



**2015 MAIN STREET
WITCH'S HUT, KILDONAN PARK**

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
Researcher: M. Peterson
January 2023

This building embodies the following heritage values as described in the *Historical Resources By-law*, 55/2014 (consolidated update July 13, 2016):

- (a) the Witch's Hut has been an integral part of experience of visiting Kildonan Park for Winnipeg children for many decades;
- (b) The resource, constructed in Winnipeg's post-World War II growth phase, is associated with the ongoing upgrading and modernization of public parks in Winnipeg;
- (c) The building represents an iconic structure in a medieval fairy tale and represents an imaginary gingerbread house. It was designed by local architect Hans Peter Langes;
- (d) The structure is built of reinforced concrete and fieldstone, typical materials;
- (e) The structure is located in the heart of one of Winnipeg's best known and visited public greenspaces, Kildonan Park; and
- (f) Much of the building's exterior building materials and layout remain.

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“[Recently] the people of this country began to realize the fact that cities were becoming solid masses of masonry... no provisions were being made for lungs for the cities.”¹

Land for public parks in what became the City of Winnipeg was first identified in the 1870s but disappeared during the railway-initiated real estate boom of the early 1880s. It would be another decade before the City of Winnipeg would officially set aside public parks- a reaction to the great societal changes globally as well as local pressure from citizens and developers.²

Winnipeg parks in 1890 fell into two classes: vacant green space that had simply come to be used for park or recreational purposes because it was free and not being used for any other purpose; and park areas owned by individuals or companies and run as commercial ventures, such as Elm Park and River Park.³

It was George Frederick Carruthers (1846-1918) alderman for Ward Six (area north of the CPR tracks) who spearheaded the move, on the part of Winnipeg City Council, to press the provincial government for legislation that would permit all municipalities in Manitoba to create parks boards and acquire, improve, and maintain public parks. Local newspapers of the day dubbed him “the father of our public parks” (Plate 1).⁴

On March 28, 1892, a draft of a Public Parks Act was drawn up and presented to Winnipeg City Council. It was approved and forwarded to the Provincial Legislature, which passed the Public Parks Act for Manitoba on April 20, 1892 and provided for “the establishment and maintenance

¹ City of Winnipeg Engineer's Report, 1892, quoted in Mary E. Cavett, H. John Selwood, and John C. Lehr, “Social Philosophy and the Early Development of Winnipeg's Public Parks,” Urban History Review, Vol. 11, No. 1, June 1982. Below as Cavett, Selwood and Lehr, 1982.

² The author wishes to thank G. Bugailiskis for sharing his research on Winnipeg parks and greenspaces.

³ Catherine Macdonald, A City At Leisure. An Illustrated History of Parks and Recreation Services in Winnipeg (Winnipeg, MB: City of Winnipeg, Parks and Recreation Department, 1995)

⁴ C. Macdonald, op. cit.; and William Douglas, “Winnipeg Parks,” Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba Transactions, Series 3, No. 14, 1959, pp. 61-64.

of public parks in cities and towns”. The act was based on similar acts which existed in other provinces of Canada and states in the United States, including the Minneapolis, MN Park Commission.⁵ City Council passed a by-law adopting the Act in January of 1893 and created the Public Parks Board.

While the Board had a long-term goal of creating large “regional parks” around the city, their initial efforts were creating smaller, neighbourhood sites. By the end of 1894, four sites had been selected and purchased: Fort Rouge (originally called Assiniboine), Central, Victoria, St. John’s. Several others followed but it would not be until well into the 20th century, during the City’s great expansion phase, that the regional park goal was achieved.

The land for Assiniboine Park was purchased by the City in 1904 and between 1909 and 1912, the City purchased nearly 40.0 hectares of land for \$163,819.17 north of the City limits on Main Street (Plate 2).⁶ Originally referred to as Strathcona Park, Chairman Champion described the site as “rank vegetation...acres of breast high ferns, and the huge masses of grape vine and bittersweet hanging from the tree tops, suggest[ive of] the tropics rather than rigorous Manitoba.”⁷ In 1910, the city spent over \$60,000 on improvements to Assiniboine Park and the initial development of Kildonan Park – the later included sowing grass, cleaning up fallen and dead trees, building bridges, and staking and grading roadways and paths (Plates 3-5).⁸

But further work at Kildonan Park was delayed because of City Council’s desire to develop a new, larger site for the Manitoba Exhibition. In 1913, Council chose land adjacent to the park, but this plan was abandoned a year later, allowing progress on Kildonan Park to restart.⁹ The

⁵ Manitoba Free Press, March 4, 1892.

⁶ City of Winnipeg, Kildonan Park History and Development (Winnipeg, MB: Parks and Recreation Department (Metro), 1972). Below as Kildonan Park History.

⁷ G. Champion, “Parks and Recreation Facilities in the United States,” quoted in John Selwood, John C. Lehr, and Mary Cavett, “The Most Lovely and Picturesque City in All of Canada: The Origins of Winnipeg’s Public Park System,” Manitoba History, No. 31, Spring 1996.

⁸ Manitoba Free Press, April 9, 1910, p. 40; and Kildonan Park History.

⁹ C. Macdonald, op. cit. In 1921, this property was opened as Kildonan Golf Course, the city’s first civic-owned club.

landscaping of the park, based on traditional Victorian examples, included formal gardens and plantings (Plate 6).

The Great Depression and World War II halted any progress on city parks- new capital projects, maintenance, and basic upkeep activities were severely reduced as budgets were slashed. But after the War, like so much of Winnipeg, revenues increased, the economy boomed and budgets were brought back.

