



400 HARGRAVE STREET

CALVARY TEMPLE
(FORMERLY FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH)

HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE

5 March, 1984

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The sight of Calvary Temple, highly visible from the busy intersection of Portage Avenue and Hargrave Street, is as familiar to this generation of Winnipeggers as First Baptist Church was to previous generations. Since 1938, this church has been home to a Pentecostal group who named their centre Calvary Temple, but for nearly fifty years before this was the home of Winnipeg's earliest Baptist Congregation.

The Baptists, a Protestant sect originating in England,¹ were relative latecomers to the prairie west. Drawing their numbers from Scottish, British and American immigration to eastern Canada, the Baptists were scattered and highly de-centralized, lacking the financial or administrative wherewithal to launch an early missionary program to the new west. Furthermore, in a purposeful reaction to the more established churches, the Baptists formed strong, autonomous and highly individualistic churches of the evangelical sect. The Bible was their authority and teacher, with ministers rising from their ranks in an organic evolution.² The Baptist Church was well suited to frontier conditions but, by its very nature, was a church of the backwoods population, with folk appeal for the individual rather than for the social masses.

The urbanization of eastern Canada began to alter the traditional basis of Baptist support in the 1860s and 1870s. Larger, wealthier congregations, especially in Toronto, had a moderating effect on the Church, creating a more professional clergy, a Baptist press, and eventually the formation of home missionary organizations.

It was not until the Church had become more centralized and more traditional that it began to look to the developing communities in the west. The Baptist Missionary Convention of Ontario sent its first representative west, the Reverend Alex McDonald, in 1873. With limited funds and support, McDonald was forced back to the old frontier Baptist methods, still effective in the frontier west. Prayer meetings, held in private homes or schools in Winnipeg and in villages in a radius around it, formed the beginnings of a Baptist movement in Manitoba. Local contributions financed the first

Baptist Church built between Sarnia and Vancouver on Rupert Avenue in Winnipeg in 1875,³ with tiny churches following within a few years in Emerson and Stonewall.

As an evangelical sect, the Baptists placed heavy emphasis on baptism in the Holy Spirit, attracting adults, youths and children from other religious faiths rather than waiting for a natural increase from their few founding members. Religious conversions swelled their ranks, particularly under the leadership of the third minister to the Winnipeg group, the Rev. Alexander Grant. Grant, a highly personable and charismatic figure, was a great orator with a skilful talent for organization. Well aware of the Baptist tradition of autonomy for local churches, he built up the congregation of First Baptist in Winnipeg as well as the smaller mission churches at a grass roots level, to be repaid with the devotion, support and assistance of an expanding congregation.

In 1893, a large new church was built for the Winnipeg congregation, keeping the name First Baptist, at the corner of Hargrave Street (then Charlotte) and Cumberland Avenue. Most of the \$45,000 cost of land, construction and furnishing of the building was presubscribed by the enthusiastic parish. Rev. Grant, clearly a key figure in these events,⁴ commissioned Toronto architects Messrs. Langley and Burke with the design, with Hugh McCowan as the site architect. Services opened in the basement of the new church late in 1893 when the main structure was but brick walls and scaffolding. The church was fully completed the following year.

Henry Langley had a long and distinguished career behind him in Toronto, with his work no doubt well known to Rev. Grant. In a series of individual and partnership endeavours, such as this one with Burke, Langley designed such significant Toronto buildings as Government House (1866), alterations to the second City hall (ca.1870), the Toronto Union Bank (1872) and the most important federal building in Toronto, the General Post Office, a masterpiece of Second Empire style.⁵ In addition to several Gothic Anglican churches, Langley also designed Metropolitan Methodist Church (1873), whose scale and design is reminiscent of First Baptist in Winnipeg. Like the Baptists, the Methodists sought a clear departure from the traditions of the Anglican and Catholic Churches. No nave, no transepts and most of all no alter characterized both these churches. Although the exterior of both buildings borrows from traditional "church" architecture, the use of an

open auditorium, rounded vaults and galleries create the desired difference.

In First Baptist, the floor slopes downward toward the sanctuary which is defined most prominently by the massive wooden pipes of the organ, mounted over the preacher's pulpit. The groin vault, resting on cast iron columns, gives the external appearance of a cruciform but in plan the building was nearly square.

