

549 GERTRUDE AVENUE – TRINITY BAPTIST CHURCH

George G. Teeter, 1907-1910



The Gertrude Avenue-Nassau Street site secured in 1904 by Winnipeg Baptists for their first church south of the Assiniboine River was soon something more than a quiet corner in residential Fort Rouge.

Not only did the new ministry led by Reverend J.B. Warnicker quickly develop into a hub of Baptist activity, but it also became an integral part of the bustling “street of churches” that arose on Nassau between River and Corydon avenues. No less than five places of worship were established along this street by 1910, including First Church of Christ Scientist; St. Luke’s Anglican; Fort Rouge Methodist (now Crescent-Fort Rouge); Nassau Street Baptist; and St. Ignatius Roman Catholic Church.

The relationship between the Baptists and Roman Catholics extended beyond a common physical location. In 1908, after the Baptists had outgrown their original one-storey frame building, the newly formed St. Ignatius congregation acquired the structure and moved it one-and-a-half blocks south to 222 Nassau. Though now substantially altered, this facility still houses religious functions under the Nassau Street Church.

Upon its opening in 1904, it was thought that the first Nassau Street Baptist Church had ample room for growth, given that its membership was 35 and its seating capacity was 250. However, a Winnipeg building boom, including rapid expansion of Fort Rouge, combined with Rev. Warnicker's popularity to attract many more new members than the structure could comfortably hold.

By 1907, the congregation had hired George Gaspar Teeter (1880-1949) to design a larger and more substantial edifice. The basement phase of the project proceeded under stonemasons Gillis, Fraser and McDonald. Further work was delayed, however, pending stabilization of both the church's finances and Fort Rouge's pace of development. Services were held in the basement from 1908 until mid-1909 when Fraser and McDonald, joined by carpentry contractor James Henry Neil, began erecting the superstructure.

Completed and furnished for about \$40,000, the second Nassau Street Baptist Church was dedicated in January 1910 under a new pastor, Rev. A.M. McDonald. It was one of four Baptist churches designed in Winnipeg by George Teeter between 1906 and 1909.

Born in St. Ann's, Ontario and educated in Toronto, Teeter became a junior partner in an architectural firm at North Bay, Ontario. After relocating to Winnipeg in early 1906, he was commissioned to design houses for the Riverview Realty Company and a church (now demolished) for the Tabernacle Baptist congregation. Plans followed for the Nassau Street, First German Baptist and Salem Reformed churches (all still standing), plus several apartment blocks, factories, warehouses, and King Edward Memorial Hospital. Teeter, a member of the Nassau Street congregation, served as chief draughtsman with the provincial Good Roads Board from 1920 to

1930. He then resumed private practice, participating in projects such as the Christie-Brown Biscuit Works and Bryce Bakery stables.

His eclectically styled Nassau Street church is dominated by Romanesque Revival detailing, including heavy stonework, round-topped openings and three rose windows. Traces of Gothic and Baroque Revival styling also are apparent. The building is of load-bearing construction, a common technique in Winnipeg, with stone foundation and high peaked roof. The all-stone walls are unusual since most of the city's load-bearing facilities have been executed in wood frame or brick.

Teeter's front (east or Nassau Street) elevation features a large rose window, an elevated and pedimented main entrance porch, and two end towers. To the south is the 18.3-metre (60-foot) central tower topped by corner bartizans, a distinctively shaped green tile roof and wrought-iron finial. Other ornamentation includes stone corbelling, buttresses, belt courses, round-topped tripartite windows, and an elevated arched entrance off Gertrude. The smaller, north-end tower incorporates a round-topped doorway, flat roof and corbelling.

A Gothic-style dormer frames a rose window on the south (Gertrude) facing. This and other elements are replicated on the building's north side, with the addition of a small office wing toward the rear. A five-sided parlour wing and high chimney appear on the west (lane) elevation.

The interior includes a 540-seat auditorium with a long, deeply coved ceiling, a raised pulpit backed by the console of a massive pipe organ, and three sections of slash-grained oak pews which fan out on an upward slope from the pulpit area. The striking rose windows display designs of an open Bible; the cross and crown of spiritual triumph over death; and the land of human and divine knowledge.

The rear of the church is organized into meeting space, dressing rooms, baptismal pool, and pastor's study, while the basement originally included a large open area, washroom, kitchen, and boiler room. During extensive renovations in 1963, the lower level was divided into an assembly area flanked by a committee room, kitchen, three activity rooms, nursery, storage space, and washrooms.

Renamed in 1930 as Trinity Baptist Church, this facility continues to be used by the congregation as well as two other congregations and a food bank operates in the basement.

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

Exterior-

- Stone church with complex roof on the northwest corner of Gertrude Avenue and Nassau Street North, its south façade facing Gertrude Avenue, its east façade facing Nassau Street North, its west façade facing a back lane and its north façade facing a neighbouring building;
- Its east façade with high tower at the south end with stone corbelling and round-topped tripartite windows under a wide stone arch and red tile roof with corner bartizans, a low tower at the north end with corbelling, a round-topped doorway and a flat roof, a central main entrance with arched opening and a rose window in the gable end;
- The south façade with arched entrance in corner tower, rectilinear and arched window openings, buttresses, gable end with rose window and arched entrance at west end;
- The west elevation with five-sided projecting section and chimney; and
- The north façade with rectilinear and arched window openings, buttresses and a gable end with rose window.

Interior-

- The Church's finishes, volume of space and ornamental detailing in the sanctuary.