



51 BALMORAL STREET

WILLIAM E. MILNER HOUSE

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee
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By the end of the first decade of the 20th century, western Canada had grown in all aspects. Its economy, its social institutions, and its population had all surpassed even the most optimistic of predictions. The wheat economy flourished, provincial and civic governments began to organize important institutions, and wave after wave of immigrants settled the land and planted crops. Leading the way was Winnipeg, which had firmly established itself as the region's major centre. The city became the territorial nucleus for banking, wholesaling, freighting, and other vital functions. As it grew, much of its past was quickly replaced in a rush to keep pace. Spatially, original residential districts in the vicinity of Main Street were supplanted by large warehouses, banks, office buildings, and retail blocks. In response, new residential districts emerged, serving workers, supervisors, presidents, and owners.

Broadway, so named for its widened layout and expansive, tree-lined boulevards, became one of the city's finest streets. Located in the Hudson's Bay Reserve, this avenue emerged as an exclusive area of expensive homes, large apartment blocks, and ultimately the Legislative Building. West of Osborne Street, Broadway was intersected by numerous streets filled with large, two- and two-and-a-half-storey, single-family dwellings. As in other higher income neighbourhoods, lots were kept small, partly to increase the profits of the subdivider and partly because large lots were not in demand from this group of homeowners in the early 1900s.

A new subdivision of 63 lots was created in 1903 on land originally granted to James Spence, an ex-Hudson's Bay Company employee who farmed the property for many years.¹ This 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 southern extension of Balmoral Street known then as Balmoral Place.² From 1904 to 1912, this drive filled with large, expensive homes for a number of influential families (see Appendix II for a complete list of the area's extant homes). On the east side of the

¹ M. Peterson, "Henry E. Sharpe, 56 Balmoral Street," Report to the City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee, January 1990, pp. 1-2.

² Ibid., p. 2.

Balmoral Place, a two-and-a-half-storey, brick-veneered house was built in 1909 for W.E. Milner and his family. It has remained in the Milner family until recently.

STYLE

This house is based on a revival of the Dutch Colonial style, which originated in the Dutch colonies of present-day New Jersey and New York in the 18th century. Its initial development, characterized by use of the gambrel roof and flared eaves forming heavy overhangs, was confined mainly to the northeastern United States and, by the early 19th century, had waned in importance.³

The revival movement has been traced to ca.1877, approximately the same time as Spanish, German and French colonial revival styles also came to the fore in residential architecture.⁴ By the early 1900s, Dutch Colonial Revival homes were being built as suburban cottages all across North America.

Plans for such buildings were found in numerous building catalogues and plan books. Common elements included the gambrel roof, an exterior chimney, spacious veranda, and four distinct sides.⁵

The City of Winnipeg's Historical Buildings Inventory includes five other structures of similar design (gambrel roof):

138 East Gate, 1911 (Plate 1)
 213 Kingsway, 1907 (Plate 2)
 124 Middle Gate, 1909 (Plate 3)
 16 Ruskin Row, 1908 (Plate 4)
 147 West Gate, 1910 (Plate 5)

The style was popular during the 1905-12 period, and examples not on the Inventory are numerous, especially in River Heights. One block of Kingsway had six Dutch Colonial Revival houses. The

³ John J.-G. Blumenson, Identifying American Architecture (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1981), p. 17.

⁴ Alan Gowans, The Comfortable House (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1987), pp. 128-29.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

Milner House is a good example of the style, although many other examples, both more and less elaborate, exist throughout the city. These include:

90 Furby Street, 1904 (Plate 6)
 96 Furby Street, 1909 (Plate 7)
 194 Kingsway, 1909 (Plate 8)
 244 Kingsway, 1912 (Plate 9)
 266 Kingsway, 1913 (Plate 10)

CONSTRUCTION

The Milner House is situated on land legally described as 84 St. James, Plan 726, Lot 14 and part of Lot 15, on the east side of Balmoral Street between Mostyn Place and Great West Life Road.⁶ The building measures 9.8 x 10.5 x 9.9 m. (32 x 34.5 x 32.5') or over 1,000 cu. m. (38,088 cu. ft.) of interior space.⁷ Ceilings range from 2.3 m. (7.5') in the basement, to 2.7 m. (9') on the first floor, 2.4 m. (8') on the second, and from 1.5 to 2.4 m. (5'-7') on the top floor.

