



**134 WEST GATE
“BEECHMOUNT”
THE FORMER J.B. MONK HOUSE**

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee

March 1995

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The 22-hectare (54-acre) parcel of land known as Armstrong’s Point has long been one of the city’s most beautiful residential developments, home to many influential families living in some of the finest and most opulent houses built in turn-of-the-century Winnipeg.

The property was granted to Captain Joseph Hill by the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1848. Hill returned to England in 1853, leaving the wooded land, then known as “Hill’s Point,” and a small farm cottage (located on present-day West Gate) in the care of his former batsman, Corporal James Armstrong.² The land was well known to Red River Settlement residents who took many picnics and excursions to the area.

In July 1873 Armstrong, who had not heard from Hill in some time, sold the property to F.E. Cornish, soon to become Winnipeg’s first mayor. A year later, Armstrong was dead but rumours swirled that Hill was still living in London, England. Two Winnipeg businessmen travelled overseas to locate him and buy his land. They succeeded in finding Hill, but he refused to sell. He instead returned to Winnipeg in 1880, then a year later transferred his holding for \$28,000 to a local syndicate which quickly subdivided the land.

The name for the syndicate’s development, “Victoria Place,” did not stick, but it did indicate the type of neighbourhood planned for the area.³ It was not long before Armstrong’s Point was home to several important families – Eden, Stobart, Kaye, Sutherland, Tupper, Waghorn, Ruttan and Blair, among other businessmen, professionals, politicians and wealthy investors.

¹ The name “Beechmount” is found on a photograph taken of the home in 1908. The photograph (see Plate 3) is courtesy of the home’s present owner, C. Singh.

² S. Carter, “Armstrong’s Point: Victorian Suburb in the Heart of Winnipeg,” Report for the City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee, n.d., pp. 1-2.

³ Ibid., pp. 2-5.

One of the first palatial houses to be built on the Point was that of A.G.B. Bannatyne, pioneer merchant. His Tyndall stone and red sandstone mansion was commonly known as Bannatyne's Castle. Like so many other speculators, however, Bannatyne's wealth disappeared when land prices bottomed out during the bust of the mid-1880s and he died in 1889 before his dream house was completed.⁴

On the river property just north of the Castle, Bannatyne's son, A.R.J. Bannatyne, built a home in ca.1883 (he had purchased the land in 1881).⁵ A.R.J. Bannatyne was born in the Red River Settlement in 1856 and, after getting his education in Scotland, returned to Winnipeg in 1873, entering the employ of the Merchants' Bank. In 1881 he formed a partnership with Andrew Strang and purchased his father's wholesale grocery business, renaming it Bannatyne and Company.⁶ He appears to have lived in his house on Assiniboine Avenue (later West Gate) until 1888 when big changes occurred on the Point. Much of the property, including the younger Bannatyne's house, was purchased by the Frontenac Loan and Savings Society of Kingston, Ontario. From 1888 to 1894, the society rented out the residence, its tenants including William Skead, an inspector.⁷ Henderson's Directory has only scant records of the Point during his period, but the house listed as next to A.G.B. Bannatyne was reported to be vacant from 1888 to 1890.

On March 3, 1894, this building and several lots around it were purchased by another of the early landowners on The Point, Lendrum McMeans,⁸ a well-known barrister whose political career included stints as an M.L.A. (1910) and a Senator (1917).⁹ McMeans was first mentioned in the City of Winnipeg Tax Rolls for Armstrong's Point in 1889 as holding Lots 51/58, 70/76

⁴ Ibid., pp. 6-7. The house was finally purchased and completed by J. Stewart Tupper, son of Sir Charles Tupper, father of Confederation. Tupper named the home Ravenscourt and the building was also used as a boys' school and a convent before being demolished in 1951.

⁵ City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls (below as ARo), 1874-1883.

⁶ Winnipeg Daily Sun, December 24, 1883.

⁷ ARo, 1885-95.

