

591 PRITCHARD AVENUE – UKRAINIAN LABOUR TEMPLE
R.E. Davies, 1918



At first glance, this building at northwest Pritchard Avenue and McGregor Street appears to be a temple from antiquity. But its role over the past nine decades has not been as a passive shrine to some ancient deity. Rather, the Ukrainian Labour Temple of Winnipeg has been a hub of social action — a place to advance and celebrate both ordinary working people and Ukrainian culture.

This was the first and ultimately largest facility of its kind in Canada. It also was the most grand of the Ukrainian labour temples established in Manitoba in the 1920s and 1930s, and it is the only surviving one that retains its early functions.

The North End facility was built by the newly chartered Ukrainian Labour Temple Association (ULTA) after mass meetings in March 1918 raised \$5,600 for the project. The building contained an auditorium, print shop, offices, and classroom and library space. The hall could hold about 1,000 people on its main and balcony levels. It had a coffered ceiling, sloped floor, large stage behind a proscenium, a fire curtain with a factory-peasant scene, dressing rooms, and lighting, intercom and mechanical backdrop

systems. Fully outfitted, the temple cost \$72,000, of which workers had contributed \$50,000 by late 1918.

The site immediately became a locus of trade unionism and socialist politics. It was from here that Canada's first Ukrainian newspaper, *Robochy Narod (Working People)*, was published and that the ULTA operated as an affiliate of the Ukrainian Social Democratic Party. Both the paper and the party were curtailed by a Canadian government decision in September 1918 to ban groups deemed to be radical or anti-war. This did not stop the ULTA, however. Its continuing political influence helped make 591 Pritchard one of the targets for a police raid during the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike as authorities searched for evidence of alleged sedition and conspiracy.

Following this period, the ULTA began to sponsor branches across Manitoba and in 1922 it established the Workers' Benevolent Association, a fraternal insurance society that still operates nation-wide from its temple offices. As well, the ULTA was reconstituted in 1924 as a national organization, the Ukrainian Labour-Farmer Temple Association, dedicated to uniting workers and farmers under a socialist umbrella.

The temple's role in fostering Ukrainian education and culture expanded concurrently. Language and music schools, choirs, mandolin orchestras, brass bands, a string orchestra, choral-drama groups, a folk dance school, theatrical productions, festivals, movie screenings, and various Ukrainian publications all found a home here. These activities were designed not only to preserve and promote Ukrainian heritage, but also to meet the social needs of the temple's largely immigrant membership.

In 1926, a \$36,000 office/printing shop addition was built on the west side of the structure (595 Pritchard). The resulting one- and two-storey complex has load-bearing brick walls supported by trusses. The original section rested mainly on concrete posts and beams with only a partial basement. This changed in 1948 when a full basement was installed under the auditorium.

Designed in a restrained Neoclassical style, the Pritchard and McGregor exteriors are

faced with cut stone and fawn-coloured, sand-lime brick. The west addition disturbed the symmetry of the Pritchard façade, but otherwise replicated the scale, fenestration and finishes of the original building. Both elevations have recessed centre sections flanked by side bays. Vertical emphasis is provided by tall rectangular windows set between single and twinned brick pilasters. The latter extend from stone bases to stone capitals that are interconnected by a belt course. Windows are accented by smooth-cut stone surrounds, including label moulds with large keystones. A metal cornice and tall parapet with stone coping and patterned brickwork mark the roof-line.

A major symbolic feature is the classically detailed main entrance which is approached by four broad stone steps and ornamented by engaged rusticated stone columns and a formal crown. Above these elements, two carved stone hands extend across the globe to clasp in unity. An accompanying banner is inscribed with the words, Workers of the World Unite.

Over the years, the most significant physical changes to 591 Pritchard have entailed the installation of glass blocks in the main windows and auditorium renovations, including floor levelling.

The temple's designer, Robert Edgar Davies, came into conflict with the Manitoba Association of Architects (MAA) as a result of his involvement in the project. Provincial legislation passed in 1910 and substantially revised in 1914 required persons practising as architects to meet established qualifications and remain in good standing as MAA members. The unregistered Davies had used the term "architect" in connection with his labour temple plans. When the MAA threatened legal action, he applied for membership, but then failed to pass one of the examinations necessary for certification. He continued on occasion to describe himself and be listed in local directories as an architect. Indeed, he planned the Nurses' Residence at the municipal hospital complex in Fort Rouge (1920) and was co-designer of Winnipeg Hydro's Amy Street steam heating plant (1923). Born in England, Davies studied architecture at the Nottingham School of Art and Design and engineering at the University of Nottingham. After coming to Canada, he entered the

office of Hugh McCowan of Winnipeg, first as chief assistant, then (c.1905) as partner. After McCowan's death in 1908, Davies continued a solo practice and joined the City of Winnipeg as an architect and building inspector. Little is known of his career after he left that employment in the mid-1920s.