



SCANDINAVIAN MISSION CHURCH

268 ELLEN STREET

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee

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BACKGROUND:

To descend from the train at the CPR station in Winnipeg was to enter an international bazaar: the noise of thousands of voices and a dozen tongues circled the high marble pillars and drifted out into the streets...

G. Friesen¹

Friesen's "international bazaar" of the early twentieth century was a result of a number of factors both Canadian and international. The Liberal Government under Prime Minister Laurier and especially the minister responsible for immigration, Clifford Sifton, embarked upon a massive program of funding, education and recruitment in order to populate Canada's west. While some argue this was intended to provide a new economic hinterland for Southern Ontario and Montreal business concerns, it seems more attributable to a fear of U.S. expansionism (the fear of the idea of "Manifest Destiny" was still a rallying cry for the Canadian nationalists). Secondly, all the arable free land in the U.S. had officially been taken by 1900, making the Canadian prairies more attractive. And finally, the wheat economy was beginning to flourish. Prices were rising, freight costs were dropping and technological advances were increasing production. All these factors led to the huge jump in Canadian immigration in the two decades after 1890.²

Winnipeg originally was the final stop on the rail lines, and as such became organizer and supplier to the trickle of immigrants moving into the prairies. As trickle gave way to waves of settlers (Plates 1 and 2), many new arrivals, as J.S. Woodsworth saw, chose to remain in the rapidly growing city because of employment possibilities. To Woodsworth, "Winnipeg was not only the main distributing point for immigrants to Western Canada but also the centre where many remained temporarily or permanently."³

One of the more numerous and successful groups of immigrants that came to Winnipeg were the Scandinavians (Swedes, Norwegians, Finns, and Danes). It was estimated that their population in

the three Prairie Provinces rose 453% from 1901 to 1910, rising 2,340% in Saskatchewan alone. Manitoba's Scandinavian population grew from 11,924 in 1901 to 16,419 in 1910.⁴ Much of Winnipeg's new Scandinavian population settled in the "North-End" district along Logan Avenue. By the late 1890s, a strong Scandinavian community was flourishing in the area and as with other ethnic communities, uppermost in many minds was religion. With a large and settled population in neighbouring Minnesota assisting (both with missionary and financial support), congregations and churches were organized. One such effort was the Free Church which had organized as a reform movement to the Lutheran or State Church in the Scandinavian countries and Minnesota. The movement objected to the hierarchical format of the State Church and therefore created autonomous congregations whose control and organization rested entirely upon itself. Thus, by 1897 the strong Free Church Scandinavians in Winnipeg, both economically steady and geographically united and aided by Minnesota missionary efforts, constructed their second church at the corner of Logan Avenue and Ellen Street.

STYLE

The Scandinavian Mission Church at 168 Ellen Street (also given as 410 Logan Avenue on occasion) is a simple example of the Romanesque Revival-type church. It utilizes the centralized or Akron floor plan first used in Roman temples and made popular with Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist churches in Akron, Ohio, in the early 1800s. This contrasts the linear basilica plan used by most Anglican and Roman Catholic churches in Canada and early Christian churches in Europe.⁵

CONSTRUCTION

The original frame church (that was demolished to allow construction of the second church) was built in 1886 and cost \$900.⁶ The present structure was built in 1897 and measures approximately 61' x 40'. It is of frame construction with brick-veneer and stone basement and cost \$5,000. Nave seating totalled 225 with an adjoining room that could be opened or shut-off with seating for an extra 125 people.⁷ The cornerstone was laid June 4, 1897, and services began the last day of October.⁸

DESIGN

Hugh McCowan's interior design is intended to focus attention on the pulpit. Floors slope from entrance to apse and pews radiate from the pulpit (as with central or Akron plan churches). The apse is built in semi-circular fashion to accentuate the focussing effect. All openings utilize round-headed arches with radiating brickwork. The main windows are grouped in threes with round-headed drip mouldings, rusticated stone at basement level and stone sills complete the design. The entrance and bell tower at the Northeast corner of the building has a pyramidal roof with four pinnacles. The basement is designed with low ceilings and ample space for the social events often staged at the site.

