

56 BALMORAL STREET – HENRY E. SHARPE HOUSE
D.J. Ross, 1906



Built for an oil company executive, this 2 1/2-storey house is an integral part of a highly visible and historic residential streetscape on the western fringe of downtown Winnipeg.

Balmoral Place, renamed a street in the late 1950s, was part of a subdivision south of Broadway and west of Osborne Street created in 1903 out of a farm granted to James Spence, an ex-Hudson's Bay Company employee. Large houses owned by influential citizens were erected along the avenue during the boom years leading up to World War I.

In the 1970s, demolition of most structures on the eastern side of Balmoral between Broadway and Mostyn Place opened the surviving western side to view, revealing an intact row of period dwellings

spared the infill construction and redevelopment that have marred adjacent streets.

56 Balmoral, originally numbered 26, is a substantial brick building with a stone foundation and cross-gable roof with wide eaves supported by wooden dentils and plain brackets. It was constructed in 1906 by D.J. Ross at a cost of \$6,500, probably on the basis of a design found in one of the era's available catalogues or plan books.

The style falls under a category variously known as utilitarian, eclectic, homestead, gabled-ell cottage or tri-gabled ell. All of these terms have been applied to an adaptable building form used in both urban and rural North America from 1870 to about 1920.

The tri-ell or gable-ell cottage incorporated a basic ell plan with one corner (or a simple T-shaped design) and cross gables. The projecting stem usually was off-centre and pointed toward the street. Porches and entrances appeared in the corner(s) of the ell or T-shape. Ornamentation was modest to preserve simplicity and economy. However, decorative elements from various architectural styles often were employed at the pleasure of owners unfamiliar with design principles.

The layout used for 56 Balmoral resulted in a recessed front entrance at the building's northeast corner to which access is gained via a large, open, one-storey wooden veranda that runs the width of the facade. Tuscan order columns support the veranda's dentilled eaves, while a second-floor doorway leads to a small sun-deck on the roof above the entrance.

Most of the structure's windows are rectangular with unadorned wooden surrounds, brick heads and rough stone sills. To the south, the side wall features a two-storey bay window. Adjacent to the second-floor doorway is a round-headed opening with leaded glass. Both side walls also contain an arched window, while leaded glass is found in openings on the rear elevation.

Unlike a number of its neighbours, this seven-bedroom building was not converted to a rooming-house. As a result, several original interior elements have been retained, including an ornamental

staircase on the north side. Its dark wood has relief carving on all levels. Two large-stained-glass windows add an elegant touch to the first flight of stairs. A smaller stained-glass opening lights the steps between the second and third levels.

Two fireplaces with coloured tile are on the main floor. The largest one features fluted wooden columns supporting smaller unfluted columns, a carved panel and a wooden mantel. A modest brick fireplace is in one of the second-storey bedrooms.

The first owner-occupant was Henry Edwards Sharpe, an Ontarian who came to Winnipeg in 1881 as western manager of the Imperial Oil Company. Sharpe was an active member of the Baptist Church and YMCA. Because of ill health, he sold his house with the intention of moving to southern California. However, he died in Winnipeg in 1909 after a sudden relapse.

He was succeeded at 56 Balmoral by Angus D. Robertson of the Robertson-Adams Lumber Company (to the late 1910s); Dr. H.J. Meikley (to 1922); Dr. William Leggette (to 1938); and numerous others. At present, the structure is still classified as a single-family dwelling although it has been run as a housing co-operative by the Common Ground Co-op Limited. Recent renovations have been undertaken to update wiring and plumbing.