1360 PEMBINA HIGHWAY

FORT GARRY PUBLIC LIBRARY

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
Researcher: M. Peterson
February 2023
This building embodies the following heritage values as described in the Historical Resources By-law, 55/2014 (consolidated update July 13, 2016):

(a) the Fort Garry Public Library had been an integral part of the post-World War II history of the area since it opened in 1960;

(b) The resource, constructed in Winnipeg’s post-World War II growth phase, is associated with the ongoing upgrading and modernization of public services and facilities in Winnipeg and the surrounding municipalities, towns and cities;

(c) The building is an excellent example of the International Style, popular in Winnipeg and throughout North America and Europe in the 1950s and 1960s. It was designed by local architect George A. Stewart;

(d) The structure is built of reinforced concrete, concrete block and face brick, all common materials and construction type for this era;

(e) The structure is located in Fort Garry, part of the municipal complex on Pembina Highway; and

(f) While the building’s main (west) façade has been redesigned, it and the remainder of the building exhibit many of its original design element and materials and the original materials and layout remain on the interior.
The area known as Fort Garry, located in the south, both east and west of the Red River, began as the result of the expansion of the Métis settlements on the east side of the Red River. Most of the Métis of the area were buffalo hunters and ox-cart freighters, taking advantage of the nearby river and overland transportation networks.¹ The east side, with a population of approximately 600, would incorporate as the Rural Municipality of St. Vital in 1903, named after Bishop Vital-Justin Grandin (1829-1902), who was the religious leader of the Roman Catholic Church in the area and had been a long-time spokesman for Métis rights.² West of the river, the area was also settled by Francophone families and became known as West St. Vital. Through it ran the Pembina Trail, an important early overland link between Upper Fort Garry (Winnipeg) and the international border leading to St. Paul, Minnesota.

Construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the early 1880s had a profound effect on all of Western Canada. In West St. Vital, the influx of Anglophone settlers caused almost all of the original Francophone families to sell their property and move further west or south into the established Métis community of St. Norbert.

The area continued its slow pace of development until after 1900, when Winnipeg’s population began to boom, causing the expansion of residential districts outwards from the City’s core. West St. Vital’s population had grown to approximately 1,000 by 1905,³ and Rural Municipality of Fort Garry was incorporated on April 6, 1912, a community comprised mainly of sparsely settled market gardeners and other agricultural operations.⁴ And like many other municipalities, Fort Garry

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² William J. Fraser, “Bishop Grandin Remembered,” in Manitoba Pageant (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Historical Society, Volume 24, Number 2, Winter 1979). The Rural Municipality of St. Boniface was created in 1880 but was renamed the Rural Municipality St. Vital in 1903 to avoid confusion with the Town of St. Boniface (created 1883).
³ Information from Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Hansard, December 1, 2003 found at www.gov.mb.ca/legislature/hansard/2nd-38th/vol_08.
⁴ N. Shipley, op. cit., pp. 44-45. After the purchase of the land for the agricultural college, a rumour surfaced that the area would become the site of extensive real estate speculation and take the name South Winnipeg. Public opposition to this scheme resulted in a name change to Fort Garry.
struggled during the 1930s and a supervisor was appointed by the Municipal and Public Utilities Board in 1933 to oversee its finances.5

On July 27, 1971, the City of Winnipeg Act received Royal assent, incorporating the rural municipalities of Charleswood, Fort Garry, North Kildonan and Old Kildonan, Town of Tuxedo, and the cities of East Kildonan, West Kildonan, St. Vital, Transcona, St. Boniface, St. James-Assiniboine, Winnipeg and the Metropolitan Corporation of Greater Winnipeg into a unified City of Winnipeg, known as Unicity. The new City came into legal existence on January 1st, 1972.

