



**444 LOGAN AVENUE  
PENROSE HOUSE  
(FORMERLY 232 BELL AVENUE)**

HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE

6 November 1986

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The house at 232 Bell Avenue, built in 1894, is relevant to the architectural history of the city of Winnipeg for three reasons. First, it is representative of a North American style of domestic architecture which in its design and utility reflects the emergence of industrialization and the rise of a larger working population. Second, the Bell Avenue house is the work of a prominent Manitoba architect and builder, James McDiarmid and, third, it was the home for many years of Winnipeg pioneer photographer, merchant, and civic official, James Penrose and his family.<sup>1</sup>

Although Bell Avenue was surveyed and laid out in lots in the 1870s from the estate of the Honourable H.J. Clarke, Premier of Manitoba from 1871 to 1874, construction did not begin before the early 1890s.<sup>2</sup> The first entry of the road and its six houses is to be found in the 1892 Henderson's Directory.<sup>3</sup> By 1895 there were eighteen houses registered in the Directory and of those at least three of them were the work of James McDiarmid.<sup>4</sup> 232 Bell Avenue was owned by the contractor, likely for speculative reasons and was let out to Walter P. Marter, a commercial agent, who continued to rent the house until 1904.<sup>5</sup> Some of the other residents on Bell Avenue in 1895, a bank clerk, an employee of the H.B.C., a carpenter, a painter and a railwayman, suggest the lower middle class/working class character of the neighbourhood. This was a neighbourhood which was being developed in response to accelerated growth in Winnipeg with the completion of the C.P.R., an influx of immigration, emerging industry, banking and the demand for skilled labour.<sup>6</sup>

James McDiarmid's work here is a good example of late Victorian building for working class areas throughout Canada. Typical is the fact that the contractor was responsible for more than one house on the block and that the lots were long and narrow, 112' x 30'.<sup>7</sup> The house at 232 Bell Avenue is designed in the Queen Anne style exhibiting many of the elements popular in vernacular architecture of the time.<sup>8</sup> Such elements as decorative mouldings, cutwork, and spindle work were made readily accessible by the industrialization of mill work. In addition improvements in transportation, especially the railways, and relatively inexpensive and available building materials such as decorative woodwork and glass led to the repetition of design. This was underscored by the improvement in communication between architects and builders with the proliferation of

architectural journals and design books.

232 Bell Avenue is a two and one half storey frame construction building which stands on a limestone foundation. The outside cladding is weatherboard with a shingle detail on the third floor dormers. The steeply pitched hipped/gable roof extends onto an overhanging eave which is supported by decorative brackets. The façade of the house is asymmetrical with a side entrance, wall projections on the front facing, east side bays, and dormers on the third floor. Sash windows are arranged in singles and in pairs. Bay windows are on the east side with a stained glass feature on the lower level. The porch is noteworthy for its gable scrollwork and decorative design. Its roof is supported by brackets and square columns grouped in twos which lead up to a cutwork frieze. The balustrade is open rail and rests on a lattice work base. Decorative mouldings, examples of late 19th century millwork, are found on the porch and on the window frames. The floral motif is carried into the interior of the house where the same rectangular moulding pieces can be found marking the corners of the windows and doorways.

Inside, the house has been changed little despite duplexing in 1950.<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note that James McDiarmid's interior design conforms exactly to that described by P. Ennals and D. Hodsworth in an article on working class housing built in the same period, but in the Maritime region. The authors' description is also that of the Bell Avenue home:

...the main door, near one corner of the house opens onto a spacious vestibule and staircase leading to the second floor. Rooms open off a hallway running the length of the house along one wall. The first room off the hall is the parlour; the second room most often serves as a dining-room, although it too may have been a parlour in the past. A third room beside the dining-room at the end of the hall passage was usually the kitchen. This small kitchen is often extended by an appended wing, originally a summer kitchen, this was frequently upgrade later and integrated into the main kitchen. The upper floor was given exclusively to bed chambers, usually matching the room arrangement of the ground floor with the addition of a small bedroom over the entrance hall.<sup>10</sup>

In the structurally intact, but otherwise rather worn interior, the spindle staircase stands out as the

most interesting feature.

Despite its rather used appearance, the Bell Avenue home from 1894 to the present has had fewer than ten owners and although duplexed was never used as a rooming house. The owners were minor public officials, small businessmen, and blue collar workers. The most memorable resident was Winnipeg pioneer James Penrose who with his wife owned the house from 1906 to 1925. Penrose was born in England but came to Manitoba in 1871 where he soon gained recognition as a photographer. His photographs of Louis Riel, the death of Thomas Scott, and prominent Winnipeg families are well known. During the 1880s and 1890s he worked as an import merchant. By 1906, however, he had taken a post in the Liquor Licensing Department of the Provincial Government first as chief clerk, then as inspector, and then again as chief clerk when ill health forced him to step down. He held the post until his death in 1918. Following his death, Mrs. Penrose continued in the house with her sons and daughters until 1925.<sup>11</sup>

The house at 232 Bell Avenue, built in the Queen Anne style, situated on a long but narrow lot, is representative of late 19th century working class housing. With its decorative façade and characteristic interior floor plan, it is reminiscent of other such houses built in North America in response to the rise of industrialization and a growing working class population. Moreover 232 Bell Avenue illustrates the work in domestic architecture of Winnipeg designer and builder, James McDiarmid and, finally, it was the family home of Winnipeg pioneer photographer, James Penrose.

