



251 BANNERMAN AVENUE
ST. JOHN'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee
Research: St. John's Presbyterian Church
March 1989

ST. JOHN'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
251 BANNERMAN AVENUE

By World War I Western Canada's popularity as an immigration mecca had all but vanished. New arrivals would certainly come, but not in the vast waves that westerners had become accustomed to in the past. Virtually all of the new citizens travelled through Winnipeg from eastern points and the city's growing influence; socially, politically and commercially often acted as a magnet for these newcomers. Finding work in the shops and factories of north Main Street, but lacking the financial strength to live elsewhere, many immigrant families took up residence as near to their employment as possible. Winnipeg's North End, that is the area north of the CPR tracks on Main Street, soon became a centre of cheap housing.

As more and more immigrants stayed in the city, more and more of their extended families chose to settle in the district, thus the phenomenon of chain migration took place in an urban as well as rural setting. By 1921, 60% of Winnipeg's German population lived in the North End, along with 86% of Winnipeg's Ukrainians, 84% of the Jewish total and 76% of the Polish people.

This new population of citizens came into contact with many Winnipeggers, not the least of which was the non-immigrant population already living in the area. As had occurred in other areas of the city, this group consisted of mainly British Isle stock and grew into strongly unified communities. These families were either given land or purchased it for small sums from the Hudson's Bay Company or the Dominion Government. The long lots usually had river frontage and the speculators lured by easy cash converted these lots into smaller parcels as the nineteenth century came to a close.

In 1904, it was realized by a number of people living between St. Giles Presbyterian Church on Selkirk Avenue and Kildonan Presbyterian Church Main at John Black Avenue that there may be a need for a new congregation to be formed, as the area around Inkster and Lansdowne was being built up.

The Presbytery commissioned theological student J. Mackie Niven to conduct a survey in north

Winnipeg. He located 40 Presbyterian families. On June 17th the first service was held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Polson at 94 Cathedral Avenue. J.H. Cameron of old Kildonan conducted the service.

The first W.M.S. meeting was held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Hyde, 134 Lansdowne Avenue.

The St. John's congregation enjoyed a joint pastorate, under student ministers J. Phillips Jones and J. Mackie Niven.

The first church building was opened on September 25, 1904 at the northeast corner of Charles and Cathedral. The first organist, Miss Ina Polson returned her annual honorarium of \$55.00; she would not accept money for service to the church.

Reverend J. Phillips Jones was St. John's first ordained minister, 1906 - 1921 copies of the letter of call on file.

The first building was moved to the southwest corner of Cathedral and Charles and reopened October 20, 1907 with a new entrance. In 1914 this building was again moved to the back of the lot and construction of the basement began. This was to be the meeting place until the upper structure was opened on April 1, 1923 (April Fool's Day)! The mortgage for the basement was burnt on June 20, 1920 and the first manse was purchased at 112 Bannerman Avenue. The old building was sold for \$242.00 less \$6.00 for advertisement and the furnishings sold for \$150.00.

Style building number 1:

This structure followed the traditional Gothic type of building favoured by church builders at that time (see photo app. A). One can see the features of the original building prior to the addition.

Style building number 2:

This structure is a modest example of the Free Style Edwardian Gothic school that grew rapidly in England after the turn of the century. Less ornamented than true Gothic Revival style, the Free Style movement developed from a negative reaction to the highly decorative Art Nouveau style of the European continent. Only slightly less important as a factor in the creation of Free Style building was the concern over the cost of the highly ornamented buildings of the Gothic Revival and Art Nouveau schools. Although the church at 250 Cathedral exhibits the twin towers and centre gable of a Gothic Revival structure, it has been simplified to the point of being nearer the Free Press Style.

CONSTRUCTION:

The building was carried out in two stages. In 1914 the basement was completed and served as a meeting place until 1923 when the upper structure was added (Plate 1). 1925 saw a tremendous change take place as a result of church union. The new church went with the majority and became St. John's United and is now an apartment block (Plate 2). The 236 staunch Presbyterians voting against union lost their new church and began meeting first in the College theatre (currently Jehovah's Witnesses Assembly Hall). Then in Anglican Parish Hall, Tuesday evening prayer meeting, bible study and young people's meetings in the Tabernacle Baptist Church.

Later in 1926 the former Musker Engineering Institution, later a bank building at Lansdowne and Main became our church house (this building was demolished in 1984).

During this trying time their numbers were increased by some members from the St. Gile's Presbyterian Church on Burrows Avenue which joined in union. The Minister at this time was University student, Manford George Gutzke.

In the summer of 1928 the members witnessed the turning of the sod for the new church on Bannerman Avenue. The Hon. H.A. Robson K.C.M.P.P. laid the cornerstone. The laying of the cornerstone took place on Saturday, September 8 and dedication of the church on November 18. This was a difficult time for northenders as composed of mainly working class, they had limited funds and the wealthier Winnipeg Presbyterians of the south part of the city had just assumed a large

debt to build First Presbyterian Church on Picardy Place and could not be expected to provide much help. The Minister was Reverend T. Owen Hughes 1928 - 1933 (see app. c1-c2) and G.J.E. Gustafson, Winnipeg Pictorial Historical Souvenirs 1872 - 1949.

Style building number three:

This was a return to the more modest timber style similar to the first church but slightly more European (see app. d1, d2, d3).