In 1966, as Manitoba's plans for Canada's Centennial celebrations were well underway, the German-Canadian Centennial Council of Winnipeg organized a meeting to move forward their plans to construct a gingerbread house modelled after the witch's house in the Brothers Grimm fairy tale, Hansel and Gretel. Plans had been produced and civic officials had agreed to put the house in Kildonan Park, but support among Winnipeg's German community, at this initial meeting, was limited.¹⁰

Almost a year later, in September 1967, the contract for its construction was let but it would be October 1970 before the facility was opened to the public (Plate 7).

STYLE

The Witch's Hut, which has also been referred to as the Fairy Castle and Fairy Tale Cottage (or *Maerchenhaus* in German), is based on a German folktale from the 15th or 16th century and first published by the Brothers Grimm as Hansel and Gretel in the early 1800s (Plate 8). The gingerbread "castle" of the story is a medieval house and the architect was able to add fanciful elements to his design.

¹⁰ Winnipeg Free Press, November 4, 1966, p. 2.

CONSTRUCTION

The circular building rests on a concrete pad and is constructed of fieldstone over reinforced concrete (see Appendix I for additional construction information). The original conical roof is covered in cedar shakes with “coloured translucent fiberglass inserts”¹¹ near the stone and copper peak (Plates 9-11). At its base, the building measures 8.0 metres in diameter. Cost of construction was \$18,000.¹²

The cedar shake roof was replaced by the City in 2014.¹³

DESIGN

The Witch’s Hut is a circular structure with an arched wooden door as entrance (Plate 12). The structure features coloured fieldstone walls (Plate 13) and the eaves of the conical roof curve around the building (Plate 14). This roof features wood panels with painted shapes above the eaves (described as “faux gingerbread cookies”,¹⁴ two shed dormers, coloured glass windows and topped by a round fieldstone element (Plates 15-16).

INTERIOR

The interior of the Witch’s Hut features elements depicting the famous fairy tale, from the 13-step curved split log staircase to the second floor, the field stone “chimney” running up the centre of the space, to the characters from the tale, giant spider and “scary” furniture. A terra cotta relief sculpture illustrating the story of Hansel and Gretel is mounted to the main floor wall (Plates 17-20).

This last element was the work of local sculptor Elfriede Berger (1916-2011). Born Elfriede Leopoldine Geier in Graz, Austria, she attended art school in her early 20s, and married and had a son in the 1940s. The family moved to Winnipeg in 1953 and she worked as a sculptor into her 80s,

¹¹ “Entrance Elevation,” Architect’s Plans, #2501/1968.

¹² City of Winnipeg, Assessment Record, Roll No. 14072340500.

¹³ Winnipeg Free Press, May 21, 2005, p. F3.

¹⁴ Loc. cit.

with works displayed in Canada, the U.S.A. and Europe. She lived for many years on Scotia Street, near the park (Plate 21).¹⁵

INTEGRITY

The building stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition. There have not been significant changes to the structure beyond maintenance since its opening.

STREETSCAPE

The Witch's Hut is located in the heart of Kildonan Park, one of the City's largest greenspaces on the banks of Lord Selkirk Creek (Plates 22-23).

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS

The Witch's Hut was designed by Hans Peter Langes (Plates 24-25). Born in Germany, he settled in Winnipeg in 1951, working for Green, Blankstein and Russell before opening his own practice in 1964. He has not been evaluated by the Historical Buildings and Resources Committee.

Construction of the hut was awarded to Neustaedter Construction Co. of Winnipeg.¹⁶ After working for Bird Construction, Henry Neustaedter (1911-2008) founded this company in 1945, focusing on residential construction. He was also very active in a number of the local German community and business organizations and was awarded a Community Service Award from the City of Winnipeg. He retired to Vernon, B.C. in 1976 and passed away in 2008.¹⁷

¹⁵ Winnipeg Free Press, July 30, 1979, p. 53 and November 9, 2011, p. 28.

¹⁶ Winnipeg Free Press, September 2, 1967, p. 54.

¹⁷ Winnipeg Free Press, October 9, 2008, p. 32.

PERSON/INSTITUTION

Winnipeg's public parks, greenspaces and outdoor recreation spaces have always been an important part of its civic history and a source of great pride for its citizens. The Parks Board and Parks Department have historically striven to supply these citizens with natural spaces for leisure, sports and recreation. Kildonan Park was the City's second large regional park and has been an important part of the lives of Winnipeggers not only in the area but Winnipeggers as a whole. The ongoing upgrading and modernization of the park facilities is an example of the park's importance within the city.

The Witch's Hut, a gift from the German-Canadian Centennial Council of Winnipeg to the children of Winnipeg, has been an extremely popular venue in the park which is now staffed by volunteers who help maintain the building and its displays and greet guests. A 2015 estimate had over 1,000 people visiting the hut weekly during the summer months.¹⁸

EVENT

There is no known significant historic event connected with this building.

CONTEXT

One of Manitoba's many centennial projects was the construction of the Witch's Hut in Kildonan Park. This addition was part of the city-wide park upgrade policy of the 1960s and 1970s.

LANDMARK

The Witch's Hut is a very well-known structure to Winnipeggers.

¹⁸ [Winnipeg Free Press](#), July 21, 2015, online.