INTERIOR

Many of the original pieces of the building are still present including main windows, pews, central light fixture and apse railing. While the interior is in unkempt condition, there does not appear to be any structural problems with either the basement or main floor.

INTEGRITY

1) Occupies original site. 2) Has remained unaltered. 3) Is in poor structural condition (Plates 3 and 4).

STREETSCAPE

The church is located on the southwest corner of Logan Avenue and Ellen Street and is not out of place with its surrounding environment.

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTOR

The contractor for the church is the small Winnipeg firm of the Spencer Bros. and the architect is Winnipegger Hugh McCowan⁹ (see Plate 5 and Appendix I for the McCowan biography). It is

interesting to note that McCowan also designed the Scandinavian Baptist Church on the northeast corner of Logan and Ellen also built in 1897¹⁰ (Plate 6). The two structures are remarkably similar in design and appearance.

INSTITUTION

The diluting of the ethnic communities in Winnipeg with time took a heavy toll on many of the so-called "Foreign Churches". By the late 1950s, the Scandinavian Mission Church had vacated in favour of a Presbyterian congregation and the church was renamed the First Reformed Church.¹¹ Many of the old Mission Church parishioners went to St. Marks Lutheran Church in River Heights while others divided the city's other Lutheran churches. By 1975 the Ellen Street church stood empty. Present owner is Jim Stevens who wishes to repair the building with the possible construction of a restaurant and theatre on the premises within the boundaries of McCowan's design.

EVENT

Churches have, throughout the history of the Canadian west, been central in the development of every community. Examples of residents erecting beautiful and expensive churches with few personal resources are countless. These churches became the social as well as spiritual centres of the communities and attracted immigrants of similar backgrounds to them. As one writer witnessed,

With Scandinavians, Germans and other foreign nationalities, it is a consideration of no small weight that they find on their arrival here religious institutions established so that they can immediately enjoy them in their own languages.¹²

In Winnipeg's case, a mushrooming immigrant population mainly centred in the "North-End" gave way to numerous churches. In the 1920s for example, there were no less than five Scandinavian churches in the two block area around the Mission Church.¹³

Most importantly, the Ellen Street Church became an immigrant drop-off centre for new

Scandinavian arrivals. From here the new citizens could be organized and cared for by the growing community. As such, the Mission Church became one of the first contacts many immigrants had with their newly adopted country.

CONTEXT

This building is a good example of the type of structure the new immigrant community endeavoured to build. It showed a concern for religion as well as a need for meeting space (in this case in the basement). It also reflected the new community's increasing prosperity and social organization.

LANDMARK

Standing on an extremely busy corner, this structure is highly visible to the average resident of Winnipeg. It is also important as one of the few remaining original immigrant churches in the area.

FOOTNOTES

1. G. Friesen, The Canadian Prairies. A History. (Toronto - 1984) pp. 242-243.
2. Total Canadian Immigration 1900-1907 was 1,070,548. J.S. Woodsworth, Strangers within our gates. (Toronto - 1909) pp. 24-25.
3. Ibid. p. viii.
4. A.S. Morton, History of Prairie Settlement. (Toronto - 1938) p. 127.
5. The Year Past. (Winnipeg), 1984, pp. 29-30 and 1985, pp. 29-30.
6. Manitoba Daily Newspaper, 27 March 1886.
7. Manitoba Free Press. (MEP) 02 October 1897, p. 8 and City of Winnipeg, Assessment Records. Roll No. 818190, Code 90, Ward 2.
8. It is interesting to note that there was a lengthy delay between completion of the structure and the first service because of the late shipment of the pews. Winnipeg Tribune. 03 June 1897, p. 8 and 26 October 1897, p. 8 and MEP, 02 October 1897, p. 8.
9. MEP, 03 October 1897, p. 8.
10. Winnipeg Tribune, 16 August 1897, p. 8.
11. Henderson Directories.
12. Manitoba Daily Newspaper, 27 March 1886.
13. Henderson Directories, 1920, p. 253.

