



368 - 370 EDMONTON STREET
HOOVER & TOWN DUPLEX

Historical Buildings Committee

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If exuberance typifies the Queen Anne style of domestic architecture, then this duplex certainly qualifies for the category. Built in 1901 as a two-family dwelling, in both form and ornament this house celebrates the joy of late Victorian design. Its relatively high construction cost (\$8,000 in 1901)¹, its commodious twin interiors and its location precluded occupation by upper middle class families.

The two earliest occupants of the prestigious duplex were also its builders, who presumably customized the space for their personal needs. Martin Hoover and Alfred Town were business partners who lived beside each other in their new duplex from 1901 until 1908. Hoover was the owner of the Commonwealth Store, a successful mens' furnishing shop at 518 Main Street. In 1901, Town was manager of the store but by 1903, there was also a Hoover and Town Clothing Store at 680 Main Street. Both shops may have been supplied by a third related enterprise, the Hoover Manufacturing Company. It may well be that all this proximity was too much for the two men. By 1906, Town had become a lumber dealer and by 1908, he was in partnership with contractor Thomas Kelly in manufacturing brick. The Hoover-Town partnership dissolved completely when both men sold their half of the duplex in 1908 and took up separate residences elsewhere.²

Hoover and Town had chosen a relatively unknown architect to design their duplex. John, or Johann, Schwab was newly arrived in the city in 1901, of German decent and possibly directly from Germany. Schwab also worked in partnership with Louis Pachal as contractors of the residence. Little is known about Schwab, whose architectural career in Winnipeg seems to last from 1901 to about 1911. Schwab lived first on Magnus Avenue and later on Selkirk Avenue, where he kept an office in his home. Among his known designs are a large store and residential block (1903) for a Dr. Trick on Main Street north.³, the German Society Building (1904) a large brick clubhouse on 61 Heaton Avenue in Point Douglas, and the Lauzon Block (1905), a meat market and office block at 339 William Avenue, also in partnership with Louis Pachal.⁴ Considering Schwab's obvious talent, and his choice of living in the north section of the city, it seems likely that most of his work was in the north end. There was a great deal of construction here between the turn of the century and

World War I and while some of it certainly was marginal housing, a great number of solid houses, shops and service buildings were constructed.

Louis Pachal, John Schwab's partner, was also a resident of the north end, a carpenter turned contractor whose economic gain can be traced by his address. From the north end, Pachal moved to a house on north Sherbrook Street and finally to a house on Walnut Street in the solidly middle-class neighbourhood of the west end.⁵

The duplex as constructed in 1901 measured 45 feet by 46 feet and rose two and a half storeys to a height of 30 feet. Its brick walls rest on a stone foundation 18 inches thick that is anchored on stone footings. The mason and bricklayer engaged by Schwab and Pachal, named Alfred Spiers⁶, was a neighbour of Schwab's on Magnus Avenue.

We are fortunate in having an archival photograph of the new duplex from which we can compare the present appearance of the building. A good deal of the upper two floor remains in its original condition, albeit the brick is now darkened and the trim repainted. The roofline combines a gable with a hip roof with large gabled dormers across the front and sides. The two main dormers, which are in front, combine a remarkable variety of decorative elements. "Gingerbread" in the form of carved sunburst panels, brackets, scrolls and wooden scales make the gables a Victoria feast⁷, while each gable end drips downward to form a pendant bracket over the front projections. All of these elements have survived, although a palladian window arrangement in the gables has been substituted for the original single windows. The side gables were much simpler, covered in wooden scales and boxing in the twin chimneys.

The projecting windows on either corner of the facade build downward from the fretted wooden bracket to a tiny balcony resting on the angular bay windows. A slightly more functional balcony in the centre, accessible by the twin doors on the second floor, created a convenient spot for shaking out mops and bedding.

An elaborate veranda crossed the front ground floor, extending to butt against the bay windows. The

pediment in the centre of the veranda also features the carved sunburst pattern of the gables. The balustrades and columns also demonstrate the love of ornament.

Stained glass windows, finials and iron cresting, taken together with all the other decorative elements make for one of the best Queen Anne residences extant in the downtown district. In the words of critic John Ruskin: "Remember that the most beautiful things in the world are the most useless: peacocks and lilies for instance."⁸

The brick core of this house however was far from useless. Following the departure of its original owners, the Edmonton Street duplex came to be occupied by a series of people, none of whom stayed for an extended length of time.