The building, which rests on a 45.7 cm. (18") stone foundation on concrete footings,⁸ is constructed of stone, red brick and shingles. In total, 17 cords of stone were used in construction, along with 15,000 red bricks, 1,085.5 superficial sq. m. (1,300 superficial sq. yards) of plaster and 10.7 cu. m. (14 cu. yards) of concrete. It cost \$8,000 to build.⁹

DESIGN

The rusticated stone base of the house firmly anchors the frame superstructure above. The ground floor is covered by red brick veneer, while the upper levels are covered by shingles, whether as part of the roof on the north and south elevations, or on the gable ends on the front and back (Plates 11-14).

⁶ City of Winnipeg Assessment Records, Roll Number 913930 (old number 16265), Ward 1, PC 10. Below as AR.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ City of Winnipeg Building Permit, Number 585/1909.

⁹ Ibid. Note the average original construction cost of extant homes on this section of Balmoral Street is \$7,165.48 (see Appendix II).

The front or west facade is accented by a large, partially screened veranda and projecting entrance, and by a two-storey bay window which wraps around the northwest corner of the house. Another window on the second floor projects slightly and is covered by a full entablature lintel. Most dominant is the gable end formed by the New England-style¹⁰ gambrel roof.

The first floor of the south facade features a small door and two windows with rough-cut stone lug sills and radiating brick heads. The gambrel roof with patterned shingles encompasses the remainder of this elevation, and is broken by a gable dormer with window.

The east or rear elevation includes a one-storey lean-to entrance (with deck above), and first-floor windows with rough-cut stone lug sills and radiating brick heads. The shingled second floor is interrupted by windows featuring wooden surrounds of similar ornamentation to the front elements.

The north facade includes the continuation of the two-storey front bay and a one-storey bay at the rear which is topped on the second level by a shed dormer holding an oversized window.

Taken as a whole, the Milner House has a very tidy appearance. It is an aesthetically pleasing structure that radiates comfort and stability.

INTERIOR

The interior of this home is well laid out and spacious, belying the small, cottage-like appearance of the exterior. The main floor holds the living and dining rooms on the north side of the home, a parlour (southwest corner), the kitchen, and a storage room at the rear. The living room, at the northwest corner of the house, includes the bay window and a fireplace. Both the living and dining rooms are finished in dark wood panelling, wood floors and several original, ornate light fixtures. Sliding doors allow for the closing of the living room and dining room from each other, and the closing of the living room and the parlour from the main hallway. Interesting (and functioning) features of these doors are the original handles that spring out of the doors at the touch of a button.

¹⁰ A. Gowans, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

The main staircase has had an ornate newel lamp on the landing removed. The landing of this staircase features a small set of stairs leading to the kitchen, allowing domestic help access to all parts of the upper floors and kitchen without having to enter the 'public' areas of the house (the living room and parlour).

The second floor contains four bedrooms and a bathroom with a separate toilet room. The bedroom in the northwest corner, likely the master bedroom, boasts a bay window and a fireplace. The third floor contains three good-sized bedrooms. Finishes in all bedrooms are plain and many light fixtures and switches are original.

Taken in total, the Milner House is, at present, a remarkably well-kept and unaltered example of this style and period of housing in Winnipeg. The luxuriousness of its interior finishes is startling given the unassuming guise of the exterior.

INTEGRITY

The house remains in its original location, is in good structural condition, and does not appear to have been altered on the exterior.

STREETSCAPE

The west side of Balmoral Street south of Broadway has remained virtually unchanged since World War I. Almost all the homes are still extant, although some have been converted from single-family dwellings into boarding houses and the like. The east side, however, has been severely altered. The Milner House is the last remaining dwelling on this side, the others having been demolished in the 1970s as part of an expansion of the Great-West Life Assurance business. Large apartments, a mix of modern structures and contemporaries of the Milner House, south of the intersection of Balmoral and Mostyn Place.

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTOR

The duties of architect and contractor for this house were completed by George W. Ford, a small local contractor. Ford is listed as the owner of the house in the Building Permit, but he immediately sold it to Milner. Ford is first mentioned in the Henderson's Directory (Winnipeg) in 1906 as a carpenter. He is listed as a contractor from 1909 until 1915, after which his name does not appear. He neither incorporated nor advertised in this journal and his whereabouts after 1915 are unknown. This is the first G.W. Ford design before the Historical Buildings Committee.

