

61 CARLTON STREET – MACDONALD HOUSE ("DALNAVERT")
C.H. Wheeler, 1895



For nearly a century, Dalnavert has remained an eclectic, yet elegant, survivor of what was once Winnipeg's foremost residential district on the southern edge of the downtown.

The two-storey dwelling occupies a site that was part of a reserve retained by the Hudson's Bay Company around Upper Fort Garry following the transfer of Rupert's Land to Canada in 1869-70. The company used large-lot subdivision, building restrictions and other means to encourage an exclusive neighbourhood stretching west along Broadway from Main Street. That strategy attracted leading business and professional families, including lawyer-politician Hugh John Macdonald, son of Canada's first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald.

Hugh John (1850-1929) had been raised by relatives in Toronto and Kingston after his mother died. He first came west with the 1870 Wolseley Expedition sent to Fort Garry to quell the Red River Rebellion. He later resumed law studies in Ontario, then practised for a decade in his father's firm

before resettling in Winnipeg in 1882 and beginning a new partnership with barrister J. Stewart Tupper, son of another Father of Confederation.

Reluctant to enter active politics, Macdonald nonetheless was pressed to run in the 1891 national election as Conservative candidate for South Winnipeg. He won and joined a government led by his father. Sir John A. died soon afterward, however, and by mid-term Hugh John had resigned his seat. Again under pressure to help the party in the West, he briefly returned to Ottawa as an appointee to cabinet, then contested the 1896 election. He landed on the opposition benches, but in early 1897 found his victory overturned due to improper campaign practices by workers.

Macdonald quickly resurfaced as leader of the provincial Conservatives who had been split by the Manitoba Schools Question. He rebuilt the party and in late 1899 led it to victory over Thomas Greenway's sitting Liberals. After less than a year as premier, however, Macdonald left the post to seek another federal seat. When that bid was unsuccessful, he retired from politics.

It was during this phase of his career that Dalnavert, named after family homes in Scotland and Toronto, was designed by Charles H. Wheeler and built by S.B. Ritchie at a cost of \$10,000. Located on the east side of Carlton Street south of Broadway, the red brick house displayed a lively mix of planes, elevations, materials (including generous application of wood and stone accents), and architectural details drawn from Norman, Gothic and Romanesque Revival influences.

The house was one of the city's social centres. Macdonald's wife, Gertie, was well-known as a charming and ambitious chatelaine. Macdonald himself maintained a high profile as police magistrate (1911-29), recipient of a knighthood (1913), member of the royal commission which probed the 1915 Legislative Building scandal, and a strong anti-union voice during the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919.

Lady Macdonald sold the property after her husband's death. Like many other large holdings in the area, Dalnavert was converted to a rooming house, then to a fashionable boarding house for women. In 1970, it was acquired for redevelopment into a high-rise apartment block. The Manitoba Historical Society intervened, raised funds to purchase the site, then launched a three-

year restoration project to return Dalnavert to its 1895 appearance.

The main section of the house rises from a stone foundation to a hip roof punctuated by gables, shed dormers and large brick chimneys. The rear consists of a two-storey, gable-roofed section and attached one-storey shed. The premises were serviced by full plumbing, central heating, electricity from a nearby Winnipeg Electric Street Railway Co. plant, a bell box, and a speaking tube to summon servants.

The front (west) facade features two pairs of round-headed windows outlined by stone arches and continuous sills, a tower-like element at the south corner, a wide veranda that wraps around to the north, a columned wooden entrance porch that doubles as a circular balcony, and a tall, pedimented, stained-glass opening in an Art Nouveau design. Further detailing is provided by stone coursing, a corbelled brick cornice and elaborately patterned woodwork. The north side of the veranda takes the form of a half-circle around a separate entrance to the parlour.

Inside, an Art Nouveau motif is evident in the vestibule's stained-glass transom and in the carved design of the main oak staircase. The front of the house holds a study on the south side, complete with a fireplace, and the parlour to the north, with French doors, a fireplace bordered by columns, ceiling coving, a chandelier medallion, and gilt-edged statue niches. To the rear are the dining-room with an oak-panelled ceiling, solarium, adjacent sitting room, kitchen (including a larder and butler's pantry), and storage shed/summer kitchen.

Off the second-floor hallway is a master bedroom equipped with a fireplace, small bathroom and dressing room. There also are three other bedrooms, a family bathroom and sewing room. The rear servants' quarters are connected to the kitchen by a separate stairway.

Architect Wheeler (1838-1917) was at the peak of his career when he designed Dalnavert. Born in England, he apprenticed in the building trades and pattern-making before becoming a student and clerk of works with two London architects. He participated in projects throughout Great Britain and continental Europe before moving to Winnipeg during the 1882 land boom.

Wheeler briefly associated with designer James Chisholm, then struck out on his own. He soon had a prolific practice throughout Manitoba and the North-West Territories, assisted at times by one or more of his three architect-sons. Holy Trinity Anglican Church (1883-84) was his first major commission. Warehouses, offices, Dufferin and Argyle schools, and residential structures followed. As well, he supervised the Bank of Ottawa and first Canadian Bank of Commerce buildings in the 1890s. Additional prominence came from his work as a choirmaster, vocal trainer, and music and drama critic.

The painstaking restoration of 61 Carlton was led by John A. Chivers of Winnipeg. In the absence of original plans, extensive research and stripping were necessary to determine original materials, colours, wood stains, and location of stairs, fixtures and other elements. As well, concrete piles were added to the foundation; the south wall, chimneys and a portion of the veranda were substantially rebuilt; new radiators, a new sewer line and additional plumbing pipes were installed; and limestone was used to replace deteriorated sandstone detailing. The attic and a portion of the basement were converted to meeting, office, display and storage space. Period furnishings were collected, including some Macdonald family items.

Dalnavert opened as a museum during Winnipeg's 1974 Centennial. It and nearby Government House now stand as the most publicly accessible examples of pre-1900 domestic architecture in the downtown.