



56 BALMORAL STREET
HENRY E. SHARPE HOUSE

The Historical Buildings Committee
City of Winnipeg

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The date was 1903, the place, Winnipeg. It seemed to most of the population that they were the centre of the universe. The city's economy, and that of the entire Canadian prairies, were red hot from a decade of unbridled growth. Everything was booming and caution had been joyously thrown to the wind.

As downtown thoroughfares filled with large warehouses, office buildings, banks and other 'signs of progress', the original residential districts were moved further and further from Portage and Main. New areas of development included the streets running off Portage Avenue to the north and south. Fort Rouge, River Heights and a number of outlying regions saw increased activity as well.

Broadway, so named for its widened layout and expansive, tree-lined boulevards, had always been considered one of the city's finest streets. Located in the centre of what was known as the Hudson's Bay Reserve, it became an exclusive area of expensive homes, large apartment blocks and ultimately the Legislative Building.

The avenues that intersected Broadway west of Osborne Street were filled with large two and two-and-a-half-storey, single-family dwellings. As with today's higher income neighbourhoods, lots were small to increase the profits of the subdivider and, it should be added, because large lots were not in demand from this group of homeowners in the early 1900s.

In 1903 a section of land originally granted as a farm to ex-Hudson's Bay Company employee James Spence¹ was subdivided into 63 lots. The new subdivision took in the south side of Broadway and east side of Spence Street, but mostly ran along both sides of a new road, a

¹ Old Systems Abstract Book, #244, St. James (Land Titles Office).

southern extension of Balmoral Street known as Balmoral Place.² In 1906 Henry E. Sharpe joined a number of influential citizens by constructing his family home on this new road.

STYLE

Utilitarian, eclectic, homestead, gabled-ell cottage and tri-gabled ell are all terms that have been used in various journals and studies to categorize the style of architecture used to create this structure. One fact seems clear: it is what these buildings don't possess, rather than what they do, that helps to classify them. The above terms suggest only modest ornamental treatment and an emphasis on simplicity both to save money and because of the method of design. Often the plans for such homes could be found in catalogues, plan books and the like, and they frequently were altered by homeowners who had no training in architecture.

Another characteristic that makes identification of these houses inexact is the wealth of elements borrowed from numerous architectural schools and often applied to the same structure. Found throughout the buildings, these flashes of decoration were often chosen and placed at the pleasure of owners who, as stated earlier, did not possess the classical training involved. The 'I know what I like' attitude usually meant a loss in overall planning to the ornament treatment of the basic homestead house.

The tri-ell or gable-ell cottage had one distinguishing feature — a basic ell plan with one corner or a simple T-shaped design and resulting cross gables.³ The projecting stem most often was pointed toward the street and usually was not centred on the crossing portion of the building. Because of its adaptability, this style was popular throughout North America, in both rural and urban settings, from 1870 until about 1920.⁴

² Plan 726, 1903

³ H. Gottfried and J. Jennings, American Vernacular Design (New York -1985), p. 180.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 180-81.

Porches and entrances were created in the corner or corners of the ell or T-shape and fenestration remained symmetrical in almost all cases. Dormers were uncommon and the most popular ornamentation was stickwork applications to gables and gable-end walls.⁵

CONSTRUCTION

The building rises two-and-one-half storeys from grade and rests on a 45.7 cm (18") stone foundation.⁶ A brick veneer finish was used to give the home a more solid and substantial air. Dimensions are approximately 10.4 x 11.0 m. (34x36') with an open veranda running along the front of the structure.⁷ Ceiling heights measure 2.1 m (7') in the basement and 2.7 m. (9'), 2.6 m (8.5') and 2.4 m (8') respectively in the upper three levels. Construction cost \$6,500 and required 16 cords of stone, 21,000 bricks, 1,000 superficial square yards of plaster and 15 cubic yards of concrete.⁸

The house is found on the west side of Balmoral Street (the name was changed from Balmoral Place in the late 1950s) between Spence and Osborne streets on land legally described as 84 St. James, Plan 726, Lot 29.⁹

DESIGN

The Sharpe House is asymmetrical and based on an ell plan (see Plate 1). Its brick veneer walls rest on a rough stone foundation above grade. The large open veranda is supported by wooden Tuscan order columns that rise to eaves with wooden dentils.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 180-81.

⁶ Building Permit, #1606/1906.

⁷ Assessment Record, #9145100, Ward 2, P.C. 10.

⁸ Building Permit, op. cit.

⁹ Assessment Record, op. cit.

Windows throughout the structure are rectangular with the exception of one round-headed accent window of leaded glass on the second floor of the front façade and one round-headed window on each of the side walls. Leaded glass is also found in openings on the rear elevation. All openings have brick heads and rough stone sills and are set in unadorned wooden surrounds. The stone sills of the side windows are connected by a raised brick belt course. A two-storey bay window is present on the south side.

The brick veneer walls on the second floor lead to the wide eaves of the roof. These are ornamented with wooden dentils and supported by plain wooden brackets. The structure is topped by a gable roof covered with shingles.

INTERIOR

Because the Sharpe House has not been converted into a rooming or boarding house as have so many of the area's larger residences, it has retained much of its originality. Wooden floors are seen throughout the three levels and are in good condition. The main floor boasts two fireplaces, both ornamented with coloured tile. The largest one features two fluted wooden columns supporting smaller unfluted columns, a panel of ornamental carving and a wooden mantel. Door hardware throughout the house is original and in good condition.

