



32 BALMORAL STREET

ROBERT R. MUIR HOUSE

PREPARED BY PETERSON PROJECTS – FEBRUARY 2008



32 BALMORAL STREET ROBERT R. MUIR HOUSE

Date of Construction: 1906

Building Permit: 2472/1906

Architect: Claydon Brothers

Contractor: Claydon Brothers

ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

One of a group of pre-World War I single-family dwellings is 32 Balmoral Street, built in 1906 at a cost of \$3,600¹ for an influential businessman and politician.

The front (south) façade of this stucco clad residence features a projecting enclosed entrance porch with hooded door and newer wooden deck. Windows are wood frame and the front facing gable on the top storey includes a unique arched element. Decking on the second floor deck is much heavier than the original element it replaced. The west side includes an oval stained glass window on the ground floor and a two-storey bay window towards the back of the home. The east side features several sets of wood frame windows. The rear (north) façade includes a lean-to with an enclosed second storey clad in newer composite siding. A small wood clad garage is found to the rear of the home.



Front (south) and west façades, 2007

The building stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition. Alterations include the stuccoing of the building, the replacement of the front decking and the enclosing of the rear porch.

Stylistically, the building is minimally detailed, suggesting that the contractor who built it likely used plans out of a published plan book, as was often the case during this period.

The contracting firm involved in the design and construction of this house was the Claydon Brothers Company. The company was founded in 1904 by Ebenezer (1881-1954) and Arthur Claydon, two of the five Claydon brothers.² Ebenezer Claydon was born in Deeping St. James, Lincolnshire, England in 1881. After receiving his education in England, he immigrated to Canada in 1902, coming to Winnipeg shortly thereafter and establishing the general contracting firm Claydon Brothers in 1904.³ A third brother, Ernest, came to Winnipeg and joined the firm ca.1912. Arthur and Ernest enlisted and fought overseas during World War I and Arthur was killed in action in 1917. Ernest returned to Winnipeg and rejoined Claydon Brothers as the secretary-treasurer, with Ebenezer as president.

The firm was reorganized in 1917 and renamed Claydon Company Limited.⁴ By 1945, it had been expanded to handle home and business fuels and to include five Claydons: Ebenezer; his two sons, Oliver and Gurth E.; and Ernest and his son Rowland. Ebenezer died on February 26, 1954⁵ and Ernest died in 1976. J. Norman Claydon, a son of Gurth E., was also associated with the business in the 1970s.

The company continued to operate until recently. Obviously, a contracting firm with such a long history would have a very long list of buildings to its credit. Like other medium-scale contracting firms, Claydon Brothers also designed and owned some of the structures they



Front (south) and east façade, 2007



West side stained glass window, 2007

built, usually single-family dwellings. All of Winnipeg's important early twentieth-century architects used this firm. Some of its better-known and larger projects include: Dominion Bank, 678 Main Street (1907, Grade II); Assiniboine Park, first Pavilion (1908, destroyed by fire); DeBary (Highgate) Apartments, 626 Wardlaw Avenue (1912, Grade II); Anvers Apartments, 758 McMillan Avenue (1912, Grade II); and St. Michael and All Angels Anglican Church, 300 Hugo Street North (1920, Grade III).⁶



Rear (north) and west façades, 2007

HISTORICAL INTEREST:

Broadway, so named for its widened layout and expansive, tree-lined boulevards, became one of the city's finest streets. Located in the Hudson's Bay Reserve, this avenue emerged as an exclusive area of expensive homes, large apartment blocks, and ultimately the Legislative Building. West of Osborne Street, Broadway was intersected by numerous streets filled with large, two- and two-and-a-half-storey, single-family dwellings. As in other higher income neighbourhoods, lots were kept small, partly to increase the profits of the subdivider and partly because large lots were not in demand from this group of homeowners in the early 1900s.

A new subdivision of 63 lots was created in 1903 on land originally granted to James Spence, an ex-Hudson's Bay Company employee who farmed the property for many years.⁷ This new subdivision took in the south side of Broadway and east side of Spence Street, but mostly ran along both sides of a new road, a southern extension of Balmoral Street known then as Balmoral Place.⁸ From 1904 to 1912, this drive filled with large, expensive homes for a number of middle- to upper-income families.

