

6 FERMOR AVENUE – ST. VITAL LIBRARY

George A. Stewart, 1963



St. Vital, incorporated as a city in 1962 with a population of approximately 27,000, had seen a growth in its library system since the first facility was opened in a converted retail space near the corner of St. Mary's Road and St. Anne's Road in 1953. The need for larger, more modern space was felt nearly immediately and a community group, the Friends of the St. Vital Library began to lobby the Library Board and municipal council for a new facility.

Council purchased an oddly shaped, triangular piece of property on the south side of Fermor Avenue for a dollar and in late 1961 hired local architect George A. Stewart to design a new library building. His unusual structure related directly to the site and Council approved the plans. The official sod turning occurred in 1962 and the formal opening of the new library took place on June 9, 1963.

Often described as a "key" shape, the library runs east to west, the east end features two segmented circular areas, the smaller and shorter at the east end, the larger to the west and holds the main entrance. The west end boasts a stepped front (north) façade with large windows. The frame

structure is clad in dark brick with exposed concrete columns and fascia clad in “enamelled steel sheeting. The rear (south) façade of the west end features high angular windows.

The structure’s basement includes storage in the west end and work space and activity rooms in the east. The main floor holds the books and other materials, many on the original wood bookcases. The main desk is centrally located and the east end includes the mezzanines with original wood handrails and guardrails (although wire meshing has been added). The ceiling of this section is exposed glue-lam wood and skylights add natural light to the stacks. Skylights are also found in the ceiling of the west end of the building.

Both the interior and the exterior show a remarkable degree of retention of original design and layout and materials.

The library continues to be an important part of the City of Winnipeg’s services in the south end of the city.

Elements of the building that would require approval if alterations were planned are:

Exterior:

- The key-shaped massing, featuring two adjoining, double height circular sections on the east, and a lower, rectangular block to the west with a stepped back front façade, and flat roofs throughout
- Cladding materials including dark brown brick throughout, contrasted by vertical metal reveals in regular intervals, and matching metal fascia in an undulating pattern
- Large rectangular windows throughout, many with slanted heads to mimic the fascia, in singles or stacked in pairs, with simple mullions and spandrel panels
- Main entrance centrally located

Interior:

- The open plan
- The exposed glue-lam beams throughout, in intricate radiating or grid patterns, with plank wood ceilings.
- The circular sections featuring multiple mezzanines and stairs with original wood and metal handrails/guardrails, ocular skylights, and pendant light fixtures.
- Details including some original wooden book stacks, wood paneling, etc.