



**540 BALMORAL STREET**

**BALMORAL COURT APARTMENTS**

PREPARED BY PETERSON PROJECTS – JANUARY 2007



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## 540 BALMORAL STREET BALMORAL COURT APARTMENTS

**Date of Construction:** 1905

**Building Permit:** 1393/1905

**Architect:** Atchison, John Danley

**Contractor:** Wood, D.D.

### ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

Built in 1905, the Balmoral Court Apartments must be considered one of Winnipeg's older apartment blocks, a familiar site in every residential district in the city but at the time a new innovation in residential structures. So popular did it become in Winnipeg, for a variety of reasons, that Winnipeg built more blocks per-capita than any other major city in Canada in the pre-World War I era.

This three-storey dark brick structure stands on a raised stone foundation, the rusticated base separated from the upper brick walls by a smooth-cut stone belt course running along the two public façades, east facing Balmoral Street and north facing Sargent Avenue. Standing on a corner lot, the building's two main façades are similarly designed with multiple three-storey bay windows, square headed window openings with stone lug sills and radiating brick heads, a stone belt course acting as a continuous sill for the third storey



Front (east) façade detail, 2006



South side fire escape, 2006

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windows, stone keystones on the top floor windows, a modest cornice above and a stone capped brick parapet finishing the flat roof. The basement windows have been boarded up.

The most ornamentally treated elements are the east and north doors. Both rest in carved stone frames, both are accessed atop a short set of steps and both include attached columns with ornate bracket-like capitals supporting the curved broken pediments above. Carved medallions framed in vines are found within the pediment, as is a stone panel bearing the words “BALMORAL COURT”. The double wooden doors are original and include transoms.

The rear (west) façade is flat and finished in common clay brick. Windows are arched and include stone lug sills. The south façade includes a bay window at the east end and a recessed area that holds a wooden fire escape.

Costing \$32,500 to build in 1905, the block sits on the southwest corner of Balmoral Street and Sargent Avenue and measures approximately 17.7 x 24.4 metres (58 x 80 feet).<sup>1</sup> The use of recessed areas and bay windows was a common practice to increase the amount of air and natural light available to each suite, an important consideration that had been included in by-laws regarding multi-tenant housing in the city.

J.D. Atchison (1870-1959), the architect of this block, was born in Monmouth, Illinois in 1870. Educated in Chicago, he studied architecture at the Chicago Art Institute and the Chicago Manual Training School.<sup>2</sup> After graduation he worked in the offices of W.G. Barfield, as well as for the firm Jenney and Mundie. William Le Baron Jenney was considered by many to be one of America’s leading architects and Atchison participated in the planning of buildings utilizing the latest technology in steel skyscraper construction.





North façade, 2006

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In 1895, he opened his own practice that continued until the early 1900s. He worked on the staff of the World's Columbian Exposition and for the Chicago and Eastern Illinois Railroad. His commissions brought him to Winnipeg and by 1905 the prosperity and future prospects prompted him to relocate his business here.<sup>3</sup> He would spend the next years as one of Winnipeg and Western Canada's most renowned designers, leaving in 1923 for Pasadena, California where he continued to practice until his death in 1959.<sup>4</sup>

Among his more prominent local works are: Wardlaw Apartments, 544 Wardlaw Avenue (1905, Grade II); Kennedy Building (Mitchell-Copp), 315 Portage Ave. (1906, Grade II); North West Commercial Travellers' Association Building, 291 Garry St. (1908, Grade III); Oldfield, Kirby and Gardner Building, 234 Portage Avenue (1909, Grade II); Chamber of Commerce Building (Great-West Life Building), 177 Lombard Ave. (1911, Grade II); Boyd Building, 388 Portage Ave. (1912, Grade III); Union Tower, 191 Lombard Ave. (1912-13, Grade II); Curry Building, 233 Portage Ave. (1915, Grade II) and the Bank of Hamilton Building, 395 Main St. (1916-18, Grade I). He has been given 20 points by the Historical Buildings Committee.



Rear (west) and north façades, 2006

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HISTORICAL INTEREST:

Albert Bright, fruiterer, is listed as the original owner of the block.<sup>5</sup> Original tenants included William J. Stevenson, sales manager of Thomas Ryan and Company, Frederick C.T. Porter, manager of Porter and Company, Frank E. Filer, sales manager for Northern Electric and Manufacturing Company and J. Cecil Agnew, manager of the Toronto Pharmaceutical Company.<sup>6</sup>

The De la Fonchais family owned this block into the 1940s beginning with Theresa De la Fonchais of Ste. Rose du Lac, Manitoba. Tenants over the years have been varied and have included clerks, managers, physicians, government employees, butchers and retired couples.<sup>7</sup>



Rear (west) and south façades, 2006



South façade, 2006

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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 apartment blocks in the downtown and an example of an early design of this building type;
- its design- an excellent example of a large, classically detailed multi-tenant block;
- its architect- J.D. Atchison was one of the city's most respected and important practitioners;
- its location- defines an important intersection and contributes to the historic streetscape of two major downtown arteries; and
- its integrity- its façades continue to display many of their original elements and design.





Front (east) and south façades, 1978

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ENDNOTES:

- 1 City of Winnipeg Building Permit, No. 1393/1905.
- 2 Winnipeg Telegram, September 18, 1906, p. 55; and F.H. Schofield, The Story of Manitoba (Winnipeg: S.J. Clarke, 1913), Vol. II, p. 374.
- 3 F.H. Schofield, op. cit., p. 374.
- 4 The Emerson Court House and Town Hall Building (Winnipeg: Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Recreation, Historic Resources Branch, 1985), pp. 8-11.
- 5 City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls, Roll No. 13-051824100 (below as ARo), 1906.
- 6 Henderson's Directory, 1910.
- 7 Henderson's Directory, 1920-1990; ARo, 1920-1990.