251 FURBY STREET

THOMAS RUSSELL DEACON HOUSE

PREPARED BY PETERSON PROJECTS – FEBRUARY 2009

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Date of Construction: 1905

Building Permit: 776/1905

Architect: Russell, John Hamilton Gordon

Contractor: Heslop, J. and Company

ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

This is a larger, 2½-storey brick veneer home resting on a raised stone foundation with stone accenting. Costing $7,000,[1] a large sum for a single-family dwelling in 1905, it was built for one of Winnipeg's business and political leaders who would come to the fore as the driving force behind ensuring clean water for the citizens of Winnipeg.

Architectural details on the front (west) façade include the two-storey bay window at the north end of the building and the simple gable roof with the front eaves broken by a large arched stone dormer with an arched window opening. Discolouration on the front façade's south end suggests that an entry porch of some description had originally been built there. Lug stone sills and wide heads add variety to the design.

Front (west) and south façades, 2009

The building is a reduced example of a Queen Anne style structure.[2] The style borrowed heavily from English architecture of the 15th century, blending classical and medieval motifs into a picturesque form. Asymmetry was achieved through combinations of porches, bay windows, projecting wings, balconies and other devices. Roofs were usually irregular and complex, with dormers, gables and ornamental chimneys. Variations in materials and colours were also used to animate the façades. Given this freedom of design, however, accomplished designers were still able to create balance in the structures, offsetting busy surfaces by placing calmer elements nearby.[3]

The popularity of the style in Canada began in the 1880s and lasted until World War I. On the prairies, pre-1900 examples of the style were not numerous because large-scale development occurred after the turn of the century. Post-1900, it was quickly adopted for use in the growing residential districts, especially the more affluent neighbourhoods where its showy qualities were greatly admired.

The home stands on its original site and appears to be in fair structural condition. The major alteration to the building is the removal of the original front porch.

Building designer J.H.G. Russell (1862-1946) was born in Toronto, Canada West (Ontario), in 1862, the son of a dry goods dealer. After attending school in that city, he went to work for H.B. Gordon, a prominent area architect. Russell was with Gordon from 1878 until his departure for Winnipeg in 1882. From 1886 to 1893, Russell travelled throughout the United States, learning civil engineering, surveying and architecture in centres such as Chicago, Illinois, Spokane and Tacoma, Washington, and Sioux City, Iowa.

Rear (east) and south façades, 2009

In 1895, two years after returning to Winnipeg, he set up his private practice, coinciding with the city's period of unbridled growth. His designs were (and are) scattered throughout the city, province and Western Canada, covering a variety of building types, sizes, costs and uses. His business continued to be steady during World War I and after, when many architects struggled to find commissions.

Russell was president of the Manitoba Association of Architects (1925) and served for three terms as the president of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (1912-15). His chairmanship of the Presbyterian Church Board of Managers and his devotion to Presbyterianism partially explain the large number of churches he designed for the denomination in Winnipeg and Western Canada. Russell died in 1946.

A complete list of his designs would be very lengthy, included among his more notable local projects would be J.H. Ashdown Warehouse additions, 157-179 Bannatyne Avenue, (1899-1911, Grade II), Lake of the Woods Building, 212 McDermot Avenue (1901, Grade II), Hammond Building, 63 Albert Street (1902, Grade III), Adelman Building, 92-100 Princess Street (1903, Grade II), Franklin Press, 168 Bannatyne Avenue (1904, Grade III), R.R. Wilson, 545 Broadway (1904, Grade III), J.H. Ashdown Store, 211 Bannatyne Avenue (1904, Grade III), Porter Building, 165 McDermot Avenue (1906, Grade III), Child's (McArthur) Building, Portage Avenue (1909, demolished), Casa Loma Building, Portage Avenue (1909, Grade II), Glengarry Block, 290 McDermot Avenue (1910, Grade III), Westminster Presbyterian (United) Church, 745 Westminster Avenue (1910-12, Grade II), Dingwall Building, 62 Albert Street (1911, Grade III), YMCA, 301 Vaughan Street, with Jackson and Rosencrans of New York (1911-13, Grade II), J.H. Ashdown, 529 Wellington Crescent (1913, Grade II) and St. John's Presbyterian (United) Church, 250

Rear (east) and north façades, 2009

Cathedral Avenue (1923, Grade III). He has been given 20 points by the Historical Buildings Committee.

HISTORICAL INTEREST:

Thomas R. Deacon (1865-1955) came to Winnipeg from Ontario in 1901, and was the founder of Manitoba Bridge and Iron Works, one of the major companies of its type in Western Canada. He was a prominent member of the Board of Trade and served as Winnipeg's mayor in 1913-1914. During his time in office, Deacon acted on a scheme he had first championed in 1905, the construction of an aqueduct from Shoal Lake to Winnipeg.[4]

In 1911, Deacon is listed in the Furby Street home with his wife Lily D. and children Lester, Edith, Alfred and Ronald.[5] In 1920, widow Martha Brown-Stow is listed as the resident.[6]

Front (west) and north façades, 2009

RECOMMENDATION TO HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE:

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

- its historical importance- illustrative of the type of residential development that occurred throughout Winnipeg shortly after the turn-of-the-century;
- its associations- its connection to early and influential businessman and politician T.R. Deacon;
- its design- a reduced example of the Queen Anne style;
- its architect- J.H.G. Russell was a respected and important practitioner;
- its location- contributes to its historic streetscape; and
- its integrity- its main façade continues to display some of its original elements and design.

Front (west) façade, 1999

ENDNOTES:

1 City of Winnipeg Building Permit, #776/1905.

2 Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg: Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, 1991), p. 17; L. Maitland et al., A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1992), p. 102; and L. Maitland, The Queen Anne Revival Style in Canadian Architecture (Ottawa: Environment Canada, 1990), p. 64.

3 L. Maitland, op. cit., p. 98.

4 Information from the Manitoba Historical Society website.

5 Census of Canada, 1911.

6 Henderson's Directory, 1900-1920.