The ground floor is laid out with a staircase running up the north side of the house. The south half of the floor is the living and formal dining room. The kitchen is adjacent to the dining room at the rear of the structure.

The second storey holds four bedrooms and one bathroom, all of which have seen varying degrees of renovation. One room on this level contains a small brick fireplace. A doorway leads to a small sun-deck on the roof of the porch, but the railing has been removed in order to repair it.

The third floor has three small bedrooms and a small bathroom. Again, renovations have occurred to different degrees in different areas.

The focal point of the home is the ornamental staircase running up the north side of the structure. Beautiful relief carving in the dark wood on the ground floor of this element is mirrored to a lesser degree on the upper floors. Two large, stained-glass windows add an elegant touch to the first flight of stairs, while the second flight begins with another stained-glass window of reduced size. All the stained glass is beginning to show its age, with some heaving and breakage evident.

INTEGRITY

The building occupies its original site and is in excellent structural condition. No permits have been listed against the structure but renovation work is now in progress, mostly to update wiring and plumbing.

STREETSCAPE

While almost all houses along the east side of Balmoral north of Mostyn Place were demolished in the 1970s, the west side has escaped a similar fate. As such, this block of residential buildings, erected by some of the city's more notable citizens, is a fine example of the type of residential planning taking place during this period. The Sharpe House adds to the existing character of the neighbourhood.

ARCHITECT

The architect named on the original Building Permit (#1606/1906) is the owner, Henry E. Sharpe. He most likely obtained plans for his new home from one of the many plan books in circulation or from his contractor, D.J. Ross.

PERSON

Henry Edwards Sharpe was born in Lobo Township, Middlesex, Ontario in 1841 (see Plate 2). In 1881 he was appointed as the western manager of the Imperial Oil Company based in

Winnipeg.¹⁰ He was in charge of the company's interests from the Great Lakes to the Pacific Ocean and, when Imperial amalgamated with Standard Oil, he managed both ventures until his death.

His private concerns led him to serve as director of the Y.M.C.A., treasurer and later president of the Western Canada Baptist convention, and a deacon in the First Baptist Church of Winnipeg from his arrival.¹¹

Because of failing health, Sharpe decided to move to southern California and sold both his homes at 26 Balmoral Place (as it was described originally) and all of his furniture. However, a sudden relapse sent him to the home of his son, E.E. Sharpe (a barrister in the local firm of Sharpe, Stackpoole and Elliot). He died on Sunday, October 17, 1909 in his 68th year.¹²

Sharpe sold his home to Angus D. Robertson, a successful member of the Robertson-Adams Lumber Company. In 1915 the west side of Balmoral Place was renumbered due to increased construction at the southern end of the road. The numbers from 2-42 were altered by adding 30 to them (except for #42 which became #64).¹³ In this way, the Robertson property became #56. Robertson lived there until the late 1910s when Dr. H.J. Meikley took up occupancy.

In 1922 Dr. William Leggette, physician and surgeon, became the home's fourth tenant. He remained on Balmoral Place until 1938 when a Mrs. Mary Stein became the occupant. The house has since seen numerous tenants and owners.¹⁴

At present, this is still recognized as a single-family dwelling although it has been run as a housing co-operative by the Common Ground Co-op Limited.

¹⁰ Winnipeg Telegram, October 18, 1909, p. 1.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Henderson's Directory, 1907-15.

¹⁴ Ibid., 1915-present.

EVENT

There is no known significant event connected with this structure.

CONTEXT

As mentioned above, the Sharpe House is characteristic of both the city and its original owner. Winnipeg was growing quickly and new residential areas were keeping pace on the outlying land around the city. The area along Broadway west of Osborne Street built up as one of the most exclusive neighbourhoods, acting as a buffer between the downtown and what was (and to some extent still is) one of the city's most exclusive residential areas, Armstrong's Point.

While the overall number of like homes in the city would be very large indeed, only one has been studied by the Historical Buildings Committee. The family home of Canadian author Gabrielle Roy at 375 Rue Deschambault was designated Grade III in 1982 (see Plate 3). The basic ell plan can easily be seen and the large veranda with prominent columns is also similar to the Sharpe House (built one year later). The wooden siding was left exposed on the Roy home.

As for the owner, a manager of a large concern would want to surround himself with prominent neighbours and with a home that would express his success. While the plans of Sharpe's home had common beginnings, he was able to adapt the blueprints to create a more solid and imposing structure. The addition of ornamented fireplaces and a beautiful staircase increased the distinctiveness of the building.

LANDMARK

The Sharpe House and its neighbouring structure create an interesting streetscape on Balmoral. Because of the large open area immediately to the east, this row of homes is more conspicuous than normally would be the case.

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Plate 1 – 56 Balmoral Street. (M. Peterson, 1990.)



Plate 2 – Henry E. Sharpe, 1909. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Manitoba Telegram, October 18, 1909, p. 1.)

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Plate 3 – 375 Rue Deschambault, Roy House, ca,1915 (built ca.1905). (Courtesy of the City of Winnipeg, Planning Department.)