



**29 RUSKIN ROW**

**ROBERT R. SCOTT HOUSE**

City of Winnipeg  
Historical Buildings Committee

May 1991

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### ROBERT R. SCOTT HOUSE

The residential district south of the Assiniboine River was annexed to the City of Winnipeg during the great real estate boom of 1882. It was not until many years later, however, that services were introduced on a large scale, specifically streetcars, fire protection and sewers.<sup>1</sup> Crescentwood subsequently developed into a prestigious residential area on the inside of one of the river's many meanders.

While large homes began to dot the district east of Crescentwood in the early 1880s, it was not until 1889, when John Henry Munson built a large home on his property, that Crescentwood began its serious development. The Munson home at 475 Wellington Crescent was ultimately occupied by the Richardson family and demolished in 1980. So central and well-known was this house that, when the C.H. Enderton Company began the major development of the district after the turn of the century, it sought Munson's permission to name the whole area after his home, Crescentwood.<sup>2</sup>

Subsequent construction added many palatial houses occupied by some of the city's most influential businessmen, politicians and families. The structures were architecturally diverse, offered a wide range of styles and ornamental treatment, and were nestled amongst large trees and heavily landscaped lawns. In 1914, fairly late for the area, Robert R. Scott built his large home on Ruskin Row near Enderton Park, named for the developer who had set it aside.<sup>3</sup>

### STYLE

Tudor-style homes were constructed throughout Winnipeg and North American from the 1890s until

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<sup>1</sup> R.R. Rostecki, The Growth of Winnipeg, 1870-1886. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, 1980, p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> Manitoba Historical Society, Crescentwood-Winnipeg's Finest Community A Walking Tour (Winnipeg-n.d.), n.p.

<sup>3</sup> J. Solonecki (editor), Fort Rouge Through the Years (Winnipeg-1974), p.24.

World War II, although the decades of the 1920s and 1930s saw an explosion in Tudor-style house construction on this continent. The style is loosely based on a number of late Medieval English structures ranging from thatch-roofed cottages to grand mansions. In North America, the style developed several distinctive elements - ornamental half-timbering, steeply pitched roofs, front-facing gables, and stucco, masonry or masonry-veneered walls.<sup>4</sup>

The most common feature of Tudor homes is a steeply pitched central roof with cross gables. Tall, narrow windows in multiple groups, and massive chimneys crowned by chimney pots, are other common elements. About half of all examples of the style contain decorative (non-structural) half-timbering with stucco or brick infill.<sup>5</sup>

## **CONSTRUCTION**

This home is of load-bearing brick construction on the main floor, with support provided by walls containing three layers of brick. The frame second and third floors feature half-timbering and stucco infill. The foundation is of stone and concrete. The building is found at the southwest corner of Ruskin Row and Kingsway, on land legally described as 43/45 St. Boniface, Plan 822, Block 24, Lot 11.<sup>6</sup>

The house originally cost \$20,000 to build and provides 1,730 cu. m. (57,678) cu. ft.) of living space. Contractors were the well-known local firm, J. McDiarmid Co.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> V. and L. McAlester, A Field Guide to American Houses (New York-1984), p. 358.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 355-356.

<sup>6</sup> City of Winnipeg, Assessment Records, #404290, Ward 1, PC 10.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., and City of Winnipeg, Building Permit, (below as BP) #1069/1914, dated May 1, 1914.

## DESIGN

The front or east elevation of the Scott home contains stone steps to the projecting main entrance, topped by a second-storey balcony. Original plans show a much larger, more ornate entrance that was likely reduced at time of construction.<sup>8</sup> A pair of gable dormers interrupts the roofline at the upper level of this facade. The dormers are adorned with bargeboards and finished with hip knobs. One dormer contains a plain window, while the second holds an oriel window. All windows are multi-paned, rectangular, set in wooden frames, and placed on smooth-cut limestone lug sills.

The rear of the home (west side) is similar in all aspects to the front, save for the lack of an entrance and the absence of the lone oriel window.

The north side of the building boasts double gable ends and stone stairs leading to a small entrance door. The first floor contains a large bay window with a balcony above.

The south side of the structure holds a one-storey brick garage and is completed by exterior detailing similar to the rest of the home.

The steeply pitched hip roof is interrupted on all sides with paired, gable dormers on the east and west sides, and cross gables forming the structure's north and south wings.