APPENDIX I

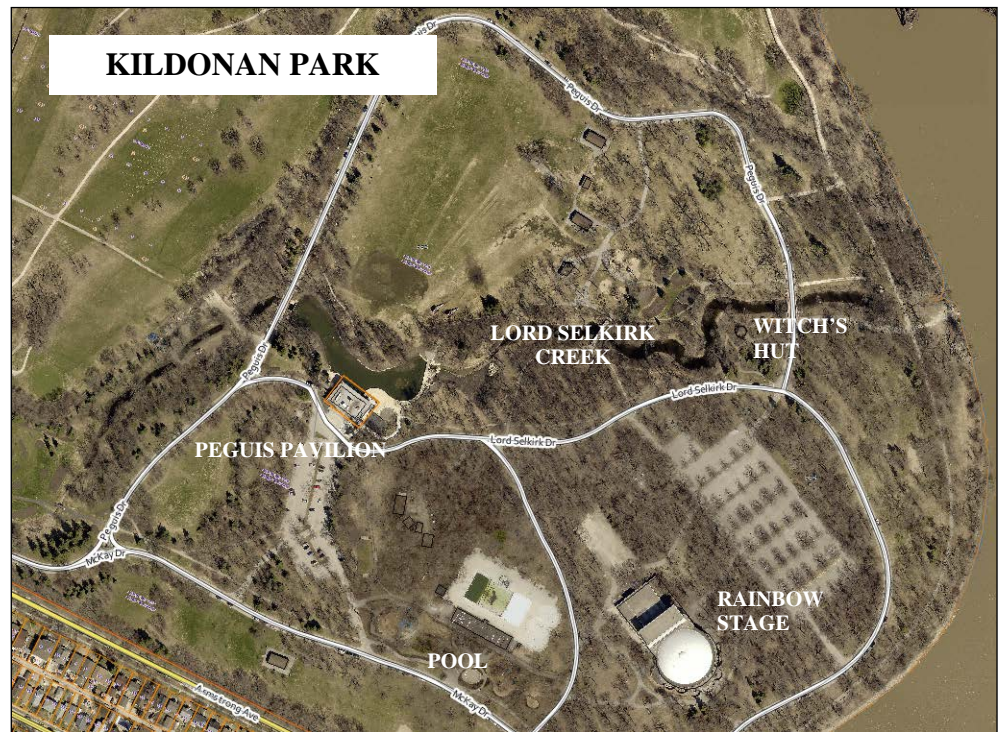
CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report Assessment Record

Building Address: 2015 Main Street Building Name: Witch's Hut, Kildonan Park
Original Use: park structure Current Use: park structure
Roll No. (Old): 14072340500 (20320) R.S.N.: 196801
Municipality: 01 Ward: --- Property or Occupancy Code: 86
Legal Description: Parts of River Lots 17/24 Kildonan Storeys: 2
Location: Kildonan Park Date of Construction: 1968-1970
Construction Type: reinforced concrete and rough stone

HERITAGE STATUS: NOMINATED LIST

Building Permits (Plans available: [CS] City Storage):
- 2501/1968 [CS] \$18,000 (original)

Information:
- structure rests on a concrete slab



ARCHITECT: HANS PETER LANGES

CONTRACTOR: UNKNOWN

APPENDIX II

Hans Peter Langes

Langes was born in Datteln, Germany in 1925 and studied at the School of Architecture in Essen, Germany, graduating in 1951.¹ He came to Winnipeg the same year and took a job the next year in the office of Green, Blankstein and Russell. Twelve years later, in 1964, he opened his own practice as Peter Langes and Associates, which operated until his retirement in 1988. This firm received several large contracts with the Provincial government in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as Rural Municipalities and school divisions. A list of his work in Manitoba would include:

Polo Park Shopping Centre, 1485 Portage Avenue, 1958-1959

Fisher Branch Collegiate Institute, Fisher Branch, MB, 1961

St. Andrews School No. 2, Rural Municipality of St. Andrews, MB, 1964

Morris Rural Municipal Office, 207 Main Street, Morris, MB, 1967 (demolished)

Westwood House, 3200 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, 1969

Imperial Place, 246 Roslyn Road, 1969

The Cedars, 365 Wellington Crescent, Winnipeg, MB, 1969

Witch's Hut, Kildonan Park, 2015 Main Street, Winnipeg, MB, 1970

Ross L. Gray School, 21 Canham Street, Sprague, MB, 1970

Fort Rouge Ecumenical Apartments, 324 Stradbrook Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, 1971

Duplexes and Townhouses, Rue le Maire, Parc la Salle, Fort Garry, 1971

Additions to Austin, MacGregor & Gladstone Elementary Schools, Pine Creek School Division, 1973

Elder Housing, Portage la Prairie, MB, 1974

Canadian National Railway Rail Transportation Centre, Gimli Industrial Park, Gimli, MB, 1975-1978

Emerson Personal Care Home, 26 Main Street, Emerson, MB, 1977

Swan River Home for the Elderly, Swan River, MB, 1985

Manitoba Law Courts, 391 Broadway, 1988 – renovations/preservation (won Heritage Winnipeg Preservation Award)

St. Clements Municipal Office, 1043 Kittson Road, East Selkirk, Rural Municipality of St. Clements, MB, date unknown

¹ Winnipeg Free Press, January 23, 2008, p. 28.

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Plate 1 – G.F. Carruthers, ca.1902. (Representative Men of Manitoba [Winnipeg, MB: The Tribune Publishing Company, 1902].)

