



691 ALEXANDER AVENUE
SALEM MENNONITE BRETHERN CHURCH

PREPARED BY PETERSON PROJECTS – DECEMBER 2009



691 ALEXANDER AVENUE SALEM MENNONITE BRETHERN CHURCH

Date of Construction: 1906

Building Permit: 43/1906 (basement) [Plans in City Storage] and 961/1906 (superstructure)

Architect: German Lutheran Congregation (owners), basement & Bridgman, Charles S., superstructure

Contractor: German Lutheran Congregation (owners), basement & Maurer, A., superstructure

ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

This is another of the North End's older church buildings that has served the German community in the city for over 100 years.

The building rests on a raised stone foundation, the frame superstructure covered in an imitation brick sheet siding. The front (south) façade features a projecting central section with the entrance atop a wide set of stairs. Above this doorway is a modest pediment, a circular window and the building's most conspicuous element, its tower with metal clad spire. Two wood framed doors are located at grade on this elevation. Pointed arched windows are located on the main façade and in the tower.



Front (south) and east façades, 2009

The side elevations (east and west) are similarly designed with large, centrally-located cross gables holding a large pointed arch window and smaller paired openings on either side. Both roofs originally include small, windowless dormers near their south end but these have been removed since 1978. The rear (north) façade includes a projecting one-storey section with pointed arched windows and two doors.

It is a well designed, well built structure that stands on its original site, appears to be in fair structural condition and does not appear to have suffered major exterior alteration.

The Beaux-Arts Gothic style used here is employed in a number of Winnipeg churches. The first decade of the 20th century saw an evolution of the Gothic Revival style that had been popular in Canada since the early 19th century. The new Beaux-Arts Gothic designs included not only the ornate exterior detailing of the Gothic Revival School, but also classically inspired floor plans.¹

With the adoption of the new style, the architect did not have to sacrifice the logical arrangement of the interior space in order to use the popular elements of the Gothic style. Educational and religious structures most often used the style in western Canada but other public structures and residences displayed it as well.² It was the architecture of the pointed arch, flying buttress, and rib vault coupled with the conscious attempt to reduce or at least interrupt flat wall space. Used in concert, these elements represented “a system of skeletal structure with active, slender, resilient members and membrane-thin infilling or no infilling at all.”³

In Winnipeg, the Anglican, Baptist and Lutheran churches all raised buildings that exhibited similar Gothic elements, borrowing from their common Protestant background. By the 20th



Front (south) and west façades, 2009

century, technological advances in building materials and engineering and the rise of an affluent population in urban centres pointed towards more monumental structures, heavily ornamented with Gothic elements. Following the Beaux-Arts Gothic lead of eastern Canada and the United States, Winnipeg saw numerous monumental Gothic-inspired churches built after the late 1890s. Between 1900 and 1930, Beaux-Arts Gothic was the most popular choice of style for the Anglican, Baptist and Lutheran churches as well as the United Church and its three founding groups (Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational).⁴

Architect C.S. Bridgman was a well-known and prolific architect who practised in Winnipeg for over 30 years. He was born in Toronto, Ontario on February 14, 1875, moving with his family at an early age to nearby London, Ontario, where he received his early education.⁵ Deciding on a career in architecture, Bridgman moved to New York where he graduated from Atelier Masguray in 1891. For the next twelve years he worked as an architect in that city, before coming to Winnipeg in 1903.⁶

Bridgman spent the next 35 years in Winnipeg, designing buildings of all scales and descriptions. In 1938, at the age of 63, he retired, moving back to London, Ontario. During World War II, he was called into service, assisting in the construction of Air Training Stations throughout central Ontario. He apparently enjoyed this return to work, because after the war he took up his profession again, this time in partnership with his brother, Gordon Bridgman. Retiring again at the age of 80, Charles Bridgman died in London on October 17, 1965, leaving behind three daughters.⁷

A list of large, more well-known structures designed by C.S. Bridgman would include:⁸ St. Luke's Anglican Church, 130 Nassau Street North (1904 & 1909 alterations); Anvers Apartments, 758 McMillan Avenue (1912 – Grade II); Highgate (originally DeBary)



Rear (north) and east façades, 2009

Apartments, 626 Wardlaw Avenue (1912 – Grade II); Gaspé Apartments, 601 Broadway (1917); Canadian Ukrainian Institute Provista, 777 Pritchard Avenue (foundation 1918, superstructure 1921 – Grade II); and Dawson-Richardson Publishing Company warehouse, 171 McDermot Avenue (1921 – Grade III). He has been given 10 points by the Historical Buildings Committee.



Detail of tower, 2009

HISTORICAL INTEREST:

The original church was known as the German Lutheran Church of the Cross, this congregation occupied the building until the mid-1960s when it was taken over by the present Mennonite Brethren congregation.

RECOMMENDATION TO HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE:

Under the Historical Buildings By-law, this building meets a number of important criteria:

- its historical importance- one of the older church buildings in the North End and an excellent example of the type of modest facility built by many of Winnipeg's immigrant communities in the first decade of the 20th century;
- its associations- its long-term connections to local Germans and Lutherans;
- its design- an excellent example of the Beaux-Arts Gothic style;
- its architect- C.S. Bridgman was a respected and important practitioner;
- its location- defines an important intersection and contributes greatly to their historic streetscape; and
- its integrity- its main façades continue to display many of their original elements and design.



Front (south) and west façades, 1978

ENDNOTES:

- 1 Mathilde Brosseau, Gothic Revival in Canadian Architecture, Canadian Historic Sites: Occasional Papers in Archaeology and History, No. 25 (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1980), p. 26.
- 2 Ibid., pp. 28-9.
- 3 John Fleming, et al., The Penguin Dictionary of Architecture, Third Edition (London: Penguin Books, 1980), p. 142.
- 4 Ibid., pp. 236-273.
- 5 Winnipeg Free Press, October 27, 1965.
- 6 Winnipeg Telegram, September 18, 1906; and Canadian Architect and Builder, Vol. 17 (1904), Issue 5, p. 85.
- 7 Winnipeg Free Press, October 27, 1965.
- 8 Compiled from City of Winnipeg Building Permits, 1903-1926; and Western Canada Contractor and Builder, Vol. 27, No. 6 (June 1930), p. 46. Permits after 1926 rarely list architect and contractor, and many of the originals have been destroyed or misplaced.