



641 ST. MATTHEWS AVENUE ST. MATTHEWS ANGLICAN CHURCH

Date of Construction: 1912-1913

Building Permit: 3088/1912 (Plans at City Storage)

Architect: Matthews, Herbert E.

Contractor: Pattinson and Eilbech

ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

Built on a busy street corner in Winnipeg's West End, this massive red brick and stone structure is one of the neighbourhood's most conspicuous structures.

The front (south) façade holds the church's main entrance, a pair of double wood doors set in an ornate stone frame with brick and stone buttresses and other ornamental elements. Above the entrance is a large pointed arch opening finished in smooth limestone with a pair of stained glass windows set in the middle two sections. The gable end finishing this façade is stepped, ornamented with more limestone and finished at the apex with a stone cross. Pointed arch stained glass windows are founded elsewhere on this elevation. The southeast corner was designed to hold a tower which was not built.



Front (south) and east façades, 2009

The east and west façades are similarly designed, with doors and stained glass and tracery windows with pointed arches and stepped gable ends. Limestone is used as accenting on both elevations. The rear (north) façade also features numerous stained glass windows and a stepped gable.

The building stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition. Some research will be required to determine if the post-fire structure followed the 1912 plans or whether alterations were made to the original design.

This church is a good example of the Modern or Late Gothic Revival style which rose in popularity after 1900 as a reaction to the highly ornamented buildings of the earlier Gothic Revival style. The newer version opted for much simpler silhouettes and subdued ornamentation, in the words of one author, “a calm, disciplined monumentality.”¹

Flat surfaces were preferred; buildings were often long, low symmetrical masses embellished with crenellated towers and the distinctive pointed arch of the Gothic style. Construction material was monochromatic, usually brick or stone, again a departure from the multi-hued façades of the Gothic Revival style. Inspiration for the detailing of the new style was found in the English Perpendicular Gothic design of the 15th century. Because Modern Gothic found widespread expression on the campuses of many North American universities, it has also been referred to as Collegiate Gothic.²



Front (south) and west façades, 2009

Architect H. E. Matthews came to Winnipeg in 1905 and immediately began his architectural practice. In that year alone, he designed ten structures totalling \$103,000. These structures included large and small homes, warehouses and a business block. For two building seasons, 1910 and 1911, Matthews formed a partnership with Fred F. LeMaistre. The firm designed numerous structures throughout the city but by late 1911, Matthews was back on his own.³

Matthews became the first president of the Manitoba Association of Architects in 1914 “for a term of two and a half years”⁴ with J.B. Mitchell acting as vice-president and J.H.G. Russell as secretary. That same year, Matthews was responsible for the design of Winnipeg’s two new armouries, Minto at 969 St. Matthews Avenue and McGregor at 551 Machray Avenue.

In 1921, Matthews was hired as an architect for the Dominion Department of Public Works, a position he held until his retirement in 1938. His name leaves the Henderson's Directory in 1942 but what became of him is unknown at present.

A list of significant Winnipeg buildings designed by Matthews includes: St. Matthews Anglican Church (West End Cultural Centre), 586 Ellice Avenue (1908); Congress (Boylston) Apartments, 300 River Avenue (1910 – Grade II); Rothesay (Preston) Apartments, 828 Preston Avenue (1912 – Grade III); Minto Armouries, 969 St. Matthews Avenue (1914); and McGregor Armouries, 551 Machray Avenue (1914). He has been given 20 points by the Historical Buildings Committee.



Rear (north) and west façades, 2009

HISTORICAL INTEREST:

The Anglican congregation of St. Matthews was formed in 1896, a mission of Holy Trinity Church. A year later, a small wooden church was completed at the corner of Sherbrook Street and Ellice Avenue. Early in the new century, the congregation became independent and hired a minister. With the growing congregation, a new church was built on the original site, officially opened in January 1909 (now the West End Cultural Centre, 586 Ellice Avenue). This lasted only a short time and in 1912 the decision was made to build a larger facility. The cornerstone of the new church, at the corner of St. Matthews Avenue and Maryland Street was laid on May 7, 1913, planned as the largest Anglican church building in the Province with seating for 1,500.⁵ It opened in November of that year.

The congregation held a mortgage burning dinner in June of 1944 and unfortunately, in November of the same year, a second fire gutted the building.⁶ The church was rebuilt to the original plans, dedicated in 1947 and consecrated in 1953. A Casavant organ was installed in 1948, replacing a similar instrument destroyed in the 1944 fire.⁷

Today, besides the original congregation, the church building is home to three other worshipping congregations: Grain of Wheat, a non-denominational group; Shiloh Apostolic, a Pentecostal congregation; and the Emmanuel Mission at St. Matthew's, an Anglican congregation with origins in Southern Sudan who worship in the Dinka language. The church has recently converted much of the interior into residential suites to offset the cost of maintenance and operating the building.⁸



Front (south) façade detail, 2009

RECOMMENDATION TO HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE:

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

- its historical importance- an important institution in Winnipeg's West End and representative of the type of church building completed in the pre-World War I era;
- its associations- its long-term connections to Anglicans in Winnipeg;
- its design- an excellent example of the Modern Gothic style;
- its architect- H.E. Matthews was a respected and important practitioner;
- its location- contributes greatly to the historic streetscape of its neighbourhood; and
- its integrity- its main façades continue to display many of their original elements and design.



Front (south) and east façades, 1978

ENDNOTES:

- 1 L. Maitland et al., A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press Ltd., 1992), p. 166.
- 2 Ibid., p. 166; and Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, Historic Resources Branch, 1991), p. 20.
- 3 This information, along with the list of buildings, is gleaned from the City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books; and M. Peterson, files.
- 4 J. Chivers, "A History of the Manitoba Association of Architects," Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Manitoba, 1966, p. 31.
- 5 Manitoba Free Press, May 8, 1913, p. 26; and James B. Hartman, "The Churches of Early Winnipeg," in Manitoba History, No. 45, Spring/Summer 2003.
- 6 Manitoba Free Press, November 13, 1944, pp. 1-2.
- 7 J.B. Hartman, op. cit.
- 8 Information from St. Matthews Anglican Church website, www.st-matthews.ca, no date.