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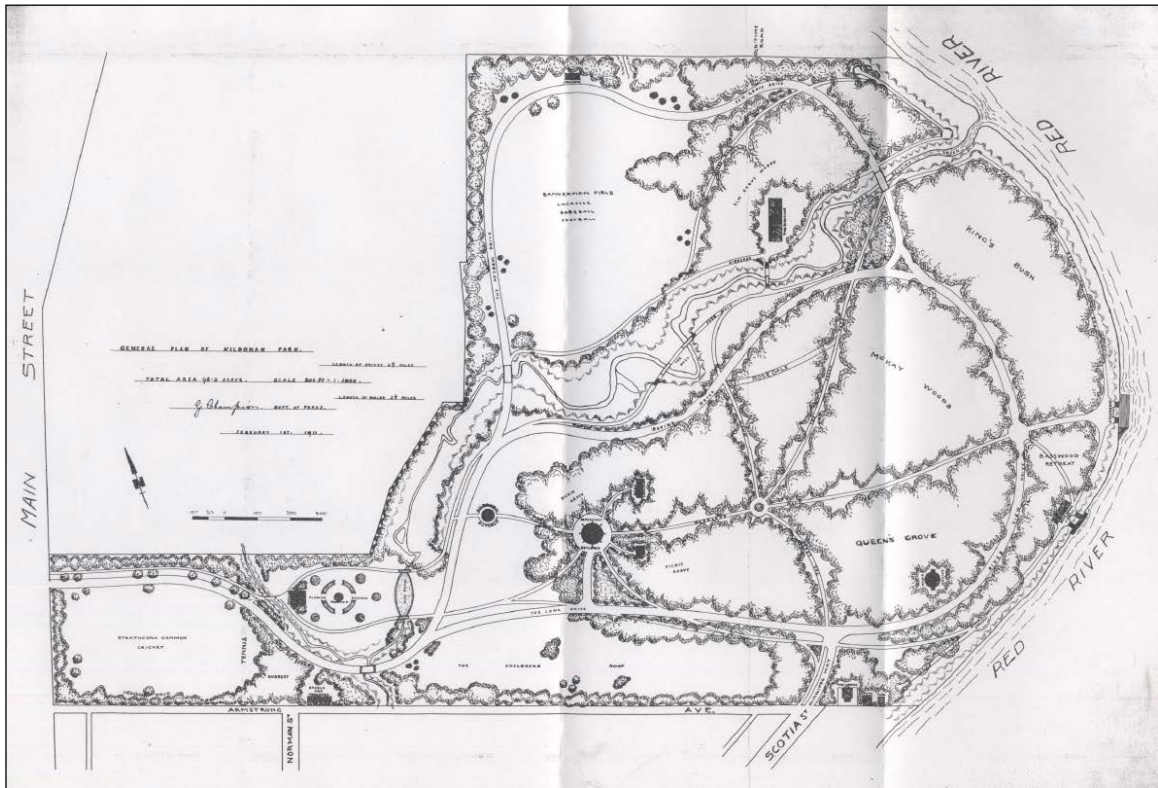


Plate 2 – “General Plan, Kildonan Park, 1911.” (City of Winnipeg, Kildonan Park History and Development [Winnipeg, MB: Parks and Recreation Department (Metro), 1972].)

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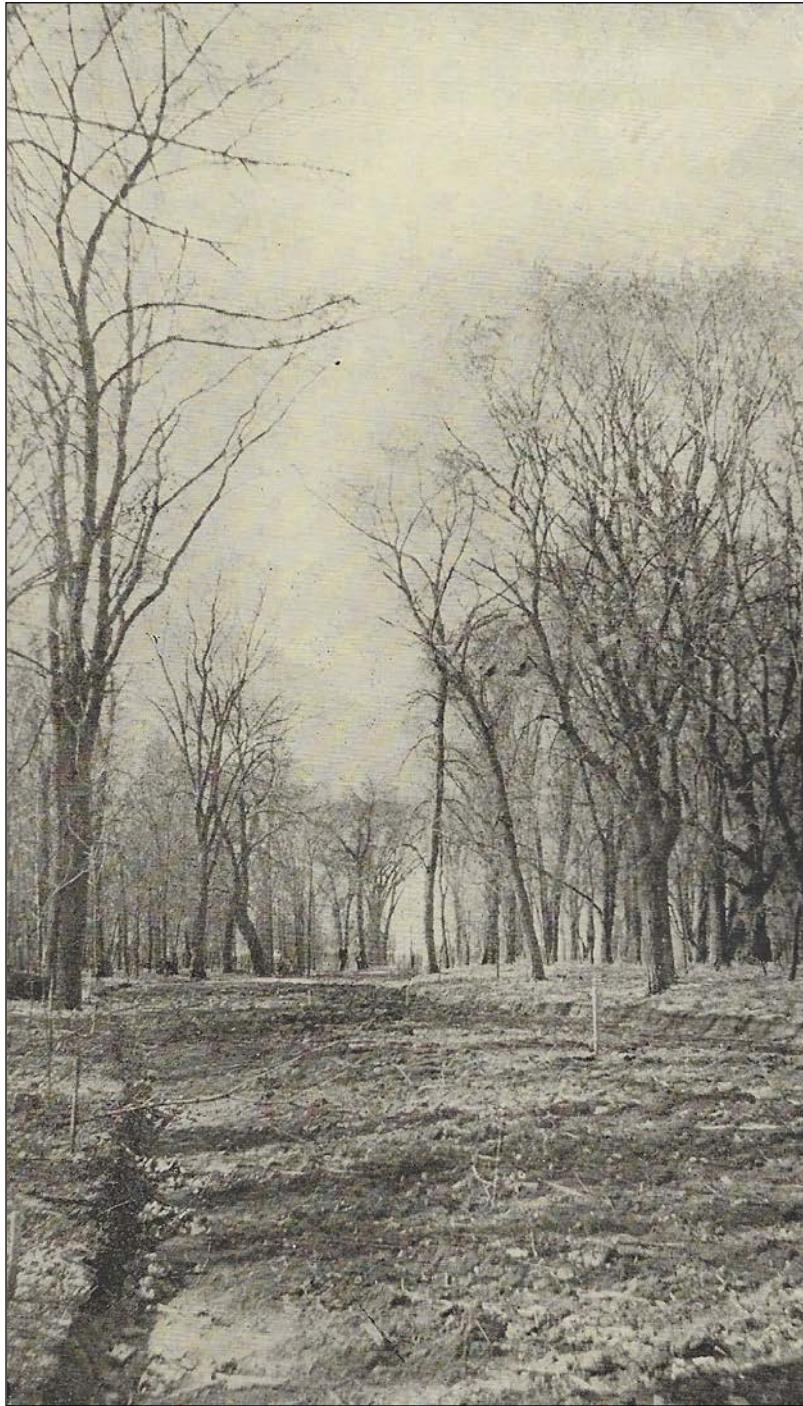


Plate 3 – Road grading at Kildonan Park, 1910. (Winnipeg Public Parks Board, Annual Report, 1910, p. 28.)