## INTERIOR

The interior of the former Scott house is as ornate and luxurious as the exterior. Wood panelling in excellent condition is found throughout the first floor: African mahogany in the sitting room (to the north of the entrance), oak in the hallway and staircase, and cherry in the formal dining room to the south of the main stairs. The ornate main staircase is lit by three panes of stained glass on the second-floor landing (a pair of similar panes is found at the rear of the staircase on the ground floor, lighting the entrance to the basement).

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<sup>8</sup> Original plan furnished by present owner.

The second floor is not as ornately finished as the first level, although wood trim is found around all doors. An interesting feature on this level is the bathrooms. One contains the bath and sink, while down the hall is the second bathroom holding only the toilet. Original plumbing is still in use in both rooms.

The third floor, likely used as living quarters for maids and other household personnel, is sparsely ornamented, but the complex roof has created interesting rooms of unique design.

The basement was originally built to include a formal recreation room, complete with open fireplace. Two more fireplaces using the same chimney are found on the first floor (sitting room) and on the second (master bedroom). Floors throughout the home are wood, and door and window frames are all finished in dark wood.

The southern end of the building, which holds the kitchen and servants' staircase, can be entirely closed off from the rest of the home. Laundry and dust chutes lead from both the second and third floors into the basement.

## **INTEGRITY**

The home stands on its original site. The north end of the structure has settled approximately 20.3 cm. (8"), causing severe, although repairable, damage to both the exterior and interior. Sloping floors, cracked panelling and walls, and damaged windows have occurred on all levels of the interior. The exterior also has large cracks, while the settling has loosened many of the bricks and affected the eaves troughing system. Some of the roof and bargeboard has suffered water damage as a result. The only building permit listed against the home since original construction is for \$200 in repairs in 1935;<sup>9</sup> however, some minor repointing has occurred since then to offset the settling problem.

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<sup>9</sup> BP #2303/1935.

## **STREETSCAPE**

The entire area around Enderton Park, and indeed for many blocks in all directions, is filled with large homes on well-treed lots. Styles and designs are many and varied, but all exude charm and luxuriousness. The former Scott house fits in well in its surroundings.

## **ARCHITECT**

Colonel J.N. Semmens, a native Winnipegger for over 50 years, is listed as the architect of design for the Scott house. Semmens became well-known as the Winnipeg School Board's supervising architect after 1920 (see Appendix I for biographical information). He has been given 10 points by the Historical Buildings Committee.

## **PERSON**

Robert Ross Scott was born in Pickering, Ontario on July 27, 1857. (see Plate I). He came to Winnipeg at the age of 25 as a buyer and salesman for the Macpherson Fruit Company.<sup>10</sup> This eastern Canadian venture located in Winnipeg to take advantage of the growing population both in the city and in western Canada.<sup>11</sup> By 1896, with the business firmly established, Scott was appointed general manager of the western operations, a position he held until the Macpherson Company dissolved prior to World War I.

Scott, along with partners Donald Ross Dingwall (jeweller), George Grisdale (Scott's manager), John Graham (lawyer), and Jean Matheson (nurse), then organized a new firm, incorporated as the Scott Fruit Company, Limited, on July 10, 1912. The company was capitalized with \$250,000 from the five partners.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> "Biographical Scrapbooks", newspaper clippings at the Legislative Library, B8, p.22.

<sup>11</sup> See M. Peterson, "the Macpherson Block - 491 Main Street", Report for the Historical Buildings Committee, April 1988, p.1.

<sup>12</sup> The Manitoba Gazette, Vol. 42, No. 27 (1912), p.1395.

The Scott Fruit Company grew quickly and would ultimately boast branches in Brandon, Regina, Saskatoon, Edmonton, Calgary, Moose Jaw, Lethbridge, and Minneapolis.<sup>13</sup> Scott's son, Stewart M., became vice-president and then president of his father's business.

In 1924, R.R. Scott died at his home on Ruskin Row. His widow continued to live in the home until 1930 when it was bought and occupied by George Russell Ryan (1884-1955), president of Ryan Brothers Limited. This company, organized in 1906, sold butchers' supplied and manufactured fridges and other butcher shop fixtures, out of a warehouse/factory at 110 James Avenue.<sup>14</sup> Ryan was born and died in Winnipeg. After his death, the house was bought by George W. McIntosh, a physician and surgeon.<sup>15</sup>

The home has also been occupied (1966-91) by James Elliott Coyne, born in Winnipeg on July 17, 1910, who became Governor of the Bank of Canada. Coyne was Manitoba's Rhodes scholar in 1931 and studied law at Oxford. He returned to Winnipeg and joined his father's firm but later turned to the world of finance with the Bank of Canada in 1938. After a stint in Washington as Canada's first financial attache, he joined the RCAF for two years, then returned to the Bank of Canada as a special assistant to Governor Graham Towers. In 1955 he took over for Towers, becoming the second Governor of the Bank of Canada.<sup>16</sup>

By late 1960, Coyne's outspoken beliefs and fiscal policies came into direct conflict with those of the Prime Minister, John G. Diefenbaker and his Minister of Finance, Donald Fleming. Through a series of public addresses, Coyne warned against both increased government spending and increased American involvement in the Canadian economy: exactly the paths being chosen by the federal government.

