



88 ADELAIDE AVENUE

KELLY HOUSE

A Study Prepared by

MANITOBA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE,
HERITAGE AND CITIZENSHIP
HISTORIC RESOURCES BRANCH

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HISTORY

The property on which the house at 88 Adelaide Street, Winnipeg¹ now stands was originally part of a Crown grant of land made to Alexander McDermot on 17 February 1875.² In a special arrangement, McDermot sold the land to John McKechnie for \$225 and then granted him a \$200 mortgage on the property.³ On 26 October 1881 when Winnipeg was entering its first major land boom McKechnie sold the land with the lot to the east (later known as 84 Adelaide Street) to Michael and Thomas Kelly for \$2,000.⁴ The following year the Winnipeg Sun (23 September 1882) announced that Mr. Kelly of the firm of Kelly Brothers, contractors, was laying the foundation of a brick dwelling for himself on the property.⁵ The dwelling was to be 20 x 30 feet, two storeys high and "to be finished in good style." The estimated cost of the building was \$2,200. The Mr. Kelly who erected the house was Michael Kelly who in 1882 resided in the house east of 88 Adelaide while he was erecting his new home.⁶

Kelly was born in Roscommon, Ireland in 1844 and arrived in Winnipeg in 1877 after residing in the state of New York for about thirteen years.⁷ In 1881, the year the Adelaide Street property was purchased, the Kelly Brothers (Michael, Thomas and Martin) entered the contracting business with Michael initially as senior partner.⁸ The firm prospered and Michael was responsible for erecting some of the principal buildings in Winnipeg including the Post Office on Portage Avenue, the Law Courts Building and the Boyd Building.⁹ Michael Kelly retired in 1910 and died on 29 January 1923. He was then residing at 45 Edmonton.¹⁰

The directories of Winnipeg record Michael Kelly as living at 88 Adelaide, usually alone but occasionally with other family members such as Martin (1883), Thomas (1890) and John (1890), until 1894 when Kelly moved to 424 Notre Dame Avenue and Mrs. M. Redmond tenanted the building. In 1896 J.M. Murray, a printer, lived in the building and from 1897 until 1901, James H. Cadham resided there.

James H. Cadham was born on 31 August 1850 in London, Ontario where he trained as a carpenter.¹¹ In 1870 he moved to Winnipeg where he volunteered as a private in the No. 1 Battalion of General Wolseley's Red River Expedition. He received his discharge in March 1871 and then became

involved in contracting and building in Winnipeg.¹² After 1895 when he was residing at 88 Adelaide, he "devoted most of his energies towards the profession of architecture, and was the pioneer of his profession in the province."¹³ Cadham worked primarily on large warehouses and stores in Winnipeg. He looked after the building operations of J.H. Ashdown Warehouses Ltd., G.D. Woods Co., Miller and Morse, Robinson and Company and was also responsible for the Whitla Block.¹⁴ He was a close friend of Alexander McIntyre, was an advisor to McIntyre's executors and superintended the building of the McIntyre Block and its addition.¹⁵

One of Cadham's sons, Frederick Todd Cadham, became one of the most successful physicians in Winnipeg and received special recognition for his study of vaccines.¹⁶

It was about the period that Cadham and his family resided at 88 Adelaide (1896-1901) that the character of the street began to decline as Winnipeg's warehouse district expanded and encroached upon the neighbouring residential district. In 1889 the street had been prestigious enough for James M. Clark, the Chief of the Provincial Police, to live next door to Michael Kelly in the house which the Kellys also owned and possibly built.¹⁷ Although now demolished, this house which was originally numbered 26 Adelaide and later 84 Adelaide, is visible in c.1883 photograph of McDermot Avenue. (See Plate 1). In 1896, the year before Cadham moved to Adelaide Street, only two houses probably with large lots were on the block between McDermot and Bannatyne Avenues. In 1902, two years after Cadham had moved, 88 Adelaide had become a boarding house run by Mrs. Margaret Little and six other houses were listed on the block. By 1918 the nature of the street had completely altered. One the east end of the block stood the Finnie and Murray Ltd. Building, a five storey clothing factory and warehouse. At the western corner stood the Van Tassel Building, another large five storey building given largely to the printing trades.¹⁸ Only 84 Adelaide, 88 Adelaide and 90 - 94 Adelaide (a 2½-storey brick triplex) remained as residences on the block. In 1920 these five houses were all vacant.

