51 BALMORAL STREET – WILLIAM E. MILNER HOUSE
G.W. Ford, 1909

Soon after William Edwin Milner relocated to Winnipeg as western manager of the Maple Leaf Flour Mills Company, he chose to settle his family in a new middle-class subdivision on Balmoral Place at the southwestern edge of what is now downtown Winnipeg.

Many changes have occurred in the area since then, but there also has been one constant-Milner's 2 1/2-storey Dutch Colonial Revival house, with its distinctive gambrel roof, has remained until recently under his family's ownership.

Born in Brampton, Ontario, Milner (1865-1942) served as mayor of his hometown for four years before moving west in 1907. He became director of the Maple Leaf Company and president of the Winnipeg Grain Exchange in 1916. He also served for eight years as president of the Traders' Building Association and in 1921 was appointed managing secretary of the Winnipeg Board of Trade. After Milner's death, his wife Charlotte retained ownership of their home at the

northeast corner of Balmoral and Mostyn Place until 1952 when title was transferred to one of their sons, barrister William H. Milner. He, in turn, sold the property to the neighbouring Great-West Life Assurance Company in 1991.

51 Balmoral was developed on land that formerly was part of a farm granted to James Spence, an ex-Hudson's Bay Company employee. This acreage, which encompassed Spence Street and the south side of Broadway, was subdivided in 1903. Over the next decade, its lots were filled with large, single-family dwellings. Some were designed by prominent architects; others, like the Milners' house, were planned and built by contractors.

Little is known of George W. Ford, initial owner and developer of 51 Balmoral, except that he was active in the local building trade from c.1906 to c.1915.

For his $8,000 project, Ford employed a popular suburban cottage plan — one readily found in turn-of-the-century building catalogues. The style, characterized by gambrel roofs, flared eaves forming heavy overhangs, exterior chimneys, spacious verandas, and four distinct sides, had its origins in the residential architecture of 18th century Dutch colonies in the northeastern United States. Its revival began in the latter 1870s, concurrent with the return of Spanish, German and French colonial influences.

The Milner House has a rusticated stone foundation on concrete footings, a frame superstructure, and a New England gambrel roof broken by a 1 1/2-storey gable dormer on the south side and two shed dormers on the north. Red brick veneer covers the main floor, while upper levels are clothed by shingles on the front (west) and rear elevations and by the roof on the side walls.

The front entrance is accessed through a long, gable-roofed porch, flanked at the building's southwest corner by a partially screened veranda with wooden balustrades and at the northwest corner by a two-storey, wrap-around bay window. Rusticated stone piers underlie the wooden columns of both the porch and veranda. Stone also extends up the wall of the home to the bay's first-floor sills.

Above the porch are a pair of projecting second-storey lights topped by a full entablature, followed on the upper level by a trio of smaller rectangular windows capped by a narrow shed roof. Other openings include a one-storey bay near the rear of the north facade and variously placed vertical and horizontal windows on the south and east elevations. Most openings are set in plain wooden surrounds; those on the main floor are underlined by rough-cut stone lug sills and radiating brick heads. There is a south-side doorway and one-storey, lean-to entrance topped by a deck at the rear.

The Milner House has been a solitary figure since the 1970s when expansion of the nearby Great-West Life office-parking complex led to demolition of all other structures on the east side of Balmoral between Broadway and Mostyn. In contrast, the west side of the street has remained relatively intact, although some of its pre-World War I dwellings have been converted to boarding houses and other multiple-family uses.