APPENDIX E – HISTORICAL SOCIETY FACILITY REPORT

6 FERMOR AVENUE – ST. VITAL LIBRARY

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee
Researcher: M. Peterson
January 2014

6 FERMOR AVENUE – ST. VITAL LIBRARY

The permanent settlement of the area that is now known as St. Vital began with the arrival of the Selkirk settlers at present-day Winnipeg in 1812. It signalled the beginning of a fundamental change in the lives of the people who worked and lived in the area, most of whom were Métis. The lives of this large group, offspring of Aboriginal mothers and European fathers, centred on the fur trade and the buffalo hunt, agriculture was practiced but not as the primary activity. When the Hudson's Bay Company and its rival, the North West Company of Montréal, merged in 1821, it resulted in the loss of work for many Métis families who turned to farming as an alternative. Support for this change came from the Roman Catholic church in St. Boniface, which began a program of bringing francophone families, farmers and professionals, from Quebec, thereby increasing the population and partially transplanting French society in the West.

Métis families were known to have settled along the banks of the Seine River in the early 1820s. Other francophone families followed – names like Riel, Genthon, Lavallee, St. Germain, Guay, Mager, Ritchot and Mouard - intent on becoming farmers.[1] The population also grew as a result of Métis families from Fort Daer, North Dakota moving north to escape the Sioux unrest.[2] Slowly the area developed, although drought, flood and grasshopper infestation often stunted the community's growth. The first school was organized in 1860 and named St. Vital.[3] In 1883, the Rural Municipality of St. Vital was created, and in 1891 became part of the Rural Municipality of St. Boniface (which had incorporated in 1880). In 1903, a Market Gardeners' Society was formed, acknowledging the importance of the activity to the community, and the name of the Municipality was changed to St. Vital to avoid confusion with the Town of St. Boniface (which would incorporate as a city in 1908).

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[1]   V. and M. Wyatt, "A History of St. Vital," unpublished paper prepared for the St. Vital Historical Society, June 1962, pp. 1-13.

[2]   Information supplied by Bob Holliday, President, St. Vital Historical Society, May 8, 2010.

[3]   History of Settlement and Development of St. Vital, 1822-1970 (Winnipeg, MB: St. Vital Historical Society, no date), p. 3.

In the early 1910s the Rural Municipality of St. Vital was rural in nature, with many large landowners and market gardeners. However, developers began exerting pressure on owners to sell their property, and in turn, subdivide it into city lots. Winnipeg's newspapers were full of advertisements touting St. Mary's Road as "the Portage Avenue of St. Vital."[4] The growth of the Municipality was also reflected by the 1911 construction of a new municipal hall on St. Mary's Road. Development pressures were also surfacing politically as the Municipal Council, largely controlled by established Francophone farmers and dairymen, fought to block the activities of a new group of largely Anglophone developers trying to subdivide property, extend streetcar lines and introduce sweeping changes to life in St. Vital.

In 1912, the boundaries of the Municipality changed as part of its territory became the Municipality of Fort Garry[5], and a new Anglophone-led council was elected in St. Vital.[6] By 1913, the Municipal Council was tendering large sewer, paving and other construction contracts as parts of the area "urbanization." Leaders of the nearby City of St. Boniface began lobbying their counterparts in St. Vital for an amalgamation of the two entities.

However, the growth in municipal services in the pre-1915 era was not matched by a similar growth in the tax base after 1915. With less than 10,000 people within its borders, St. Vital verged on bankruptcy in 1926 and its affairs were taken over by the Municipal and Public Utilities Board of the provincial government for a year.[7] This was followed by several decades of slow, subdued growth, which would change after World War II.

By the 1950s, St. Vital, and all of the other jurisdictions surrounding Winnipeg saw a period of expansion and modernization, including residential subdivisions, commercial and industrial development and street and other infrastructure expansion. In 1959, St. Vital's Council moved

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[4]   Manitoba Free Press, January 11, 1913, p. 40.

[5]   "St. Vital," unpublished history supplied by the St. Vital Historical Society, p. 2.

[6]   Richard Wilson, "St. Vital - 1912", The Dominion, December 1912. Wilson was, coincidentally, St. Vital Municipality's first English-speaking reeve.

