



616 ALVERSTONE STREET

BJORN PETURSSON HOUSE

PREPARED BY PETERSON PROJECTS – FEBRUARY 2009



616 ALVERSTONE STREET BJORN PETURSSON HOUSE

Date of Construction: 1914

Building Permit: 350/1914

Architect: Petursson, B. (owner)

Contractor: Petursson, B. (owner)

ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

One of Winnipeg's most uniquely designed single-family homes is this house on Alverstone Street in the heart of Winnipeg's Icelandic West End.

The front (east) façade is symmetrically designed and features two two-storey bay windows topped by conical roofs. The centre is filled by a monumental porch with towering columns and an open deck on the top level. The roof above the central portion of the building is actually partially domed at the front. Heavy overhanging eaves are embellished with open rafters and the remaining three façades are plainly adorned and simply designed.

The building is an excellent example of a Queen Anne style structure.¹ The style borrowed heavily from English architecture of the 15th century, blending classical and medieval motifs into a picturesque form. Asymmetry was achieved through combinations of porches, bay



Front (east) and south façades, 2009

windows, projecting wings, balconies and other devices. Roofs were usually irregular and complex, with dormers, gables and ornamental chimneys. Variations in materials and colours were also used to animate the façades. Given this freedom of design, however, accomplished designers were still able to create balance in the structures, offsetting busy surfaces by placing calmer elements nearby.²

The popularity of the style in Canada began in the 1880s and lasted until World War I. On the prairies, pre-1900 examples of the style were not numerous because large-scale development occurred after the turn of the century. Post-1900, it was quickly adopted for use in the growing residential districts, especially the more affluent neighbourhoods where its showy qualities were greatly admired.

The City of Winnipeg Building Permit lists Petursson as the owner, contractor and architect of the large West End house.³ The two-and-a-half storey solid brick structure rests on a 45.7-centimetre stone foundation and concrete footings. Total cost was \$8,000 and the building measures 10.1 x 10.7 metres. Material used included 13 cords of stone and 30,000 bricks.⁴

The house stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition. The main columns of the front porch have been supported with temporary material for several years and are still waiting rebuilding.



Southeast corner detail, 2009

HISTORICAL INTEREST:

The house was built in 1914 by Iclander Bjorn Petursson. City of Winnipeg Assessment Record for the house contains several interesting facts.⁵ In 1968, the house was used as a Children's Aide Society group foster home. It is apparent that this home was considerably more elaborate and expensive than houses in the neighbourhood. City inspectors twice made mention of it, once in 1959 when the house was described as "elaborate and expensively built, this dwelling is...definitely out of place in this district." A second inspector in 1990 called the house "over built for [the] area."⁶

Petursson was a merchant and operated a general store (groceries and hardware) at 704-706 Simcoe Street.⁷ In 1916, besides his house and business block (the latter included several residential suites), Petursson also owned houses at 696 Banning and 825 Ingersoll streets, and an apartment block on Agnes Street. He also co-owned another apartment block at 677 Maryland Street.⁸ By 1918, Petursson had increased his holdings to include two more apartment blocks: 602 Agnes Street and 594 Agnes Street.⁹ He lived in this house until 1943 when it was sold to farmer C.S. Jones.¹⁰



Rear (west) façade, 2009

RECOMMENDATION TO HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE:

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

- its historical importance- illustrative of the type of house being built prior to World War I in Winnipeg's West End by an influential member of the area's Icelandic community;
- its associations- its long-term connections to early and influential merchant B. Petursson;
- its design- an excellent example of the Queen Anne style;
- its architect- N/A;
- its location- contributes greatly to its historic streetscape; and
- its integrity- its main façades continue to display many of their original elements and design.



Front (east) façade, 1978

ENDNOTES:

- 1 Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg: Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, 1991), p. 17; L. Maitland et al., A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1992), p. 102; and L. Maitland, The Queen Anne Revival Style in Canadian Architecture (Ottawa: Environment Canada, 1990), p. 64.
- 2 L. Maitland, op. cit., p. 98.
- 3 City of Winnipeg, Building Permit, #350/1914.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 City of Winnipeg, Assessment Record, Roll No. 13-030134000.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Henderson's Directory, 1917.
- 8 City of Winnipeg, Assessment Roll, below as AR, 1916, Ward 3.
- 9 AR, 1918, Ward 3.
- 10 AR, 63/4 St. James, Plan 2879, part of Lot 30.