



836 ARLINGTON STREET

ST. EDWARD'S ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE

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From a corner store to a magnificent parish church – 1908 to 1913! The spectacular growth of the tiny parish of St. Edward's in West End Winnipeg from 134 families to nearly three times that number, five years later, can be understood in these architectural terms. Worship began with their founder Father Gerritsma in a small corner store at Notre Dame and Arlington. By 1913, however, they observed their first mass in “one of the most significant Roman Catholic edifices in the city”.¹ The story of the determination and dedication of this small group and their pastor is only matched by the very unique quality of the church itself. Designed by David Wynyard Bellhouse, St. Edward's was the only substantial public building created by this Winnipeg architect (see Appendix I for biographical information). Moreover the church exhibits many distinctive characteristics which might well speak to the training which Bellhouse received in the architectural schools of Bruges, Belgium and London, England.

The rapid expansion of St. Edward's parish can be explained in terms offered by the extension of the railroad system and development of the retail and wholesale trades in the first decade of the twentieth century. Settling in the West End of the city were those primarily of British, Scottish and Irish stock. The Catholics among them gathered around parish priest Father Gerritsma so that, in July 1908, they had their first service in a small grocery store. From that Sunday \$1,000.00 was raised and plans were laid to build a church. Six weeks later the walls were up on a small frame building at 818 Arlington Street. Without a roof, but with walls and planks laid on nail kegs for pews, the simple structure offered a place for prayer for those who had worshipped in the corner store.²

Before a year had passed from completion of the church building, this zealous group laid the

cornerstone for a parish school. St. Edward's school would be run by the Sisters of Our Lady of the Missions, a teaching order from Ste. Rose, Manitoba. The parish was becoming established, but it also continued to expand. In 1910 an addition was built to the back of the church, then another addition was added to the front the following year, bringing the seating capacity up to 550. However, by 1913, with the congregation sustaining growth under Father Gerritsma's leadership, a decision was made to build a grand church of brick and stone.³

David Bellhouse was commissioned to design the building which would rise on the corner of Arlington Street and Yarwood Avenue. Tenders were called and Winnipeg contractor, Fred Lewis, was granted the contract. He applied for a building permit on the 17th of February 1913. Construction began in the very early spring and by mid-June a cornerstone laying ceremony was held with Archbishop Langevin officiating before a congregation of one thousand people. Subsequently, the building was officially dedicated on the 19th of October 1913, the day of patron St., St. Edward the Confessor. Over eighteen hundred people attended this service which was opened by Bishop Beliveau of St. Boniface.⁴

St. Edward's Roman Catholic Church, with its deep red variegated Sidney brick and cut stone decorative façade, displayed many elements of the Italian Romanesque style, likely reflective of Bellhouse's European training. Based on St. Miniato, Almonte (1000 A.D.) in Florence, St. Edward's is arranged in a basilica plan with a raised central section flanked by lower side aisles. The church was distinctive with its round headed openings, recessed doors and windows and virtually no external trim except for the stone sills, mouldings and capitals on the stepped buttresses. The roof was tar and sand.⁵

The church stood on a stone foundation (63'6" frontage x 156' 5.5" depth x 87' height) from which rose the brick walls supported by stepped brick buttresses garnished with cut stone. The front façade was unique with its great rounded arch framing the deeply recessed central entrance.

Two smaller arches framed the doorways which balance that in the centre of the building. Rising above the grand arch is a façade which became more decorative as it gained height, ending in a checkered brick and stone triangular gable upon which rested a Greek cross. Access to the building was gained by two long staircases which led up on angles to the small entrance doorways. Several years later, in 1927, the staircase was changed to give complete front entry from the street.⁶

The sanctuary of the church displays many architectural principles common to North American Catholic churches, as well as Bellhouse's own imprint. For instance, there are three altars, the centre altar and two side altars – one dedicated to the Virgin Mary and the other to the patron St., St. Edward, the Confessor. Within the sanctuary are also a confessional, raised chancel, and communion rail. Plaster cast replicas of the stations of the cross line the north and south walls.⁷

But as with the exterior, Bellhouse's church has some singular qualities. The choir sings, accompanied by a Cassavant pipe organ. Their places are lit by sunlight coming in from the beautiful rose window on the east wall. The stained glass (1913) is an exceptional feature. Designed and executed by the Toronto firm of N.T. Lyon are over twenty windows from the vestibule to the sanctuary.⁸ The sanctuary is completely open space, without pillars, so that the priest can be seen from every seating position. The floor inclines 3' from the street entrance to the communion rail, to further facilitate vision. Between 1924 and 1930 the interior walls were decorated and painted with medallions in honour of the twelve apostles. Additionally, there are fresco-like paintings of Christ done by Leo Mol in 1949. The centre altar piece is a very elaborate structure of wood and plaster with a simulated marble finish. It stands on a rich red carpet. The interior of the sanctuary is painted plaster with raised pilasters which lead up to the flat dropped ceiling. Sanctuary furniture is golden oak which stands on a linoleum floor with carpeted aisles.

