



124 NASSAU STREET NORTH

GEORGE H. WEST HOUSE

PREPARED BY PETERSON PROJECTS – DECEMBER 2009



124 NASSAU STREET NORTH GEORGE H. WEST HOUSE

Date of Construction: 1906

Building Permit: 743/1906

Architect: Russell, John Hamilton Gordon

Contractor: Unnamed

ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

Built for the sizeable sum of \$10,000 in 1906,¹ this red brick and stone house has graced Nassau Street North for over 100 years - its materials and design making it conspicuous in the neighbourhood.

The front (west) façade features an entrance with side lights placed in a heavy stone porch with pediment and a wide set of stairs. In the northwest corner of the home is a 2½-storey turret with ornamental shingle cladding, conical roof and wood finial. Windows throughout the building are of various size and finish, some with radiating brick heads and other with stone lug sills. The larger second storey openings are connected by a stone belt course that doubles as a continuous sill. A one-storey glazed porch, clad in stone, is attached to the south side of the building. The gable roof is embellished with a large gable



Front (west) and south façades, 2009

dormer window on the front slope. The side elevations continue the cladding and ornamentation of the front façade.

The building stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition. Alterations to the exterior have been minimal.

The house is an excellent example of a Queen Anne style structure.² The style borrowed heavily from English architecture of the 15th century, blending classical and medieval motifs into a picturesque form. Asymmetry was achieved through combinations of porches, bay windows, projecting wings, balconies and other devices. Roofs were usually irregular and complex, with dormers, gables and ornamental chimneys. Variations in materials and colours were also used to animate the façades. Given this freedom of design, however, accomplished designers were still able to create balance in the structures, offsetting busy surfaces by placing calmer elements nearby.³

The popularity of the style in Canada began in the 1880s and lasted until World War I. On the prairies, pre-1900 examples of the style were not numerous because large-scale development occurred after the turn of the century. Post-1900, it was quickly adopted for use in the growing residential districts, especially the more affluent neighbourhoods where its showy qualities were greatly admired.

Building designer J.H.G. Russell (1862-1946) was born in Toronto, Canada West (Ontario), in 1862, the son of a dry goods dealer. After attending school in that city, he went to work for H.B. Gordon, a prominent area architect. Russell was with Gordon from 1878 until his departure for Winnipeg in 1882. From 1886 to 1893, Russell travelled throughout the United



Front (west) and north façades, 2009

States, learning civil engineering, surveying and architecture in centres such as Chicago, Illinois, Spokane and Tacoma, Washington, and Sioux City, Iowa.

In 1895, two years after returning to Winnipeg, he set up his private practice, coinciding with the city's period of unbridled growth. His designs were (and are) scattered throughout the city, province and Western Canada, covering a variety of building types, sizes, costs and uses. His business continued to be steady during World War I and after, when many architects struggled to find commissions.

Russell was president of the Manitoba Association of Architects (1925) and served for three terms as the president of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (1912-15). His chairmanship of the Presbyterian Church Board of Managers and his devotion to Presbyterianism partially explain the large number of churches he designed for the denomination in Winnipeg and Western Canada. Russell died in 1946.

A complete list of his designs would be very lengthy, included among his more notable local projects would be J.H. Ashdown Warehouse additions, 157-179 Bannatyne Avenue, (1899-1911, Grade II), Lake of the Woods Building, 212 McDermot Avenue (1901, Grade II), Hammond Building, 63 Albert Street (1902, Grade III), Adelman Building, 92-100 Princess Street (1903, Grade II), Franklin Press, 168 Bannatyne Avenue (1904, Grade III), R.R. Wilson, 545 Broadway (1904, Grade III), J.H. Ashdown Store, 211 Bannatyne Avenue (1904, Grade III), Porter Building, 165 McDermot Avenue (1906, Grade III), Child's (McArthur) Building, Portage Avenue (1909, demolished), Casa Loma Building, Portage Avenue (1909, Grade II), Glengarry Block, 290 McDermot Avenue (1910, Grade III), Westminster Presbyterian (United) Church, 745 Westminster Avenue (1910-12, Grade II), Dingwall Building, 62 Albert Street (1911, Grade III), YMCA, 301 Vaughan Street,



Front (west) façade detail, 2009

with Jackson and Rosencrans of New York (1911-13, Grade II), J.H. Ashdown, 529 Wellington Crescent (1913, Grade II) and St. John's Presbyterian (United) Church, 250 Cathedral Avenue (1923, Grade III). He has been given 20 points by the Historical Buildings Committee.

HISTORICAL INTEREST:

Barrister George H. West (1853-1906) was an Ontario-born barrister who came to Winnipeg in 1883. He died in 1906 prior to the completion of his new home, leaving his widow, Sara M. West, who continued to live in the home into the 1930s. It operated as the Wedgewood Nursing Home in the 1950s and from the 1960s to the 1980s was used by the Alcoholism Foundation of Manitoba.⁴



Front (west) façade, 1978

RECOMMENDATION TO HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE:

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

- its historical importance- an example of a well-appointed house built for in one of the City's finer neighbourhoods at the turn-of-the-century;
- its associations- its long-term connections to early and influential businessman W.E. Robinson;
- its design- an excellent example of the Queen Anne style;
- its architect- J.H.G. Russell was a respected and important practitioner;
- its location- contributes greatly to the historic streetscape of its neighbourhood; and
- its integrity- its main façades continue to display many of their original elements and design.

ENDNOTES:

- ¹ City of Winnipeg Building Permit, #743/1906.
- ² Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg, MB: Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, 1991), p. 17; L. Maitland et al., A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 1992), p. 102; and L. Maitland, The Queen Anne Revival Style in Canadian Architecture (Ottawa, ON: Environment Canada, 1990), p. 64.
- ³ L. Maitland, op. cit., p. 98.
- ⁴ City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls, Roll No. 12032160000, 1920-1990.