

400 HARGRAVE STREET – FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH (CALVARY TEMPLE)
Langley & Burke (Toronto), 1893-94
J.H.G. Russell, 1904



Calvary Temple, visible from the busy intersection of Portage Avenue and Hargrave Street, is as familiar to recent generations of Winnipeggers as First Baptist Church was to previous ones.

The First Baptist congregation in western Canada was formed in Winnipeg in 1873 by Reverend Alex McDonald. Rev. McDonald organized the building of their first church on Rupert Avenue in 1875. The rapid growth of the city combined with religious conversions swelled the ranks of the denomination. Under the dynamic leadership of Rev. Alexander Grant, the third minister to the Winnipeg congregation, capital was raised, land was purchased and prominent Toronto architects Langley and Burke were commissioned to design a church to be located at the corner of Hargrave Street (then Charlotte) and Cumberland Avenue.

Edward Langley and Edmund Burke had a successful practice in Toronto and were favoured by the Baptist assembly. Their work in that city included the Horticultural Pavilion (1878), McMaster Baptist College (1881), Elm Street Methodist Church (1885) and the College Street Baptist Church (1889).

Construction of the new church started in 1893, with local architect Hugh McCowan supervising the \$45,000 project. When services opened in the basement of the new church late that fall, the main structure was only brick walls and scaffolding. The building was completed the following year.

The centralized plan of First Baptist Church has its roots in Roman temple-designs and was chosen to contrast with the linear basilica plan used for Anglican and Roman Catholic houses of worship. The Romanesque Revival Style (commonly used throughout North America for Methodist, Baptist and Presbyterian churches between 1840 and 1900) and the building's deep red brick exterior with red stone accents set the church apart from the numerous buff-coloured brick structures of the city.

A prominent tower, with gabled entranceways of rusticated stone, was balanced by paired round-headed openings and a steep pyramidal roof. The main façade of the church was broken into three parts; rusticated stone was used to outline the windows of the raised basement, complex hood molds with corbel stops and stone sills articulated the grouped round-headed windows; and the gabled upper section of the façade had three stepped windows that were enriched by projecting hood moulds with corbel stops.

The simple interior had a main aisle with a barrel vault ceiling that was broken by transverse arches. Slender cast iron columns with capitals passed through the galleries and supported the ceiling. The main floor sloped downward towards the apse which contained the organ's massive wooden pipes, mounted over the preacher's pulpit.

A semi-circular lecture room seating 400 people was located in the basement. Five more classrooms opened out from behind folding doors along with two nursery or kindergarten rooms.

So active was First Baptist Church in Winnipeg that more space was needed only a decade after its completion. In 1904, local architect J.H.G. Russell and builder Andrew McBean made an addition to the main auditorium that doubled seating capacity to 1,500 people. The two-storey addition went onto the west-side of the building at a cost of \$24,000.

The economic pressures of the 1930s and the shift of much of the congregation to the suburbs diminished the resources of the church. In 1938, the Baptists sold their building to the Pentacostals and joined with the Broadway Baptist congregation. The Pentacostals, an evangelical and fundamentalist sect, reopened the church building as Calvary Temple.

Two major additions were made to the original brick church. A Sunday-school building was added on the east side in 1955 and a Christian Education Centre was joined to the west side of the church along Cumberland Avenue in 1962.

In 1974, a new large temple, seating 2,400, was built next door, while the old church was used for youth groups and Christian education sessions. The building was demolished in 1985 to make way for a new Christian Education facility.