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<sup>13</sup> "Biographical Scrapbooks", newspaper clippings at the Legislative Library, B8, p.22.

<sup>14</sup> Henderson's Directory, 1920-40.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> "Coyne, James Elliott". Vertical File, Legislative Library. The Canadian Encyclopedia (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1988), p.528.

The so-called Coyne Affair reached its climax in the summer of 1961 when Fleming and many leading economists asked for his resignation. Coyne's refusal brought about a bill from the House of Commons relieving him of his position on July 13, 1961. The Senate, dominated by Liberals, rejected the bill but Coyne resigned. In the aftermath, legal provisions were introduced guaranteeing government supremacy over fiscal policy.<sup>17</sup>

Coyne returned to Winnipeg in 1966 when he was associated with the set-up of the Bank of Western Canada. He has lived in the Scott House since his return to the city, but recently moved onto Kingsway, across the street from the Scott House.<sup>18</sup>

## **EVENT**

There is no known event connected with his house.

## **CONTEXT**

The former Scott house was built at the end of several phases. It marked the end of the true growth and development stage for the residential community known as Crescentwood. On a larger scale, it also came at the end of Winnipeg's phenomenal growth period that had dated back to the final years of the previous century. For two decades from the mid-1890s, all facets of Winnipeg life and society changed, as did those all across western Canada. Almost unbridled did this growth occur, and it was not until World War I that development slowed and then stopped.

The Scott house and its owners are another example of the type of success that could be reaped in western Canada. Meagre beginnings could, by luck and perseverance, become wealth and power. Homes and lifestyles reflected this affluence, and exclusive residential neighbourhoods, full of

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<sup>17</sup> The Canadian Encyclopedia, op.cit., pp. 171, 528 and D. Creighton, Canada's First Century (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1970), pp. 316-317.

<sup>18</sup> James E. Coyne, in conversation with the author, 25 June 1991.

businessmen quickly climbing the ladder of success, were created throughout the city during this period.

### **LANDMARK**

It is not difficult to conclude that this home is known to local residents. It is located on a busy corner, near a well-known and well-used park, and is one of the best examples of its style found in the city. Renovation plans now underway will ultimately bring the home back to its original splendour, adding even more notoriety to the structure. Its inclusion in a walking tour of the area reinforces its position as an area landmark.

## APPENDIX I

### John N. Semmens

Colonel J.N. Semmens was born in Toronto, Ontario in 1880, the son of a pioneer Methodist minister. He graduated from Wesley College and received his architectural degree from the University of Pennsylvania. In 1910 he moved west to Winnipeg and in 1912 was given the rank of Lieutenant in the 100th Regiment, Winnipeg Grenadiers, then under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel J.B. Mitchell. Two years later he had risen to the rank of Major and went overseas in 1915 as the second-in-command of the 78th Battalion. After rising to Commanding Officer rank in 1917, he returned to Winnipeg to renew his architectural practice.<sup>1</sup>

In 1920 he was hired as a consultant for the Winnipeg School Division by J.B. Mitchell. In that role (which was expanded as Mitchell approached retirement), Semmens designed a great number of Winnipeg schools and supervised the planning of others.

During World War II, Semmens organized the 2nd Battalion of the Grenadiers but did not go overseas. he spent the remainder of the war as Commandant of Camp Shilo.<sup>2</sup>

In 1958 he moved from Winnipeg to Victoria, B.C. and died three years later. Semmen's work ranged from homes to warehouses to banks to schools. He was well-known in the city and left his mark on its development. An incomplete list of his work includes:

RCMP Barracks, Winnipeg (demolished)  
Winnipeg North End Library  
St. Boniface Sanatorium  
Grace Maternity Hospital  
Winnipeg Electric Company Building  
School for the Feeble Minded, Portage la Prairie  
Bank of Montreal, Portage and Main, 1913 (local supervising architect)  
Civic Auditorium, 444 St. Mary Avenue, 1932 (member of board of design)

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<sup>1</sup> Winnipeg Free Press, November 5, 1961.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. and J.N. Semmens, "Typical Schools of Western Canada" in The Journal, The Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, IV, No. 11 (November 1927), pp. 401-406.