Public libraries in Fort Garry began with a small collection circulated by the Fort Garry Community Club.6 In November 1955, the Municipal Council of the Rural Municipality of Fort Garry passed By-Law No. 3777, allowing for the establishment of a municipal public library.7

On March 26, 1956, the first meeting was held of the Friends of the Library Association and met with the Fort Garry Library Board in the Council Chamber of the Municipal Hall.8 The courtroom in the Hall was to be converted into a temporary library to be opened in September 1956, managed by Rural Municipality’s Library Development Committee. This occurred even as Council, in cooperation with the Library Board, set aside property south of the Municipal Hall (Plate 1) for the construction of a modern library.9

An architect was chosen and he produced preliminary plans – a 446-square metre facility capable of holding 40,000 volumes – and a model (Plates 2-5). In the fall of 1958, a money by-law for the

6 Unnamed/undated newspaper article, “Opening of Public Library Marks Another Milestone for Fort Garry,” Fort Garry Public Library, Local History Vertical File.
7 Fort Garry Public Library, Local History Vertical File.
8 Minutes, Friends of Library Association, March 26, 1956, courtesy of the Fort Garry Library, Local History Vertical File.
9 The Municipal Hall was built 1953-1954, designed by Winnipeg firm Prain and Ward and also served as the general offices, fire hall and police station.
$85,000 library was held. It was strongly supported by the citizenry and in November, By-Law No. 4020 was passed by the Municipal Council for the construction of a new library building.

The official opening was held on Feb. 14, 1960, the ribbon was cut by the Hon. Sterling Lyon, Attorney General and area M.L.A. (Plates 6-8).

**STYLE**

The Fort Garry Public Library features many of the design elements associated with the International Style. The style dates to the early 1930s, although its widespread popularity throughout Europe and North America did not occur until after 1950. Seen as a reaction to the historically based styles of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, its goal was to reinterpret architecture using modern construction materials and technologies, especially steel framing and reinforced concrete. Architects could design buildings without the need for load-bearing exterior walls – the walls could be designed and built as mere “curtains” covering the steel/concrete structural system and could be constructed almost entirely of glass if desired. Through its use of hard, angular edges, severely plain surfaces, large areas of glass and square or rectangular modules, the style stressed material and proportionality over ornamentation. The use of glass and steel gave the style a “lightness” of appearance.

Winnipeg in the 1950s featured a number of young, well-trained Modernist architects, a population and economic boom, ready capital and a lack of modern office and institutional space. Over the next two decades, some of the country’s finest Modernist buildings were designed and

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10 [Winnipeg Tribune](#), July 24, 1958.
11 [Fort Garry Public Library, Local History Vertical File](#).
completed in the city to meet the demand for office space, private homes and public buildings of all use and description.

The Modern era was…considered to encompass the years from about 1930 to about 1975; that is, from the period when a faith in a better future independent of the past began to take hold and find expression in a significant number of buildings, to the period when Canadians’ faith in a better future untethered to the past began to fade, replaced by the rooted architecture of the heritage conservation and post-Modernist movements.¹⁵

There are many excellent examples of the style in Winnipeg (Plate 9) including:

- Monarch Life Building, 333 Broadway (1962, Smith Carter Searle Associates)
- City Hall & Administration Building, 510 Main Street (1964, Green Blankstein Russell and Associates)

CONSTRUCTION

The one-storey library building is constructed of reinforced concrete, concrete block and clad in face brick (see Appendix I for additional construction information). Ceilings range from 3.1 to 4.6 metres on the main floor, 3.1 metres in the partial basement.¹⁶

It appears from the preliminary drawings (Plate 2), that the building was designed so that additions could be easily made to expand the facility.

The 1966 additions, known as the Hogg Memorial Wings, were officially opened in May 1967 (Plate 10).

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¹⁶ City of Winnipeg, Assessment Record, Roll No. 807930, PC 80.
DESIGN
As originally designed, the vertical emphasis of the front (west) façade was designed in two parts (Plate 11). The southern portion included pilasters dividing the wall with thin rectilinear window openings beside and rectilinear clerestory windows below the flat roof line. This roof line continued beyond the wall and created a cover for the main entrance. This entrance was located atop a short flight of stairs and ramp in the northern part of the building, set back and slightly taller, and also included full height windows shaded by vertical briese soliel. The slightly overhanging roof was supported by exposed beams. The brick cladding of the north wall was uninterrupted (Plate 8). The south wall featured a continuation of the architectural language of the south portion of the front façade: brick pilasters, clerestory and vertical rectilinear window openings, exposed beam support for the flat, overhanging roof (Plate 12). A second entrance was located at the rear of this façade. There are no records illustrating the original design of the protruding rear (east) façade (Plate 13) and whether the small, square window openings are original (Plates 14 and 15).