⁸ Certificate of Title (below as C.T.), #14785, Land Titles Office, Winnipeg. McMeans owned Lots 41-45, 134 West Gate is located on Lots 41 and 42.

⁹ Who's Who and Why, 1917-18 (Toronto: International Press, 1918), p. 674.

and 99/103 (all vacant land), making him one of the Point's largest landowners. Much of this property was sold the next year, then in March 1894 McMeans purchased the old A.R.J. Bannatyne House. He began to remodel the premises for his own use, but the building was destroyed by fire just six months later when equipment could not reach it because of muddy roads.¹⁰

It was near the ruins of the burnt-out home that McMeans had contractor Hugh Murray build a new brick and stone structure in 1895. McMeans never took occupancy, but instead sold the property on November 19, 1895 to bank manager John Benning Monk (Plates 1 and 2).¹¹ The McMeans family established a separate residence further north on Assiniboine Avenue (today numbered 40 West Gate).

STYLE

The Monk House was designed in the Queen Anne style (Plates 3 and 4). Common elements distinguishing this style include: irregular, asymmetrical plans; a lack of flat façades achieved by the use, often in combination, of bay and oriel windows, porches, towers and multiple roofs; and the use of Eastlake decorations such as spindles, balusters and finials. The style was popular from approximately 1890 to 1910 and at its best created lively structures with a wealth of ornamentation and a picturesque quality.¹²

CONSTRUCTION

This house is built of solid, cream-coloured brick on a rubble-stone foundation. The 2½-storey building measures approximately 11.9 x 10.5 x 9.9 m (39 x 34½ x 32½ ft.)¹³ Limestone is used

¹⁰ Manitoba Free Press, September 19, 1894, p. 1. The newspaper account estimated the value of the home and personal property at \$8,000.

¹¹ C.T. #18157.

¹² Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg: Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, Historic Resources Branch, 1991), p. 16.

¹³ City of Winnipeg Assessment Record, Roll No. 917080 (old no. 16428), Ward I, PC 10.

throughout for accents around doors and windows. Originally, a one-storey open porch wrapped around the northeast corner of the building, with a second storey, used as a summer bedroom, on the east elevation. The porch was removed in 1958 and replaced by two sets of concrete steps.¹⁴

DESIGN

As originally built, this house had a great deal of elegance and charm. The one- and two-storey open verandah created a perfect entrance, added aesthetically to the front of the home and was the most visible element of the Queen Anne style. Without this feature, the simple brick walls of the house are exposed, certainly not the intention of the designer.

Windows throughout are rectangular, set in plain wooden frames and highlighted by stone lug sills and radiating brick heads. The only exception is the main window on the West Gate (east) façade. Here a large, round-headed window has been located to afford better light to the living room. A limestone keystone and radiating bricks form this arch.

Bays, lean-tos, dormers and the verandah were all used to give the house its uniqueness, as well as to increase its visual interest. Patches of ornamental shingling and decorative eaves also grace the structure.

The roof of the Monk House is hipped, its steep slopes cut off at the top by a flat section surrounded by a wooden fence known as a “Widow’s Walk.” The roof also features a large, ornate brick chimney and numerous dormers, both original and contemporary, that vary in size, design and ornamentation.

INTERIOR

The present owner has taken on the massive task of bringing this home back to its original splendour. As with the exterior, many of the interior alterations completed over the years were

¹⁴ Ibid.

extremely insensitive and intrusive. New stipple ceilings were hung throughout the house, almost all the wood trim was painted and the service staircase leading from the kitchen to the third floor was dismantled.

Renovations continue under the guidance of contractor Norbert Badiou who worked on the Kittson House, 165 rue La Verendrye. Much of the ground floor wood has been stripped and stained, including a magnificent main staircase and intricately carved newel post.¹⁵

INTEGRITY

The Monk House stands on its original location and appears to be in excellent structural condition. It has suffered, however, from several drastic alterations, of which the demolition of the verandah was the most serious.¹⁶ A 3.7 x 3.7 m. (12 x 12') rear addition was removed in 1958, and new concrete steps were built in the same year to replace the verandah. The second-floor doorway which originally led to the upper balcony of the verandah was converted into a window. A dormer on the third floor, which had been removed, was replicated and added in 1985.¹⁷

In sum, the changes made to the Monk House have been extensive, although not irreversible.

