

0 CORNISH AVENUE – ARMSTRONG’S POINT GATES
H.N. Ruttan, 1911



The ornamental stone and iron gates marking the entrances to Armstrong’s Point in central Winnipeg symbolize the area’s early exclusivity as a residential suburb for prominent citizens.

Enveloped on three sides by a U-shaped bend in the Assiniboine River, the 22-hectare Point was granted by the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1848 to Captain Joseph Hill, a staff officer with English veterans recruited to protect the Red River Colony.

Care of the property fell mainly to Hill’s attendant, Corporal James Armstrong, until it was sold in 1881 to a syndicate with plans to develop an elite refuge from the bustle and problems of the city’s built-up area some two to three kilometers to the northeast.

Promoted as the ‘Faubourg St. Germain’ of Winnipeg, the Point attracted some of the city’s most affluent families and finest turn-of-the century domestic architecture. The houses were palatial; the grounds extensive and well-kept; the amenities reflective of a Victorian passion for outdoor

sport and leisure. Some homes were identified by names that recalled their owners' British roots.

By 1904, 20 substantial houses had been built. The pace of development quickened between 1910 and 1920, including construction of the Cornish Library (1914).

Early owners included Arthur F. Eden of Stobart and Company wholesale merchants; Andrew Bannatyne, pioneer merchant and politician; Donald Bain, grocery wholesaler and nationally-known athlete; author-theologian Charles Gordon (Ralph Connor); Robert T. Riley, a founder of the Great-West Life Assurance Company; and Dr. Daniel McIntyre, an educator.

The gates were built in 1911 at the Point's three vehicular-pedestrian entrances off Cornish Street at Assiniboine Drive and Central Avenue (later renamed East, Middle and West Gates). City Council had been petitioned successfully to undertake the work as a local improvement with costs recovered by an annual levy paid by the Point's property owners.

The project, costing about \$7,150, was awarded to Henry Norlands Ruttan, a resident of the Point who began private practice as a civil engineer and contractor in Winnipeg in 1880 following work with several railways. He was City Engineer from 1885 to 1914. He garnered several professional honours and a distinguished record with local units of the military reserve during his career.

His design of the gates was consistent with models found in contemporary pattern books – not too pretentious, yet expressive of the Point's prestige, solidity and concern for environmental quality.

The quarried limestone posts rest on concrete foundations. Iron fencing curves to connect the main uprights with smaller side posts. Each gate features a longer foundation on the west side and two additional freestanding posts to mark the pedestrian entrances. All posts have stone caps; iron light fixtures top the main uprights. Available information on the sources of the stone and iron works is incomplete.

The gates were never functional as no provision was made for swinging fences between the posts. Nonetheless, they formed a clear social boundary and reinforced the Point's air of privacy and seclusion.

The gates had to be reset after the 1950 flood. Road realignment in the 1960s resulted in the uprights at West Gate being set back.

Much of the Point's attractiveness and solitude has been maintained despite the growing intensity of adjacent and internal development. Most of the large lots have been subdivided. Some of the grand homes have been demolished or made into multiple-family units. A few institutional uses have encroached on the area. However, a resident-instigated 1913 by-law has protected the Point from the higher density apartment redevelopment that has affected other older downtown residential districts.