[7]   Winnipeg Free Press, March 4, 1960.

to update their municipal headquarters with the construction of a new municipal hall and offices at 604 St. Mary's Road (Plate 1).[8]

The City of St. Vital was incorporated in 1962 with a population of 27,000. That same year, it completed and opened a modern library, located south of the Municipal Hall on Fermor Avenue (Plate 2).

STYLE

> The Modern era was…considered to encompass the years from about 1930 to about 1975; that is, from the period when a faith in a better future *independent* of the past began to take hold and find expression in a significant number of buildings, to the period when Canadians' faith in a better future untethered to the past began to fade, replaced by the *rooted* architecture of the heritage conservation and post-Modernist movements.[9]

The St. Vital Library stands as an excellent example of the International Style, a modern architectural movement of the post-World War II era that lasted into the late 1960s. The style is seen as a reaction to the historically based styles of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The age of machines created a desire for a new aesthetic, one that fully utilized the new construction materials and technologies, especially steel framing and reinforced concrete.[10] Architects could design buildings without the need for load-bearing exterior walls – these elements became "curtains" covering the steel/concrete structural system and could be constructed almost entirely of glass if desired. Through its use of hard, angular edges, severely plain surfaces, large areas of glass and square or rectangular modules, the style stressed material and proportionality over ornamentation.

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[8]   "New Civic Offices Opened in 1960", St. Vital Lance, September 10, 1970.

[9]   National Historic Sites of Canada System Plan: Commemorating Canada's Built Heritage of the Modern Era (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 2001), p. 4.

[10]   Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg: Manitoba Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, 1991), pp. 34-35; and L. Maitland, et al., A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1992), p. 178.

There are a number of excellent, internationally recognized and award winning examples of the style in Winnipeg due to the city's place at the forefront of the post-1950 International Style movement through the University of Manitoba's School of Architecture.

CONSTRUCTION

The library used the latest materials and engineering in its construction (see Appendix I for additional information). The reinforced concrete foundation is 25.4 cm. thick and rests on concrete piles.[11] The superstructure is steel frame with reinforced concrete floors and columns and is clad in 20.3 cm. thick dark face brick. "Glu-laminated"[12] wood is used to support the roof in the round sections of the building, the smaller circle (east) is 12.2 metres in diameter and the larger (west) is 17.1 meters.

The final cost of construction, not including furnishings, was $161,150.00.[13]

DESIGN

> The unusual shape of the property led to the adoption of the circular type plan in combination with the stepback rectilinear plan…[14]

The building runs east to west, the west end is rectangular, with a stepped front (north) brick-clad façade holding large windows (Plate 3). The concrete columns and facia of this section are clad in "enamelled steel sheeting."[15] The west end features a metal door and concrete ramp, the rear (south) façade includes high angular windows (Plate 4).

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[11] City of Winnipeg Assessment Record, Roll No. 08001620500.

[12] Western Construction and Building, June 1963, p. 9.

[13] Ibid., p. 10.

[14] Ibid., p. 7.

[15] Ibid., p. 8.

The east end of the building holds two segmented circular areas, the smaller and shorter at the east end, the larger, which holds the main entrance, to the west (Plates 5 and 6). The larger area is windowless on the front façade, the smaller area features two-storey windows with wide spandrels that are continued around to the rear (south) façade and along the rear of the larger area (Plate 7).

INTERIOR

> Such a plan was possible because the Library Board agreed with the principle of a segregated library plan instead of the more universally used open plan so prevalent in Library planning today. Due to the attenuated nature of the site the segregated type of plan seemed to lend itself very well for the purpose; to place the public and administrative area in the centre with the children's section to the left and the adult section to the right. Again, due to the limited size of the property, it became necessary to consider a multi-storey plan which led to the use of the basement area for some public space and to the adoption of a mezzanine floor to gain the floor area which the Board considered would be necessary.[16]

When it opened, the St. Vital Library boasted a unique interior space (Plates 9 and 10) that is still intact today.

The basement of the library originally served a number of purposes, storage in the west end and work space and activity room in the east end (Plate 11). It continues this use to the present (Plate 12).

