

251 BANNERMAN AVENUE – ST. JOHN'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Parfitt and Prain, 1928



As the third St. John's Presbyterian Church to appear on Charles Street, this structure is a modest yet solid architectural statement of the congregation's determination to maintain its traditional roots.

Founded in 1904 to accommodate North Winnipeg's growing population St. John's first house of worship was located at Charles Street and Cathedral Avenue. A second, more substantial building was completed at the same intersection in 1923, but the church community split two years later over the issue of merging with Methodists and Congregationalists to form the United Church of Canada.

After 42 percent of the 558 voting St. John's members opposed the union. They began meeting in nearby rented facilities along with other dislocated Presbyterians from the district. In 1928, they erected their own building on the northwest corner of Charles and Bannerman Avenue, just one block from the Cathedral site.

This project was a substantial undertaking for the congregation whose members were largely from the working class and, in many cases, had already made substantial contributions toward the 1923

building. Elsewhere in the city, Presbyterians "of means" had been called on to support establishment of other church facilities. Thus, the St. John's group had to appeal to a wider constituency for financial assistance.

Available documentation on the project's architect is contradictory, indicating that Edgar Prain, Gilbert Parfitt or perhaps both men designed the church. It does not appear that the two formed a professional partnership. However, both practised in Winnipeg for many years and worked jointly on St. John's Cathedral.

Prain studied and worked in his native Scotland and with the London County Council before setting up a private practice in Winnipeg in c.1909. From 1953 to 1957, he was a consultant with Ward and McDonald. His early portfolio included numerous Winnipeg apartment blocks and a senior citizens' home in Melville, Saskatchewan.

The English-born Parfitt arrived in Winnipeg in 1912 and gained employment with the Provincial Architect's/Building Superintendent's Office. By the mid-1920's, he was considered the de facto Superintendent of Public Buildings with responsibility for major projects such as the Headingley Gaol, Selkirk Mental Hospital and Portage la Prairie Industrial Training School. He was confirmed as Building Superintendent in 1933 and Provincial Architect in 1947. After retirement in 1956, he continued as a consultant to the provincial government. Among his designs were the Winnipeg Cenotaph, Central Provincial Garage and St. Patrick's Anglican Church after which St. John's Church was to be modelled.

Built by Langford and Birch Ltd. for about \$19,500, St. John's is a T-shaped, frame and stucco building resting on a concrete surface foundation with a rear basement. Its design combines elements of the Tudor, Gothic Revival and Craftsman styles.

Tudor and Gothic Revival influences include the church's steep, front-gabled roof, its rear cross gables with decorative half-timbering, multi-level eaves, and tall, narrow pairs of side windows with multi-pane, coloured glazing. From the Tudor and Craftsman styles come the hipped-roof front entrances and the series of four hipped-roof dormers along both sides. Tapered or battered piers at

the corners, and along the east and west elevations, are Craftsman elements.

The main front and rear gables contain a trio of openings inside pointed (Gothic) arches. In 1981, the church dedicated a three-part stained glass window in the chancel at the north end of the building (the rear gable). This Ascension scene was designed by Wanda and David Pike of Winnipeg.

The Gothic theme is continued in the arches over the double wooden entrance doors. Gable eaves are outlined with plain vergeboards, while side and dormer eaves have exposed rafters.

The interior is divided according to the bay system with a central nave separated from side aisles and bays by a series of pillars that support the ceiling's wooden trusses. In 1979, the "parlour" and balcony were converted into a nursery.

A one-storey church hall with a rough-cut limestone facade was attached to the west wall of the original structure in 1960-61. In 1978, the exterior was re-stuccoed and interior renovations were undertaken. Some exterior aluminum windows also have been installed.