



**648 BURROWS AVENUE**

**ROBERTSON MEMORIAL UNITED (PRESBYTERIAN) CHURCH**

PREPARED BY PETERSON PROJECTS – FEBRUARY 2009



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**648 BURROWS AVENUE  
ROBERTSON MEMORIAL UNITED (PRESBYTERIAN) CHURCH**

**Date of Construction:** 1911

**Building Permit:** 1442/1911 (Plans at City Storage)

**Architect:** Russell, John Hamilton Gordon

**Contractor:** Shepley Construction Company

**ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:**

This North End church, built at a busy intersection, has stood for nearly 100 years, serving its congregation. The solid brick superstructure rests on a stone foundation and measures approximately 15.4 x 22.6 metres.<sup>1</sup> Notable exterior design elements include the tall, crenellated corner tower, arched window openings with stone lug sills and brick drip moulding, rusticated raised stone base, brick and stone buttresses and multiple entrances. It is an attractive structure, well-designed and executed.

The church is a good example of the Romanesque Revival style, very popular in North America from the 1880s well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in warehouse districts. The buildings were nearly always solid brick with a raised basement and featuring rusticated stone accenting – around windows and doors and at roof level. Other elements include towers flanking the main façade, quoins, belt courses, corbelled brick panels, chevrons and



Front (north) and west façades, 1978

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flat rooflines, with or without cornices and entablatures. The most obvious feature of these structures was the use of the arch above windows and doors.<sup>2</sup> Although the style was applied to private residences, in Winnipeg it was almost exclusively used in the warehouse district, where the designs were somewhat more subdued, and for many churches. The resulting buildings had a massive, sturdy visage.

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 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.

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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.

#### HISTORICAL INTEREST:

The church has served this congregation which was originally a Presbyterian group and joined the United Church in 1925.

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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 list of United churches built in the pre-World War I era in the North End;
- its associations- its long-term connections to the Presbyterian and United churches;
- its design- an excellent example of the Richardsonian Romanesque style;
- its architect- J.H.G. Russell was a respected and important practitioner;
- its location- defines an important intersection and contributes greatly to the historic streetscape of two major arteries in the North End; and
- its integrity- its main façades continue to display many of their original elements and design.

## ENDNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> City of Winnipeg Building Permit, #1442/1911.

<sup>2</sup> L. Maitland, et al., A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1992), p. 84; and Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg: Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, Historic Resources Branch, 1991), p. 14.