Robert R. Muir, founder and president of Robert Muir and Company, grain dealers, built this home. Born on December 28, 1850 at Manila, County of Victoria, Canada West, he came to Manitoba in 1878 engaged in the machinery business and later branching into flour milling and grain. By 1892 he transferred all his time to milling and grain, and founded the firm of Robert Muir and Company. He served a term as Winnipeg alderman in 1892 and was an active member of the Winnipeg Grain Exchange. He died in June 1908 and Muir Road in Inkster Industrial Park commemorates his contributions to the City.⁹



Front (south) and east façade, 2007

After Muir's death, the home changed hands a number of times, its owners not living in the house.¹⁰ Tenants during this period included William T. Hall, agent for Confederation Life Assurance Company (1920s) and John C. Dries, brewmaster at McDonagh & Shea (1920s and 1930s).¹¹ In the 1940s and 1950s the home was owned by Roy Soltzman of the Empire Wholesale Tobacco Company and his wife May. In the 1960s, Cornelius and Katie L. Wiebe were listed as owners and occupants and in the 1970s the home was owned by Sziliard S. and Maria Mate of the Sunshine Pastry Shop.¹²

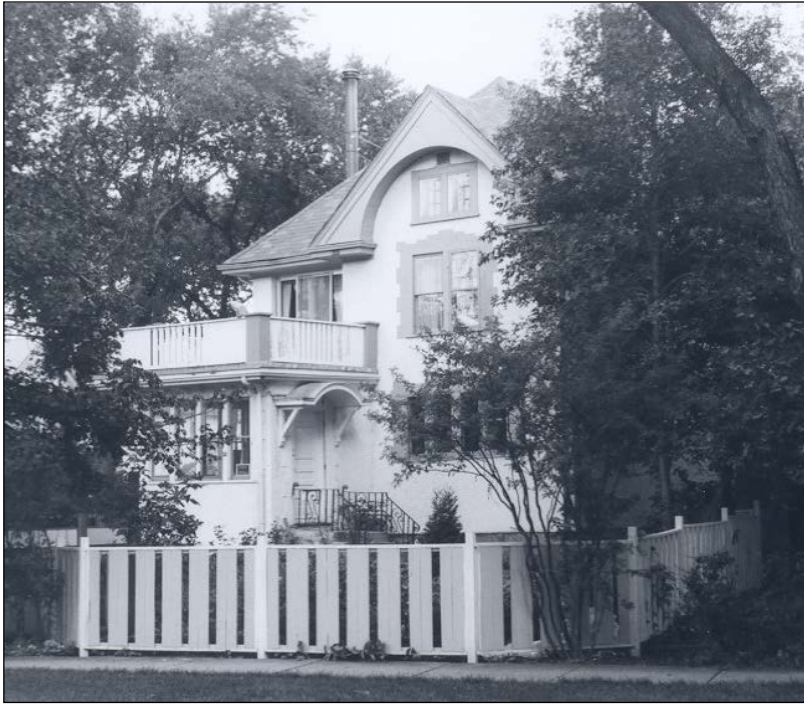


Robert R. Muir (1850-1908), no date
(Reproduced from Historical Society of Manitoba website)

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 oldest warehouses in the Exchange District and its illustration of the expansion of business that occurred in the City and especially in the Exchange District throughout much of the pre-World War I era;
- its associations- its long-term connections to early and influential retail/wholesale personalities G.F. and J. Galt;
- its design- an excellent example of the Richardsonian Romanesque style;
- its architect- C.H. Wheeler was a respected and important practitioner;
- its location- defines an important intersection and contributes greatly to the historic streetscape of two major arteries within the Exchange District; and
- its integrity- its main façades continue to display many of their original elements and design.



Front (east) façade, 1978

ENDNOTES:

- 1 City of Winnipeg Building Permit, #2472/1906.
- 2 Much of the biographical and business information on the Claydon family was furnished by Rowland R. Claydon, in conversation with the author, December 1, 1993. R.R. Claydon is the son of Ernest Claydon, brother and partner of co-founders Ebenezer and Arthur.
- 3 Winnipeg Free Press, February 27, 1954. During his career, Ebenezer Claydon was also president of the Winnipeg Builders Exchange and vice-president of the Canadian Construction Association.
- 4 Manitoba Gazette, Vol. 46, No. 29 (July 21, 1917), pp. 703-04.
- 5 Winnipeg Free Press, February 27, 1954.
- 6 List compiled from City of Winnipeg Building Permits Ledger Books and personal files of D.M. Lyon and author.
- 7 M. Peterson, "Henry E. Sharpe, 56 Balmoral Street," Report to the City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee, January 1990, pp. 1-2.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- 9 Pioneers and Early Citizens of Manitoba (Winnipeg: Manitoba Library Association, 1971).
- 10 City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls, Roll No. 12-091402000, 1910-1940.
- 11 Henderson's Directory, 1910-1940.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 1940-1980.