



432 ASSINIBOINE AVENUE

FRANK HALL MATHEWSON HOUSE

PREPARED BY PETERSON PROJECTS – FEBRUARY 2008



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Date of Construction: 1890

Building Permit: N/A

Architect: Wheeler, Charles H.

Contractor: Unknown

ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

This large, 2½-storey single family home is located on the banks of the Assiniboine River in what was, when it was built, Winnipeg's most prestigious residential neighbourhood. Known as The Reserve, it stretched from Main Street west to Kennedy Street on both sides of Broadway, the wide tree-lined thoroughfare that cut through the neighbourhood.

The front (north) façade is asymmetrical, with unmatched window openings featuring gentle and more pronounced arched heads and stone lug sills. Oversized carved wooden brackets support the overhanging eaves of the complex hipped roof with front facing gables and hipped gable dormers. Modest bargeboard with finials embellishes the front facing gable end. The original design included a one- and two-storey open porch with carved wood ornamentation that was removed (date unknown).



Front (north) and east façades, 2007

The east and west façades include a number of small windows and a hipped gable dormer on each roof slope. A second door is found on the west side. Originally, some of the windows on both façades were topped by wooden hoods. The rear (south) façade includes several windows and a newer metal fire escape.

The entire building except for the rear façade is now stuccoed and brightly painted.

Stylistically, the Mathewson House as built was an excellent example of a Queen Anne style residence. This style borrowed heavily from English architecture of the 15th century, blending classical and medieval motifs into a picturesque form.¹ The desired asymmetry was achieved through a number of combinations of porches, bay 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.

With the number of alterations and the removal of much of the ornamental work, the house today shows little of its original grandeur and picturesqueness.



Front (north) and west façades, 2007

This house was designed by Charles H. Wheeler (1838-1917) who was born in Leicester, England. He learned architecture through the study of its composite trades: carpentry, brick-laying and stone masonry. He worked as an architect with firms first in Birmingham and later in London. Wheeler brought this wide range of experience to Canada when he immigrated to Winnipeg in 1882 with his family. He worked first in the architectural office of James Chisholm before establishing his own practice late in the 1880s. His first major work was the design of Holy Trinity Church on Donald Street, winning a competition of sixty entries. The completion of the church established Wheeler as one of the West's finest designers and by 1897 he had designed over 270 buildings in Manitoba and the North West Territories.

A partial list of his larger city commissions includes Holy Trinity Anglican Church, 256 Smith Street (1883-84, National Historic Site), Tees & Persse Building, 285 Market Avenue (1888, demolished), Sanford Building, 109 Princess Street/291 Bannatyne Avenue (1890, Grade II), Deaf and Dumb Institute, Portage Avenue and Sherbrook Street (1890, demolished), Peck Building, 33 Princess Street (1893, Grade II), Provincial Court House, Kennedy Street near Broadway (1893, demolished), James Burridge House, 99 George Avenue (1893), Hugh John Macdonald's House, "Dalnavert," 61 Carlton Street (1895, Grade I and National Historic Site), Grandstand and Stables, Winnipeg Industrial Exhibition, corner of Dufferin Avenue and Sinclair Street (1900, demolished). He has been given 20 points by the Historical Buildings Committee.



Rear (south) façade, 2007

HISTORICAL INTEREST:

Frank Hall Mathewson was the manager of the Bank of Ottawa when this home was built, although by 1895 he had become the manager of the Bank of Commerce in Winnipeg. Mathewson and his family only lived in the house a short time; it was taken over by John Aird (1855-1938), another bank manager.³

Aird was born in Longueuil, Canada and educated in Toronto. He began with the Bank of Commerce as a stenographer in 1878, rose to be a manager in Winnipeg (1899-1908) and then superintendent of Western Canadian operations (1908-11) before moving back to Toronto. He was knighted in 1917 and became the president of the bank in 1924. He was hired in 1928 to chair a Royal Commission on Canadian radio. His findings, the Aird Commission on Radio Broadcasting (1928-29), ultimately led to the creation of the CBC.⁴

After Aird's departure, the home was taken over by the Philip family, David and Matilda L.. Mr. Philip was a manufacturers' agent and the couple remained in the home into the 1930s.

By 1940, local contractor William Moxam had purchased the building and converted it into a six suite facility renamed the Boine Apartments. Early tenants included nurses, clerks, stenographers and accountants. The building continued in this use into the 1980s when it was partially converted into retail space and then a restaurant.⁵



Front (north) and west façades, date unknown

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 of the dwindling number of representative single-family dwellings located in The Reserve, one of Winnipeg's oldest prestige neighbourhoods;
- its associations- its long-term connections to early and influential bankers F.H. Mathewson and J. Aird;
- its design- a severely altered example of the Queen Anne style;
- its architect- C.H. Wheeler was a respected and important practitioner;
- its location- contributes to its streetscape; and
- its integrity- although changed significantly, its main façades continue to display some of their original elements and design.



Front (north) façade after the first major exterior renovations, the removal of the front porch (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 et al., op. cit., p. 98.
- 3 City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls, Roll No. 12-092703000 (below as ARo), 1895-1910.
- 4 Bumsted, J.M., Dictionary of Manitoba Biography (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1999), p. 4.
- 5 ARo, 1910-1990; and Henderson's Directory, 1910-1990.