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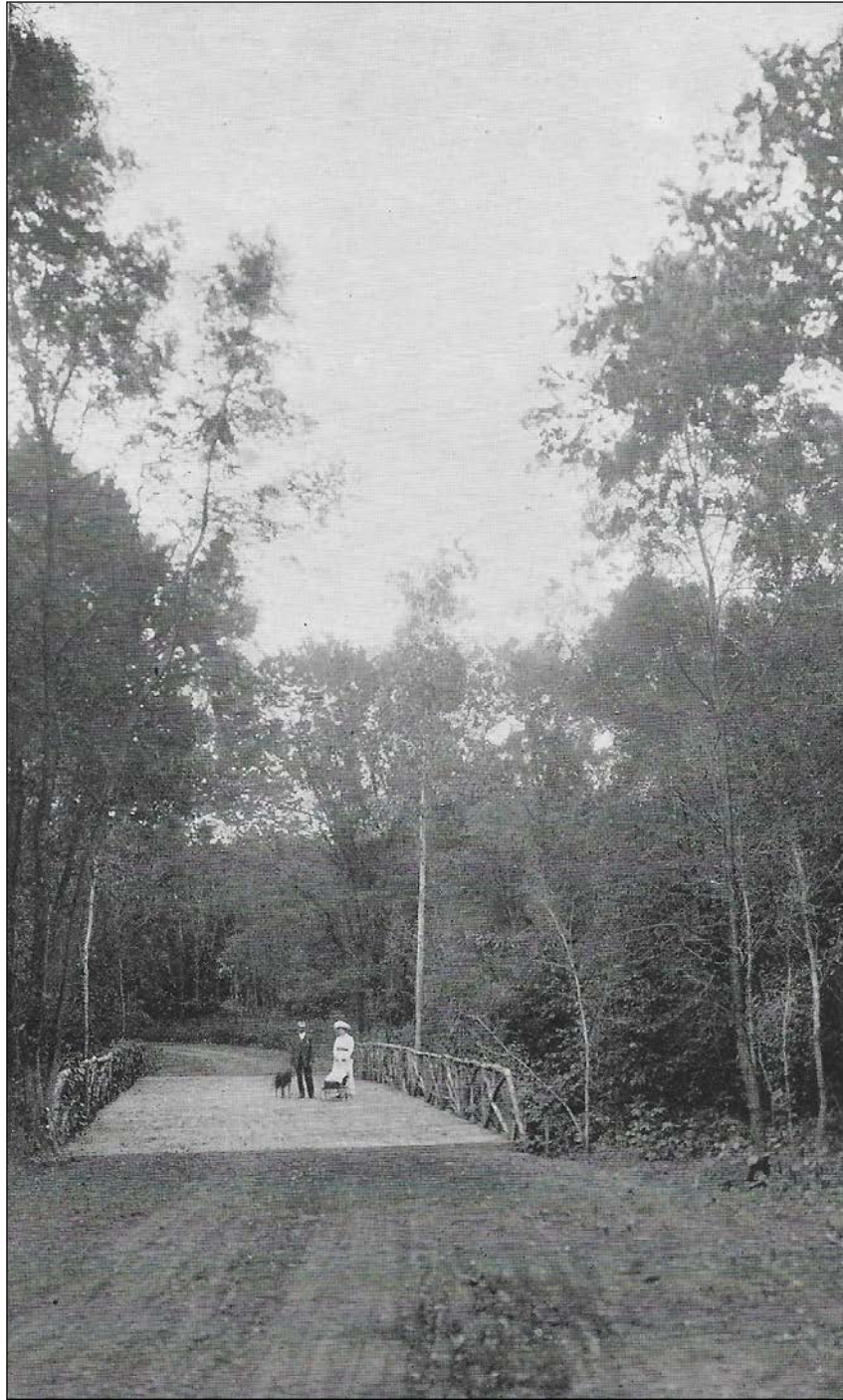


Plate 4 – Bridge over Lord Selkirk Creek, Kildonan Park, 1911. (Winnipeg Public Parks Board, Annual Report, 1911, p. 12.)

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Plate 5 – Original Main Street entrance, Kildonan Park, 1916. (Winnipeg Public Parks Board, Annual Report, 1916, p. 6.)