The main floor features the entrance and front desk, washrooms and offices in the central circle, the children's book section to the east and the adult section to the west (Plate 13). Again, much of this space has remained unchanged in terms of use and layout (Plates 14 and 15). The ceilings of the circular areas feature skylights for natural lighting and wood accenting and mezzanines are accessed by several sets of stairs (Plates 16 and 17).

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[16] Western Construction and Building, June 1963, pp. 7-8.

INTEGRITY

The building stands on its original location, has not suffered major alteration or renovation and appears to be in good structural condition.

STREETSCAPE

The library sits on an unusually shaped piece of property (Plate 18) on the south side of Fermor Avenue just west of St. Mary's Road. Across Fermor Avenue are both Glenlawn Collegiate and the South Y.M.C.A.-Y.W.C.A (Plate 19). The library contributes to this streetscape.

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS

The designer of the St. Vital Library was local designer George A. Stewart (Plate 20), a University of Manitoba Architecture graduate (see Appendix II for biographical information). This is the first Stewart structure evaluated by the Committee.

St. Vital firm Taubensee Construction Co. Ltd. was the general contractor for the library with Crosier and Greenberg, Consulting Engineers, in charge of the structural design.[17]

PERSON/INSTITUTION

The public library system in St. Vital dates to a meeting in the Windsor School Auditorium in May 1948 after a discussion on the "evil of the comic book" led to a call for an organized library.[18] After a money by- law was successful passed, a facility was opened in a converted commercial building at the corner of St. Mary's Road and St. Anne's Road in December 1953 (Plate 21). It soon became obvious to the Library Board and the citizens of St. Vital, however, that this space was inadequate,

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[17]   Ibid., pp. 9-10.

[18]   Dr. D. Hollenberg, speech to the Friends of the Library, December 3, 1963, p. 1, courtesy of the St. Vital Library.

even with an expansion into adjacent space in the building in 1956.[19] After several years of effort and planning and a necessary change in location, an architect was hired to design the new structure in November 1961[20] and a money by-law passed in April 1962 (Plate 22).[21] The sod turning for the new building took place (Plate 23) and the formal opening occurred on June 9, 1963 (Plate 24).[22]

The St. Vital Library continued to expand its services with the purchase of a bookmobile in 1971 with three scheduled stops (Plate 25).[23]

It was announced by the City of Winnipeg in early 2013 that the building was scheduled to undergo extensive renovations costing approximately $1.8 million.[24]

EVENT

There is no known event connected with this building.

CONTEXT

This library was completed during the post-World War II growth phase that saw, over a span of two decades, the expansion and modernization of civic services and structures. Many new library buildings were completed during this period; the St. Vital Library is one of the most unique.

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[19]   St. Vital Lance, February 14, 1957, p. 1; and St. Vital Public Library Board, "Annual Report, 1973," n.p. In 1955, the library had a membership of 2,201 and circulation of 14,445 books. When the new building opened, membership was at 8,852 and circulation at 93,000.

[20]   St. Vital Lance, November 10, 1961. Architect Stewart completed a scale model of the new library in the spring of 1962 to assist in getting a positive vote in the money by-law.

[21]   St. Vital Lance, April 19, 1962, p. 1. The $150,000 by-law passed with 67% approval (60% was required).

[22]   A tunnel underneath Fermor Avenue gives access to the north side of street just west of the library.

[23]   St. Vital Public Library, Annual Report, 1972, n.p.

[24]   Metro, January 8, 2013.

LANDMARK

This structure's highly public use, location near the corner of one of the area's busiest intersections and its eye-catching design heighten its conspicuousness.

CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report
Assessment Record

Building Address: 6 Fermor Avenue

Building Name: St. Vital Public Library

Original Use: public library

Current Use: public library

Roll No. (Old): 08001620500 (16205)

RSN: 95728

Legal Description: 114/117 St. Boniface, Plan 21864, Lot 1

Location: south side between St. Mary's Road and Killarney Street

Date of Construction: 1962

Storeys: 2 and 1 and basement

Heritage Status: **NONE**

Construction Type: Steel frame, reinforced concrete floors, joists, beams and foundation, face brick

Building Permits (Plans available: **[A]** Archives; **[M]** Microfilm; **[PPD]** Department Storage):
   - 5791/1962 $160,700 (original); 973/1973 $2,000 (alterations – additional staircase);

Information:

- 77½ x 35½ + = 7,012 sq. ft.

