

40 OSBORNE STREET – ROSLYN COURT APARTMENTS
W.W. Blair, 1908-09



Location and quality design have combined for decades to make Roslyn Court one of Winnipeg's residential landmarks. That status was enhanced in 1996 when the structure was recognized by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada as one of the country's finest apartment buildings in the Queen Anne Revival style of architecture.

Roslyn Court originated during a period of rapid economic and physical growth which gave rise to affluent suburbs such as Fort Rouge and Crescentwood on the south side of the Assiniboine River. Here were found the large single-family homes of Winnipeg's business, professional and political elites. Here too were found most of the city's pre-1915 luxury apartment blocks.

Among the latter, Roslyn Court was one of the earliest, largest and most costly to construct (\$205,000 or nearly \$5,700 per suite). Moreover, architect William Wallace Blair gave the structure a lively Queen Anne Revival face rather than one of the more sedate neoclassical designs commonly applied to the era's apartment blocks.

Roslyn Court attained further prominence by virtue of its location across the Assiniboine from the Manitoba Legislative Building and at the southeast corner of the Osborne Street Bridge, one of the busy gateways between the downtown and South Winnipeg.

The block's original owner was Dr. Richard J. Mattice (1847-1925), an Ontarian who studied medicine in Québec and England, then practised at Omaha, Nebraska for some two decades before he settled in Winnipeg in 1902. In hiring Blair, Mattice chose an architect who also was a recent arrival in the city, but was quickly developing a reputation for elegant designs, including the Warwick Apartments (1908) on Qu'Appelle Avenue and Princeton (Kenmore) Apartments (1909) on Broadway.

Irish-born and trained, Blair practised in England in 1874-76 before emigrating to work in Hamilton and Toronto, Ontario. He returned to Ireland in 1884 as resident engineer for the Londonderry and Ballymena waterworks, but was back in North America (Chicago) by the late 1880s. He moved to Winnipeg in 1905, engaged in a brief partnership with George W. Northwood, then opened a solo practice in 1907. By the early 1910s, Blair was planning buildings for the Canadian Pacific Railway in Western Canada. He eventually settled in Victoria.

His five-storey Roslyn Court, built in 1908-09 by contractors C.P. Mills and L.H. Shepley, has a raised stone foundation on concrete footings, solid brick bearing walls, a framework of reinforced concrete and tile joists, and interior partition walls of fire-resistant brick and hollow tile. The two main façades — Osborne Street (west) and Roslyn road (south) — are clothed in red brick and rusticated and smooth-cut limestone. Porches (now enclosed with glass), light wells, bay windows, and an interior court enhance the amount of natural light and ventilation available for tenants.

The Roslyn elevation has a strong vertical emphasis due to a series of staggered pavilions and three- and four-storey bays that extend from the block's high stone base to its busy roof-line. The latter is adorned with tiled mansard sections, shed and hip-roofed dormers, chimneys, and ornamental round, triangular and Scottish gables with stone coping. Large windows are set in

pairs, trios and quartets within broad stone surrounds, including continuous lintels and sills that double as vertical dividers between the floors. Several stone steps lead to a deeply recessed entrance near the building's southeast corner.

The Osborne façade, which is flush to the property line, has corner pavilions between which extend rows of porches along the first to fourth floors. The fifth floor, in contrast, features the pavilions' stone-capped Scottish gables and a long columned dormer flanked by small polygonal turrets. The off-centre, at-grade entrance is highlighted by stone columns and an arched pediment with carved accents, including the block's name. Additional detailing is provided by stone bands, brick pilasters with stone bases and caps, stone window surrounds, and tiled and bracketed roof sections.

The Osborne and Roslyn finishes wrap around to cover portions of the block's north and east walls. The latter also contain multi-storey bays, but otherwise have relatively plain treatments.

The block originally was divided into 36 suites, including 26 two-and three-bedroom units and 10 one-room bachelor suites with full baths. Some units had a small bedroom off the kitchen for domestic staff. Original elements included ornate plaster- and woodwork, stained glass, beamed dining-room ceilings, open fireplaces, and a cage passenger elevator that has remained operative over the years.

Mattice owned Roslyn Court until 1919 when the title was transferred to bankers Robert Campbell and W.G. Yule. Among subsequent owners were the Montreal Trust Company, grocer Harry Bryk (1948-70) and Roslyn Properties (1970 to date).