

**250 CATHEDRAL AVENUE – ST. JOHN’S UNITED CHURCH**  
*R.L. Smith, 1914; J.H.G. Russell, 1923*



Built in two stages, this 1,000-seat church in Winnipeg’s North End reflects the area’s growth prior to World War I and its subsequent transition to relative stability and permanence as a residential district.

The area, originally subdivided into agricultural lots for Red River settlers, was absorbed within Winnipeg’s boundaries in 1882 in anticipation of the city’s future outward expansion. The pace of development did quicken in the North End by the turn of the century, spurred by a sustained influx of immigrants and formation of new households by the families of early residents.

The North End’s multi-ethnic character was enhanced during this period of growth, as was its mix of economic classes. The larger lots and more substantial houses which appeared after 1900 reflected residents’ improved economic circumstances compared to the older southern portion of the district with its cheap overcrowded housing and prevalence of mixed land uses.

Thirty-six families from St. Giles Presbyterian Church on Selkirk Avenue formed the St. John's congregation in 1904, establishing a frame house of worship on the north side of Cathedral Avenue at Charles Street. In 1907, this building was relocated to the southwest corner and expanded. The church subsequently was moved to the back of the site to make way for the stone foundation of a second, more durable edifice. The basement was completed in 1914 but war and lack of adequate finances delayed erection of the superstructure until 1923.

The project is a modest example of the Free Style Edwardian Gothic school which emerged in England in the early 1900s as an alternative to the costly ornamentation of Art Nouveau and Gothic Revival designs. Plans for the basement were prepared by R.L. Smith; the superstructure was designed by John H.G. Russell and constructed by Pearson-Burleigh Ltd. Total cost was \$90,000.

Smith was associated with at least two other pre-war church projects – First English Lutheran and Winnipeg Lutheran Tabernacle (now First Lutheran) in the city's West End.

Russell, an Ontarian who began practicing in Winnipeg in 1895, was a prominent designer of key commercial, institutional and residential buildings including Augustine, Crescent-Fort Rouge, Robertson Memorial, Westminster, Knox, Home Street, and Riverview churches. He also was active in professional associations, several local businesses, and as chairman of the board of managers of the Presbyterian Church.

St. John's features two towers and central gables on all elevations, supported by a stone base and steel columns. The building, which is set back from the property lines, is finished in Fort William red brick with stone accents. Lancet arches highlight the main windows, entrances and upper louvered openings in the towers. Other windows are rectangular with brick voussoirs or flat heads.

Both towers, braced by stepped diagonal buttresses, are crenellated with raised corners and beveled stone caps. The tallest tower at the northeast corner contains the main entrance off

Cathedral. Its louvered lancets are further enclosed by segmental brick arches. A second entrance with double wooden doors appears off Charles in the southeast tower.

Three lancet windows, with narrow vertical indentations in the above brickwork, are on the Charles (east) façade. The Cathedral (north) and south elevations have double lancets flanked by stepped buttresses and smaller single openings. A well-lit, one-storey rear extension is on the west side. Simple detailing is provided by stone sills, coping, buttress caps, keystones, and a beveled belt course above the rusticated foundation.

The 1925 union of Methodist, Congregational and Presbyterian churches in Canada split the St. John's membership. The congregation voted 322 to 236 for union and held its first United Church service with area Methodists in January 1926. Disaffected members broke away, establishing a new St. John's Presbyterian Church on Charles at Bannerman Avenue in 1928.

Attendance at St. John's United dwindled over time as member families moved out of the North End. The church closed in 1986 and subsequently was sold to the Charles Cathedral Housing Cooperative Ltd. for conversion to housing with public sector assistance.