

**54 WEST GATE – UNIVERSITY WOMEN’S CLUB
(FORMER REV. GORDON HOUSE
*G.W. Northwood, 1913***



By 1910, Armstrong’s Point, with its many trees along the Assiniboine River, had become an exclusive residential district. It was here that one of Canada’s best-selling authors, Ralph Connor, a pseudonym of Charles Gordon, built his home.

Born and raised in Upper Canada, Gordon studied theology in Toronto. Posted in Banff in 1890, he spent four years circuit-preaching on horseback, an experience that would enrich his novels. He was appointed to St. Stephen’s Church (now Elim Chapel) in Winnipeg’s West End, and at the same time started his literary career. His early books such as *The Sky Pilot* (1898) and *The Man from Glengarry* (1901) were financial successes enabling him to build his mansion in 1913. With the outbreak of the war in the following year, Gordon went overseas as a padre. Returning home a year later he found that real estate investments made in his absence had failed and that far from being a millionaire, he was not in debt. Gordon began writing again. In 1921, the Presbyterian Church elected him as a Moderator, with the responsibility of getting its members’

support for union with the Methodists in order to form the United Church of Canada. His writing career continued with over thirty million copies of his works being sold.

George Northwood designed the Jacobethan Revival styled mansion which cost \$50,000 to build. Based on motifs found in Elizabethan England, the style was to suggest an English middle-class suburban home. Distinctive features of this style were gables that rose above the roof in a steep-sided triangular form, hipped roofs, tall distinctive chimneys and rectangular windows divided by stone mullions. Red brick with the limestone dressings on the sills, gable tops, and the radiating stone on the four-centered arch of the entrance porch completed the Elizabethan imagery.

The interior, which was formal and elegant, was finished with beamed ceilings, lead-glass windows, a double-return staircase and elaborate fireplaces. It retains much of its original condition thanks to the careful attention of the second owners of the house, the University Women's Club.

Chartered in 1909 as a vehicle for outgoing professional women, the Club leased the house in 1945, made a few alterations, and furnished it with period furniture. In 1976, the Heritage Canada Foundation commended the conservation of the house with a plaque, proudly displayed on the front of the building.