

365 JEFFERSON AVENUE – WEST KILDONAN PUBLIC LIBRARY

George A. Stewart (1967)



West Kildonan moved from Municipality to City in 1961, underlining the evolution of the area and its need for increased civic services for its citizens. One of the most important and requested services was a public library. The City opened its first facility in 1962 but the steadily increasing usage necessitated the construction of a new, modern building. West Kildonan’s “Library and Cultural Centre” opened as a Centennial Project on June 24, 1967.

The library is an excellent example of the International Style, a post-World War II modernist architectural style that found expression in buildings around the City of Winnipeg, often designed by local architects and firms that graduated from the University of Manitoba Architecture Program. The style strove to express the new construction materials and technologies through the use of hard, angular edges, severely plain surfaces, large areas of glass and square or rectangular modules to bring the materials to the fore rather than ornamental elements.

George A. Stewart (1922-1994) was chosen architect for the project. Born in Boissevain, MB and

receiving his B.Arch from the University of Manitoba in 1948, Stewart's private practice lasted over 20 years before taking the role of Director of the University of Manitoba, Physical Planning and Design Office. He designed several outstanding buildings during this career, including the Fort Garry and St. Vital (List of Historical Resources) Public Libraries, the Ellis Building at the University of Manitoba and Harrow United Church.

John Miller and Sons Limited, a local firm, built the library.

The one-storey steel and reinforced concrete structure is clad in Tyndall limestone stone, its main (south) façade facing Jefferson Avenue with a raised entrance deeply set in an overhang accessed by stairs and a ramp. Encircling the entire structure just below the flat roofline is a set of slender clerestory windows. To the west of the main entrance is an exit door and large window opening with heavy projecting mullions. The façade facing Powers Avenue features two mullioned windows. The rear (north) façade includes a recessed entrance flanked by two exit doors and the west façade is built in a depression in neighbouring greenspace and has seen some alteration – the addition of an elevator shaft.

On the interior, the main floor holds the main desk, book shelves and staircases at the front and rear leading to the basement, which was originally designed as a 200-person assembly hall and offices for the local School Board. Today, it is used as the children's area, meeting and staff rooms, and a small hall. The entrance lobby, which brings the stone cladding into the interior, the staircases and the wood accenting above the main desk are original. Many of the original book cases are still in use.

The building is still used as a busy public library.

Elements of the building that would require approval if alterations were planned are:

A. Site:

- i. The landscaped and recessed south and east yards with pathway, ramp, and stair entry sequence and low masonry wall.

B. Exterior:

- i. The rectilinear, one-storey concrete block and steel structure clad in wood and limestone with flat roofs with its main (south) façade facing Jefferson Avenue, its east façade facing Powers Avenue, its west façade facing a sunken grassed area and its rear (north) façade facing a parking lot;
- ii. The front (south) façade with raised entrance deeply set under the roof overhang, structural columns, set of slender clerestory windows, entrance ramp, and exit door and large window opening divided by projecting concrete mullions to the west of the main entrance;
- iii. The east façade with two sets of projecting concrete mullioned windows, large rectilinear window opening and clerestory windows;
- iv. The west façade with rectilinear basement window openings, exit doors, projecting concrete mullioned window openings, and clerestory windows; and
- v. The rear (north) façade with central raised entrance flanked by two exit doors and clerestory windows.
- vi. The centralized raised roof with clerestory windows.

C. Interior

- i. The arrangement, volume, and finishes of the front and rear foyers and main floor area, including the staircase guardrails and handrails, structural columns, the raised ceiling above the circulation desk, projecting concrete window mullions, mosaic tile floor finishes, and wood, glass, and stone wall finishes.