The additions on the southeast and northeast corners were designed to continue the architecture of the original building. The south addition is a similar height to the original and has like fenestration and cladding (Plates 16 and 17). The north addition utilizes the same cladding, large windows fill the space between its roofline and the lower roof of the original building on the elevation facing Pembina Highway and below the roof on the rear elevation (Plate 18).

In 2013, the front façade was altered with the replacement of all window units and removal of the briese soliel (Plates 19-22). The remainder of the building’s exterior does not appear to have suffered major alteration.

INTERIOR
As originally designed, entrance to the interior of the library (Plate 4) was through a vestibule, beyond which was the main desk. The adult book section was located in the north portion, the children’s section in the rear (east) and the south area included staff space, offices, a work room and
the receiving area (Plates 23-24). A small, raised outdoor courtyard for “Story Hour” was located in
the southeast corner (Plate 12). The interior boasted laminate wood beams and ceilings.

The 1966 additions increased the children’s area, enclosed the courtyard created more workspace
and the north addition was to be used for music and reference sections (Plate 25).17 A modest
mezzanine level runs the width of the addition along the east wall.

The partial basement was used for storage and the boiler.

Today, the wood accenting at the ceiling remains in tact, as does much of the original layout (Plates
26-32).

INTEGRITY

The building stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition. The two
rear additions do not affect the overall exterior design, but the window replacements have severely
changed the appearance of the front (west) façade.

STREETSCAPE

The library stands on the east side of Pembina Highway, just south of the former Fort Garry
Municipal Hall/Fire & Police Station. In the greenspace to the south of the library and along the
front, shards from various demolished buildings have been placed (Plates 33-34).

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS

George A. Stewart (Plate 35) was the designer of the Fort Garry Library. Stewart was a University
of Manitoba Architecture graduate (see Appendix II for biographical information) who also

17 Winnipeg Free Press, April 21, 1967, p. 17.
designed the St. Vital and West Kildonan libraries. He has received 10 points from the Historical Buildings and Resources Committee.

At this time, the name of the contractor of the original library has not been found.

The 1966 additions were completed by Peterson and Fonger Limited. A.W. Peterson and Donald R. Fonger (1923-2006)18 formed the company in the 1960s. This company who also had contracts for the Altona Industrial Development Ltd. Garment Plant, Altona, MB (1961), an addition to the St. Vital Public Works Garage and Offices, 590 St. Anne’s Road (1963), and St. Vital Fire Hall, 1057 St. Mary’s Road (1964).19

PERSON/INSTITUTION
Fort Garry’s new public library was an immediate success. In the first year of operation, 13,000 borrowers registered at the facility, 70% of the municipality’s population.20

Almost as soon as the library opened, it was too small. Increases in its holdings, including records, and use, underlined the need to expand the building. A bequest of nearly $80,000 from the estate of long-time Fort Garry physician Dr. W.A. Hogg’s estate made the 1966 additions possible, as well as the purchase of additional books.21

In October 1969, the library began its bookmobile service, with 2,500 books, two staff members and a six-stop circuit through Fort Garry and St. Norbert (Plate 36).22

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20 “Fort Garry Library,” Vertical File, Millennium Library.
In 1986, a fire in the basement caused $35,000 worth of damage (Plate 37).  

More recent alterations and upgrades have allowed the library to keep current and serving the local population.

**EVENT**
There is no known significant historic event connected with this building.

**CONTEXT**
This building is another example of the modernization/expansion of civic services provided citizens in the post World War II era as populations and tax bases grew and old facilities reached the end of their usefulness. The new facilities were designed to meet the modern needs of the citizenry using the lasted in design and engineering technology.

**LANDMARK**
The Fort Garry Public Library, because of its highly visible location and public use, is well-known in the area.

