

134 WEST GATE – MONK HOUSE
Hugh Murray (contractor), 1895



Armstrong's Point was a sparsely developed, quasi-rural suburb when this 2.5-storey Queen Anne house first overlooked the Assiniboine River in 1895. Within two decades, however, Winnipeg had grown up to and beyond the Point, and the neighbourhood's own streets had filled with the substantial homes of business, professional and political families.

This 22-hectare parcel of land, formed by a U-shaped bend in the river, was granted in 1848 by the Hudson's Bay Company to Captain Joseph Hill, a staff officer with English veterans recruited to protect the Red River Settlement. During a land boom in 1881, Hill sold the holding to a local syndicate intent on establishing an exclusive residential area called Victoria Place. Some houses were built in the large-lot subdivision, but more complete development had to await the city's next spurt of growth in the early 1900s.

Among the Point's first occupants were pioneer merchants A.G.B. Bannatyne and his son A.R.J. Bannatyne who built adjacent homes on Assiniboine Avenue (now West Gate) in the early 1880s. The younger Bannatyne lived on site until 1888 when ownership was assumed by the Frontenac Loan and Savings Society of Kingston, Ontario. After renting the property to a series of tenants, the society sold it to barrister Lendrum McMeans in 1894. He began to remodel the premises for his own use, but within a few months the building was destroyed by fire.

The following year, McMeans erected what is now numbered 134 West Gate near the ruins of the former Bannatyne residence. The project's architect is unknown, but the contractor was Hugh Murray who built several other smaller homes in the city in 1894-95.

Typical of the Queen Anne style, 134 West Gate displays highly varied façades and roof-lines. Most striking among the structure's surviving features are its two-storey bay on the south elevation and its steeply pitched hip roof marked by decorative eaves, an array of dormers and a "Widow's Walk," a flat top section surrounded by a wooden fence.

A one-storey open veranda originally wrapped around the building's northeast corner and was joined on the front (east) facing by a second-floor porch used as a summer bedroom. This element was removed in 1958 and replaced by concrete steps.

This large house is built of solid, cream-coloured brick on a rubble-stone foundation, with limestone accents around the openings. Most windows are rectangular, set in plain wooden frames, and outlined by stone lug sills and radiating brick heads. The large front living-room window lies in a round arch with a keystone. Other details include ornamental shingling, a brick string course and a tall, ornate brick chimney.

McMeans never occupied the dwelling, but instead sold it to John Benning Monk and established a separate residence at 40 West Gate. Monk (1854-1947) was an Ontarian who first came to Winnipeg with the Bank of Ottawa in 1882, later managed the bank's branch in Keewatin, Ontario, then returned to direct the Winnipeg office until retirement in 1917.

His family, which named the home "Beechmount," retained ownership of 134 West Gate until 1958. The premises subsequently were leased for several years to the Japanese Consulate, then again changed hands in 1980 and 1985.

The current owners have removed paint to return the exterior to its original brick finish. They also are gradually restoring the much-altered interior under the guidance of contractor Norbert Badiou.