

CENTRAL PARK – WADDELL FOUNTAIN
John Manuel, 1914



Waddell Fountain, the classic focal point of Central Park in downtown Winnipeg, is a legacy of one citizen's desire to be remembered and of the ornamental nature of the city's early greenspaces.

As rapid growth transformed Winnipeg from a village to an urban centre, the need to reserve open spaces for aesthetic and recreational purposes became evident. In early 1893, City aldermen established a public parks board to create "ornamental squares or breathing spaces" (parks) and landscaped boulevards.

Four park sites were acquired within a year, including a 1.4 hectare block of land in the northern tip of the Hudson's Bay Company Reserve purchased from the company for \$20,000 in cash and debentures. The property, bounded by Cumberland and Qu'Appelle avenues and Edmonton and Carlton streets, was undesirable for development due to poor drainage. Thousands of loads of soil

and manure were brought in to correct the problem and form a base for Central Park's lush lawns.

This passive 'ornamental square' soon had walkways and gardens, followed in 1905 by a bandstand and two tennis courts. It also attracted nearby residential development. The Central Park/North Ellice area became a fashionable neighbourhood for professional and business families.

The fountain was installed in 1914 to commemorate Emily Margaret Waddell who had come to Winnipeg in the early 1880s with her husband Thomas, a local temperance leader. It also symbolized the Scottish heritage of many early city residents as its design was based on a magnificent, 55-metre Gothic Revival monument to Sir Walter Scott, one of Scotland's best known romantic poets. This monument, designed by George Meikle Kemp, was built in Edinburgh in 1844.

The Waddells lived on Sargent Avenue near Central Park prior to Emily's death in 1908. Her will stipulated that if her husband ever remarried, he should donate \$10,000 to the City for construction of the fountain. By 1911, Waddell was planning to remarry but lacked funds to meet the obligation. He eventually was able to secure the required sum and, after studying North American and British designs, selected local architect John Manuel.

This was among Manuel's early Winnipeg commissions. Others included the University of Manitoba's Science Laboratory (1919-20) and a two-storey extension of its Science Building (1923) in Fort Garry. He also was active in the Manitoba Association of Architects before relocating in c.1927 to Alberta to direct construction of Canadian Pacific Railway hotels at Banff and Lake Louise. He suffered fatal injuries in a 1933 fall from a hotel in Calgary.

Manuel's symmetrical and steeple-like fountain is a reduced example of High Victorian architecture, characterized by elaborate design and ornamentation. The white stone and concrete structure is dominated by a series of flying buttresses which connect the main body; four large nodding ogee arches; and a crocketed pinnacle. Other arch and floral motifs are prevalent.

Four lions' heads containing the water spouts are attached to the lower half of the main tower beneath the ogee arches. Water runs into a double tier of basins, then overflows into a moat. The

pump is housed under the fountain's stepped granite base. The name 'Waddell' is inscribed on both the base and superstructure.

The memorial, constructed by day labour, cost \$9,722. Stone cutting and dressing occurred in Winnipeg, directed by the William Penn Stone Company of Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Vandalism and deterioration have eliminated the fountain's delicate star finial and damaged other elements. Nonetheless, the structure is sound.

Central Park continued to be developed for more active, organized leisure activities. Playground equipment was installed in 1936; restrooms were added in 1959. During the Depression of the 1930s, the fountain was a popular place for community singsongs.

Following several years of neighbourhood decline, efforts to revitalize Central Park/North Ellice began in the early 1980s under the Winnipeg Core Area Initiative. In 1986, Qu'Appelle was closed and the park extended half a hectare southward along Edmonton to Ellice Avenue. Its new amenities include a second, contemporary fountain.