

351 ASSINIBOINE AVENUE – KERR HOUSE
Architect Unknown, 1887



The Kerr House, one of Winnipeg's oldest and least altered Second Empire residences, was built in 1887 in the northwestern tip of the Hudson's Bay Reserve for Francis Ferguson Kerr.

Kerr arrived in the city that year as principal of the Winnipeg School Division's Carlton (later South central) School, erected in 1883 on Graham Avenue between Carlton and Hargrave streets. This was a period of significant expansion in education and all other areas of urban development as the city's population had more than doubled to 20,200 between 1881 and 1886.

Kerr's house, on the northeast corner of Qu'Appelle Avenue and Balmoral Street, was built across from the ground of Manitoba College on the edge of a 182-hectare reserve retained by the Hudson's Bay Company when it relinquished control of the North-West to the Crown in 1869.

The company and subsequent real estate interests successfully sought to attract upper and middle-class families to the reserve by controlling property values and construction quality. The Kerr House was one of the earlier dwellings north of Ellice Avenue. More intense development of the area occurred after establishment of Central Park north of Qu'Appelle between Edmonton and Carlton streets in 1893.

The architect and builder of the two-storey residence are unknown. However, its Second Empire style was popular in Eastern Canada during the latter 1860s to 1880. Since much of the West developed after this period, relatively few of its residential, commercial or institutional buildings are of this type.

A mansard or double roof is the most prominent detail of Second Empire structures, providing more upstairs living space than other contemporary designs. The style also commonly includes asymmetrical facades, porches, bay and dormer windows, moulded cornices with decorative brackets, iron cresting, and generous use of Italianate details.

The Kerr House, appraised at \$1,500 at the time of construction, is a fine example of the genre. Its brick walls rise to a straight mansard roof from a foundation of unfinished rubble stone. Single, round-headed dormer windows, complete with Doric columns, appear on each elevation. A pair of smaller round-headed windows has been inserted in the dormer above a bay window on the ground-floor front (south) facing.

A small simple cornice without brackets separates the two storeys. The bay window is highlighted by segmental brick arches and projecting brick sills. Below the sills are three panels of decorative angled brick. Raised quoins at each corner of the building provide additional ornamentation. Flat and round-headed windows with brick drip mouldings appear on other elevations.

Among alterations to the original design, all openings on the east side of the house have been enclosed. The front porch has been replaced by an open deck. A porch at the northwest corner and a rear one-storey frame enclosure also have been removed.

Kerr occupied 453 Qu'Appelle until 1891, then rented it to various individuals. He apparently left Winnipeg in 1893 but retained ownership of the house until 1896 when it was purchased by Robert Farquhar, a salesman. His family remained until c.1899 after which a succession of households occupied the dwelling.

In 1979, approximately \$100,000 was spent to convert 453 Qu'Appelle to office space, altering the interior but retaining the integrity of the building's basic structure.

Following some years of decline, the Central Park/North Ellice area recently has undergone publicly-stimulated revitalization. Much of the original housing has been replaced by high-density apartment structures or renovated for contemporary uses.