



400 SOUTH DRIVE
COLONEL R.M. THOMSON HOUSE

PREPARED BY PETERSON PROJECTS – DECEMBER 2009



400 SOUTH DRIVE COLONEL R.M. THOMSON HOUSE

Date of Construction: 1914

Building Permit: N/A

Architect: Chivers, Cyril W.U.¹

Contractor: James McDiarmid Company

ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

This would rank as one of the City's finest mansions built in the pre-World War I era.

The building sits on the banks of the Red River on a piece of property on the inside of a loop of the river. There is a wealth of ornamental detailing including Flemish gables, formal stone entrance with buttresses and pointed arches, stone cladding at grade, dark brick walls with stone accenting around windows and doors, metal cornice and large brick and stone chimney. A two-storey wood and glass veranda is attached to the building's southeast corner.

The building stands on its original site, appears to be in good structural condition and does not appear to have suffered major exterior alteration, even though it stood empty for many years and has now been converted for use by its private school owners.



Rear (east) and south façades, 2009

The mansion was designed by Brigadier Major Cyril W.U. Chivers (1879-1959), one of Winnipeg's fine 20th century architects who for most of his career was partnered with Major George W. Northwood (1876-1959). Both men were distinguished Winnipeg veterans of the First World War and formed a professional partnership after the War. They designed a number of fine buildings including the Manitoba Cartage Building, 345 Higgins Avenue (1926), St. Ignatius Church, 255 Stafford Street (1928), the second pavilion at the Assiniboine Park and Zoo, 55 Pavilion Crescent (1929-30, Grade II), the Riverbend School for Girls Junior School, now Balmoral Hall School, 630 Westminster Avenue (ca.1930), Greater Winnipeg Gas Building, 265 Notre Dame Avenue (1930, Grade III) the Women's Tribute Memorial Lodge, 200 Woodlawn Street (1931, Grade II), the Civic Auditorium, 444 St. Mary Avenue (1932), the Bank of Toronto Branch on Academy Road (1934) and the Federal Building, 269 Main Street (1935).² They have been given 20 points by the Historical Buildings Committee.



South façade, 2009

HISTORICAL INTEREST:

The Municipality of Fort Garry was incorporated in April 1912 but prior to this, several developers had tried to bring modern development to the area beginning in 1908 with Colonel R.M. Thomson who introduced the name Wildewood and attempted to organize a very exclusive residential neighbourhood along the lines of Wellington Crescent and Armstrong's Point. Roads were built and Thomson built his luxurious mansion on the banks of the Red River. Unfortunately, Colonel Thomson died in World War I and the house, which had not been completed, stood empty for 17 years when it was bought by the Ravenscourt School For Boys. This school had been operating for many years in another mansion, the Tupper House in Armstrong's Point.

St. John's College School (Anglican), which had been founded in 1849, joined Ravenscourt at the Wildewood site in 1950, creating St. John's-Ravenscourt School that continues to the use the building.



South façade, 2009

RECOMMENDATION TO HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE:

Under the Historical Buildings By-law, this building meets a number of important criteria:

- its historical importance- one of the oldest and most luxurious homes built in the Municipality of Fort Garry and one of Wildewood's first homes;
- its associations- its long-term connections to Ravenscourt School;
- its design- an excellent example of the Classical Revival style;
- its architect- C.W.U. Chivers was a respected and important practitioner;
- its location- located in an isolated piece of property on the river; and
- its integrity- its main façades continue to display many of their original elements and design.



Front (west) and north façades, 1978

ENDNOTES:

- 1 Manitoba Free Press, May 23, 1914, p. 12.
- 2 City of Winnipeg, Historical Buildings Committee, files.