Up till the latter date 88 Adelaide had remained in the ownership of the Kelly family. In 1908 Thomas Kelly had become its sole owner.¹⁹ In 1916 it was registered to Thomas Kelly and Sons

Ltd.²⁰ The next change of ownership of the property was the result of the largest building and political scandal in Manitoba's history.

Thomas Kelly (born 1855) like his brother was a native of Roscommon, Ireland. He emigrated to the U.S.A., was educated in Oneida County, N.Y. and then moved to Winnipeg probably with his brother Michael in 1877.²¹ He was noted for his "unusual ability and a native shrewdness"²² which probably accounted for the firm's rise in the Winnipeg building world. Thomas eventually replaced Michael as head of the firm of Kelly Brothers and Company.²³ It merged into the Manitoba Construction Co. Ltd. with Thomas as president and manager from 190? till 1905.²⁴ From 1905 till 1908 he was president and manager of Kelly Brothers and Mitchell Ltd. and in 1908 Thomas Kelly and Sons was established.²⁵ Kelly was also president of the Manitoba Quarries Ltd. and the Master Builder's Liability Insurance Co.²⁶ In the 1890s and 1900s the firm had obtained many civic contracts for pavements, sewers and other local improvements. As time went on the firm acquired more prestigious contracts such as:

- the St. Andrews Locks
- part of the Shoal Lake Aqueduct of the Greater Winnipeg Water District
- Grain Exchange
- Free Press Building, Portage and Garry
- Canadian Pacific and Canadian Northern Railway Shops
- Canadian Northern Railway hotel and depot at Brandon
- Agricultural College, Fort Garry.²⁷

In July of 1913 Kelly's firm received its most significant building contract, that for the erection of Frank W. Simon's Manitoba Legislative Building (1912-1920). Kelly's estimate for at least the piling was absurdly low which indicates the possibility of graft and collusion from the outset.²⁸ In very suspicious circumstances the specifications for the work were altered without a new call for tenders and new financial arrangements were made by a special informal verbal agreement between Kelly and the Provincial Architect. The sum involved in the changes amounted to \$844,000 and were made merely at Kelly's advice with no report by an engineer.²⁹

On March 15, 1915 the storm broke. The Public Accounts Committee put forward a report which

found "gross and culpable negligence on the part of the government and officials thereof" and the Manitoba Free Press summarized the Committee's findings with:

"Kelly paid, according to statements made by A.B. Hudson, for 13,732 cubic yards of concrete which he did not supply — Was also over-paid on concrete actually supplied at least \$6.95 per yard — There was further an over-payment on steel of \$42.50 per ton — a clear gift of \$103,000 to contractor in one case — Undue profits on concrete of \$575,000 and on North and South wings of \$281,715 — a total over-payment of \$857,200 — Nothing quite so bad in the whole history of contracts — Royal Commission Demanded".³⁰

The Royal Commission demanded by the Liberals was announced in April, 1915 and Kelly fled to the U.S. to avoid being subpoenaed to appear before the Commission. He was arrested in Chicago on 1 October 1915 while trying to make his way to South Carolina.³¹ Thomas Kelly was extradited for the crimes of "perjury, obtaining money by false pretences, larceny or embezzlement and the obtaining of money, knowing the same to have been embezzled, stolen or fraudulently obtained."³²

After a long series of inquiries including the Mathers Royal Commission and court cases there were civil and criminal actions taken against the firm of Thomas Kelly and Sons. The provincial government asked that all the Kelly contracts with the government should be declared null and void. Out of the claim of \$1,636,642 against the Kelly estate the province obtained judgement for \$1,400,000.³³ In the criminal trial Kelly was convicted and sentenced to a term of 2½ years in Stony Mountain Penitentiary.³⁴

After his release Kelly went to Kansas where he was awarded a contract for building a subway under the Kaw River and expenditures for it furnished material for public investigation and a chaotic campaign in Kansas City.³⁵ He also undertook large contracts in Missouri and Oklahoma and a large oil strike was alleged to have brought him a substantial fortune.³⁶ Thomas Kelly died in Pasadena, California on 13 March 1939.³⁷