Until the 1920s, the occupants were generally middle-class. The district, bordering on Central Park, was known for its gracious homes. Edmonton Street in particular was the home of many of the city's most prominent citizens, while residences with a view on the park continued to command high prices. As the suburbs grew and gradually siphoned off the downtown elite, this district and this duplex were transformed to more of a working class nature. Clerks, a machinist and a salesman came to represent the occupations of the duplex tenants. Many of the large homes were soon divided into smaller suites while others were demolished as the business district expanded north from Portage Avenue.

It is difficult to determine exactly when this building was converted from a duplex to a rooming house. During the 1940s and 1950s it was owned and at least partially occupied by the Adolph Schott family. In 1962, it was divided into several small suites and single rooms.⁹ During this period, most of the veranda was removed and adapted into a porch, while small additions were made to each half of the rear of the building.

Despite massive interior alterations, the exterior has retained a good amount of its early features. Like most of the buildings in the vicinity, it is now a multiple dwelling but one can still see in this house the previous character of the neighbourhood around Central Park.

FOOTNOTES:

1. City of Winnipeg Building Permit No. 237 (25 May 1901).
2. Henderson's Directory for Winnipeg 1901 - 1909.
3. "Winnipeg Building Materials" photograph caption Manitoba Free Press, 14 November 1903.
4. Files of Provincial Archives of Manitoba Photograph Collection.
5. Henderson's Directory, op. cit.
6. Permits, op. cit.
7. Anthony Adamson and John Willard The Gaiety of Gables - Ontario's Architectural Folk Art (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1974).
8. John Ruskin in The Stones of Venice quoted in Adamson and Will and, Ibid, title page.
9. Ivan Saunders "368-370 Edmonton Street" in Early Building in Winnipeg C.I.H.B. Vol. IV p. 300.

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Plate 1 – The Hoover & Town Duplex, 368 - 370 Edmonton Street, 1903. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N7147.)



Plate 2 – Other houses on the same side of the street just north of the present site of Knox Church, 1903. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N7146.)

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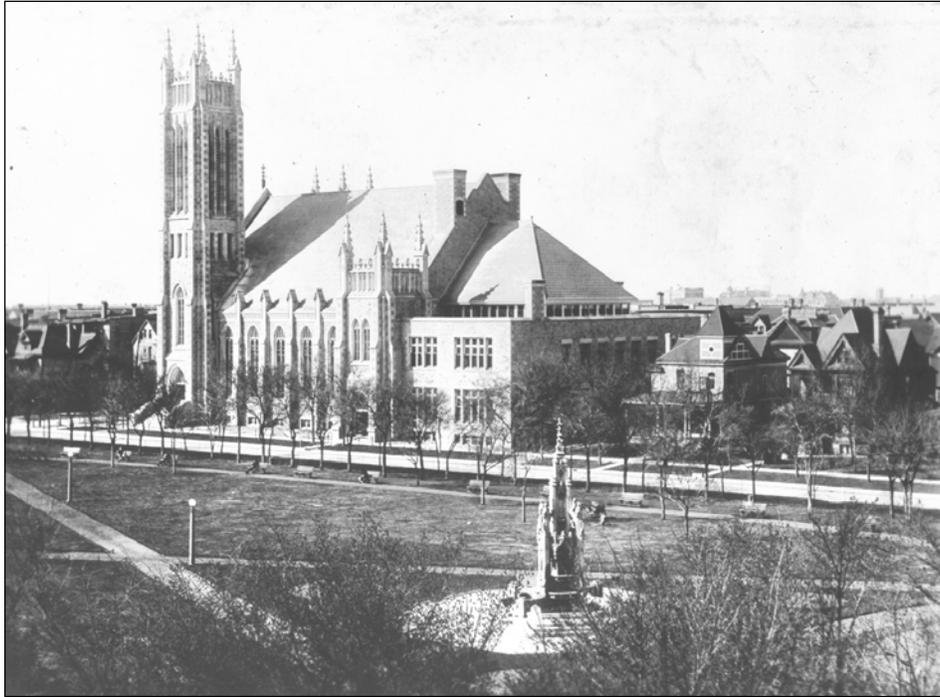


Plate 3 – Knox Church and district, ca.1928. This duplex would be the next house on the extreme left of the photograph. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N5169.)



Plate 4 – A view of the west side of Edmonton Street (running to the front of Knox Church), 1927. These houses were designed for narrow downtown lots so that emphasis was placed on the street elevation with comparatively little decoration on the sides. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Thomas Burns Collection, #658.)