

137 SCOTT STREET – GRAHAM HOUSE
W. B. Lait, 1902



The fine wood and glass features of this Fort Rouge dwelling are a fitting legacy of its original owner-occupant, John Campbell Graham, a sawmill operator and lumber merchant who became one of the largest suppliers of door and wood trim products in Western Canada.

The Ontario-born Graham developed shipping experience on the Great Lakes and a joint lumber venture at the Lakehead before moving to Winnipeg in 1888. He managed the Rat Portage and later the Prairie Lumber Companies, then organized his own firm in 1905 to capitalize on intensive building activity in the West.

The J. C. Graham Lumber Company supplied contractors with specialty glass products and finished wood for interior and exterior use. By 1906, it employed more than 25 full-time workers and a travelling salesman. Such was its growth that two storeys had to be added to its head office at 290-94 Princess Street. A second storage facility was later established on McPhillips Street.

Graham also was involved in several other financial and lumber firms in Northwestern Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

In 1902, he commissioned William Barnes Lait to design a 2½-storey frame residence on the northwest corner of Scott Street and Spadina (later Stradbrook) Avenue in one of Winnipeg's prestigious residential neighbourhoods. The structure was built by contractor J. T. Hunter for \$4,500.

Lait, the son of an architect and county surveyor, arrived in Toronto in 1890 after several years of design experience in his native England. He moved to Winnipeg two years later and worked with George Browne, one of the city's best known architects. From 1897 to 1907, Lait had his own practice. His portfolio included the University of Manitoba Agricultural College (1898), several houses, and commercial, industrial and institutional buildings. He became building inspector in 1908, but left Winnipeg the next year.

The Graham House is in the Queen Anne style which was popular in North America at the turn of the century. Lait employed an L-shaped design for the frame structure which has horizontal clapboard siding and sits on a rock-faced, broken-course stone foundation. Its central hipped roof is steeply pitched with a front-facing gable dormer and side-facing cross gable on the southern elevation. Large paired brackets are used as accents on the second level.

A one-storey, full-width porch extends from the front (east) to the south facade. Roof support is provided by paired, unfluted wooden columns with unadorned capitals and unenriched bases. The columns have large pedestals covered with siding similar to that used for the rest of the building. Plain segmented arches connect the columns above, while the open handrail is supported by wooden spindles. A matching frieze appears below both the porch and second-storey eaves.

There is a bay window on the front facade. Most windows have plain wooden surrounds, although several have carved sills. The main windows have segmented heads with leaded glass accents in the arches. There also are two leaded glass oval windows containing the design of a torch framed by

ribbon and branches and highlighted by colourful artificial gems.

The north and west facades are flat, plain and have unmatched windows. It appears that an addition was later made to the rear of the building. The property is partly enclosed by an iron fence.

Although the interior has been altered, much of its original fabric remains, including carved wooden door frames, other wood accents, a well-maintained staircase, and an intricately carved fireplace opposite the bay window in the original den.

Graham lived at 137 Scott Street until about 1923, then moved into his business block where he remained until 1930. He retained the house as a rental property until at least the late 1920s. Beginning in 1945, the structure was used as a boarding house. It was converted in 1980 to offices for legal and accounting firms.