- 8" face brick

- electric book lift basement to mezzanine

- roof over centre section slightly domed

- 10" reinforced concrete foundation walls on concrete piles

- 5" reinforced concrete slab floors on main

ARCHITECT: GEORGE A. STEWART

CONTRACTOR: TAUBENSEE CONSTRUCTION CO.

N

REAR
ENTRANCE

15'

77'6"

12'

35.5'

DIAMETER
56'

DIAMETER
40'

10'

3'4"
16.5'

3'4"
16'

3'4"
16'

3'4"
16'

3'4"
16'

16.5'

MAIN
ENTRANCE
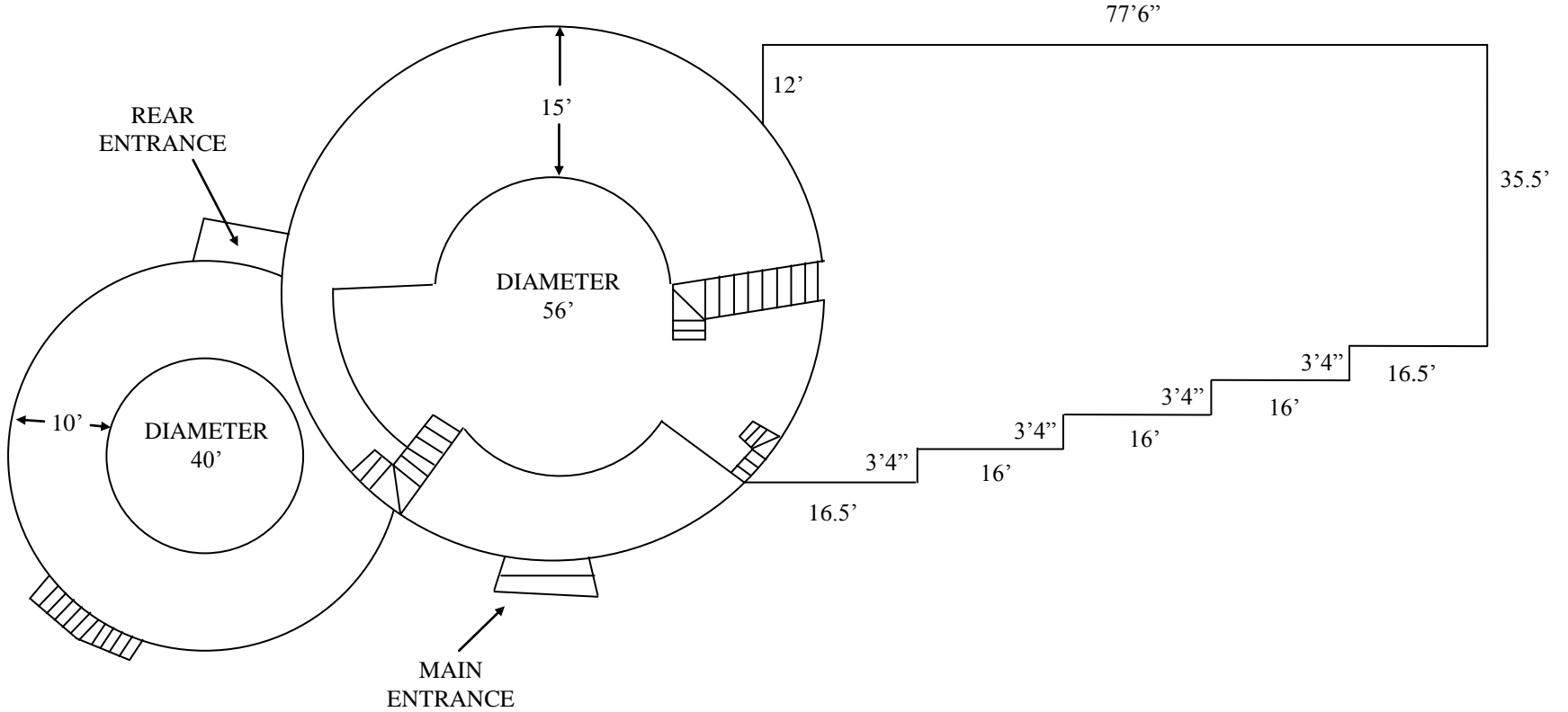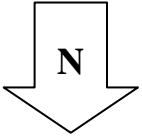
-----FERMOR AVENUE-----

