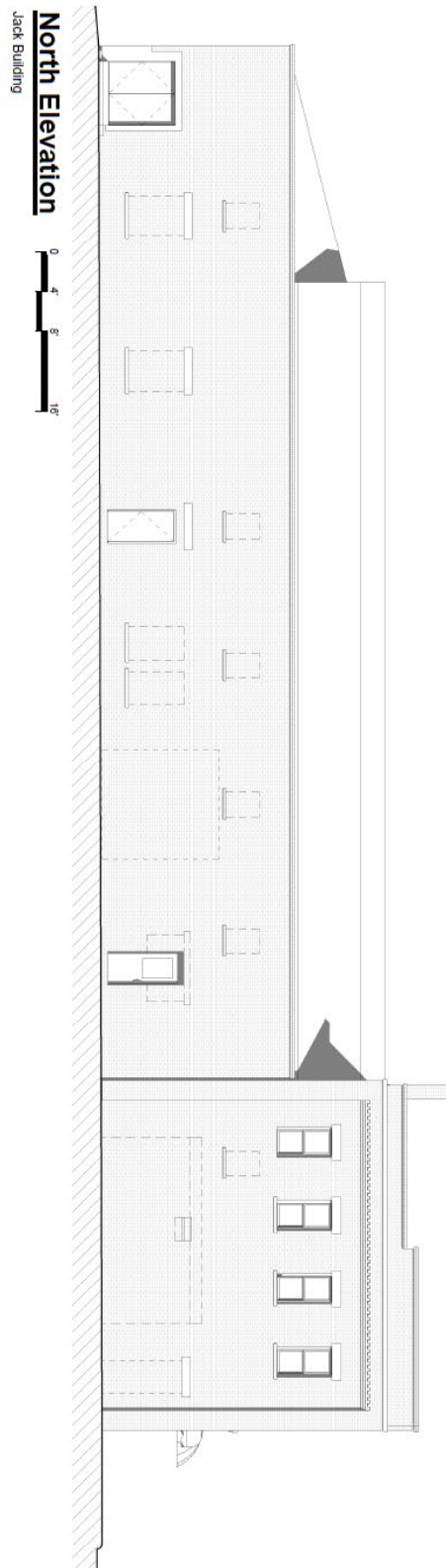


Fig. 13: North elevation of Jack's Roller Rink, along University Avenue, Note: the brick pattern on the Roller Rink is not representative of the actual brick pattern. 2020. Source: Prairie Centre Architecture PLLC.

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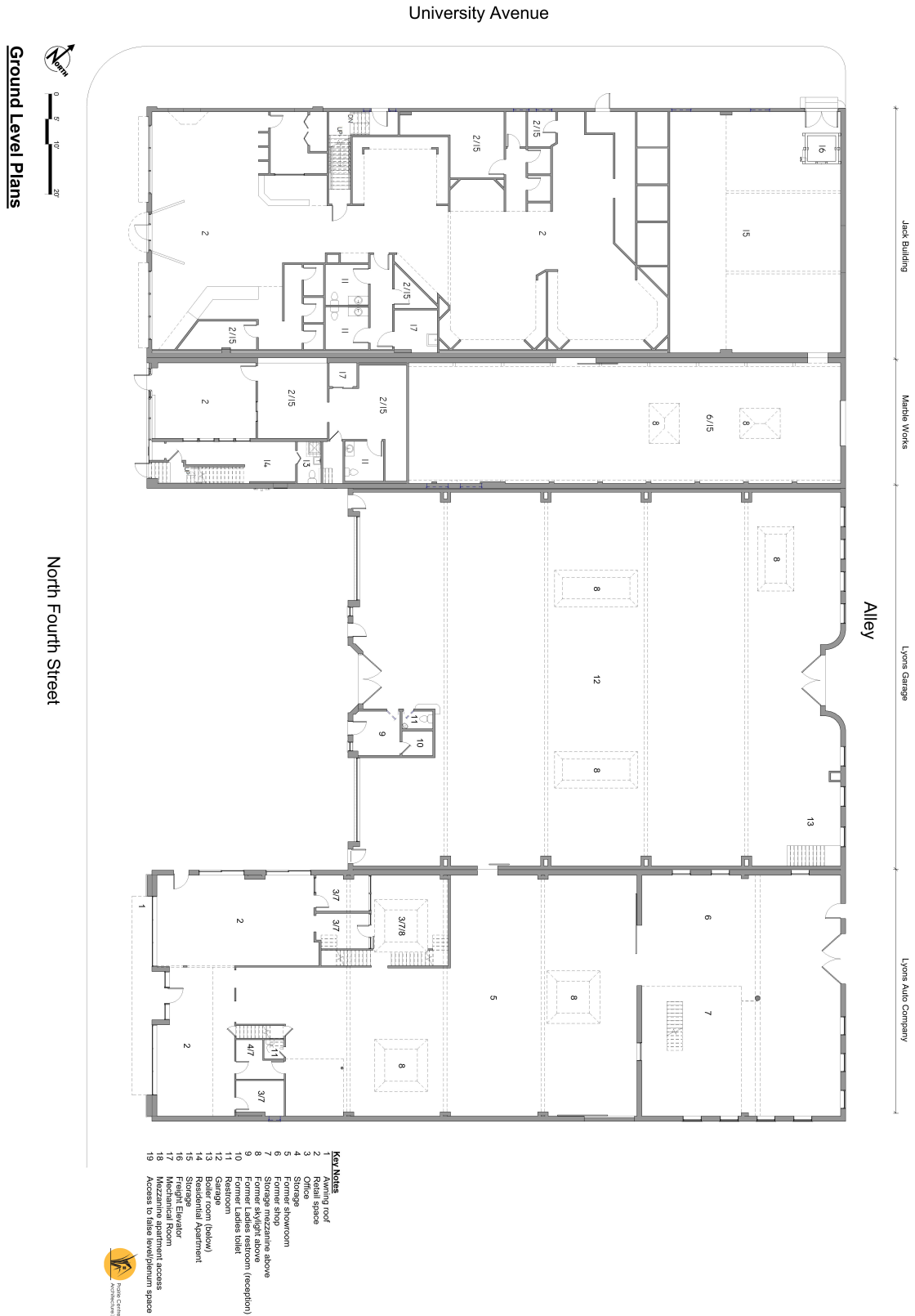


