



36 BALMORAL STREET

HON. ALEXANDER N. McPHERSON HOUSE

PREPARED BY PETERSON PROJECTS – FEBRUARY 2008



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Date of Construction: 1909

Building Permit: 448/1909

Architect: Russell, John Hamilton Gordon

Contractor: Cross, W.W.

ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

Built at a high cost of \$7,000 in 1909, this 2½-storey wood frame house on a raised stone foundation has many attractive features that set it apart from its neighbours.

The front (south) façade features a centrally placed two-storey wood entrance porch with square column supports and an open second floor balcony with newer wood lattice replacing the original wood railing. The second storey balcony is accessed via a small door. Windows on the front façade are square headed and set in wooden frames. The medium-pitched bellcast hipped roof features open eaves with exposed rafters and a front facing dormer with roof accents matching the roof of the house.

The east and west sides are a continuation of the front elements including the raised foundation, wood siding, dormers and roof elements. A large brick chimney is attached to



Front (south) and west façades, 2007

the east façade; the dormer on the east slope is smaller. The rear (north) elevation includes a one-storey closed entrance porch, windows on all levels, a slender brick chimney and a large gable dormer.

The building stands on its original site, appears to be in good structural condition and does not appear to have suffered major exterior alterations.

This home is a good example of a foursquare style structure, one of the most popular styles used for residential architecture in North America from the late 1880s until the 1930s. Its square massing and boxiness made it affordable to build and perfect for small urban lots where space was at a premium. The roofline was usually pyramidal or hipped and a front porch and small dormer on the second floor were familiar details. Usually built without the benefit of an architect, the foursquare was often detailed by the owner and could be highly ornamental or very plain. On the interior, the foursquare featured a second floor with four square rooms above three square rooms and an entrance hall with stairs tucked unobtrusively to the side on the first floor.¹

Building designer J.H.G. Russell (1862-1946) was born in Toronto, Canada West (Ontario), in 1862, the son of a dry goods dealer. After attending school in that city, he went to work for H.B. Gordon, a prominent area architect. Russell was with Gordon from 1878 until his departure for Winnipeg in 1882. From 1886 to 1893, Russell travelled throughout the United States, learning civil engineering, surveying and architecture in centres such as Chicago, Illinois, Spokane and Tacoma, Washington, and Sioux City, Iowa.

In 1895, two years after returning to Winnipeg, he set up his private practice, coinciding with the city's period of unbridled growth. His designs were (and are) scattered throughout the



Front (south) and east façades, 2007

city, province and Western Canada, covering a variety of building types, sizes, costs and uses. His business continued to be steady during World War I and after, when many architects struggled to find commissions.

Russell was president of the Manitoba Association of Architects (1925) and served for three terms as the president of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (1912-15). His chairmanship of the Presbyterian Church Board of Managers and his devotion to Presbyterianism partially explain the large number of churches he designed for the denomination in Winnipeg and Western Canada. Russell died in 1946.

A complete list of his designs would be very lengthy, included among his more notable local projects would be J.H. Ashdown Warehouse additions, 157-179 Bannatyne Avenue, (1899-1911, Grade II), Lake of the Woods Building, 212 McDermot Avenue (1901, Grade II), Hammond Building, 63 Albert Street (1902, Grade III), Adelman Building, 92-100 Princess Street (1903, Grade II), Franklin Press, 168 Bannatyne Avenue (1904, Grade III), R.R. Wilson, 545 Broadway (1904, Grade III), J.H. Ashdown Store, 211 Bannatyne Avenue (1904, Grade III), Porter Building, 165 McDermot Avenue (1906, Grade III), Child's (McArthur) Building, Portage Avenue (1909, demolished), Casa Loma Building, Portage Avenue (1909, Grade II), Glengarry Block, 290 McDermot Avenue (1910, Grade III), Westminster Presbyterian (United) Church, 745 Westminster Avenue (1910-12, Grade II), Dingwall Building, 62 Albert Street (1911, Grade III), YMCA, 301 Vaughan Street, with Jackson and Rosencrans of New York (1911-13, Grade II), J.H. Ashdown, 529 Wellington Crescent (1913, Grade II) and St. John's Presbyterian (United) Church, 250 Cathedral Avenue (1923, Grade III). He has been given 20 points by the Historical Buildings Committee.



Rear (north) façade, 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, numerous streets filled with large, two- and two-and-a-half-storey, single-family dwellings intersected Broadway. As in other higher income neighbourhoods, lots were kept small, partly to increase the profits of the developer 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.² 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.³ From 1904 to 1912, this drive filled with large, expensive homes for a number of middle- to upper-income families. The west side of Balmoral Street south of Broadway has remained virtually unchanged since World War I. Almost all the homes are still extant, although some have been converted from single-family dwellings into boarding houses. The east side, however, has been drastically changed – all homes except for #51 were demolished in the 1970s as part of an expansion of the property of the Great-West Life Assurance Company. Some newer apartment blocks have also been built on Balmoral Street south of Mostyn Place.

The Honourable Alexander N. McPherson was a prominent Winnipeg lawyer, senior partner in the firm McPherson, Saunderson and Wilson. He would later be appointed a county court judge. He died ca.1938 but his estate maintained ownership of the property



Rear (north) and west façades, 2007

until 1946 when it was sold to William and Christina F. McCasky.⁴ Over the next 50 years, the home has seen a number of short-term owners/occupants including Peter Slezak, butcher and his wife Michalina (1950s), Alex Y., yardman for George H. Flanigan & Sons, and his wife Elsie (1960s) and Wasyl Lajszczuk, employment unknowns (1970s).⁵



Caricature of Hon. Alexander N. McPherson, ca.1908
(Reproduced from Manitobans As We See 'Em, 1908 and 1909, ca.1909, by the
Newspaper Cartoonists' Association of Manitoba)

RECOMMENDATION TO HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE:

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

- its historical importance- one of a group of fine single-family dwellings located in a residential district developed in the pre-World War I era;
- its associations- its long-term connections to lawyer and judge Hon. Alexander N. McPherson;
- its design- an excellent example of a foursquare style residence;
- its architect- J.H.G. Russell was a respected and important practitioner;
- its location- contributes greatly to its historic streetscape; and
- its integrity- its main façades continue to display many of their original elements and design.



Front (south) façade, 1978

ENDNOTES:

- 1 Information from <http://www.realviews.com/homes/forsq.html>.
- 2 M. Peterson, "Henry E. Sharpe, 56 Balmoral Street," Report to the City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee, January 1990, pp. 1-2.
- 3 Ibid., p. 2.
- 4 City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls, Roll No. 12091403000, 1910-1950.
- 5 Ibid., 1950-1990; and Henderson's Directory, 1910-1990.