J.N. Semmens' designs continued:

West End Collegiate, Saskatoon  
The Collegiate Building, Dauphin  
-other small and medium-sized schools throughout the province  
Taylor House, 611 Wellington Crescent  
265 Kingsway Avenue  
Turner-Walker Block, 425 Henry Avenue (Grade III), 1912  
Scott House, 29 Ruskin Row, 1909

Winnipeg School Division:<sup>3</sup>

Margaret Scott, Arlington Street  
General Wolfe, Ellice Avenue (demolished)  
Montcalm, Tecumseh Street (demolished)  
Addition to Cecil Rhodes No. 2, East Street (demolished)  
Aberdeen No. 3, Stella Avenue  
Champlain, Machray Avenue (demolished)  
Florence Nightingale, Shaughnessy Street  
Norquay No. 2, Lusted Avenue (demolished)  
Isaac Newton, Aberdeen Avenue  
Machray No. 2, Mountain Avenue (demolished)  
Sir John Franklin, Beaverbrook Street (vacant)  
Wolseley, Clifton Street  
Sir Sam Steele, Chester Street  
Daniel McIntyre Collegiate Institute, Alverstone Street  
Grosvenor, Grosvenor Avenue  
Faraday, Mountain Avenue

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<sup>3</sup> G. Bugailiskis, "Quiet Dignity. Aspects of Building Schools in the Winnipeg School Division No. 1-1871-1928." Unpublished Master of Arts Thesis, University of Manitoba, October 1990, pp. 158-159.

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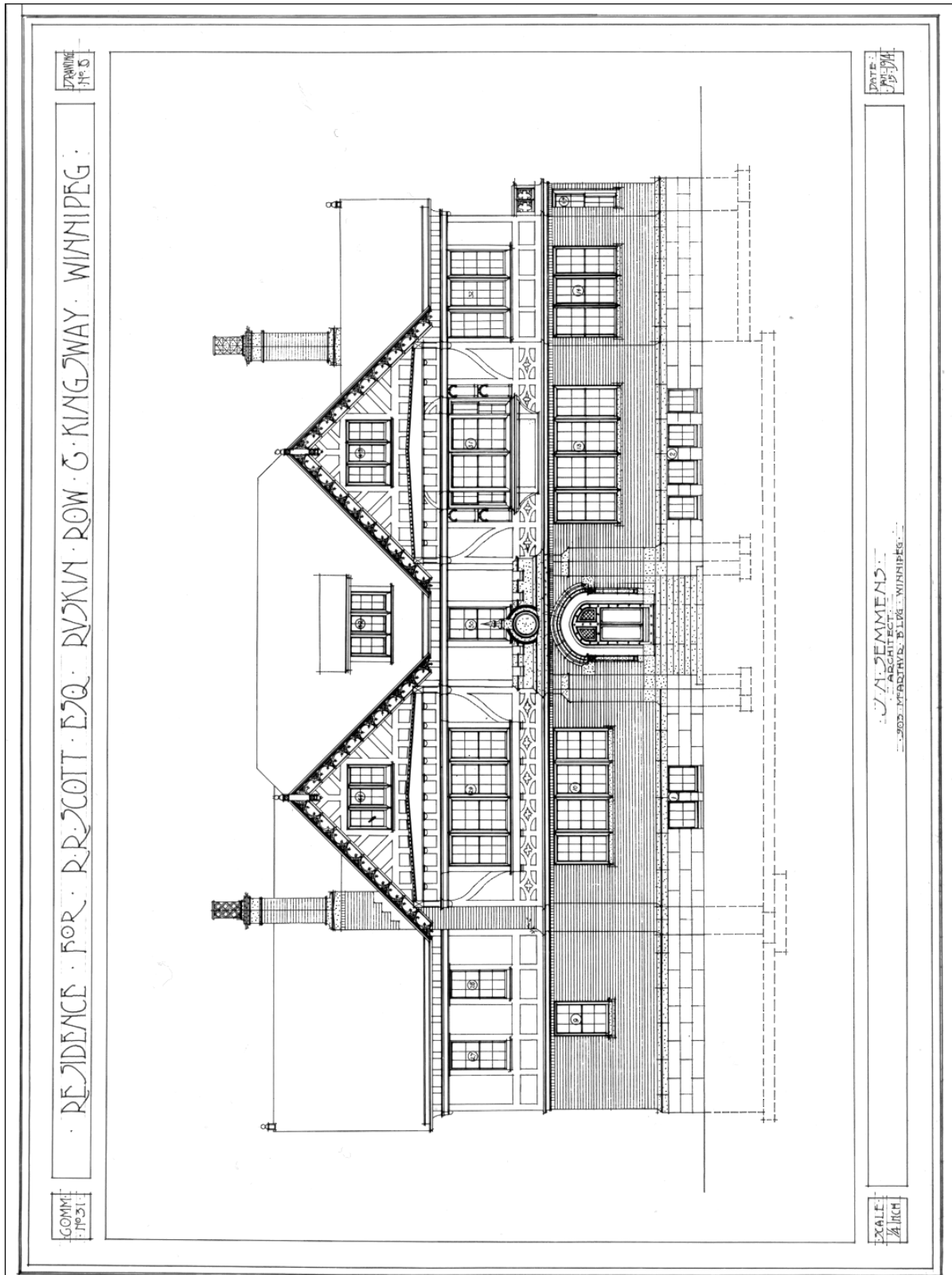