APPENDIX II

<u>George A. Stewart</u>[1]

George Stewart was born in Boissevain, Manitoba in 1922 and graduated with a B.Arch from the University of Manitoba in 1948. He was awarded, among other prizes, the Manitoba Association of Architects (MAA) Scholarship and the Ralph Hamm Memorial Scholarship. After graduation, he established his own practice which operated until 1970.

From 1970-1982, Stewart worked as the Director of the University of Manitoba, Physical Planning and Design Office. During this time, he designed the Ellis Building, renovated the Buller Biological Laboratories and oversaw several the design and construction of several new buildings. He stayed on at the University until his retirement in 1987.[2]

He served on the MAA Council and was MAA President in 1958, as well as serving on numerous committees of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC). He was appointed as a Fellow of the RAIC in1966. In 1965, he was appointed to the Winnipeg Better Housing Commission. He passed away in 1994.

A list of his projects would include:[3]

    Southwood Golf Club Clubhouse, 101 Markham Road (1950)
    Harrow United Church, 955 Mulvey Avenue (1953)
    Fort Garry Public Library, 1360 Pembina Highway (1959 and 2 additional wings, 1967)
    Ebenezer Home for the Aged, Altona, MB (1961-1962) – Plate 26
    Fort Garry United Church addition, 800 Point Road (1961)
    St. Vital Public Library, 6 Fermor Avenue (1963)
    Manitoba Motor League Building addition, 175 Carlton St. (2nd storey, 1965 – demolished)
    Charleswood Bethel Mennonite Church, 699 Haney Street (1965)
    Ellis Building, 13 Freedman Cres., University of Manitoba (1966 & 1969 addition) – Plate 27

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[1] Winnipeg Architecture Foundation, Inc., 2013; and Manitoba Association of Architects (MAA), Architect files.

[2] MAA, Architect files.

[3] <u>Architecture Canada</u>, Vol. 43, No. 7 (July 1966), p. 9; and <u>Winnipeg Free Press</u>, 1950-2000.

Plate 1 – Former St. Vital Municipal Hall, 604 St. Mary's Road, built 1959-1960, 2014. (<u>M. Peterson, 2014</u>.)

Plate 2 – St. Vital Library, 6 Fermor Avenue, ca.1962. (<u>Henry Kalen Photograph, courtesy of the St. Vital Library</u>.)

Plate 3 – St. Vital Library, 6 Fermor Avenue, front (north) façade, west end, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)

Plate 4 – St. Vital Library, 6 Fermor Avenue, west and south façade, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)

Plate 5 – St. Vital Library, 6 Fermor Avenue, front (north) façade, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)

Plate 6 – St. Vital Library, 6 Fermor Avenue, front (north) façade, east end, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)

