



703 WELLINGTON CRESCENT

JEREMIAH “JERRY” ROBINSON HOUSE

PREPARED BY PETERSON PROJECTS – DECEMBER 2009



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Date of Construction: 1911

Building Permit: 1458/1911

Architect: Rugh, Herbert Bell

Contractor: Watson, R.

ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

This large house is built of solid brick on a 38.1 cm. stone foundation, resting on concrete footings. Walls are 33.0 cm. thick throughout and the final cost of construction was \$20,000.¹

This red brick home includes a wealth of ornamental detailing, much of it carried out in smooth cut limestone. The front (south) façade features a recessed entrance, a two-storey bay window, unique stone drip moulding on the square-headed windows on all three levels and a pair of stone capped gable ends.

The home stands on its original site, appears to be in good structural condition and has not suffered major exterior alteration.



Front (south) and east façades, 2009

The home features elements of the Classical Revival style. Popular in North America from 1900-30, the style ranged from simple, small-scale neo-classical structures, such as this building, to Beaux-Arts Classicism with its grand scale and heavy ornamentation, for example the Legislative Building.² Elements of the classical revival style include columns, pediments, flat, unadorned roof lines, symmetrical facades, and Greek or Roman orders. Door and window openings are often lintelled rather than arched, although both spanning methods can be present.³

The use of classical elements, especially for public buildings, became a popular ornamental device for banks, other financial institutions, railway stations, commercial buildings and office blocks. Because of Winnipeg's importance in the early growth of western Canada's economy, the city became the headquarters of many firms doing business throughout the West. These firms often chose classically-inspired ornamentation to portray an image of respectability and stability. Many excellent examples of the style, representing both early and late phases of its popularity, adorn a wide range of structures.

Architect H.B. Rugh practiced in Winnipeg from 1904 to ca.1912, and in that time established himself as one of the city's finest architects, although his forte appears to have been designing middle- to upper-income homes. Born in Cedar Rapids, Iowa on May 16, 1879, he took his formal training at the Armour Institute of Technology in Chicago, Illinois, graduating in 1901. He then went to work in Racine, Wisconsin, relocated to Michigan two years later and came to Winnipeg in 1904.⁴ Rugh's work over the next eight years was varied and extensive and included factories, apartment blocks, office buildings and dozens of houses,⁵ many of their plans found their way onto the pages of trade magazines like Construction.⁶ Rugh's houses used a variety of styles including Georgian, Tudor and



Front (south) and west façades, 2009

Colonial in his pursuit of the “picturesque.” He also experimented with various materials, including concrete block, rough-cast plaster and terra cotta.

In 1912, Rugh became the local representative of the Montréal firm Ross and MacFarlane. He oversaw the construction of both the Fort Garry Hotel, 1911-12 (his name is found on the City of Winnipeg Building Permit)⁷ and the now demolished King George Municipal Hospital, Morley Avenue, 1912.

An incomplete list of his major local projects would include: Wesbrook and Fairchild Warehouse, 110 Princess Street (1907 – Grade II); Y.W.C.A. Building, Ellice Avenue (1908); Hotel Fort Garry, 222 Broadway (1911-1913 – Grade II, supervising architect); King George Municipal Hospital, Morley Avenue (1912 – supervising architect, demolished).⁸

HISTORICAL INTEREST:

In 1900 the land that would become Wellington Crescent was virtually empty, much of the land owned by barrister J.H. Munson and W.D. Cornish. After subdivision, the area began filling with large mansions, partially due to its proximity to Armstrong's Point, which was Winnipeg's most affluent and exclusive residential neighbourhood.



Front (south) façade detail, 2009

The original owner of the house was Jeremiah “Jerry” Robinson. Born in Quebec in 1842, he moved to London, Ontario as a young man to work in a dry goods store. In 1879 he moved to Emerson, Manitoba, then one of the West’s fastest growing centres. He opened a store and during the boom of 1880-82 his business grew quickly. In 1882 his store was destroyed by fire, which only solidified his plans to move to what was becoming the economic centre of the prairies, Winnipeg.⁹

Robinson relocated to Winnipeg, choosing to start his new business in one of Winnipeg’s newest and most elaborate blocks, the Dundee Building, at the corner of Portage and Main. In the north half of the ground floor he opened a department store specializing in men’s and women’s wear and dress goods of all kind.¹⁰

While other businesses collapsed and folded after the bust of 1882, Robinson was able to weather the downturn and in time expanded. As new lines of stock were introduced, his business took occupancy of the entire Dundee Building, which eventually was enlarged back to Albert Street and part of the neighbouring McIntyre Block. By 1928, his business covered over half an acre of land on three stories.¹¹ Known for his generosity to his employees, he ultimately sold his store to an eastern Canadian firm in May of 1929. He died from pneumonia at his home at 211 Academy Road on December 1, 1930. He was 88.¹² His house on Wellington Crescent, then, was built at one of the most prosperous periods in his career.

After his death the house was purchased by broker William Martin Jr. and by 1936 was the residence of Henry W. and Beatrix Manning. H.W. Manning was a long-time assistant General Manager of Great West Life.¹³ The Mannings owned the house until the late 1950s and it was purchased in 1977 by the Spivaks – Sidney, a former Manitoba Progressive Conservative leader, and Mira, a member of the Canadian Senate from 1986-1999.¹⁴



Front (south) façade, 1978

On June 28, 1992, a fire started in a second-floor sauna while the couple was away. Damage was estimated at \$250,000 and the upper two floors received major smoke, water and fire damage.¹⁵

RECOMMENDATION TO HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE:

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

- its historical importance- another of the fine pre-World War I era mansions built for an influential family on Crescentwood's Wellington Crescent;
- its associations- its long-term connections to early and influential retailer J. Robinson;
- its design- an excellent example of the Classical Revival style;
- its architect- H.B. Rugh 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.

ENDNOTES:

- 1 City of Winnipeg, Building Permit (below as BP), #1458/1911.
- 2 Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, Historic Resources Branch, n.d.), p. 18.
- 3 Ibid., p. 18.
- 4 Winnipeg Telegram, September 18, 1906, p. 55; and Who's Who and Why in Canada, 1913, p. 712. Information supplied by Robert G. Hill, Editor of the Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada, 1800-1950.
- 5 City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books (below as Ledgers), 1900-1915.
- 6 See, for example, Construction, March 1910, July 1910, July 1914 and June 1915.
- 7 BP #3033/1911.
- 8 Ledgers, 1904-1912; and M. Peterson Building Database.
- 9 Manitoba Free Press, December 2, 1930.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Manitoba Free Press, May 5, 1928.
- 12 Manitoba Free Press, December 2, 1930.
- 13 City of Winnipeg, Assessment Roll, Roll No. 12040471000 and 43/45 St. Boniface, Plan 308, Lots 22 and 23; and Henderson's Directory, 1910-50.
- 14 "Spivak, Mira" in Biographical Vertical File, Manitoba Legislative Library.
- 15 Winnipeg Sun, June 30, 1992, p. 3.