

454 EDMONTON STREET – BENARD HOUSE
J. Greenfield, 1903



The Benard House, across from Central Park at Edmonton Street and Cumberland Avenue, represents the substantial structures built in the Hudson's Bay Reserve, one of Winnipeg's earliest exclusive residential districts.

The 182-hectare reserve north of the Assiniboine River was retained by the trading company when it relinquished control of the Northwest to the Crown in 1869. The company and subsequent real estate interests sought to attract the city's most prominent and wealthy families to the reserve, controlling the nature and pace of development to ensure high property values and construction quality. The lure of Edmonton Street in the northwest point of the reserve was enhanced by proximity to Central Park, established in 1893.

The Benard House was constructed in 1903 for Walter R. and Edith Fish as a speculative venture. Upon its completion, it was sold to hoteliers Hermisdas (Henri) and Louisa Benard. Hermisdas came to Winnipeg from Quebec, in c.1872, worked as a butcher, then in 1895

purchased the Hotel du Canada on Lombard Avenue east of Main. He and his wife developed a profitable business catering to French-speaking travelers, but poor health forced Hermisdas to sell the hotel in 1903. He died three years later. Louisa remained at 454 Edmonton for many years; the Benard estate sold the house in 1936. The Benards' nephew Aime, who had lived with them at the hotel, became a successful Manitoba businessman, farmer, member of the legislature and senator during this period.

Architect Joseph Greenfield designed 454 Edmonton in the Queen Anne style common to late Victorian middle-class housing. Greenfield practiced in England and Toronto before arriving in Winnipeg in 1885. He subsequently became Manitoba superintendent of public works for the Dominion government.

The 2½-storey house was built by Malcolm Brothers and S.B. Ritchie of solid, buff-coloured brick on a limestone rubble foundation. Asymmetrical in composition, it features varied window sizes; a turret on the northeast corner, contrasted by an oversized dormered gable to the south; and a steeply pitched, hip roof. The original porch was two storeys high, with lattice work providing a circular frame for the second-floor doorway. The lower porch continued into a veranda which ran along the east and north sides of the house. Only parts of the first floor of the porch remain today.

Windows are an important part of the design. An oval window of leaded glass is on one side of the front entrance; the transom over a flat-headed window on the other side contains similar glass. Small, rectangular windows on the first and third floors of the turret contrast with long, vertical windows on the second storey. Upper and lower bay windows are featured on the Cumberland Avenue exposure.

The original interior included a small hallway, parlour, dining-room and large rear kitchen on the first floor. The main stairway ran off the front hallway. Two rear stairways also provided access to bedrooms and, possibly, servants' quarters on the upper levels. The house was wired for electricity but its fixtures also were hooked to gas because electrical power was unreliable. Very

little of the original interior remains due to various alterations to Benard House since the late 1930s, including its subdivision into rental units.

Ownership of the house changed hands some six times after the Benard era. Both the structure and its neighbourhood experienced general deterioration. However, 454 Edmonton is now being recycled for commercial and residential purposes as part of an overall revitalization of the Central Park / North Ellice neighbourhood. The project is being assisted by the Winnipeg Core Area Initiative and the province's Municipally Designated Heritage Building Grants Program.