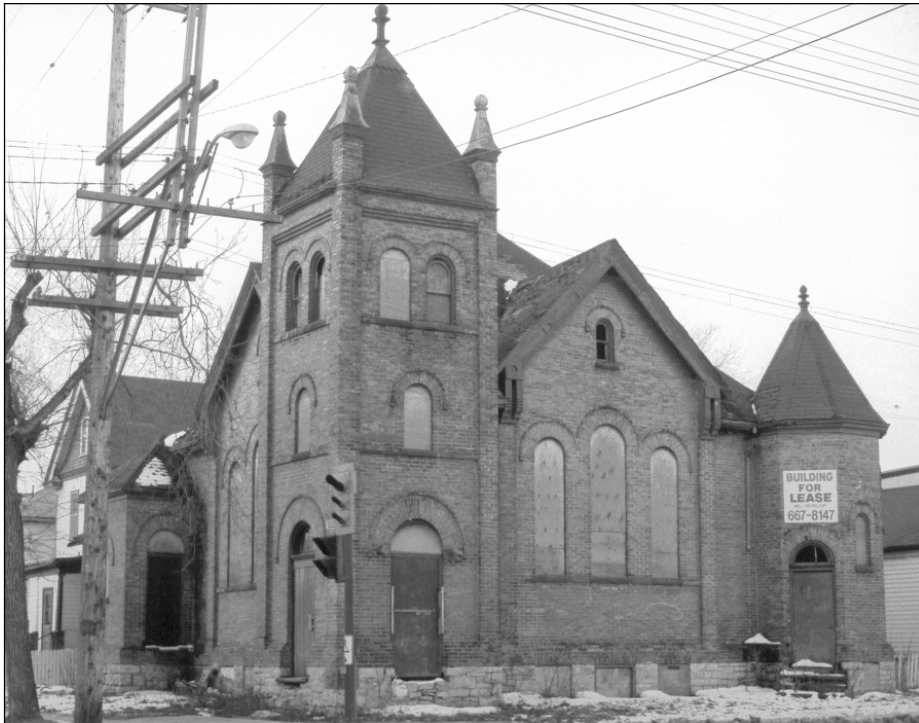


268 ELLEN STREET – SCANDINAVIAN MISSION CHURCH
Hugh McCowan, 1897



As Prairie settlement mushroomed during the turn of the century, so too did the Scandinavian presence in Manitoba and the North-West. These Swedes, Danes, Finns and Norwegians were among thousands of Europeans and North Americans drawn by promises of free land, improved economic conditions, employment opportunities, and aggressive Canadian recruitment.

Winnipeg prospered from this rapid development, both as a final destination and as a source of goods and services for settlers who moved further west and north.

Many of the Scandinavians who stayed in the city located in the Logan Avenue area immediately south of the Canadian Pacific Railway Yards. Symbolic of their strength was the early establishment of several community churches to meet religious needs and to serve as centers of social activity, mutual support and refuge for the newest arrivals.

The first Scandinavian Mission Church on the south-west corner of Logan and Ellen Street was a frame building erected in 1886 to house members of the Free Church, a movement organized in Scandinavian countries and Minnesota as an alternative to the Lutheran or State Church. This movement objected to the hierarchical nature of the latter and thus opted for autonomous congregations responsible for their own organization and control. The Winnipeg congregation had missionary aid from Minnesota.

Their original church was replaced in 1897 by a more substantial structure designed by Hugh McCowan, an Ontarian who practiced architecture in Winnipeg and southern Manitoba from 1881 until his death in 1908.

In the latter years, he was in partnership with Robert E. Davies. His work included Brandon College, the Jubilee Wing of the Winnipeg General Hospital, buildings for the Winnipeg and Morden school boards, and the Scandinavian Baptist Church (1897) across from the Mission Church on the northeast corner of Logan and Ellen.

Designed in the Romanesque Revival style, the Mission Church is of frame construction with a raised stone basement and buff-coloured brick veneer. Each elevation has a large gable rising to an irregular, steeply-pitched roof topped by a central pinnacle. The square entrance and bell tower at the northeast corner, with its pyramidal roof and pinnacles, contrasts with the smaller, polygonal turret at the northwest corner. All doors and windows have round-headed arches with radiating brick-work. The main windows are grouped in threes with round-headed drip mouldings. Rusticated stone at the basement level and stone sills complete the design.

McCowan employed the centralized or Akron interior floor plan, first used in Roman temples and later adopted by Methodists, Presbyterian and Baptist churches in Akron, Ohio. The focus is on the pulpit, situated in a semi-circular apse from which the pews radiate outward and upward along a sloping floor to the church entrance. There is seating for 225 persons, with space for another 125 in an adjoining room that can be opened as required. The basement has low ceilings but ample space for social events.

The church, constructed by Spencer Brothers for \$5,000, continued to house Scandinavian congregations until the late 1950s when members dispersed to various Lutheran churches in Winnipeg and the building was taken over by the Presbyterian First Reformed Church.

The building, one of the few remaining original immigrant churches in the area, has been vacant since about 1975. The basic integrity of its exterior and interior remains, including original main windows, pews, central light fixture and apse railing.