



121 KATE STREET

WILLIAM ASHDOWN HOUSE

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee

August 1988

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Commercial, financial and wholesale interests quickly changed the face of Winnipeg's downtown district after the city's 1874 incorporation. The residential districts throughout the area were replaced by block upon block of the mammoth commercial and warehouse structures needed for the new wave of business ventures. Thousands of new citizens flooded into the area to take advantage of the prosperity of the region and the promise of things to come. New residential districts, our first suburbs, began to develop as the need for more appropriate housing out-distanced the existing supply.

One area that saw early development was the region west of Main Street and immediately north of the burgeoning warehouse and downtown district. Notre Dame and William avenues became the major thoroughfares of the neighbourhood and, in order to save time, city fathers began naming streets running off Notre Dame alphabetically. Kate Street, for example, is found between Lydia and Juno Streets, the latter follows Isabel Street.

In 1882, on the east side of Kate Street between William and Bannatyne avenues, William S. Ashdown, brother of hardware magnate James H. Ashdown, built a beautiful brick-veneer home (now numbered 121 Kate), legally described as 6/7 W. St. Johns, Plan 16 K, Lot 11, W 1/2.¹ Interestingly, it shares a back yard with 120 Juno Street, also built in 1882 by William's brother George.²

STYLE

The 121 Kate Street residence is a reduced, unadorned example of the Queen Anne style home. This type of architecture had become popular in North America by 1880 and continued to be used extensively into the new century. First popularized by a group of English architects led by Richard

¹ City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls, Ward 2, #614080 (old number 10428). Below as ARo.

² Manitoba Daily Free Press, December 30, 1881, p. 2.

Norman Shaw, it was based on late medieval models of the preceding Elizabethan and Jacobean eras.³ Elements of the style include steeply pitched, irregularly shaped roofs, usually organized with a front-facing dominant gable. Other elements include bay windows, an asymmetrical facade and the presence of a porch, either partial or full-width.⁴

CONSTRUCTION

This L-shaped, eight-room house utilizes cream coloured brick laid in stretcher pattern. Raised brick quoins provide one of the few decorative elements on the building. This lack of decoration is strange considering the large sum of money, \$5,000⁵ which the building reportedly cost. The foundation is built of rock-faced cut stone and the roof has both gable and hip ends. The original structure included a partial porch used as an entrance; this later was removed in favour of the present concrete steps.

DESIGN

The William Ashdown house was designed to accommodate a large family, with four bedrooms on the upper floor. Rooms throughout the two-storey structure are small, normal for a home of this age. A one-storey bay window is present on the front-facing gable and all windows on the structure are provided with wooden sills and radiating brick lintels. Window divisions are not matched throughout the building and the wooden surrounds are plain.

INTERIOR

If one considers the cost of the building and the lack of noteworthy features on the exterior of the house, it would be natural to assume that the interior would reflect the extra construction costs.

³ Virginia and Lee McAlester, [A Field Guide to American Houses](#).

⁴ Ibid., p. 263.

⁵ [Manitoba Daily Free Press](#), December 30, 1881, p. 2.

However, the interior of 121 Kate Street does not provide obvious examples of money spent. Only wooden accents around doorways, and the wood banister with decorative wooden elements, remain from the original structure.

INTEGRITY

The building occupies its original site on Kate Street and is in excellent condition both inside and out. Building permits against the structure have been few, but it is likely that cosmetic changes have occurred on the interior.

STREETSCAPE

Kate Street, and the area that surrounds it, give one the impression of a self-contained community. Churches, warehouses, homes, schools, stores and small businesses all occupy property in the area and, as such the William Ashdown house fits into the neighbourhood.

ARCHITECT

No architect has yet been identified as the designer of 121 Kate Street.

PERSON

While much is known about William S. Ashdown's brothers - James H., the merchant and mayor, and George, the M.L.A. and mayor of Morden⁶ - little is known about William. It is not known when he came to the city, but the 1882 Henderson's Directory has him at 7 Kate Street (subsequently the address was changed to 5 Kate and finally to 121 Kate). William is listed as a merchant. By 1885 he is listed at 160-1/2 Ross Avenue. George vacated his Juno home the previous year.

⁶ Winnipeg Tribune, April 15, 1939.

William Ashdown remained at the Ross Avenue address until 1890 when he moved to 57 Arthur Street. By then, he was a bookkeeper in the employ of the Ashdown Hardware store, a position he held for more than ten years. In 1898 he moved in with brother James at the corner of Broadway and Hargrave, later numbered 337 Broadway. The last entry in the Directory is 1904 but whether he moved out of the city or died between 1904 and 1905 is unknown at present.

The 1885 Henderson's Directory lists two men, John E. Ennis (contractor) and Joseph Metcalfe (dry goods), as having taken up residence on Kate Street. Between 1886 and 1890, the house at Street was unnumbered in the Directory but probably was occupied by James Scott, a real estate salesman. In 1891 implement agent John O'Donohue became the tenant. He left two years later and William Ashdown sold the property to Israel and Anna L. Bennetto.

Bennetto, a photographer, had a photography supply business located at 436 Main Street and lived at 121 Kate Street until 1915 when two men, A. R. Manning and C. V. Cummings of the Northern Construction Company of Montreal, bought the building and turned it into a multiple-suite rental property. In 1934 a farmer, J. J. Hildebrand, bought the home and lived there for six years. The City of Winnipeg took over the structure in 1941; a year later, the property was sold to Erik O. and Tekla U. Moberg.⁷ Erik Moberg, a carpenter, and his family lived in the home until 1986. In September of 1987, the executor of the Moberg estate sold the house to the present owners, John A. and Maria F. Cardosa and family, who have since taken on a tenant in the basement.

EVENT

There is no known event connected with this building.

CONTEXT

This home was built at the beginning of the real growth period of Winnipeg's development.

⁷ ARo.

Depressions and economic downswings would slow or stop this trend periodically, but the 1880 to 1910 period can be seen as one of incredible growth and maturity of all phases of life in Manitoba's capital. That the original owner should have spent such a large sum of money on the building is an indication of the faith he had in his future in the city.

LANDMARK

The William Ashdown house is removed from the busy thoroughfares of the area and is not a striking or eye-catching structure. As such it is not conspicuous to either area residents or the general population.