



103 FURBY STREET ST. DEMETRIOS GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

Date of Construction: 1913

Building Permit: 2300/1913 (Plans at City Storage)

Architect: Atchison, John Danley

Contractor: Grey and Davidson

ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

Located on a corner lot in a mainly residential neighbourhood, this church has served two different congregations in its nearly 100 years of existence.

The basic rectangular plan of the building is animated through many design devices including projecting sections with window and door openings, a complex gable roof, modest buttresses along the east and west sides and accenting around windows and doors and in the gable ends (half-timbering). The main entrance is located in a projecting section in the building's southwest corner.

This modest church building borrows elements from a number of different styles based on British architectural design (the congregation's ethnic background). Half-timbering and



Front (west) façade, 2009

stucco finish from the Tudor style and pointed arches from the Gothic are the most observable stylistic elements.

The church stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition. Alterations to the exterior do not appear to have altered its original appearance.

J.D. Atchison, designer of this church, was born in Monmouth, Illinois in 1870. Educated in Chicago, he studied architecture at the Chicago Art Institute and the Chicago Manual Training School.¹ In 1895, he opened his own practice in Chicago that continued until the early 1900s. He worked on the staff of the World's Columbian Exposition and for the Chicago and Eastern Illinois Railroad. His commissions brought him to Winnipeg and by 1905 the city's prosperity and future prospects prompted him to relocate his business there.²

A list of some of the more prominent local buildings designed by J.D. Atchison over his career includes: Wardlow Apartments, 544 Wardlaw Avenue (1905, Grade II), Kennedy Building (Mitchell-Copp), 315 Portage Avenue (1906, Grade II), Dennistoun House, 166 Roslyn Road (1908, Grade III), N.W.C.T.A. Building, 291 Garry Street (1908, Grade III), Paterson Block, 54 Donald Street (1909, Grade II), Oldfield, Kirby and Gardner Building, 234 Portage Avenue (1909, Grade II), Canada Permanent Building, 296-98 Garry Street (1909, Grade II), Maltese Cross Building, 66 King Street (1909, Grade III), Chamber of Commerce Building (Great-West Life Building), 177 Lombard Avenue (1911, Grade II) Carlton Building, 354 Portage Avenue (1912, Grade III), Boyd Building, 388 Portage Avenue (1912, Grade III), Union Tower, 191 Lombard Avenue (1912-13, Grade II), Merchants' Bank Branch, 1386 Main Street (1913, Grade III), Curry Building, 233 Portage Avenue (1915, Grade II) and the Bank of Hamilton Building, 395 Main Street (1916-18, Grade I).³



Rear (east) and south façades, 2009

Atchison also designed structures in other western provinces. He won the design competition for the Moose Jaw City Hall, c.1912-13 (not built) and planned the Moose Jaw Collegiate (1908-10), Saskatchewan Presbyterian Boys' College and Principal's Residence (1911-12), and Hammond Building, Main St., Moose Jaw (1912). In 1923, Atchison left Winnipeg for Pasadena, California, and continued to practice there, adopting the Spanish Colonial style for his residential work. He died in 1959.⁴ He has been given 20 points by the Historical Buildings Committee.

HISTORICAL INTEREST:

Unitarianism in Winnipeg, and in North America in general, was diverse with various groups arising from many different liberal religious backgrounds. Both the Icelandic- and British/American-based sects practiced separately in the city.

The earliest work was done by Icelandic groups, which established a presence in Winnipeg in 1891, erecting a church the next year. A second group of Icelanders built a new church, known as First Icelandic Unitarian Church of Winnipeg, in 1904 at the corner of Sherbrook Street and Sargent Avenue. This would become the centre of Icelandic Unitarianism in Winnipeg until the congregation's move to their new church on Banning Street in 1921.⁵

An Icelandic Lutheran Church had also organized, known as "The Tabernacle". This group built a church at the corner of Furby Street and Sargent Avenue in 1894. Within this congregation there were two sides: one favouring independence and the other wanting to



Front (west) entrance detail, 2009

join the Lutheran Synod. When the two factions could not agree, the independent faction split and in 1912 built the church at 580 Victor Street, known as First Lutheran Church. When Lutheran vs. Unitarian factions again developed, the Lutherans were awarded the Victor Street building, the Unitarians combined with the First Icelandic Unitarian Church congregation to build the Banning Street facility in 1921 (the official name of the congregation became “The First Federated Church of Unitarians and Other Liberal Christians”).⁶

A third separate stream of Unitarianism came from British roots, this group’s first meeting was held in 1904 and was connected to the American Unitarian Association of Boston. All Souls’ Unitarian was incorporated in 1909 and completed their fine church at 103 Furby Street in 1913. In 1929, this congregation decided to vacate its Furby Street building and worship at the First Federated Church’s facility, holding separate English and Icelandic services.⁷ This continued until the Banning Street was vacated and taken over and renamed the Sri Sathya Sai Baba Centre of Winnipeg.

After the departure of the Unitarians, this building was used by a number of small congregations, including the Winnipeg Bible Institution (1940s). The St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox congregation, the present occupants, moved into the building in the 1950s.



Left: First Federated Church of Unitarians, 790 Banning Street
Right: First Lutheran Church, 580 Victor Street

RECOMMENDATION TO HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE:

Under the Historical Buildings By-law, this building meets a number of important criteria:

- its historical importance- a good illustration of the type of church building constructed in Winnipeg by a modest congregation in the pre-World War I era;
- its associations- its long-term connections to an early Unitarian congregation;
- its design- modest and attractive church with Tudor and Gothic elements;
- its architect- J.D. Atchison was a respected and important practitioner;
- its location- defines an important intersection and contributes greatly to the historic streetscapes in its neighbourhood; and
- its integrity- its main façades continue to display many of their original elements and design.



Front (west) façade, 1978

ENDNOTES:

- 1 Winnipeg Telegram, September 18, 1906, p. 55; and F.H. Schofield, The Story of Manitoba (Winnipeg: S.J. Clarke, 1913), Vol. II, p. 374.
- 2 F.H. Schofield, op. cit., p. 374.
- 3 Compiled from City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Files; J. Wade, Manitoba Architecture to 1940 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1976); Winnipeg Telegram, September 18, 1906, p. 55; Winnipeg Tribune, December 21, 1907; and F.H. Schofield, op. cit., pp. 374-75.
- 4 The Emerson Court House and Town Hall Building (Winnipeg: Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Recreation, Historic Resources Branch, 1985), pp. 8-11.
- 5 Petursson, Rev. Philip M., "The Unitarian Church of Winnipeg, 1891-1966," in The Icelandic Canadian (Spring 1967).
- 6 Loc. cit.
- 7 Ransom, Edgar J., "The Unitarian Church of Winnipeg, 1904-1943," in The Canadian Unitarian, Vol. 2, No. 8 (December 1943).