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23 Winnipeg Free Press, April 26, 1986, p. 3.
Appendix I

City of Winnipeg - Preliminary Report
Assessment Record

Building Address: 1360 Pembina Highway

Building Name: Fort Garry Public Library

Original Use: public library

Current Use: public library

Roll No. (Old): 807930 (---)

R.S.N.: 36901

Municipality: --

Ward: --

Property or Occupancy Code: 80

Legal Description: 2/5 St. Boniface, Plan 4966, west 140’ of north 132.8’ of south 162.8” Lot 1

Location: east side between Oakenwald & Dowker avenues

Date of Construction: 1959

Storeys: 1 + partial B

Construction Type: Reinforced concrete, face brick, concrete block

HERITAGE STATUS: NONE

- 1447/1959 $75,850 (original); 5368/1966 [M-321] $59,900 (addition)

Information:

- Ceilings: 15’ & 10’ main floor; 10’ basement

- Fire June 20, 1986 to storage area in basement

- BP #5368/1966- 2 additions to rear (north & south sides)
  24 x 36 x 11’ and 36 x 42 x 20’, masonry

Architect: George A. Stewart (1959 & 1966)

Contractor: Unknown (1959); Peterson & Fonger Ltd. (1966)
APPENDIX II

George A. Stewart¹
George Stewart was born in Boissevain, Manitoba in 1922 and graduated with a B.Arch from the University of Manitoba in 1948. He was awarded, among other prizes, the Manitoba Association of Architects (MAA) Scholarship and the Ralph Hamm Memorial Scholarship. After graduation, he established his own practice which operated until 1970.

From 1970-1982, Stewart worked as the Director of the University of Manitoba, Physical Planning and Design Office. During this time, he designed the Ellis Building, renovated the Buller Biological Laboratories and oversaw several the design and construction of several new buildings. He stayed on at the University until his retirement in 1987.²

He served on the MAA Council and was MAA President in 1958, as well as serving on numerous committees of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (RAIC). He was appointed as a Fellow of the RAIC in1966. In 1965, he was appointed to the Winnipeg Better Housing Commission. He passed away in 1994.

A list of his local projects would include:³

Southwood Golf Club Clubhouse, 101 Markham Road (1950)
Harrow United Church, 955 Mulvey Avenue (1953)
Fort Garry Public Library, 1360 Pembina Highway (1959 and 2 additional wings, 1967)
Middlechurch Home for the Aged, West St. Paul, MB (1961)
Ebenezer Home for the Aged, Altona, MB (1961-1962)
Fort Garry United Church addition, 800 Point Road (1961)
St. Vital Public Library, 6 Fermor Avenue (1963) – List of Historical Resources
Manitoba Motor League Building addition, 175 Carlton St. (2nd storey, 1965 – demolished)
Charleswood Bethel Mennonite Church, 699 Haney Street (1965)
Ellis Building, 13 Freedman Cres., University of Manitoba (1966 & 1969, 2nd storey & addition)
West Kildonan Public Library, 365 Jefferson Avenue, 1967

¹ Winnipeg Architecture Foundation, Inc., 2013; and Manitoba Association of Architects (MAA), Architect files.
² MAA, Architect files.
Plate 1 – Looking east across Pembina Highway, between Oakenwald and Dowker avenues (and close-up, 1961. Pictured are: #1 Rural Municipality of Fort Garry Municipal Hall, 1350 Pembina Highway; #2- Fort Garry Public Library; #3 Tourway Service Station, 1382 Pembina Highway; #4 Vincent Massey Collegiate, 975 Dowker Avenue. (Historical Buildings and Resources Committee.)
Plate 2 – “Preliminary Plan for Building, Fort Garry Public Library,” February 26, 1958. (Fort Garry Library, Vertical File.)
Plate 3—“Preliminary Plan for Building, Fort Garry Public Library,” February 26, 1958. (Fort Garry Library, Vertical File.)
Plate 4– “Preliminary Plan for Building, Fort Garry Public Library,” February 26, 1958. (Fort Garry Library, Vertical File.)
Plate 5 – Architect’s model of the proposed Fort Garry Library, 1958. (Winnipeg Free Press, October 17, 1958, p. 23.)

Plate 6– Official Invitation for the opening of the Fort Garry Public Library, 1960. (Fort Garry Library, Vertical File.)
Plate 7 – Fort Garry Public Library, 1360 Pembina Highway, front (west) façade, ca.1960. (H.D. Kalen Photograph, Fort Garry Public Library Collection.)