The church complex includes a small attached residence for the caretaker and a full basement used for parish activities. There is a large central hall with terrazzo tile flooring, kitchen and washroom facilities. The boiler room is outfitted to provide the utmost in fire protection with its pressed tin ceiling, heavy tin plated fire doors (with lead release mechanisms) and its two brick encased boilers. A closed tunnel (now open) was built, linking St. Edward's School with the church.⁹

Local pride in the church building and in the parish has meant that the church has been well maintained with few alterations to David Bellhouse's design. Exceptions have been remodeling of the caretaker's residence and a revamping job of the well-used kitchen in the basement. The integrity of the sanctuary, however, is very much in place.

St. Edward's parish has been the scene of a vibrant congregation from its inception. Today the ethnic base has changed with concurrent changes in Winnipeg's population so that over 65% of the parishioners are from the Philippines or Portugal. But the same enthusiasm, excitement, and drive implicit in the efforts of those early members of St. Edward's parish with their leader, Father Gerritsma, is evident today under the direction of Father Sam Argenziano. This West End Winnipeg congregation is well placed in its unique church building, the sole representation of a major architectural design by David Wynyard Bellhouse.

FOOTNOTES

1. Winnipeg Telegram, 16/06/13, p. 15, and Northwest Review, 45th Anniversary Number (1930), p. 89.
2. See Reuban Bellan, Winnipeg: First Century (1978), pp. 118-129, Free Press 30/07/55 and 15/08/59, Winnipeg Telegram, 24/08/08, p. 11. See also City of Winnipeg Plan 1908/795, 26/06/08 at City Archives.
3. Winnipeg Telegram, 17/07/09, p. 7 and Northwest Review, p. 89, Manitoba Free Press, 27/08/27, p. 22 – St. Edward’s School was enlarged to accommodate eight classes.
4. City of Winnipeg Building Permit #115, 17/02/13 – estimated cost \$55,000. Northwest Review, Winnipeg Telegram, 16/06/13, p. 15 and 20/10/13, p. 3. Free Press, 24/05/13, p. 9 includes a photograph of the construction works and note Free Press, 30/07/55 shows an architect’s drawing of Bellhouse’s original design with the tower which was never built.
5. See Marion MacRae, Hallowed Walls: Church Architecture of Upper Canada (1975), pp. 219-236.
6. See Building Permit #115 and City of Winnipeg Fire Insurance Plans, vol. 1, p. 175 and Building Permit #2620, 21/07/27, and #3022, 15/08/27. See also photographs from the P.A.M., A.S. interior and exterior (1969) and Foote Collection – N2406-1471, c. 1914.
7. F.E. Kidder, Churches and Chapels (1910), pp. 27-29.
8. See Alice Hamilton, Manitoban Stained Glass (1970), pp. 218-220 for a detailed inventory of the stained glass in the church. See also “St. Edward’s Church Souvenir Book, 75th Anniversary 1980-1983,” pp. 5-8, “St. Edward the Confessor” booklet, c. 1972-1982, p. 1 and “25th Anniversary of St. Edward’s Church and Its Present Pastor Rev. A.D. Rheame-Double Silver Jubilee 1908-1933”. (All can be found in the church rectory). The author would like to thank Sister A. Rabnett and Mr. B. Schewe for their help and useful information.
9. Fire Insurance Plans, p. 175.

APPENDIX I

David Wynyard Bellhouse (1861-1952)

D.W. Bellhouse was born in Manchester, England, on the 22nd of April, 1861. His early education was in Stuttgart, Germany, and in Neuchatel, Switzerland. He began the study of architecture in Bruges, Belgium, where he passed the requirements to be admitted to the Royal Academy Schools in London, England. He consequently studied in England from 1880 to 1882.

In 1883 he emigrated to Canada taking up land in the Glenboro District, 130 miles west of Winnipeg. Five years later he moved into the city where he opened up an architectural office. However, because of a shortage of clients, he closed his office and took a job with the Division Engineer of the C.P.R. In 1906 he reopened his architect's office at 124 Lombard Street after having spent a year practising in the firm of Samuel Hooper.¹ From his own office Bellhouse designed St. Edward's Roman Catholic Church (1913) at 836 Arlington Street and the homes of David Horn on Armstrong's Point, of J.D. Burnham on Yale Avenue, and of Dr. W.W. Pirt on Waverley Street.² He is also known to have done some design work for a number of the schools built by J.B. Mitchell in the early twentieth century.

It would appear that David Bellhouse was a member of the Royal Institute of British Architects. Additionally, he was an active member of the Manitoba Association of Architects. He was present at the inaugural meeting in 1914 and he served the Council in 1917, 1918 (as president); 1924, 1931 and 1932-33 (as vice president and president).³

¹ F.H. Schofield, The Story of Manitoba, vol. 3, 449. See also "Obituary" of D.W. Bellhouse by C.W.U. Chivers, R.A.I.C. Journal xxix (December 1952), pp. 368-369.

² Schofield, p. 449 and "Winnipeg's largest Electrical Home," Western Canada Contractor and Builder, 20 August 1923, pp. 19-20, 24.

³ File in the office of the Manitoba Association of Architects 1987 and John Chivers, "A History of the Manitoba Association of Architects," (unpublished manuscript, c. 1966), p. 25.

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Plate 1 – St. Edward’s Roman Catholic Church, 836 Arlington Street, ca.1914. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Foote Collection #1471 [N2406].)



Plate 2 – Interior of St. Edward’s Roman Catholic Church, 1969. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Architectural Survey.)

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Plate 3 – St. Edward’s Roman Catholic Church, no date. (City of Winnipeg Planning Department.)