STREETSCAPE

Nowhere else in Winnipeg is there found such an exceptional collection of well-preserved turn-of-the-century residential structures. Armstrong's Point has long been and continues to be one of the city's most remarkable neighbourhoods. The Monk House is one of the oldest homes and, although it has seen many changes to its exterior, it does contribute to the historical continuity of

¹⁵ Christine Singh, present owner, in conversation with the author, March 1995. The antique bathtub on the third floor was reportedly taken as a keepsake from Bannatyne's Castle by the Monk family during the mansion's demolition.

¹⁶ Ibid. When the present owner purchased the home, the brick had been painted blue. The paint was subsequently sand-blasted off without, it appears, serious damage to the brickwork.

¹⁷ Ibid.

the area.

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTOR

A search of City of Winnipeg Plumbing Permits, contemporary newspapers and industry journals failed to produce an architect for the Monk House. The contractor was Hugh Murray, a local builder who produced several smaller homes in 1894 and 1895. This is the first Murray house to be graded by the Historical Buildings Committee.

PERSON

The first residents were John Benning Monk and his second wife Beatrice Lola. Monk was born in Bytown, Canada West (now Ottawa, Ontario) on August 20, 1854. Taking his later education in Ottawa, Monk came to Winnipeg in 1882 and worked at the newly opened branch of the Bank of Ottawa. He served for several years as manager of the Keewatin, Ontario branch before returning to direct the Winnipeg office. He retired in 1917 and died at 134 West Gate on July 29, 1947.¹⁸

The home continued to be owned by Monk's widow until 1958 when it was sold to Edward Ernest McManus, a public relations director for Labatt's Manitoba Brewery.¹⁹ The McManus family did not live on site for long, although they retained ownership of the dwelling until 1980. For many years, the house was leased and used as the Japanese Consulate.

¹⁸ Winnipeg Free Press, July 29, 1947, p. 17.

¹⁹ C.T. #884067; and Henderson's Directory, 1930-60.

In 1980, the general manager of the Winnipeg Convention Centre, Klaus Feurniss, purchased the property, selling to the Singh family in 1985.²⁰

CONTEXT

The J.B. Monk House is an excellent example of an up-scale pre-1900 single-family dwelling with many luxurious amenities and design features on the exterior and interior. Built in what would become one of Winnipeg's earliest exclusive neighbourhoods, this house became one of the models on which many other homes in the area were based.

LANDMARK

This building, with the rebuilding of its ornate front porch, is once again a conspicuous structure in the neighbourhood.

²⁰ ARO, 1970-90.

