836 ARLINGTON STREET – SAINT EDWARD'S CHURCH
D.W. Bellhouse, 1913

By the late 1800s, middle and working-class residential neighborhoods were becoming well established between Portage and Notre Dame avenues west of Winnipeg's downtown core. In July 1908, local English, Scottish and Irish Roman Catholics held their first worship service with Father Gerritsma, founding priest of Saint Edward's parish.

They met in a grocery store but, within six weeks, erected a small frame church at 818 Arlington Street. A school and two major church additions followed as the number of parish families nearly tripled by1913. David Wynyard Bellhouse was commissioned to design a new, more substantial house of worship at the northwest corner of Arlington and Adele Avenue.

Bellhouse, an Englishman, studied architecture in Europe before emigrating to the Glenboro, Manitoba area in 1883. He subsequently opened a practice in Winnipeg in 1888, then joined the Canadian Pacific Railway. He re-established his practice in 1906 after working for a year with

Samuel Hooper's firm. His portfolio included several residences and school-related work. Saint Edward's was his only substantial public building.

The church, built by contractor Fred-Lewis for an estimated $55,000, displays many elements of the Italian Romanesque style. It was dedicated on October 19, 1913, the day of the patron Saint Edward the Confessor.

The building stands on a raised stone foundation with walls and stepped buttresses of deep-red variegated Sidney brick. The buttresses, with cut-stone capitals, rise to a two-part gabled roof. Stone sills, belts, coping and mouldings provide additional contrasting details. Six bays of round-headed, stained-glass windows appear on the south (Adele) and north elevations.

On the front (east) facing, nearly two dozen steps lead up to a massive rounded archway and deeply recessed central entrance. Its plain double wooden doors are enclosed by a smaller arch and topped by a chequered stone pediment. Behind is a large rose window lighting the interior choir loft.

Above the massive arch are two elongated crosses and decorative panels, followed by a chequered stone and brick triangular gable upon which rests a Greek cross. Separate staircases lead to non-recessed doorways flanking the abutments of the arch. Here the double wooden doors are topped by windows and two additional brick and stone panels with crosses.

Based on St. Miniato, Almonte (1000 A.D.) in Florence, the church's interior is arranged in a basilica plan with a raised central nave and lower side aisles. The open-spaced basilica consists of painted plaster with raised pilasters leading up to a flat dropped ceiling. Carpeted aisles slope down to the communion rail and three altars. The central altar is an elaborate wood and plaster structure with a simulated marble finish. Its dome contains a full painting of Christ by Winnipeg artist Leo Mol (1949). The side altars are dedicated to the patron saint and the Virgin Mary. Fresco-like paintings of the 'Agony in the Garden' and the 'Annunciation' appear on their domes.

Plaster-cast replicas of the stations of the cross line the north and south walls. Between 1924 and 1930, the interior also was decorated with painted medallions in honour of the twelve apostles. The church has more than 20 stained glass windows designed and executed by the Toronto firm of N.T. Lyon.

The full basement contains a large central hall with terrazzo tile flooring, kitchen and washroom facilities. There is an attached caretaker's residence and an enclosure linking the church with the two-storey, buff-brick school.

The building has been well maintained. The main alterations have involved changes to open up the front staircase; installation of the parish hall entrance at the building's southeast corner; and upgrading of the residence and kitchen facilities.

The congregation continues to be a vibrant one. More than 65 per cent of parishioners now are from Portugal or the Philippines, reflecting the more cosmopolitan nature of contemporary west Winnipeg.