Thanks to Martin Benum, Al Brakus, Randy Rostecki
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APPENDIX I

Hugh McCowan

Hugh McCowan was born in Wardsville, Ontario, to Scottish parents in 1841.¹ Here he learned carpentry and stair construction and then moved to Flint, Michigan, where he studied architecture and sanitary engineering (including plumbing, heating and ventilation). Due to failing health, Mr. McCowan emigrated to the Canadian Northwest (the act of changing climates was an often prescribed cure for such an illness). In 1881 he opened his Winnipeg office² and continued to work out of this office until his death in 1908. Late in his career he formed a partnership with Robert E. Davies and together their firm became a well-known entity in the province.³

An incomplete list of McCowan structures includes:

- Brandon College (1900)
- Jubilee Wing of the Winnipeg General Hospital
- Henderson Block (Princess Street)
- Stovel Block (Kay Building), 245 McDermot Avenue
- Scandinavian Baptist Church (1897), 405 Logan Avenue
- Buildings for the Winnipeg and Morden School Boards and the Government of Manitoba

¹ "Death of Hugh McCowan of Winnipeg", Canadian Architect and Builder XXII, April 1908, p. 11.

² "A Group of Winnipeg Architects", Canadian Architect and Builder X, January 1897, pp. 3 - 5.

³ Winnipeg Telegram, 18 September 1906, p. 55.

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Plate 1 – Immigrants detrainning at the C.P.R. station in Winnipeg, ca.1912. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N7927.)



Plate 2 – Group of Dutch immigrants at the Immigration Hall, Winnipeg, April 1893. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N9943.)

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Plate 3 – Section of stone foundation and upper walls showing brick veneer loss and other signs of aging. (M. Peterson, 1987.)



Plate 4 – Part of east side of church. (M. Peterson, 1987.)

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Plate 5 – Architect Hugh McCowan, ca.1902. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N9411.)

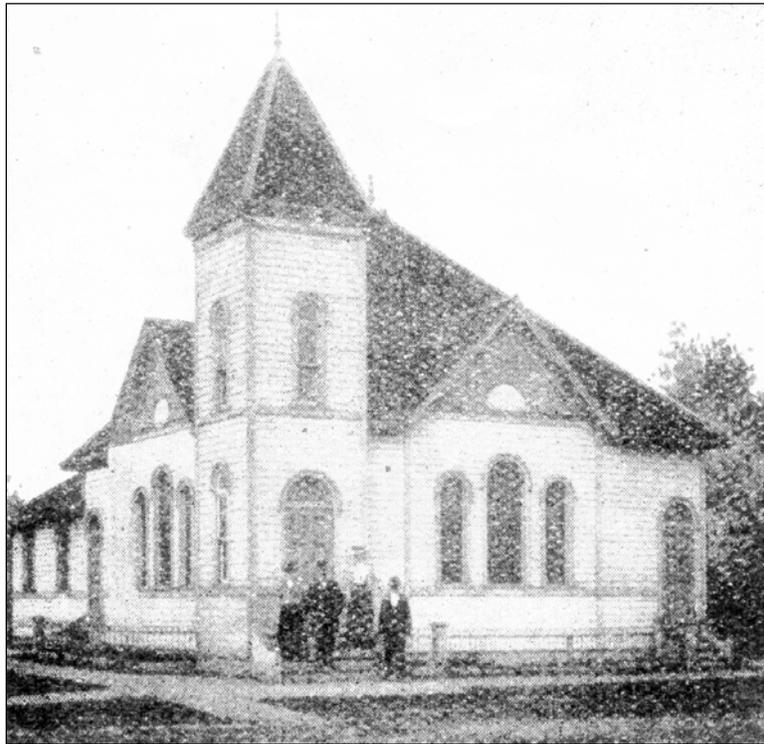


Plate 6 – Scandinavian Baptist Church, Ellen Street, ca.1905. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)