Plate 1 – Architect’s plans for R.R. Scott House, 1914. (City of Winnipeg Planning Department.)

**29 RUSKIN ROW – R.R. SCOTT HOUSE**



Plate 2 – Main staircase, 1991. (M. Peterson, 1991.)



Plate 3 – Living room, 1991. (M. Peterson, 1991.)

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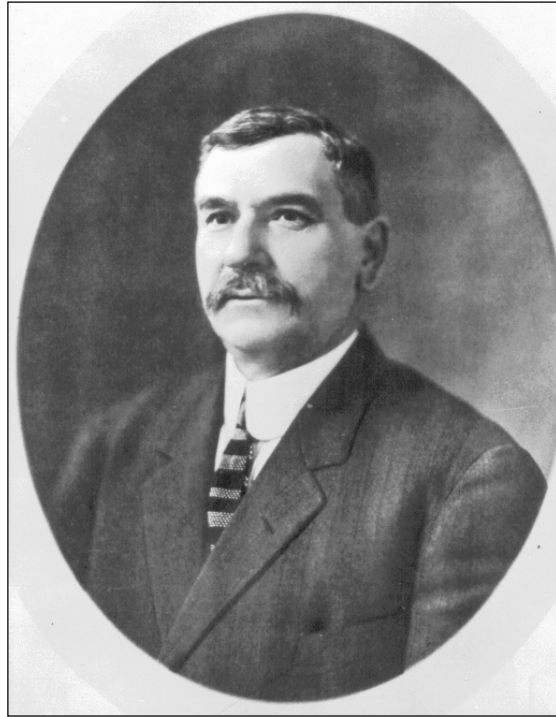


Plate 4 – Robert R. Scott, ca. 1914. (Courtesy of Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N11970.)

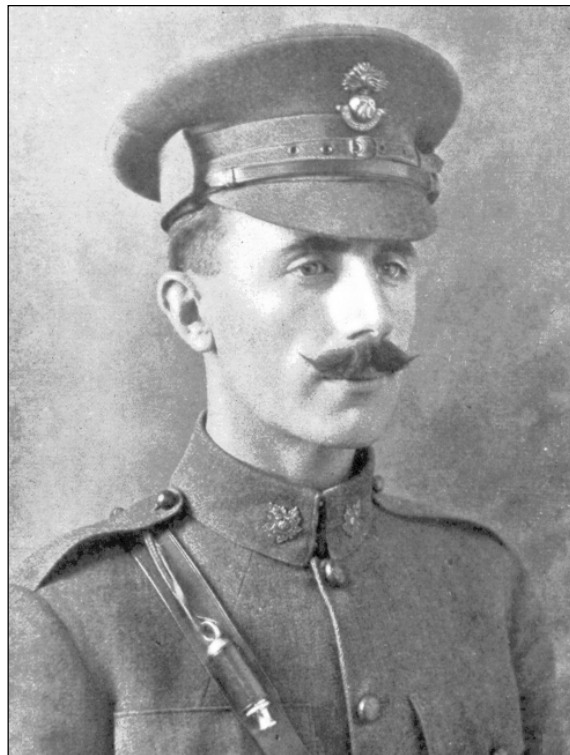


Plate 5 – J.N. Semmens, no date. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N9454.)