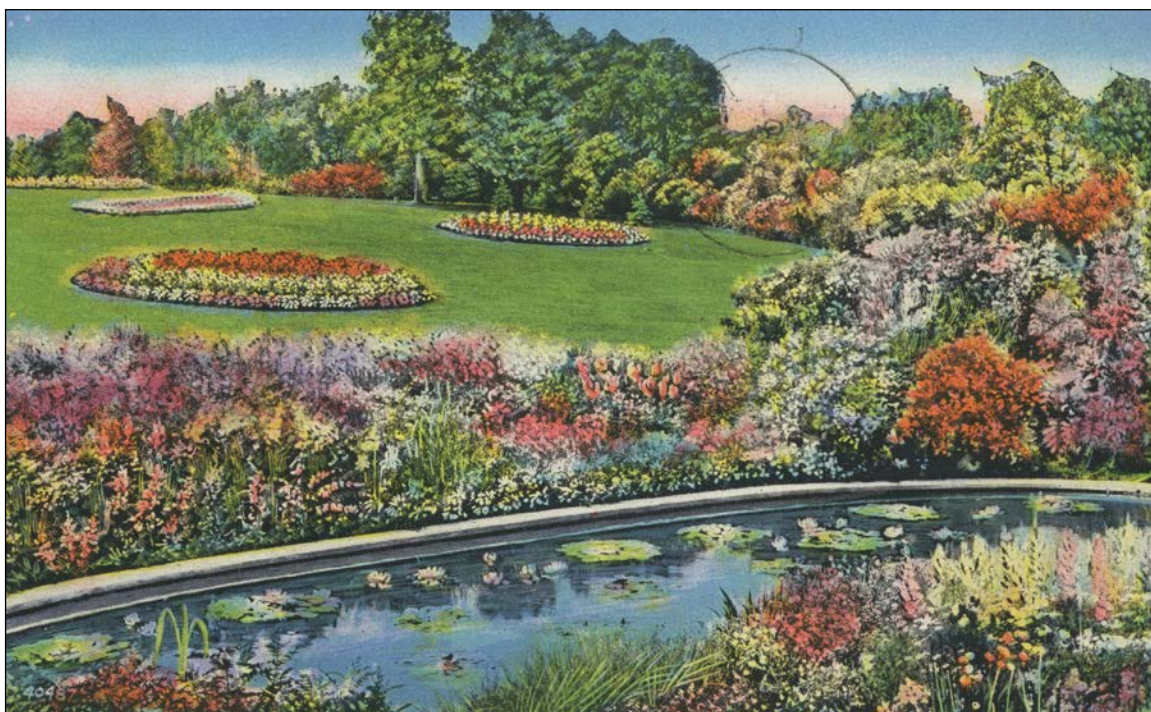


Plate 6 – Formal flower beds and lily pond, Kildonan Park, ca.1930. (City of Winnipeg Archives, Martin Berman Postcard Collection.)

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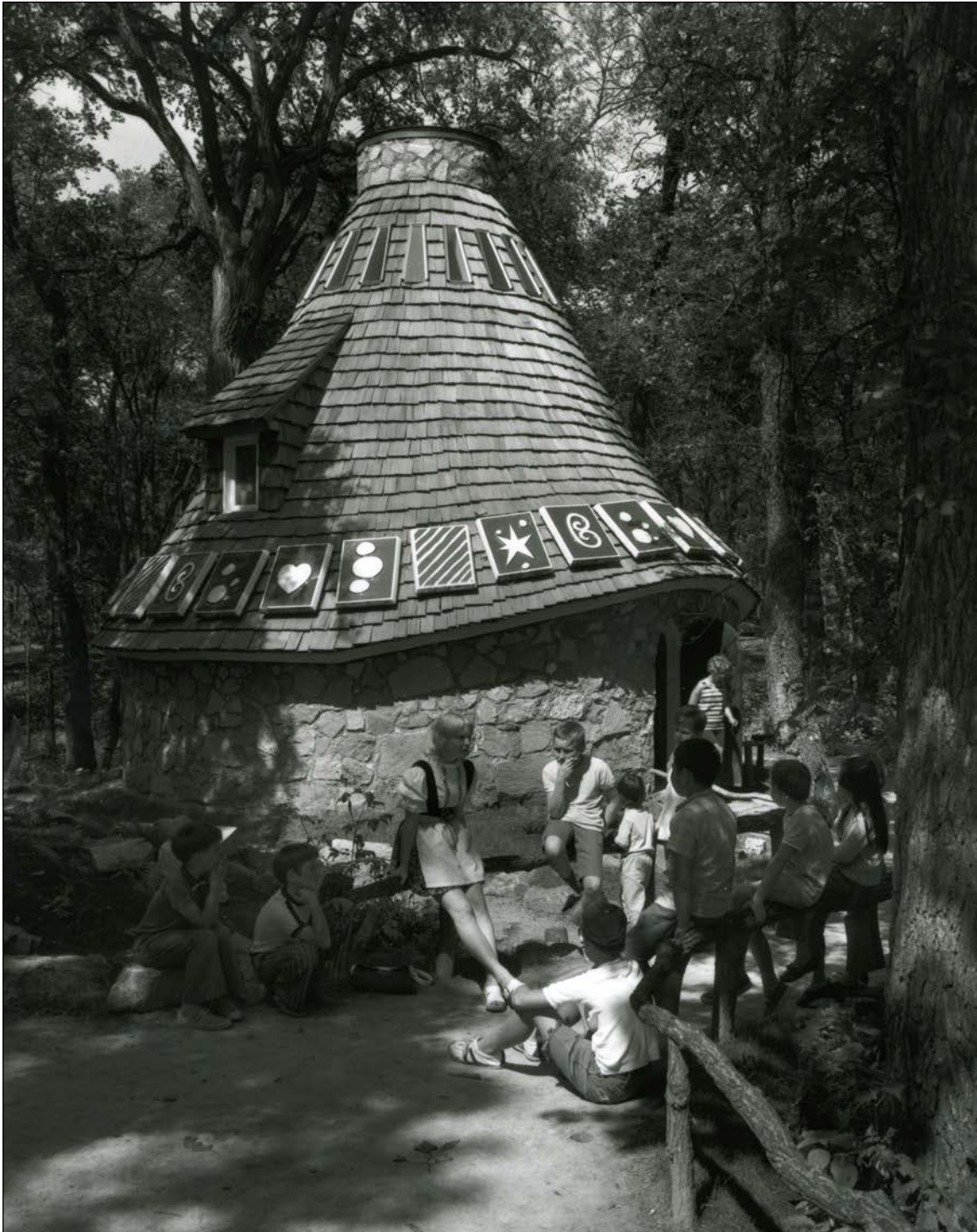


Plate 7 – Children visiting the Witch's Hut, Kildonan Park, 2015 Main Street, 1971. ([University of Manitoba Digital Collections, Henry Kalen photograph, UM-PC219-A05-100-001-0001-005-0001.](#))

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Plate 8 – An 1842 illustration by Adrian Ludwig Richter in *Mährlein von Hänsel und Gretel*.
(Public Domain.)