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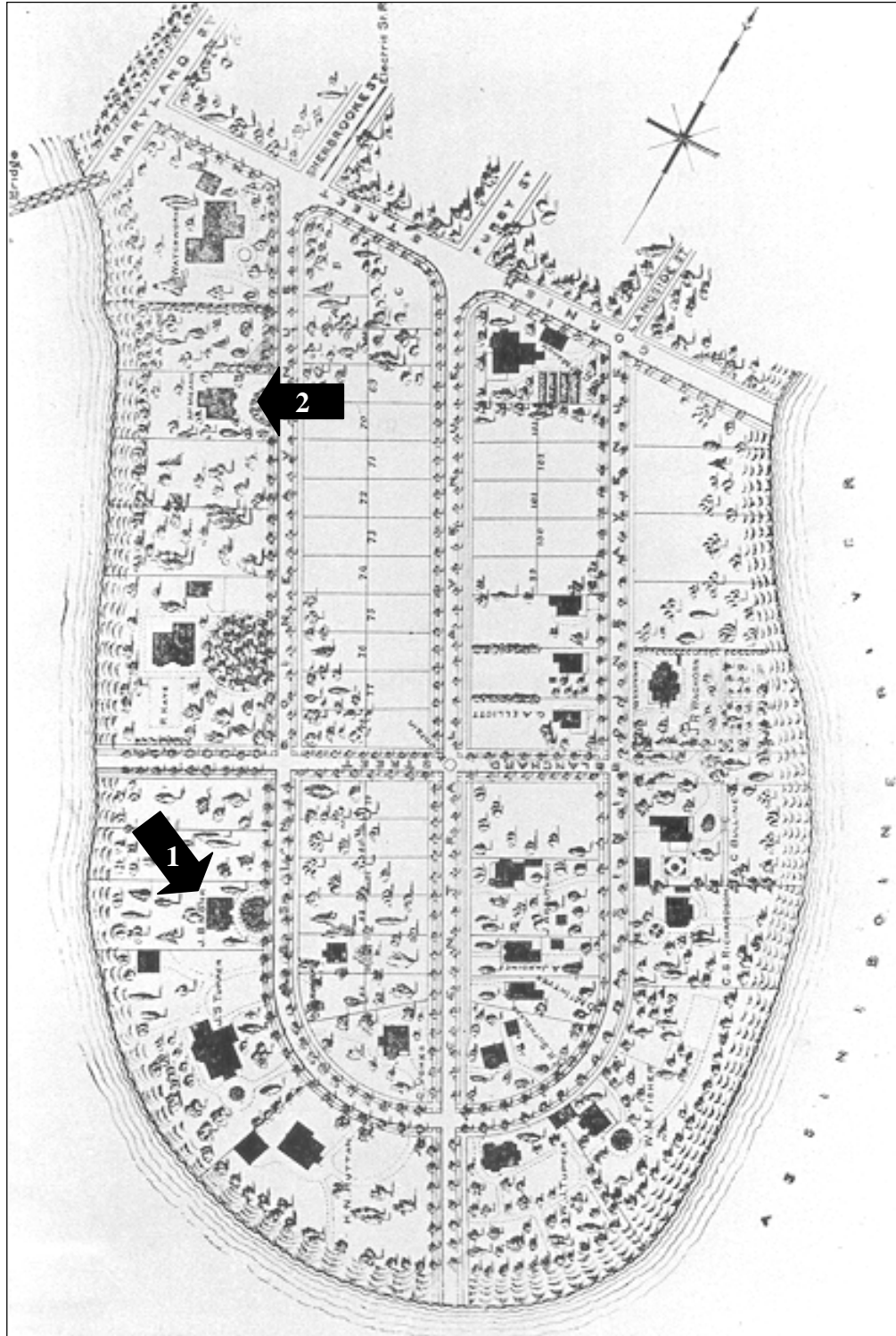


Plate 1 – Armstrong's Point, 1905. Arrow #1 indicated the Monk House, arrow #2, McMeans' residence. (Courtesy of the Western Canada Pictorial Index, Negative 413-13379.)