PERSON

William Edwin Milner was born in Brampton, Ontario in 1865. He was mayor of the town for four years, then moved to Winnipeg in 1907 as the western manager of the Maple Leaf Flour Mills Company. In 1916 he became its director, the same year he became president of the Winnipeg Grain Exchange. For eight years he was president of the Traders' Building Association and was a well-known figure in the city's grain sector. In 1921 he was appointed managing secretary of the Winnipeg Board of Trade. He died on July 1, 1942, and a moment of silence was observed in his honour at the Grain Exchange the next day. He left behind his wife, Charlotte, and two sons, William H. Milner, barrister, and Roy W. Milner, grain businessman.¹¹ Charlotte owned the house until 1952 when she sold it to her eldest son, William.

W.H. Milner was also born in Brampton in 1894. Upon returning from World War I, he finished his law degree at the University of Manitoba and joined the T. Eaton Company by the late 1920s. After over 30 years he retired from the company and joined the firm Turner, Milner, Turner and Saunders. He died at the age of 97 in November of 1990.¹² The house was then sold to the Great-West Life Assurance Company.¹³

¹¹ Thanks to the members of the Milner family who assisted in the completion of the biographies. The Winnipeg Tribune, July 2, 1942, p. 13.

¹² The Winnipeg Free Press, November 12, 1990, p. 27.

¹³ AR.

EVENT

There is no known event connected with this structure.

CONTEXT

This house is characteristic of both the city and its original owner. Winnipeg was developing rapidly during the first decade of the 20th century. New residential neighbourhoods were created in the outlying areas around the downtown district. The area along Broadway west of Osborne Street built up as a moderately exclusive neighbourhood, in turn 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.

The owner, W.E. Milner, was the manager of a large and important business in the city and therefore would be desirous of settling his family in a comfortable home surrounded by prominent neighbours. While not as distinctive or imposing as some other houses in the vicinity, it is nonetheless a fine home.

LANDMARK

The Milner House is part of an interesting streetscape along Balmoral Street. Because it stands alone on the east side, surrounded by parking lots and open space, this house is more conspicuous than would normally be the case.

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Plate 1 – 138 East Gate, built 1911. (Murray Peterson, 1992.)



Plate 2 – 213 Kingsway, built 1907. (Murray Peterson, 1992.)

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Plate 3 – 124 Middle Gate, built 1909. (Murray Peterson, 1992.)



Plate 4 – 16 Ruskin Row, built 1908. (Murray Peterson, 1992.)

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Plate 5 – 147 West Gate, built 1910. (Murray Peterson, 1992.)



Plate 6 – 90 Furby Street, built 1904. (Murray Peterson, 1992.)

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Plate 7 – 96 Furby Street, built 1909. (Murray Peterson, 1992.)



Plate 8 – 194 Kingsway, built 1909. (Murray Peterson, 1992.)

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Plate 9 – 244 Kingsway, built 1912. (Murray Peterson, 1992.)



Plate 10 – 266 Kingsway, built 1913. (Murray Peterson, 1992.)

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Plate 11 – W.E. Milner house, 51 Balmoral Street; built 1909, George W. Ford architect and contractor; front or west facade. (Murray Peterson, 1992.)



Plate 12 – W.E. Milner House, 51 Balmoral Street, south elevation. (Murray Peterson, 1992.)

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Plate 13 – W.E. Milner house, 51 Balmoral Street, north elevation. (Murray Peterson, 1992.)

