

121 KATE STREET – WILLIAM ASHDOWN HOUSE
Architect Unknown, 1882



During the last three decades of the 1800s, urban development in Winnipeg was marked by the outward spread of new residential areas, both to accommodate population growth and to replace housing lost to commercial and industrial land uses in the expanding central business district.

One such early residential area was established between Notre Dame and William avenues, west of Main Street and north of the Hudson's Bay Reserve. This area included a series of streets carrying the names of women in alphabetical order.

In 1882, William S. Ashdown, a brother of hardware magnate James H. Ashdown, built a two-storey, brick-veneer house on the east side of Kate Street between William and Bannatyne avenues. His back yard was shared with 120 Juno Street, also erected in 1882 by another Ashdown brother, George.

The eight-room house is a reduced, unadorned example of the Queen Anne style common in North America from the 1880s through to the early 1900s. This style, popularized by a group of English architects led by Richard Norman Shaw, was based on late medieval models from the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras.

Built for \$5,000, the house rests on a cut-stone foundation. Its cream-coloured brick veneer is laid in a stretcher pattern with raised brick quoins providing one of the building's few decorative elements. Consistent with the Queen Anne style, the roof is irregular and steeply pitched with both gable and hip ends. The original structure included a partial porch used as an entrance; this later was replaced with concrete steps.

The asymmetrical facade features a one-storey bay window under the gable. All windows have wooden sills, plain surrounds and radiating brick lintels.

There are four bedrooms on the upper floor of the house. Consistent with the period, the rooms are relatively small. Wooden accents around doorways, and a wooden banister with decorative elements, provide modest interior highlights.

Relatively little is known of William Ashdown compared to his brothers James, a prominent merchant and mayor of Winnipeg, and George, a member of the Provincial Legislature and mayor of Morden. It appears William also was a merchant, then worked as a bookkeeper for the Ashdown Hardware store.

William had moved to Ross Avenue by 1885, then to Arthur Street by 1890. He subsequently lived with James in his home at Broadway and Hargrave Street.

William apparently retained ownership of 121 Kate until 1893, renting the premises to various tenants. The new owners, Israel and Anna L. Bennetto, remained until 1915. The house subsequently changed hands several more times and was used for a period as a rental property. Erik O. Moberg, a carpenter, and his family were the longest-standing owner-occupants of the house (1942 to 1986).