Plate 7 – St. Vital Library, 6 Fermor Avenue, rear (south) façade, east end, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)
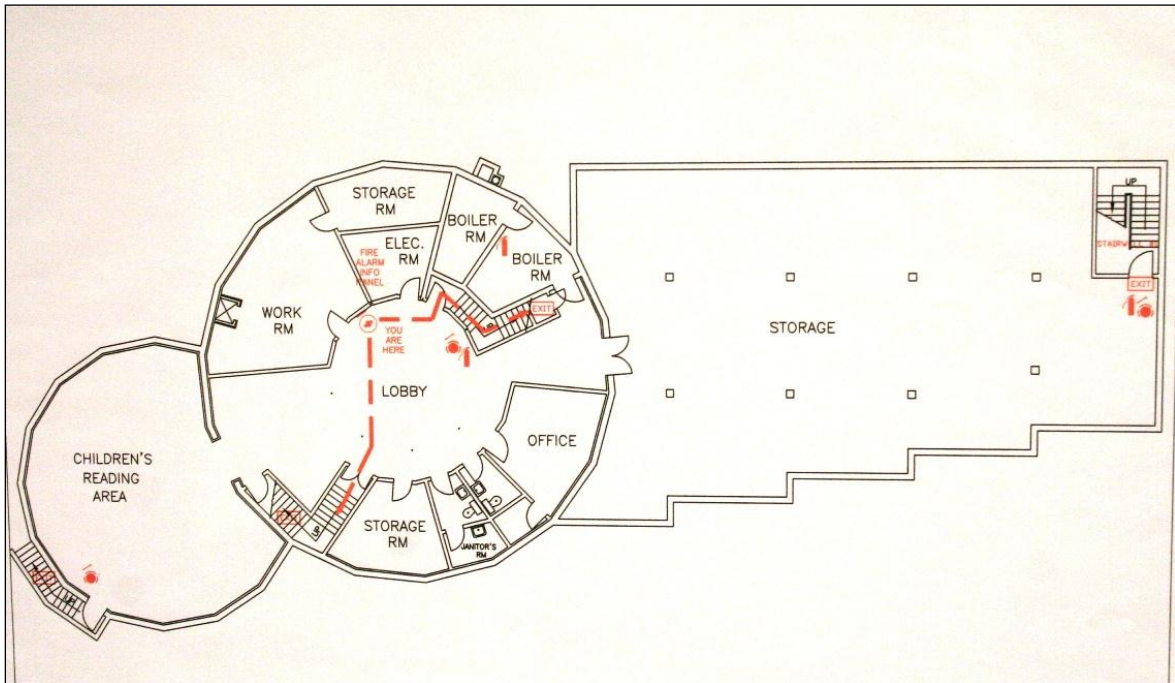
Plate 8 - St. Vital Library, 6 Fermor Avenue, plan of basement. (Courtesy of St. Vital Library.)

Plate 9 – St. Vital Library, 6 Fermor Avenue, main desk area, ca.1962. (<u>Henry Kalen Photograph, courtesy of the St. Vital Library</u>.)

Plate 10 – St. Vital Library, 6 Fermor Avenue, main desk area from mezzanine, ca.1962. (Henry Kalen Photograph, courtesy of the St. Vital Library.)

Plate 11 – St. Vital Library, 6 Fermor Avenue, basement looking west from the east end, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)

Plate 12 – St. Vital Library, 6 Fermor Avenue, basement, west end storage area, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)
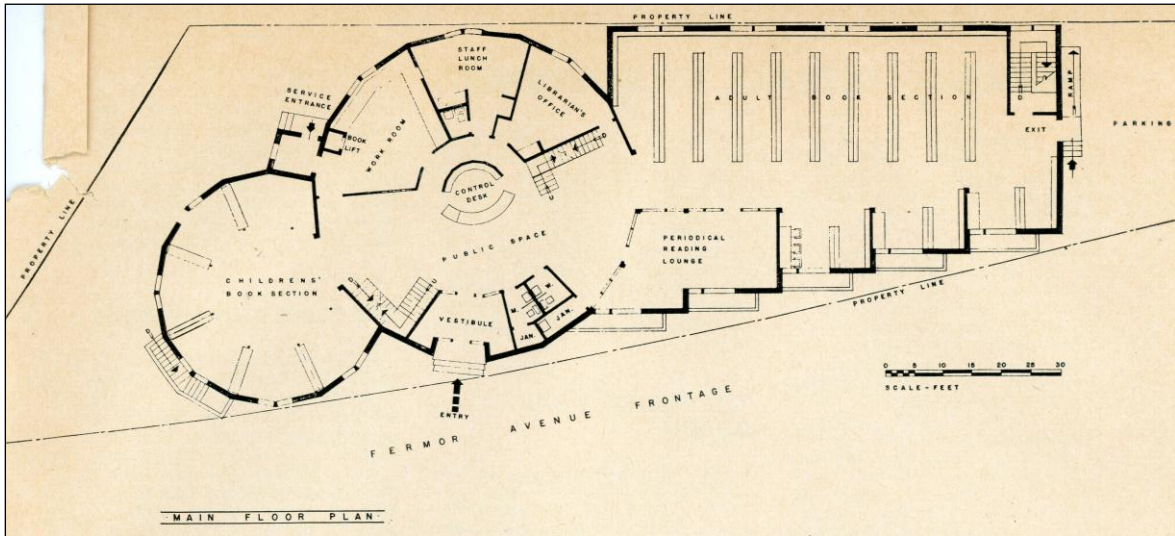
Plate 13 – St. Vital Library, 6 Fermor Avenue, "Main Floor Plan," 1963. (Reproduced from Western Construction and Building, June 1963, p. 9.)