The Kelly scandal had definite effects on the fate of 88 Adelaide Street. As mentioned on 20 June 1922 proceedings were taken against Kelly, then an American resident, to recover \$1,207,700 with interest at five percent for his work on the Legislative Building.³⁸ Twenty-one parcels of land in Winnipeg were involved in the motion and included in it was probably the Adelaide property.³⁹ (The most important Kelly asset was his palatial residence at Assiniboine and Carlton Streets which became the Manitoba headquarters of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in 1927, but which was later demolished.)⁴⁰ The City of Winnipeg had already seized the 88 Adelaide property on 27 September 1921 for default of tax payments and so the Attorney General of Manitoba issued a Lis Pendens on it in 1922.⁴¹ The City sold 84 and 88 Adelaide separately and on 5 February 1942 Mr. Ko Wah Jong, Hotel Proprietor, purchased 88 Adelaide.⁴² He sold it to Mr. Ko Bing Hong, restaurant owner, in 1942⁴³ who in turn sold it to Mrs. Wasylyna Ostafichuk in 1947.⁴⁴ The property is now owned by the Winnipeg Pants and Sportswear Mfg. Ltd.⁴⁵

SIGNIFICANCE

The house at 88 Adelaide Street is significant for both architectural and historic reasons.

It is a subdued but substantial example of a Queen Anne Style house of brick veneer. Its most striking external feature is its highly decorative verge boards with a sun burst motif above the highly embellished but structurally insignificant collar-tie beam. The narrow pierced pattern and emphasis given the decoration of the triangular peak of the gable are typical of verge boards of the early 1880s. This is an especially fine example of this type of work. The brick quoins at the corners of the building, bay window at ground floor with decorative consoles and the careful detailing of the windows with arched heads and raised and radiating voussoirs all indicate a house built by a builder to serve as a substantial home for his family as well as being an advertisement of the firm's workmanship.

Although unseen, the interior of the building is alleged to contain much of the original detailing and to be well maintained. If this is so, 88 Adelaide is a rare example of an unaltered Winnipeg residence of the early 1880s. That the building was built by and for forty years in the possession of a building firm explains the quality of its construction and the commendable way in which it has been maintained.

Whether they be rogues or honest men, the house has sheltered some of Winnipeg's most prominent builders and architects. Thomas Kelly was in many respects an infamous character, but he does represent a colourful phase in Winnipeg's building history. The house also served as a permanent residence for Michael Kelly who was an honest and important builder who was in no way implicated in the scandal concerning the work of the family firm. In contrast to Thomas Kelly, James H. Cadham was noted as one of Winnipeg's "oldest and most highly respected citizens."⁴⁶ "As well as being the pioneer architect of Winnipeg" he was considered "the pioneer architect of the province"⁴⁷ and Frank Schofield wrote in The History of Manitoba that "No citizen ever did more to promote the expansion and growth of Winnipeg along substantial lines than did James Henry Cadham...."⁴⁸

88 Adelaide Street is presently an isolated and lonely reminder of the comfortable residential neighbourhood which once grew up near Winnipeg's City Hall. As encroachment by commercial buildings makes the building an increasingly important and unique example of an 1880 core area home, it also makes its existence increasingly precarious.

FOOTNOTES

1. The property now known as 88 Adelaide Street was first listed in Steen and Boyce's 1883 Winnipeg City Directory as 28 Adelaide. The house retained this number until 1890 when it was renumbered 88 Adelaide. From 1891 till 1893 in a brief experiment with numerical street names Adelaide Street became North 4th Street.
2. Abstract of Legal Description, Parish Lots 6 and 7, Town Lot East of lot 6, Block No. "C", Parish of St. Johns. Land Titles Office, Winnipeg.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. I would like to thank Mr. Randy Rostecki of the Canadian Inventory of Historic Buildings for this reference.
6. The 1882 Henderson's Directory of the City of Winnipeg and Town of St. Boniface lists Michael Kelly as living at 30 Adelaide Street. As this directory was published in July, 1882 and the Winnipeg Sun of 23 September 1882, states that the foundation for Kelly's house was just then being laid, it seems most probable that Kelly was living in a neighbouring dwelling.
7. "Michael Kelly, Well Known Builder, Dead," Manitoba Free Press, 30 January 1923.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. "Pioneer Citizen Taken by Death," Winnipeg Telegram, 11 December 1907.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. "J.H. Cadham Died Today," Manitoba Free Press, 11 December 1907.
15. Ibid.
16. Frank H. Schofield, The Story of Manitoba, 3 vols. (Winnipeg: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1913), 2:331.

