

444 RIVER AVENUE – AUGUSTINE UNITED (PRESBYTERIAN) CHURCH
J.H.G. Russell, 1903-04



One of Winnipeg's spectacular stone churches, Augustine has served its congregation and its community since its official dedication on October 16, 1904.

The Presbyterian congregation of Augustine was organized in 1887 in Fort Rouge, another illustration of the shift in the area's inhabitants away from its original Métis families to a more English-based population of well-to-do businessmen, developers and politicians. Mainly from Ontario, these new arrivals sought to transplant their social and cultural traditions in their new home – especially their churches. The first Augustine church building was dedicated on August 7, 1887 and enlarged in 1892 and was located on the site of the present church. In 1903, however, owing to the rapid increase in area population and the size of the congregation, the magnificent new Augustine Church was planned and built.

The church is one of Winnipeg's finest examples of the Gothic Revival style, recognizable by its use of the pointed arch, flying buttresses, and rib vault. Designed to reduce or at least interrupt flat wall surfaces, it became the most popular style for the Presbyterian churches in the early 20th century.

Built of solid limestone, the church features many outstanding details including large stained glass windows on the front (north), east and west façades embellished with delicate gothic-style tracery, the tall northeast corner tower topped by a delicate metal-clad spire, stone buttresses (some finished with delicate stone towers with conical roofs and finials), a northwest corner turret with conical roof and finial and slender stone spire, pointed arches topping all openings. The rear Sunday School/Guild Hall addition uses many of these same design elements.

Augustine Church was designed by J.H.G. Russell (1862-1946), a well-known local architect born and trained in Ontario who set up a private practice in Winnipeg in 1895. One of the province's most influential early 20th century architects, Russell was responsible for a large number of buildings of every use and description across Western Canada. He designed many other Presbyterian churches in Winnipeg, including:

Crescent-Fort Rouge Methodist, 525 Wardlaw Avenue, 1906-11
Westminster Presbyterian, 745 Westminster Avenue, 1910-12 (Grade II)
Robertson Memorial Presbyterian, 648 Burrows Avenue, 1911
Knox Presbyterian, 400 Edmonton Street, 1914-17
Home Street Presbyterian, 318 Home Street, 1920
St. John's Presbyterian, 250 Cathedral Avenue, 1923 (Grade III)
Riverview Presbyterian, 360 Oakwood Avenue, 1925

Local contracting firm Malcom Brothers was responsible for the construction of the church.

In 1909, in response to its Sunday School Program that had an enrolment of over 500, the congregation built a fine two-storey Sunday School/Guild Hall attached to the south end of the existing building. Built of stone and designed to match the church, the structure originally included space for club rooms, cloak rooms, a small kitchen and an open social room in the basement, a ladies' parlour with an open fireplace and a large lecture room with platform and classrooms on the ground floor and the high-ceiling Sunday School Room with a speaker's platform at its north end, small classrooms and a boardroom and small library on the second floor. Classroom space off the

lecture rooms of the ground and second floor could be separated from the main space by rolling wooden and glass partition walls. Today, the basement is used for educational purposes, the main floor is used by the church as a hall and offices and the second floor is rented to tenants who use the space for offices and as a rehearsal hall.

One of the church's most important and prized elements is its Karn Organ, installed in 1905 – the largest organ in Western Canada at the time. American organist Clarence Eddy, considered at the time to be one of the world's best, gave two recitals on the newly installed instrument attended by approximately 1,600 people. Today, the organ is reported to be the oldest instrument installed in Winnipeg that has not been moved from its original location, although only a small amount of the original instrument remains.

Elements of the building that would require approval if alterations were planned are:

Exterior:

- The north-facing church located on River Avenue
- Complex rectangular plan with Guild Hall/Sunday School building attached to the south end, squared bell tower with metal-clad spire in northeast corner, attached corner turret with conical roof, finial and slender stone spires in southwest corner
- The steep and complex gabled and cross-gabled roof structure
- Exposed, roughly-dressed limestone cladding and buttresses with smooth-cut limestone accenting
- Pointed arch openings throughout featuring stained- and leaded-glass windows with delicate wooden tracery on the front (north), east and west elevations

Interior:

- Formal Auditorium plan featuring a raised choir loft at the south end of the sanctuary with pipe organ, wood plank floors sloping down to the front of the Sanctuary, curved wooden pews placed in radiating rows, and a U-shaped upper gallery along the north, east and west walls supported by delicate columns
- High ceilings with ribbed plaster, coved transepts and decorative medallion screens
- Curved staircases in northeast and northwest corners with decorative wood balustrades and newel posts