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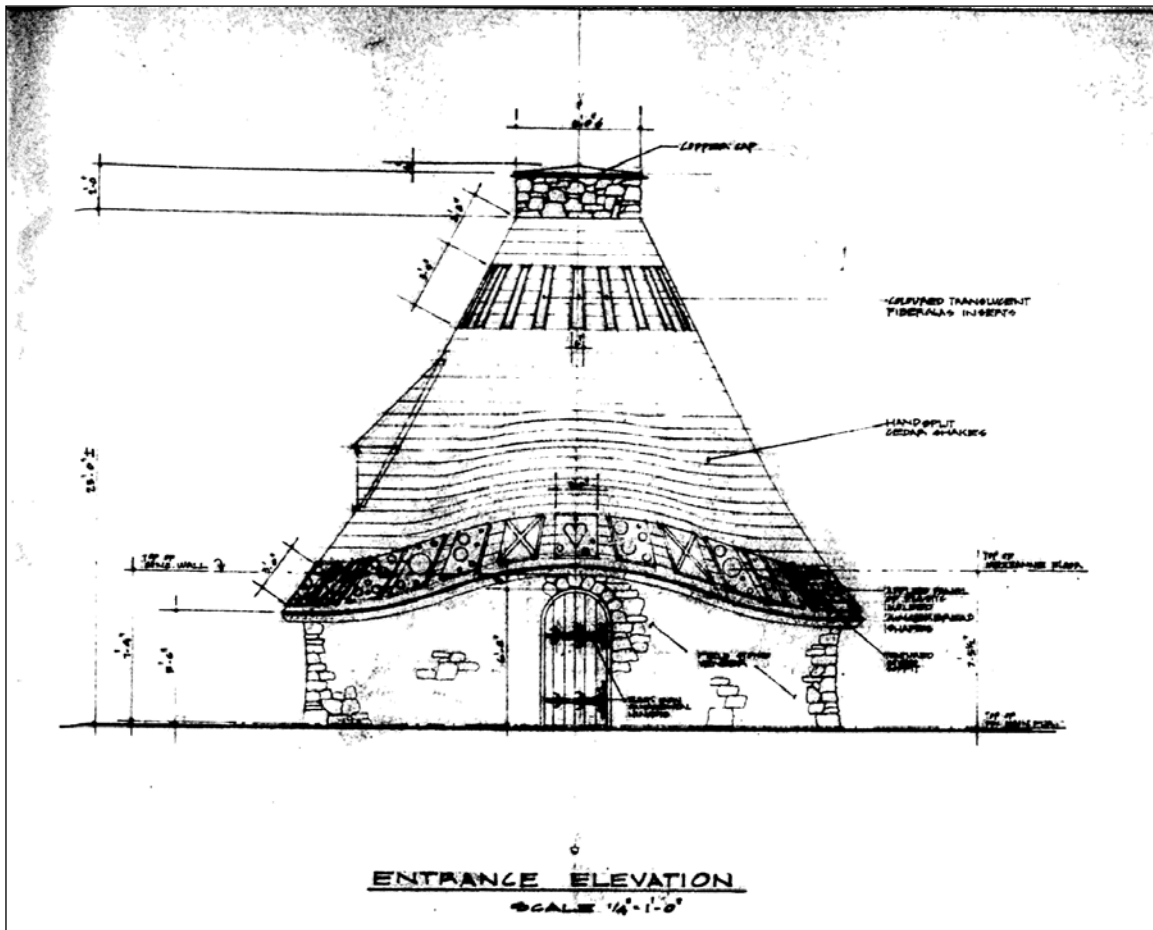


Plate 9 – “Entrance Elevation,” architects plans #2501/1968. (City of Winnipeg, Records Management Division.)