## FOOTNOTES

1. Photographs were supplied by the Photographic Collection of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba. (1) 232 Bell Avenue, architectural survey, 1969; (2) James McDiarmid, *Collective Personalities*, 3/175; (3) James Penrose, Elizabeth Green Collection, 9; (4) motif of James Penrose, Photographer, Elizabeth Green Collection, 10; See also the most recent photograph of the house, 1986 by G. Bugailiskis.
2. L. Gibbons, "Our Quiet Street", Winnipeg Tribune, 10 July 1954 in *Manitoba History* (Legislative Library), 03/11/53 - 08/06/57, p. 51.
3. Henderson's Directory and Gazetteer, 1892, p. 547.
4. See biography of James McDiarmid and Henderson's Directory, 1895, p. 641. See also D. Tye, "The Housing of a Work Force: Workers' Housing in Amherst, Nova Scotia, 1900-1914", S.S.A.C. Bulletin, 3:86, 14-16. Tye argues that a number of housing projects by one builder in a particular neighbourhood was indicative of building for the working classes. Also City of Winnipeg Plumbing Permit, #337, 20/03/1893.
5. Assessment Rolls, Ward One, City of Winnipeg, City Archives, 1894, p. 30; 1895, p. 32; 1903, pp. 45-46; 1904, pp. 53-54; 1906, pp. 98-99; 1916, pp. 161-162; 1926, p. 198. The house changed ownership from James McDiarmid to Henry Sandison (tailor) during the lease of Walter Marter. It was then sold to Henry R. Pattinson (city tax collector's office). He sold the house to James Penrose in 1906. In 1895 the house was assessed at \$2,000.00 and the lot at \$400.00. By 1926 the total assessment was \$3,720.00 (land \$1,320.00 and the building at \$2,400.00).
6. A.F.J. Artibise, Winnipeg: An Illustrated History, (Toronto, 1977), pp. 30-64.
7. Fire Insurance Plan of Winnipeg, Provincial Archives, volume 4, 1917, pp. 422-423.
8. See H. Gottfried and J. Jennings, American Vernacular Design, 1870-1940 (N.Y., 1984), pp. 263-287.
9. Building Permits, City of Winnipeg, 2972/1950, also changed bath 1148/1957 and enlargement of windows, 2523/1960.
10. Tye, 15.
11. J. Penrose, "Obituary", Free Press, 17 January 1918 in *Manitoba Biography* (Legislative Library), B6, 227.

## APPENDIX I

### James McDiarmid (1855-1934)

James McDiarmid was a noted Manitoba architect, contractor, and collector. Born in Dunkeld, Perthshire, Scotland in 1855, he trained with his father in draughting and contracting before coming to Canada in 1882. His work in Manitoba included architectural design as well as the construction of many important Winnipeg buildings, prairie grain elevators, and C.P.R. depots and warehouses. In addition to his construction business he was an avid art collector and was made the first honorary life member of the Winnipeg Art Gallery. Active in civic life he sat on the municipal parks board for several years and in that capacity was responsible for the layout of the Kildonan golf course.

The Broadway Drill Hall, built in the 1880s, was one of McDiarmid's first projects. It was followed by many others ranging from houses such as those on Bell Avenue to churches, warehouses, and preliminary or completed construction of buildings designed by other architects. In 1905 he established James McDiarmid Company, General Builders and Contractors with his two younger brothers, John (d. 1943) and Peter (d. 1915). The construction company had close ties with The Marble and Tile Company of Canada and the Winnipeg Paint and Glass Company.<sup>1</sup> Among the many building accomplishments of Jas. McDiarmid and his firm were such Winnipeg churches as St. Andrew's on Elgin Avenue (1894), St. George's (1894), Point Douglas (1905), St. Stephens (Elim Chapel, Portage Avenue) (1910), and Knox Presbyterian, 400 Edmonton (1914-1917). Further McDiarmid and Brothers built the Nokomis Block, Cumberland Avenue (n.d.)\*, the Donald H. Bain Building, 115 Bannatyne (1899),\* the Marshall-Wells Warehouse, 123 Bannatyne (1900),\* and the Merrick-Anderson Warehouse, 119 Bannatyne (1899-1900).\* He also built the Scott Memorial Orange Hall, 216 Princess (1900-1902), the Sandison Block, 302 Main Street (1904), the Canada Building, 352 Donald (n.d.) and the Customs Examining Warehouse, 145 McDermot Avenue (1908). Finally, McDiarmid contributed to the building works on the first section of the Carnegie

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\* McDiarmid was architect and builder.

<sup>1</sup> McDiarmid Lumber was established in 1927 by C. McDairmid, another brother of James McDiarmid.

Library, the Science Building at the University of Manitoba, and completion of the Parliament Buildings and Law Courts Building following the cancellation of the Kelly contract in 1915.<sup>2</sup> In sum Winnipeg's architectural landscape stands as a testament to the effort and imagination of James McDiarmid and his construction firm.

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<sup>2</sup> See the file on James McDiarmid, Historic Projects Office, City of Winnipeg. Also Early Building in Manitoba (Parks Canada) Volume 4, pp. 141, 161, 167, 305 and Volume 5, pp. 5, 317.

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Plate 1 – 232 Bell Avenue, Penrose House, 1986. (Courtesy of the City of Winnipeg, Planning Department.)



Plate 2 – 232 Bell Avenue, 1969. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Architectural Survey.)

**444 LOGAN AVENUE – PENROSE HOUSE (FORMERLY 232 BELL AVENUE)**



Plate 3 - James McDiarmid, no date. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)



Plate 4 - James Penrose, no date. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, E. Green Collection #9.)