

139 TUXEDO AVENUE – MANITOBA AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE GATES

Samuel Hooper (1906)



By 1900, Manitoba was in the midst of an unprecedented settlement and development boom based on a blossoming agricultural economy. To further encourage productivity and diversification, government officials recognized the need to support agricultural research and education.

In 1894, the Manitoba Department of Agriculture began a dairy school, followed in 1903-1904 by establishment of the Manitoba Agricultural College to provide a broad range of courses in crop and livestock production, farm management and, eventually, home economics. Two undeveloped river lots (47 hectares) were selected for this purpose south of the Assiniboine River and west of Winnipeg in an area later incorporated as the Town of Tuxedo.

When the College officially opened in November 1906, it was the first of its type in the West and only the third such institution in Canada. Full-time and short-course enrolment from across the Prairies grew quickly, resulting in the need for additional teachers, departments and land for expansion.

Unable to secure sufficient property in Tuxedo, the Province opted in 1910 to acquire 243 hectares for a second campus in St. Vital (later known as Fort Garry). A substantial investment was required to prepare for the College's move to this site in 1913. A decade later, legislation was passed to merge the College with the University of Manitoba, followed in the 1930s to 1960s by relocation of various university faculties and affiliated colleges from central Winnipeg to the Fort Garry campus.

The College was succeeded at the Tuxedo site in 1914 by the Manitoba School for the Deaf. However, its tenure was unexpectedly short-lived. By 1917, the facilities had been acquired by the Dominion government for use as a convalescent and rehabilitation centre for World War I veterans. This military hospital was later re-established across the river at Deer Lodge, enabling the campus to be converted to the army's main Winnipeg area base, first called Tuxedo Cavalry Barracks and then Fort Osborne Barracks.

These rapid changes in ownership and function resulted in substantial but not irrevocable alterations to the original site plan and buildings designed for the Agricultural College by Samuel Hooper, Provincial Architect. Indeed, this project resulted in Manitoba's first coordinated campus scheme and served as a precursor for the layout, orientation and building types used at Fort Garry.

The English-borne Hooper studied architecture in his uncle's office before immigrating to Canada in 1869. He worked as a stone carver in London, Ontario for several years and later resettled in Emerson, Manitoba. In 1881, he formed a partnership with David Ede, Winnipeg's leading monument maker. Hooper continued in this trade until 1895 when he returned to architecture. He was appointed Provincial Architect in 1904, the first position of its type in the West, and continued in this office until his death in 1911.

Hooper initially designed five structures for the College - a main building with classrooms, offices, assembly room and dormitory; a dairy building; stock judging amphitheatre and stables; power house; and residence for Principal W.J. Black. Construction began in 1905, followed in 1906-1911 by work on a horticulture building; an engineering and mechanical facility; Roblin Hall, a new dormitory; and reconstruction of the dairy building after a 1909 fire.

These facilities were placed in a formal Edwardian setting on the northerly six hectares of fenced College property overlooking the river. Turning north off Piper Boulevard (later Tuxedo Avenue), visitors entered the southern end of the campus through stone gate posts and travelled along a lozenge-shaped gravel driveway to the Administration Building at the opposite end. The driveway enclosed spacious open grounds and was flanked by ancillary buildings. To the south of Piper, a second set of gates marked access to the stock judging pavilion, barns and farmer's cottage.

The College buildings were remodelled to accommodate the School for the Deaf, but major changes awaited the army's arrival. Under the Canadian Military Hospitals Commission, existing facilities were converted, and temporary structures of wood frame and stucco were erected, to provide wards for 600 patients, offices, classrooms, shops and staff quarters. As well, the grounds were altered for outdoor sports. Construction of other facilities continued into the late 1920s.

In all, the military added some 19 buildings to the campus, eliminating much of the site's open space to the north of Piper. While the external designs of the main College structures were preserved, the stock judging pavilion and other farm buildings were demolished in the mid-1920s.

The army had outgrown Fort Osborne by the 1950s. Development of a new base (Kapyong Barracks) began on property to the south of the original complex. Several provincial government services moved to Fort Osborne as buildings were vacated by the military. The Province regained full occupancy of the site in 1968. Roblin Hall, the College's engineering and mechanical building and most military structures subsequently were demolished. Ten buildings were retained, five each from the College and military eras. The demolitions enabled restoration of the campus layout by re-opening the central grounds. In 1997, the complex reopened as the Asper Jewish Community Campus.

To reinforce an image of the Agricultural College as a special place, Hooper designed substantial stone and wrought iron gates for the complex's entrances and boundaries along Piper Boulevard (present-day Tuxedo Avenue).

The two main gates, placed opposite each other at the centre of the campus, controlled vehicular and pedestrian traffic turning north and south off Piper. Their components included two-part swinging gates attached to large stone hanging posts and joined in the centre by locks. To each side were smaller piers supporting latched pedestrian gates. These smaller accesses were repeated at the perimeters of the developed site and linked by fencing to the main entrances.

All piers sat on rock-face stone bases, while their square shafts were constructed of “bush-hammered” limestone blocks set in cement mortar. The driveway posts rose to gabled ends and a series of roll mouldings that supported smooth-cut stone spheres. The smaller posts were more modestly ornamented with plain, low-pitched pyramidal caps.

By themselves, the large pillars measured about 7.2 decimetres square. However, each also incorporated a reduced version of the smaller pier on the side that faced the pedestrian pathway. This latter structure was only about two-fifths the size of its 5.9-decimetre, free-standing counterpart.

The iron gates featured scrollwork and round vertical bars with twisted ends.

Beyond the main gate, a pair of stone pillars without iron fencing is located at the northwest corner of Tuxedo Avenue and Doncaster Street and another set with an iron gate is found at the northeast corner of Tuxedo Avenue and Edgeland Boulevard.

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

- Stone and wrought iron gates located along the sidewalk on the north side of Tuxedo Avenue between Doncaster Street and Edgeland Boulevard;
- The main entrance gates comprised of taller pillars with triangular elements, egg-and-dart moulding and smooth-cut stone spheres with smaller, attached pillars and smaller separate pillars with low-pitched pyramidal caps joined to the larger pillars by wrought iron fencing; and
- Smaller paired pillars with low-pitched pyramidal caps and wrought iron fencing (west pair) located at the east and west ends of the property.