Fig 14: Ground floor plans (left –right) for Jack's Roller Rink, Marble Works, Lyons Garage and Lyons Auto Company with key notes, 2020. Source: Prairie Centre Architecture PLLC.

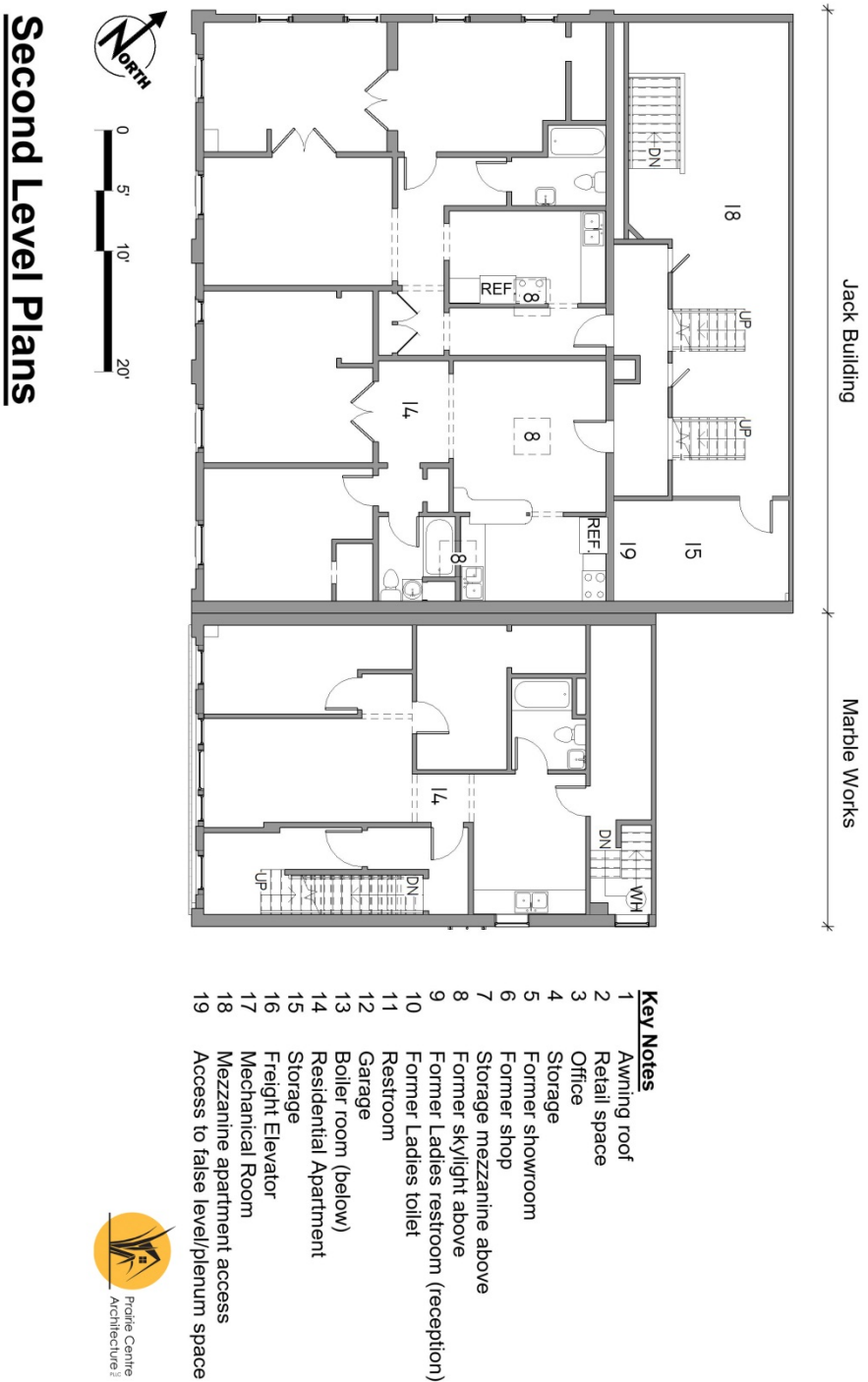


Fig 15: Floor plans (left –right) for Jack’s Roller Rink, Marble Works with key notes, 2020.
Source: Prairie Centre Architecture PLLC.