



250 BALMORAL STREET

JAMES McDIARMID HOUSE

PREPARED BY PETERSON PROJECTS – FEBRUARY 2008



250 BALMORAL STREET JAMES McDIARMID HOUSE

Date of Construction: 1901

Building Permit: 279/1901

Architect: McDiarmid, James (owner)

Contractor: McDiarmid, James (owner)

ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

With its wealth of detailing and its varied cladding material, this 2½-storey frame house is one of the picturesque in the downtown region.

The home sits on a raised rubblestone foundation and utilizes both wood siding (laid horizontally and vertically) and ornamental shingling for cladding throughout. The front (east) façade includes a two-storey corner open porch with wood railing and posts. The south end projects and holds numerous windows in plain wood frames on all levels. Decorative wood elements are applied to the gable end as well as porch. A unique dormer is located on the roof above the porch. The north façade features two elongated rectangular windows on the ground floor and a small window near the apex of the roof slopes. The south façade is similarly organized and the window openings are unmatched. The rear includes a one-storey enclosed entrance porch with a second storey deck.



Front (east) and south façades, 2007

The building stands on its original site, appears to be in good structural condition, its level of upkeep is high and much of the original cladding and ornamentation is intact.

This home is a good example of the Queen Anne style. 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.

The architect, contractor and long-time original owner/tenant of this home was James McDiarmid. He was born on March 9, 1855 in Dunkeld, Perthshire, Scotland, and his early adulthood was spent in the building trade in that country.³ He came to Winnipeg in 1882, during the real estate boom, with two of his brothers, Peter (1857-1915) and John (1863-1943). Peter took up farming in the Poplar Point district; John and James chose to become involved in the building trade that at the time was struggling to keep up with local demand. One of their early contracts was the construction of the Broadway Drill Hall (1884-1919) on the site of the present Legislative Building. At the time, the brothers were part of the



Front (east) and north façades, 2007

firm Murray and McDiarmid, although G.W. Murray would form his own company in the early 1890s.

During the 1890s, James McDiarmid began designing as well as building structures. St. Andrew's Presbyterian (United) Church, corner Elgin Avenue and Ellen Street, built in 1894, was one of his earliest works as an architect. The J. McDiarmid Company Limited incorporated in 1906 and went on to build many outstanding Western Canadian structures. James was also known as the "Father of Municipal Golf in Winnipeg," having assisted in the establishment of the Kildonan Golf Course. He was an avid art collector and for many years was closely involved with the Winnipeg Art Gallery. He died on February 24, 1934.

Work by James McDiarmid or the company that has been designated by the City of Winnipeg includes Penrose (Bell) House, 444 Logan Avenue (originally 232 Bell Avenue), built 1894 (Grade III); Donald H. Bain Building (The Brokerage), 115 Bannatyne Avenue, 1899 (Grade II), Former McClary Building, 185 Bannatyne Avenue, 1899 (Grade III), Marshall-Wells Warehouse, 123 Bannatyne Avenue, 1900 (Grade II), Anne Building, 87 King Street, 1901 (Grade III), Wilson House, 545 Broadway, 1904 (Grade III), Ralph Connor House, 54 West Gate, 1913 (Grade II), Pantages (Playhouse) Theatre, 180 Market Avenue, 1913 (Grade II), R.R. Scott House, 29 Ruskin Row, 1914 (Grade II), Scott Fruit Company Warehouse, 319 Elgin Avenue, 1914 (Grade III) and Robinson Building (Public Press Building), 290 Vaughan Street, 1917 (Grade III).⁴ He has been given 10 points by the Historical Buildings Committee.



Rear (west) and north façades, 2007

HISTORICAL INTEREST:

James McDiarmid was one of Winnipeg's best-known and busiest contractors. He lived in this house until his death in 1934, his widow Isabella continued to live in the family home until the early 1950s when it was sold to Julia A. Simonson who lived in the home into the 1960s. When the building was sold, it was converted into apartments with six suites.⁵



Rear (west) and south façades, 2007

RECOMMENDATION TO HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE:

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

- its historical importance- a good example of a turn-of-the-century single-family home built in the downtown region;
- its associations- its long-term connections to early and influential builder J. McDiarmid and family;
- its design- a good example of the Queen Anne style;
- its architect- J. McDiarmid was a respected and important practitioner;
- its location- contributes to its historic streetscape; and
- its integrity- its main façades continue to display many of their original elements and design.



Front (east) façade, 1992

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 R.R. Rostecki, "Manitoba Hall – 291½-295 Portage Avenue," report for the Historical Buildings Committee, April 1991, p. 24.
- 4 Historical Buildings Committee records.
- 5 City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls, Roll No. 12-091422000, 1910-1990; and Henderson's Directory, 1910-1990.