

**529 WELLINGTON CRESCENT – J.H. ASHDOWN HOUSE
(FORMER KHARTUM TEMPLE)
*J.H.G. Russell, 1912-13***



The history of Winnipeg, from its incorporation in 1873 to the beginning of the First World War, should be looked at as the history of individual men committed to economic growth. One such individual was the “Merchant Prince” of the hardware trade in Winnipeg: James H. Ashdown.

Arriving in the Red River settlement in 1868, Ashdown began to do business as a tinsmith and purchased a small hardware shop. By 1875, his wholesale business had increased, forcing him to operate out of two locations, one wholesale, one retail. His business acumen was such that, by 1885, Ashdown had built the largest hardware warehouse west of the Great Lakes. The Ashdown Warehouse still stands on Bannatyne Avenue, as does a retail store on Main Street at Bannatyne Avenue.

Being in business meant being involved in civic politics, and James H. Ashdown served as an alderman from 1874 to 1879. He was also a founding member of the Winnipeg Board of Trade,

which played a major role in shaping Winnipeg's growth. Ashdown was elected mayor in 1907 and was acclaimed to office in 1908. By 1910, he was a millionaire not only from his commercial endeavours but also from successful land speculation. A major contributor to the founding of Wesley College (University of Winnipeg), he also supported the Y.M.C.A. and the Children's Aid Society.

The Wellington Crescent residence was the third Ashdown mansion. The first was built in Point Douglas in the 1870s, and the second was located on Broadway. The family of six moved into the prestigious Wellington Crescent home in 1913, and the dwelling remained in the family until 1952. The house was then purchased by the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, the Shriners, a philanthropic organization which raises funds for physically handicapped children. The local Temple supports research into genetics and childhood orthopedic disorders, as well as assisting in the purchase of artificial limbs and travel expenses for handicapped children.

The house was designed by John H.G. Russell, one of the city's more prolific architects, who was also responsible for Ashdown's warehouse buildings. In Canada, the early twentieth century was a time when architects were returning to more accurate copies of earlier European architecture, especially for the more auspicious buildings. Russell chose the architecture of Tudor England as the basis for Ashdown's house. Characterized by a steep roof and half-timbered walls which are in-filled with stucco, the house featured a green tile roof, limestone walls and a garage with an automobile turntable and grease-pit. The rear of the building had a porte-cochere, which was a covered entrance porch for vehicles.

The interior featured dark polished woods and heavy ornamented furniture. Beamed ceilings graced all the formal rooms except for the parlour, which had ornamental plaster mouldings.