Plate 14 – St. Vital Library, 6 Fermor Avenue, main floor looking east from the west end (Adult Book Section), 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)

Plate 15 – St. Vital Library, 6 Fermor Avenue, main entrance and front desk area, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)

Plate 16 – St. Vital Library, 6 Fermor Avenue, east circle (Children's Section), 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)

Plate 17 – St. Vital Library, 6 Fermor Avenue, west circle, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)

Plate 18 – St. Vital Library, 6 Fermor Avenue, aerial view, 2012, lines added. (City of Winnipeg.)

Plate 19 – Fermor Street looking east, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)

Plate 20 – George A. Stewart, ca.1966. (Reproduced from Architecture Canada, Vol. 43, No. 7 [July 1966], p. 9.)

Plate 21 – The original St. Vital Public Library, 584 St. Mary's Road, exterior, 1960, interior, date unknown. (Courtesy of the St. Vital Library.)

Plate 22 – "Vote Yes" pamphlet for 1962 library money by-law produced by the Friends of the St. Vital Library, 1962. (Courtesy of the St. Vital Library.)

Plate 23 – Official sod turning for the new St. Vital Public Library. Left to right: Eric Rogerson, St. Vital Library Board chairman, George Stewart, architect, Mayor Harry Collins, John Taubensee, contractor and Mrs. D.W. Penner, president of the Friends of the St. Vital Library, 1962. (Courtesy of the St. Vital Library.)

Plate 24 – Ribbon cutting ceremony, June 9, 1963. Left to right: Mayor Harry Collins, Premier Duff Roblin, Mrs. Harold Moore, secretary of the St. Vital Library Board and E.G. Rogerson, Library Board chairman. (Courtesy of the St. Vital Library.)
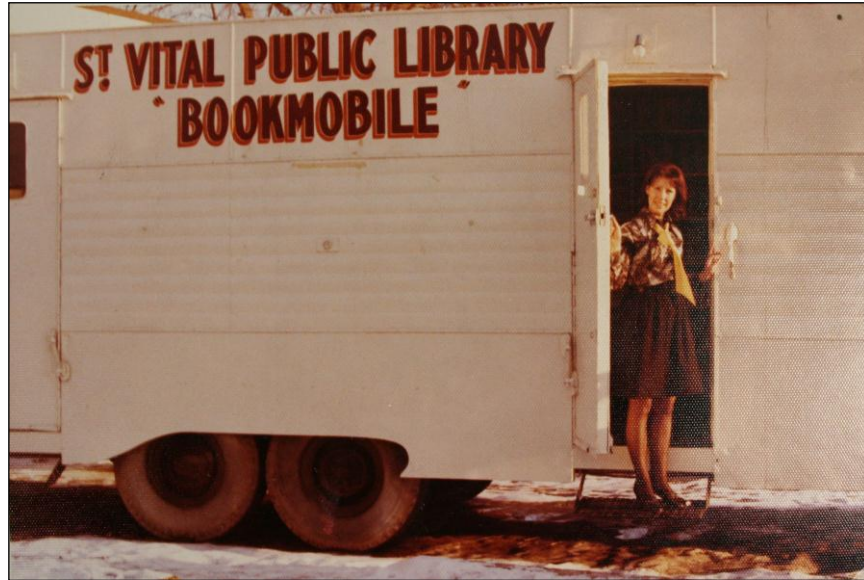
Plate 25 – The St. Vital Public Library Bookmobile, 1972. (Courtesy of the St. Vital Library.)

Plate 26 – Ebenezer Home for the Aged (now The Gardens on Tenth), 235 5th Street NE, Altona, MB, no date. (Reproduced from http://gardensontenth.ca/about-us/history/.)

Plate 27 – Ellis Building, 13 Freedman Crescent, University of Manitoba, north and west façades, 2014. (M. Peterson, 2014.)