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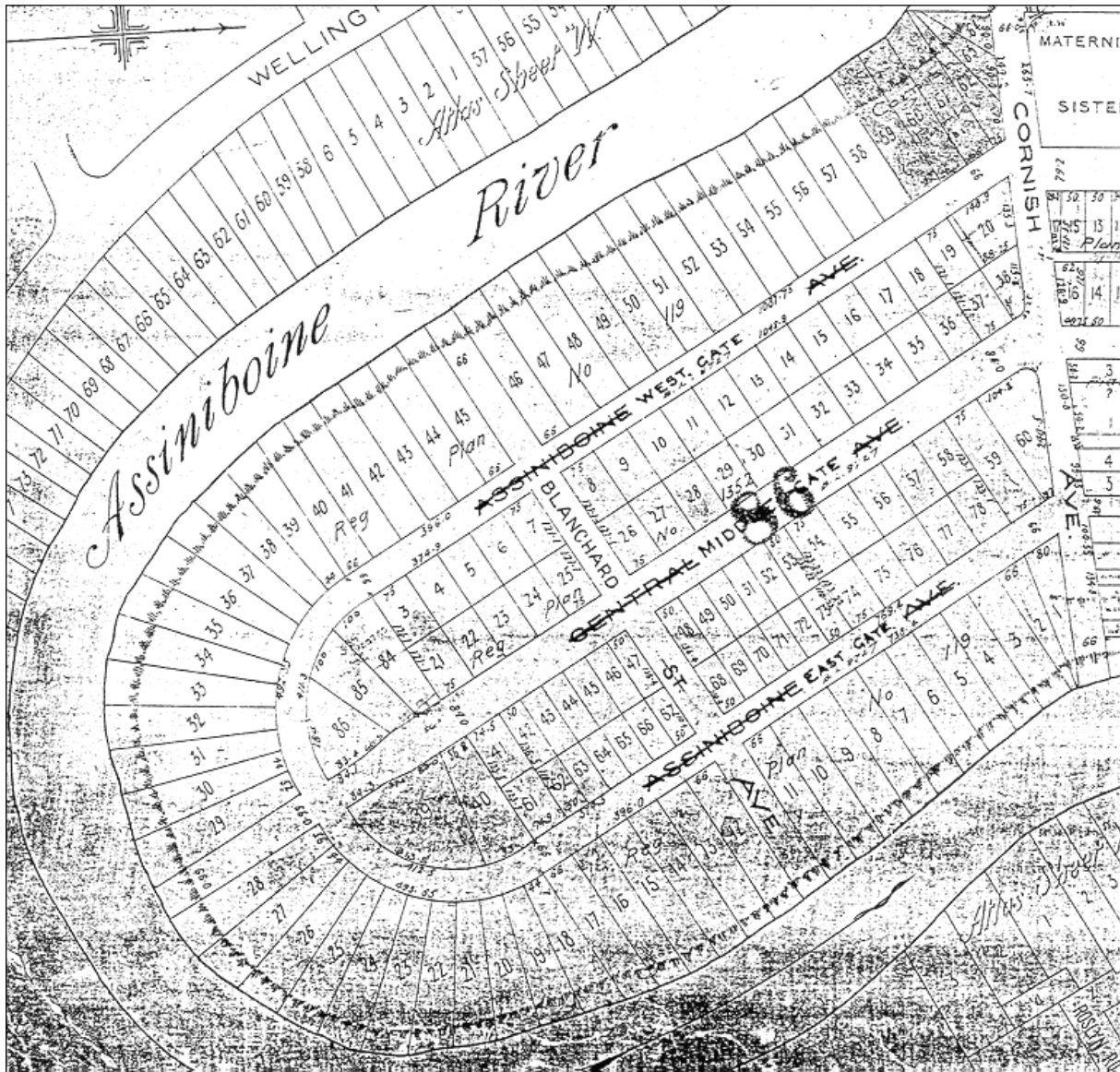


Plate 2 – Armstrong’s Point. The A.G.B. Bannatyne House was located on Lots 35/8, the A.R.J. Bannatyne House, Lots 41/2. Other houses listed in City of Winnipeg Tax Rolls, 1883 are F.W. Stobart, merchant (Lots 12/14, south of Blanchard Ave.), W. Osborne Smith, gentleman (Lots 15/17, south of Blanchard Ave.), Arthur J. Eden, merchant (Lots 22/8, at south end of Middle Gate), David Young, merchant (Lots 29/34, as south end of Middle Gate) and W.M. Ramsay (Lots 89/94, which became Lots 41/7 & 61/7, between Middle Gate and East Gate). (Map from City of Winnipeg Plan Book, n.d., City Archives.)

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Plate 3 – “Beechmount”, 134 West Gate, ca.1908. This picture shows the extent and beauty of the original wooden porch. (Courtesy of C. Singh.)

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Plate 4 – 134 West Gate, 1947. Note the small dormer above the porch which was later removed and then rebuilt by the present owner. (Courtesy of C. Singh).