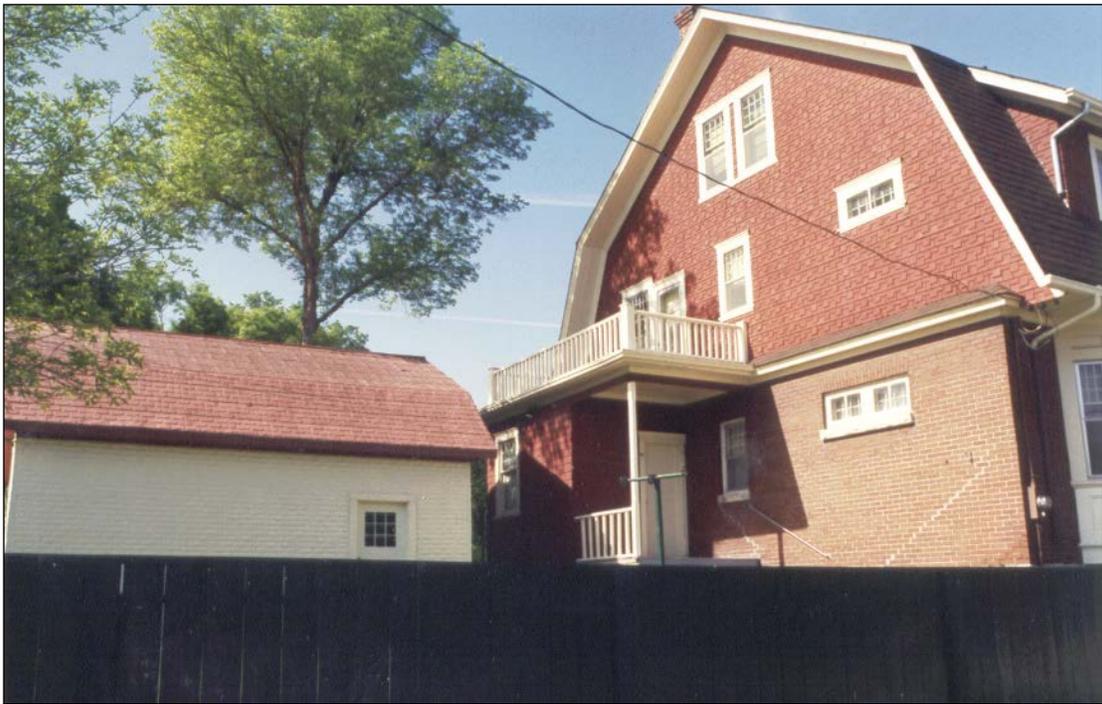


Plate 14 – W.E. Milner House, 51 Balmoral Street, east elevation. (Murray Peterson, 1992.)

APPENDIX II -

List of extant, detached homes on Balmoral Street, from Broadway to Young Street:¹

NUMBER	ARCHITECT	CONTRACTOR	AGE	STOREYS	DESCRIPTION ²	PRICE
32	Claydon Brothers	Claydon Brothers	1906	2 1/2	25x31; F & SF	\$ 3,600
36	J.H.G. Russell	W.W. Cross	1909	2 1/2	32x34; F & SF	\$ 7,000
38	R.G. Hanford	J. Winterbottom	1912	2 1/2	34x38; BV, F & SF	\$10,000
42	G.W. Northwood	R. Watson* ³	1909	2 1/2	37x40; B & SF	\$ 9,000
46	L. Van Praagh*	Day labour	1910 ⁴			
50	H.H. New	J. Pound	1905	2 1/2	30.5x32.5; BV & SF	\$ 5,000
51	G.W. Ford*	G.W. Ford*	1909	2 1/2	32x35; BV & SF	\$ 8,000
52	W. Horner*	W. Horner*	1905	2 1/2	36x36; B	\$ 6,500
54	G.W. Northwood	W.W. Cross	1911	2 1/2	35x37; B & SF	\$13,500
56	H.E. Sharpe*	D.J. Ross	1906	2 1/2	34x36; BV & SF	\$ 6,500
60	G. Kerr*	G. Kerr*	1907	2 1/2	34x35; BV & SF	\$ 6,000
64	A. Simmons*	A. Simmons*	1907	2	26x34; F & SF	\$ 4,500
70	F. Schaffner*	F. Schaffner*	1922	2 1/2	30x34; BV, SO & CF	\$ 8,000
74	J.L. Neilson*	D. Neilson	1905	2 1/2	26x33; BV & SF	\$ 5,000
80	E.W. Andrews*	E.W. Andrews*	1906	2	30x36; F & SF	\$ 5,500
82	W.H. Perryington	W.H. Perryington	1904	2	33x37; BV & SF	\$ 5,500
86	J.N. Semmens	H. Picker	1911	2 1/2	37x40; BV & SO	\$ 9,000
92	S. Hooper	C. Oleson	1904	2 1/2	32.7x32.7; F & SF	\$ 6,675
98	Andrews and Son	Andrews and Son	1904	2 1/2	35x35; F & SF	\$ 6,000
104	J.D. Atchison	W.W. Cross	1910	2 1/2	27x35; F & SF	\$ 8,500
106	J.D. Atchison	W.W. Cross	1910	2	26x43; B & SF	\$10,000
114	V.W. Horwood	Northern Construction	1907	2 1/2	36x36; B & SF	\$ 6,700

FOOTNOTES:

1. Compiled from City of Winnipeg, Building Permits and Assessment Records.
2. Key: B = Brick; F = Frame; BV = Brick Veneer; SH = Shingle; SO = Stucco; SF = Stone Foundation; and CF = Concrete Foundation.
3. An asterisk (*) after a name indicates the owner of the house.
4. This house was moved from another location and placed on a SF in 1910.