

31 McBETH STREET – ROBERT McBETH JR. HOUSE
W.W. Cross (Contractor), 1912



The McBeth family has been associated with the community of Kildonan, now a suburb in the northern limits of Winnipeg, for nearly 170 years. Alexander McBeath settled this property along the Red River when it was first deeded from the crown in 1815. The McBeath family were among the Lord Selkirk's colonists who left Scotland to start a permanent agricultural settlement in the Northwest.

The McBeath (later McBeth) property was situated down the Red River from Fort Douglas, the defensive and trading nucleus of the settlement. Land for the colonists was divided into narrow lots, fronting on the river, that extended back into the hay fields on the open prairies. The Red River provided a means of transportation and communication, while a trail gave settlers easy access on foot. Subsistence farming and the buffalo hunt enabled the isolated community to survive.

Alexander McBeath's son, Robert (Senior), continued the farming tradition and operated a small store from the family home, a Red River log house. The tradition of farming the rich alluvial soil

was passed on to the next generation when Alexander McBeath's grandson, Robert McBeth Jr. (1848-1914), inherited the original Selkirk grant from his father and also purchased nearby land to own a total of 400 acres on which he practiced "scientific" farming as well as selling timber. He served as a long-time member of Kildonan's municipal council, as a school trustee, and as president of the Kildonan and St. Paul's Agricultural Society.

In 1912, McBeth commissioned Winnipeg contractor William W. Cross to design and construct a new home, a short distance from the 1852 log house. Built of solid brick on a rubble stone foundation, the exterior walls are of expensive red pressed brick. Although the property was two miles north of the city limits, arrangements were made for a sewer outlet and full plumbing.

The exterior detailing of the house is of a Craftsman Style with hipped roof, wide eave overhang, exposed decorative brackets and a partial porch. Widely publicized in such magazines as the *Western Home Monthly*, *Good Housekeeping* and the *Ladies Home Journal*, contractors built many homes based on pattern books as well as using mail-order plans provided by architects and newspapers.

The spacious interior layout of the main floor included a front hall with a fireplace, a small den, a large rectangular living room, a dining room lined with quarter-cut oak paneling, a pantry and a kitchen. Bedrooms occupied the second floor of the house along with a sleeping porch that extended over a summer dining verandah on the north side of the house.

Although Robert McBeth Jr. died in 1914, his family continued living in the house for the next sixty years.