

442 SCOTIA STREET – SISTERS’ RESIDENCE (LEACOCK HOUSE)

Unknown, 1878



This 2½-storey brick veneer frame house was built as the luxurious mansion for one of Winnipeg’s early characters and con men, but has been used for over 100 years as part of the province’s social aid system, located on an extensive piece of property in what became West Kildonan.

The original owner of this Queen Anne style house was Edward Philip “E.P.” Leacock (1853-ca.1925) uncle of famed Canadian writer Stephen Leacock. Leacock was known for his extravagant lifestyle that, as it turned out, was paid for by others – one of his most famous scams was to claim he was the owner of a railroad, the Winnipeg, Hudson Bay and Arctic Ocean Railway, to receive free passage on operating lines all across North America. He ran up considerable debt and borrowed heavily from acquaintance before skipping town for good in the late 1890s. After many years under the ownership of lawyer Nathaniel Francis Hagel (1846-1915), the property was sold to the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd in 1911.

This religious order was founded in Montreal in 1844 and came to Winnipeg to care for young girls who had gone through the City's new juvenile court system. Over the next half century, Marymount, as it would become known, was at the fore of this care in Manitoba. From education and training to emergency shelter, the role of the institution grew and evolved, as did the buildings in the complex and the Leacock House was used for many years as a dormitory and school. In the late 1950s, with a number of other buildings completed on the site, the house was converted into a residence for the Sisters of the Order, a function it continues to the present.

The home features many fine architectural elements, including the one-storey porch wrapping around the south and east façades. This element was originally open but has been closed in with windows. The curve of the porch in the southeast corner is repeated in an unusual curved corner window on the second floor. A fine mosaic, designed by artist Norman Bruce in the 1950s, was completed in the brick chimney that interrupts this second storey window.

In spite of the changes in use of the building, there is also a wealth of original interior elements. The main staircase features wood and ornamental plaster detailing; much of the ground floor ceiling is covered in its original ornamental tin; and wood doors, door frames and window frames have been maintained as has much of the original ground floor layout.

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

Exterior:

- Irregular buff brick and stone Queen Anne style structure with three main façades facing north, south and east;
- The wrap around glazed porch;
- The ornate brick chimney in the southeast corner with mosaic;
- The wood window frames and sashes;
- Complex roof with windowed dormers; and
- Details including brick lintels, wood moulding along the eaves, brackets along the south elevation.

Interior:

- Original tin ceilings, wood finishes, architectural detailing, original wood doors/frames and wood flooring on the ground floor;
- Entire volume of space and finishes of the main staircase; and
- Curved glass windows on the ground floor.