



Call Box 131 RESTORATION

PORTAGE & MAIN

The Museum has restored a number of original Police call boxes that were made by the Seimens Corporation and installed on Winnipeg streets starting in 1913. These ornate “Police Signal Boxes” were mounted on large round cast iron bases, and refurbished ones can be seen in various locations including the Police Museum, the Winnipeg Police Association offices, The East District Station, and both branches of the Winnipeg Police Credit Union.

In subsequent years, the city also used a newer style of “Gamewell” call box manufactured by the Northern Electric Company. These signal boxes came with a more modern telephone receiver, and were often attached to square metal bases or wooden poles. Restoration specialist Derk Derin wanted to rebuild one of these newer style call boxes as the Museum actually had none on display.

Derk searched through the collection of call boxes that have been saved and held in storage by the Museum. Each of the individually numbered boxes has an identification tag detailing the location where it was installed and used. Meticulously examining each box, Derk found #131 which came from the iconic intersection of Portage and Main!

Having found the one he wanted, Derk then turned his attention to the base. Call box bases are difficult to find for 2 reasons. When the system was decommissioned, the call boxes were removed from their bases and all sent to auction. The bases however were either recycled as with most of the round cast iron ones, or discarded as with the majority of square metal variety which were more often found extremely corroded and unsalvageable.

The Museum has 4 of the square metal boxes which were received from the city after being saved during street reconstruction. Three were in rougher shape while one was nice enough to be easily restored without needing extensive rebuilding.

Derk stripped and repainted the base, then built a wooden platform to mount it on. While mulling over how to incorporate a light, Derk located a picture on “Vintage Winnipeg” (Facebook) showing the exact call box he was trying to restore. Derk approached Winnipeg Streets and Traffic who made up “Portage”



and “Main” street signs that were placed behind the call box on a pole. They also supplied the mounting hardware! The usual red signal light was incorporated into the pole and wired up with a plug end and a switch so it could be turned on as art of the display.

This restored Gamewell call box is currently on display in the Police Museum and available for viewing. The Museum extends our sincere thanks and appreciation to Derk for his endless ideas and restoration efforts!