Plate 8 – Fort Garry Public Library, 1360 Pembina Highway, front (west) and north façades, ca.1960. (H.D. Kalen Photograph, Fort Garry Public Library Collection.)
The Board and Staff of
The Fort Garry Public Library
request the pleasure of your company
at the official opening of the
Hogg Memorial Wings
on Saturday, May 6, 1967
at 2:30 o’clock
1360 Pembina Highway

Plate 10 – Official invitation to the opening of the Hogg Memorial Wings, May 6, 1967. (Fort Garry Library, Vertical File.)
Plate 11 – Fort Garry Public Library, 1360 Pembina Highway, front (west) and north façades, 1966. 
(Fort Garry Library, Vertical File.)
Plate 12 – Fort Garry Public Library, 1360 Pembina Highway, south façade, with outdoor courtyard space, 1966. (Fort Garry Library, Vertical File.)
Plate 13 – Fort Garry Public Library, 1360 Pembina Highway, 1961. (Historical Buildings and Resources Committee.)
Plate 14 – “East Elevation,” Architect’s Plans, No. 5368/1966. (City of Winnipeg, Records Management Division.)
Plate 15 – Fort Garry Public Library, 1360 Pembina Highway, rear (east) and south façades, 2013. Original rear façade at arrow, 1966 additions on either side. (M. Peterson, 2013.)

Plate 16 – “South Elevation,” Architect’s Plans, No. 5368/1966. (City of Winnipeg, Records Management Division.)
Plate 17 – Fort Garry Public Library, 1360 Pembina Highway, south façade, 2021. (M. Peterson, 2021.)

Plate 18 – Fort Garry Public Library, 1360 Pembina Highway, 1966 addition, north and east façades, 2021. (M. Peterson, 2021.)
Plate 19 – Fort Garry Public Library, 1360 Pembina Highway, front (west) façade, June 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)

Plate 20 – Fort Garry Public Library, 1360 Pembina Highway, front (west) façade, October 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)
Plate 21 – Fort Garry Public Library, 1360 Pembina Highway, front (west) façade, 2022. (M. Peterson, 2022.)

Plate 22 – Fort Garry Public Library, 1360 Pembina Highway, front (west) and south façades, 2022. (M. Peterson, 2022.)
Plate 23 – Fort Garry Public Library, 1360 Pembina Highway, front (west) and north façades, ca.1960. (H.D. Kalen Photograph, Fort Garry Public Library Collection.)
Plate 24 – Head Librarian Mrs. Erika Fuerst with new library stacks in the background, 1960. (Winnipeg Tribune, February 10, 1960.)
Plate 25 – “Fort Garry (Main), December 13, 1999,” 1999. (Fort Garry Library, Vertical File.)
Plate 26 – Fort Garry Public Library, 1360 Pembina Highway, front desk, 2021. (M. Peterson, 2021.)

Plate 27 – Fort Garry Public Library, 1360 Pembina Highway, northwest stack area looking north, 2021. (M. Peterson, 2021.)
Plate 28 – Fort Garry Public Library, 1360 Pembina Highway, northwest stack area looking south, 2021. (M. Peterson, 2021.)

Plate 29 – Fort Garry Public Library, 1360 Pembina Highway, work area, southeast corner, 2021. (M. Peterson, 2021.)
Plate 30 – Fort Garry Public Library, 1360 Pembina Highway, northeast addition looking west, 2021. (M. Peterson, 2021.)

Plate 31 – Fort Garry Public Library, 1360 Pembina Highway, northeast addition looking east towards mezzanine, 2021. (M. Peterson, 2021.)
Plate 32 – Fort Garry Public Library, 1360 Pembina Highway, south end work area, 2021. (M. Peterson, 2021.)

Plate 33 – Fort Garry Public Library, 1360 Pembina Highway, relocated building shards, 2012. (M. Peterson, 2012.)
Plate 34 – Fort Garry Public Library, 1360 Pembina Highway, detail of front (west) façade and shards, 2021. (M. Peterson, 2021.)

Plate 33 – George A. Stewart, ca.1966. (Reproduced from Architecture Canada, Vol. 43, No. 7 [July 1966], p. 9.)
Plate 36 – Exterior and interior of the Fort Garry Public Library Bookmobile, that began service in October 1969 with 2,500 books, 2 staff and a 6-stop circuit through Fort Garry and St. Norbert. (Winnipeg Free Press, September 29, 1996, p. B8.)
Plate 37 – Fort Garry Public Library, 1360 Pembina Highway, aftermath of the basement fire, 1986. (Winnipeg Free Press, April 26, 1986, p. 3.)