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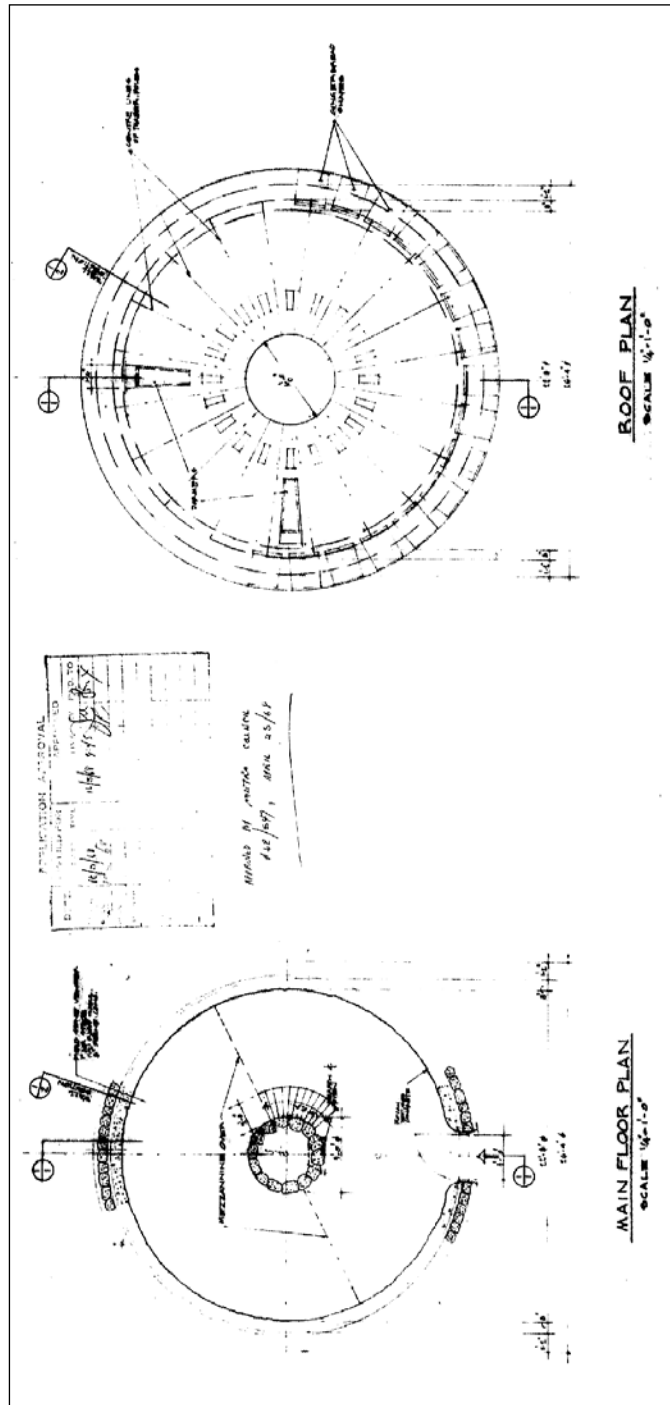


Plate 11 – “Main Floor Plan” and “Roof Plan,” architects plans #2501/1968. (City of Winnipeg, Records Management Division.)

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Plate 12 – Witch's Hut, Kildonan Park, 2015 Main Street, 2022. (M. Peterson, 2022.)

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Plate 13 – Fieldstone wall, Witch's Hut, Kildonan Park, 2015 Main Street, 2022. (M. Peterson, 2022.)

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Plate 14– Witch's Hut, Kildonan Park, 2015 Main Street, 2022. (M. Peterson, 2022.)

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Plate 15– Witch's Hut, Kildonan Park, 2015 Main Street, 2022. (M. Peterson, 2022.)

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Plate 16– Witch's Hut, Kildonan Park, 2015 Main Street, 2022. (M. Peterson, 2022.)

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Plate 17– Witch's Hut, Kildonan Park, 2015 Main Street, main floor with terra cotta sculpture, 2022. (M. Peterson, 2022.)



Plate 18– Witch's Hut, Kildonan Park, 2015 Main Street, main floor entrance, 2022. (M. Peterson, 2022.)

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Plate 19– Witch's Hut, Kildonan Park, 2015 Main Street, central stone structure, 2022. (M. Peterson, 2022.)

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Plate 20– Witch's Hut, Kildonan Park, 2015 Main Street, staircase looking towards entrance, 2022.
(M. Peterson, 2022.)



Plate 21– Elfriede Berger, date unknown. (Winnipeg Free Press, November 9, 2011, p. 28.)

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Plate 22– Witch's Hut, Kildonan Park, 2015 Main Street, 2022. (M. Peterson, 2022.)



Plate 23– Witch's Hut, Kildonan Park, 2015 Main Street, 2022. (M. Peterson, 2022.)

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Plate 24 – Peter Langes and Bill Mitchell reviewing plans, 1960. William Hayes Mitchell (1932-2022) worked with Langes at Green Blankstein and Russell until 1965 when he formed SMS Engineering. ([University of Manitoba, Digital Collection, Winnipeg Tribune Personalities Collection, UM-PC018-A81-012-009-0288-009-0001.](#))

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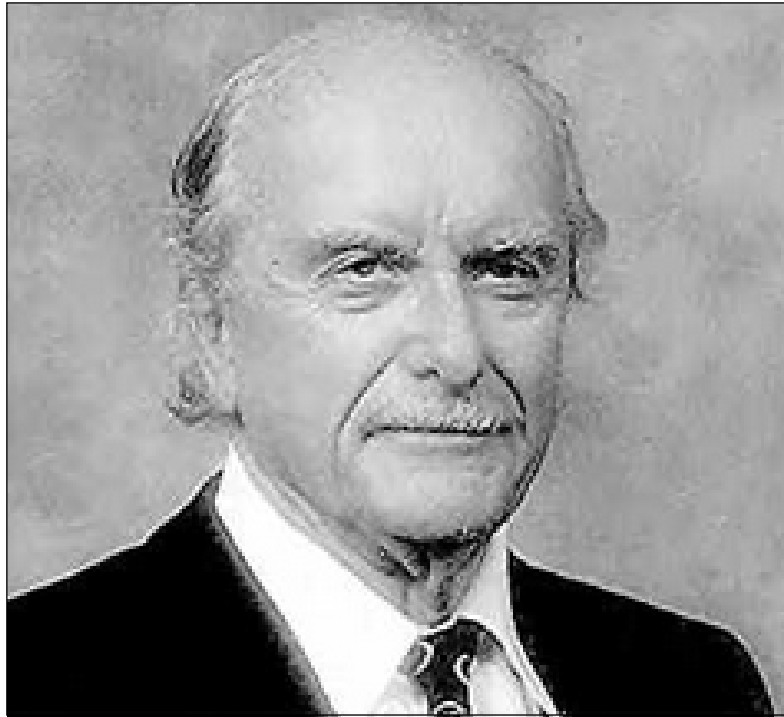


Plate 25 – Hans Peter Langes, date unknown. (Winnipeg Free Press, January 23, 2008, p. 28.)