In 1935 the Rev. John Fleck was called and in 1937 directed the first camp at Indian Bay (now Prescawa).

Rev. George Sparks was called in 1940 - 1945.

Dr. A.F. Howick from 1946 - 1949 during his tenure the second manse was purchased at 67 Luxton Avenue for \$6,600.00.

Rev. and Mrs. J.D. Marnoch came for their first part of his ministry 1950 - 1958.

St. John's donated \$980.00 to the flood relief fund and operated a Sunday School bus in the McPhillips area. Burning of the mortgage took place in 1954, the 50th anniversary of St. John's. Anita Graham retired after 30 years as organist in 1956.

Rev. Gordon Peddie ministered 1960 - 1963, and in 1960 the turning of the sod for the church hall took place. The congregation purchased the third manse at 562 Aikins Street and the hall was opened on March 3, 1961.

Rev. Peddie was called to higher service suddenly while attending General Assembly in Toronto in 1963 and Rev. J.D. Marnoch returned from Kenora.

In 1975 Winnipeg honoured Miss Agnes Arnold by naming Agnes Arnold Place in the Maples. Her

father was a founding member of St. John's.

A major facelift was carried out in 1978, painting, sanding floors, installing some carpeting and restuccoing the exterior. Rededication of the sanctuary took place on September 24. In 1979 the "parlour" and the balcony were converted into a nursery and the "Upper Room" became the Robert Hamilton Room. The first of two Vietnamese families, sponsored jointly by St. John's and Kildonan congregations, with generous support from the General Sir Sam Steele Memorial Branch of the Royal Canadian Legion, arrived in Winnipeg.

Burning of the mortgage on the hall (January 25, 1981) plus the unveiling and dedication of the Ascension window took place on May 31.

1989 sees us as a growing congregation with many young families joining, it also is a time when we must carry out some major work on the building.

INTEGRITY:

This third building occupies its original site, legally described as:

The Certificate of Title No. 415493. Dated March 20, 1928 in the name of:-

William Matheson Gordon, Superintendent,

George Dodds Sinclair, Manager, and

John Ashmore Kennedy, Paymaster C.P.R., all of the City of Winnipeg aforesaid.

Land:- In the City of Winnipeg, in the Province of Manitoba, being in accordance with the Special Survey of said City, and being the most Easterly one hundred feet in depth of Lots five and six, Excepting out of said Lot Five the most Northerly sixteen feet in width thereof; which lots are shewn on a plan of survey of part of Lot One of the Parish of Kildonan, registered in the Winnipeg Land Titles Office, Winnipeg Division, as No. 99 (see app. f1, f2).

The present building is structurally sound, in excellent condition.

STREETSCAPE:

Unlike many of the newer churches, St. John's blends well into the existing neighbourhood and adds to the stability of an area of modest architecture.

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTOR:

The architect was Edgar Prain, a noted designer of Anglican Churches, and the design chosen closely resembles St. Patrick's and St. Jude's on Valour Rd. (see letter app. e).

Mr. D. Ross was chosen to be the architect and later this was changed to Mr. Gilbert Parfitt (see letter 16 June 1928 app. e). A close look at the original drawings shows that Gilbert Parfitt's name is inked out and Edgar Prain's inserted. It is ironic that in the letter to the chairman building committee, Mr. Prain's name is scratched out and Mr. Gilbert Parfitt substituted. The cost of the church was not to exceed \$21,000.00. The pews for the new church came from Elim Chapel and cost \$600.00.

The cost was approx. \$37,000.00.

LANDMARK:

At the community level, St. John's Presbyterian certainly stands out, not as the most conspicuous building, but rather its importance is in the stories and remembrances of those past and present who will always identify with the North End of Winnipeg. During the time that the congregation was renting the Musker building from the Royal Bank they continued to hold service in the Anglican Parish Hall. The Musker building was used for meeting rooms and was sublet to the Salvation Army two nights per week plus Sunday morning and evening services provided they not use the piano.

At this time the communion roll stood at 256 representing 108 families.

This year marks the 85th anniversary of the congregation and the 60th year of occupancy in our church building.

App (d1)

The Article "Origins Of The Bay System" deals with the architecture of medieval timber churches.

The "Bay System" refers to a distinct feature of the Romanesque churches that was later carried on in the Gothic. The Bays are the areas between the pillars that run lengthwise through the church, providing what we call aisles. In the Romanesque churches these bays were vaulted at the top with rounded arches and in the Gothic style the arches were pointed. The centre section or nave was higher and also vaulted in the same manner. However, the major point that the article wanted to make was that precedent for this kind of design was a style of timber construction used for churches in northern Europe as well as for houses and barns. The style of the high peaked roof needed two rows of pillars and crossbeams for support and this was a natural and sturdy way to construct with stone. The assumption is that this peaked roof with side aisles and bays design was superimposed to the stone medium used for the huge Romanesque and Gothic Cathedrals in Europe. This was the familiar and desired effect for the northern builders and they made it fit to their Cathedral plans.

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Plate 1 – St. John’s Presbyterian Church, 251 Bannerman Avenue, n.d. (Courtesy of St. John’s Presbyterian Church.)



Plate 2 – St. John’s United Church, 250 Cathedral Avenue, n.d. (Courtesy of the City of Winnipeg, Planning Department.)