17. Henderson's Gazetteer and Directory of British Columbia, N.W.T., Manitoba and Northwest Ontario, (Winnipeg, James Henderson, 1889).
18. The Western Canada Fire Underwriters Association, Fire Insurance Plan of Winnipeg, (Winnipeg, 1918), p. 233.
19. Title Certificate No. 117184, Land Titles Office, Winnipeg.
20. Title Certificate No. 267673, Land Titles Office, Winnipeg.
21. "Thomas Kelly Dies in South", Winnipeg Free Press, 20 March 1939.
22. "Thomas Kelly, of Parliament Building Fame, Dies", Winnipeg Tribune, 21 March 1939.
23. "Thomas Kelly Dies in South", Winnipeg Free Press, 20 March 1939.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. "Manitoba Defrauded of \$800,000; Liberals Demand Royal Commission", Manitoba Free Press, 31 March 1913.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. "Thomas Kelly Arrested in Chicago", Manitoba Free Press, 2 October 1915. I would like to thank Mr. Randy Rostecki for this reference.
32. "Application re: Extradition of Thomas Kelly", JX RBC, Legislative Library, Manitoba.
33. "Thomas Kelly of Parliament Building Fame, Dies", Winnipeg Tribune 21 March 1939.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. "Thomas Kelly Dies in South", Winnipeg Free Press, 20 March 1939.

37. Ibid.
38. Manitoba Free Press, 31 May 1922, p. 5.
39. Ibid.
40. "Kelly Residence To House Royal Canadian Mounted", Manitoba Free Press, 23 June 1927.
41. Certificate of Title Number 267673, Land Titles Office, Winnipeg.
42. Title Certificate Number 558654, Land Titles Office, Winnipeg.
43. Title Certificate Number 569496, Land Titles Office, Winnipeg.
44. Title Certificate Number 648815, Land Titles Office, Winnipeg.
45. Title Certificate Number 411153, Land Titles Office, Winnipeg.
46. "J.H. Cadham Died Today", Manitoba Free Press, 11 December 1907.
47. "Pioneer Citizen Taken by Death", Winnipeg Telegram, 11 December 1907.
48. Schofield, The History of Manitoba, 2:331.

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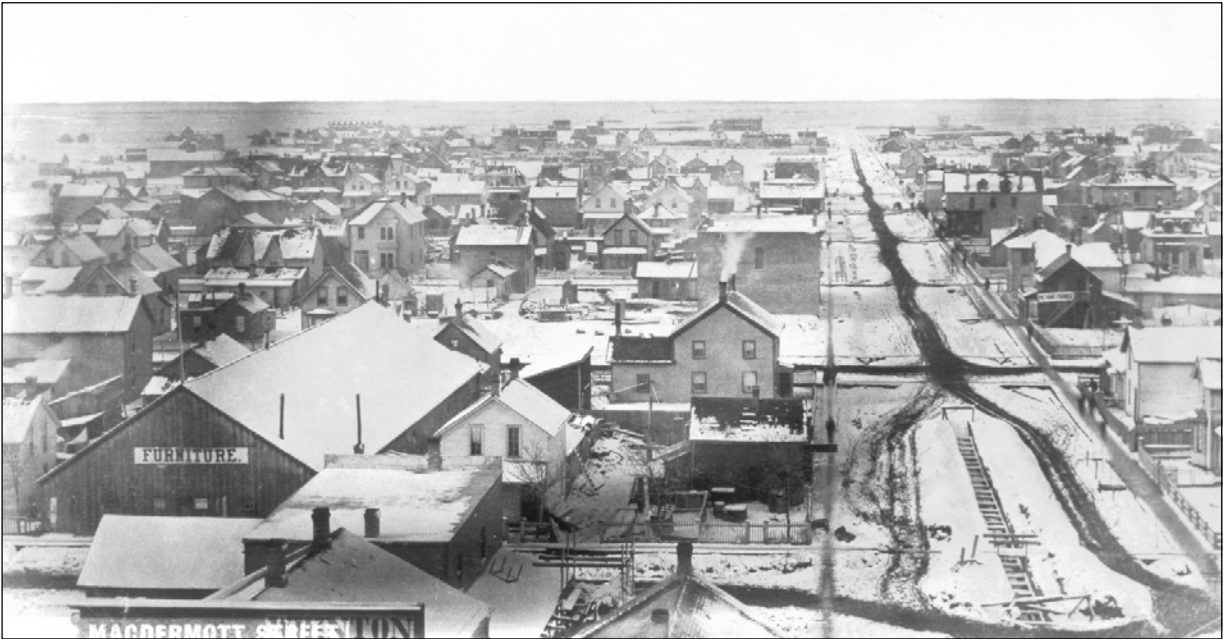


Plate 1 – McDermot Avenue looking west from Main Street, ca.1883. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

88 ADELAIDE STREET – KELLY HOUSE



Plate 2 – Kelly House, no date. (City of Winnipeg, Planning Department.)