Massive red brick walls rest on a foundation of stone, with the trimming of red sandstone. A capped tower with side pinnacles rises 60 feet in the southeast corner of the building, with the two main doorways in its base. The raised basement is lit by a series of flat and segmented-headed windows while most of the upper floor windows have arched heads. The arches in the belltower are repeated in the long windows of all four sides of the auditorium, the windows north and south admitting most of the light. These windows were originally filled with coloured glass to lessen the glare and reduce the possibility of distraction from outside buildings;⁶ stained glass was not then part of the Baptist tradition.⁷

The main auditorium, described in part earlier, was approached by two large staircases leading up from the vestibules. The walls were wainscotted with ash and red pine, finished in rough plaster below, while the space above the windows and into the ceiling vaults was smooth plaster. The four apses of the ceiling meet in an apex in which was placed a large ventilator.

Varnished ash was used for the pulpit, choir seats and screen to blend in with the woodwork of the massive organ. The seats, said to be comfortable in case of a long session, could accommodate 800 people.

Behind the sanctuary were dressing rooms and the pastor's study. To the right of the pulpit was a large baptistry, raised six feet from the floor, with access to the dressing rooms. Galleries ran down both sides of the auditorium.

In the basement was a semi-circular lecture room seating 400. From this, five more classrooms

opened out behind folding doors. This arrangement could double the capacity of the main hall. There were also two nursery or kindergarten rooms. The rooms, with walls finished in white with pine wainscotting, were well lit. The plentiful arrangement of windows was supplemented by both gas and incandescent fixtures. Four Boynton furnaces supplied hot water for the radiators.

Upon completion, it was proudly announced that:

The whole structure is an example of the comfort and convenience which modern church builders have been able to attain without taking away from the religious character of their structure and is one of the standing testimonies that "the long drawn aisle and fretted vault" is not the best form of structure for the church home of a congregation of active Christian workers.⁸

Not long after their new edifice was completed, their beloved minister, Rev. Grant, was drowned in an accident. For two years, First Baptist itself languished without a permanent preacher until the appointment of Rev. John McNeil. Since its construction in 1893, the church had become a mother church for denominations throughout Manitoba and the Northwest. The arrival of hundreds of Swedish, Icelandic and German Baptists had led to the creation of a couple of new Winnipeg churches, while similar occurrences swelled the ranks in the countryside. Not long after the formation of the Northwest Convention in 1882 (an administrative union equivalent to an archdiocese), the Baptists counted nine western churches, eight missions, eight settled pastors and two student missionaries for 741 members. By 1896, there were 47 churches, 100 missionary posts, 23 settled pastors and 10 student missionaries ministering to 2,841 members.⁹ Although their numbers always remained relatively small, the Baptists were gaining in strength. In 1899, Brandon College, later Brandon University, was opened by the Baptists and included a seminary for the Baptist ministry.

So active was First Baptist Church in Winnipeg that only a decade after its completion, more space was needed. In 1904, architect J.H.G. Russell and builder Andrew McBean made an addition to the auditorium that doubled its seating capacity to 1,500 people. The two-storey addition went onto the west side of the church down Cumberland Avenue, and cost \$24,000.¹⁰ It was opened with much

fanfare in January, 1905, a date which some people have mistaken as the construction of the whole church.¹¹

In c. 1910, the Baptists were approached for a union of Protestant churches, but declined on the grounds that their distinctive principles made it necessary "to maintain a separate organized existence" and to propagate their views throughout the world."¹² The Canadian Methodist and Presbyterian Churches formed the United Church in 1925, which became a strong and influential church, possibly reclaiming some of its former adherents back from the evangelical churches. Such political radicals as William Aberhart, the evangelical premier of Alberta's Social Credit movement, the C.C.F.'s scholarly Tommy Douglas and long-time Alberta premier Ernest Manning were all Baptists,¹³ symbolizing the solid impact of the fundamentalist faith on prairie society.

Still, the congregation of First Baptist found the economic pressures of the 1930s depression, as well as the relocation of many of its congregation to the suburbs, diminishing the resources of the congregation. In 1938, First Baptist sold their large beautiful church to the Pentecostals and merged with Broadway Baptist to form Broadway First Baptist Church, still active at 706 Honeyman Avenue.

The Pentecostal Calvary Temple, now one of 600 Pentecostal Churches in the National Assembly, first appeared in Winnipeg in 1907. A lay businessman, later the Rev. A.H. Argue, called by the Holy Spirit, began to hold prayer sessions in his home that gradually expanded into regular church sessions in a variety of rented churches. Heavily evangelical and fundamentalist, the Pentecostals attracted many believers locally and purchased First Baptist in 1938 to house the growing congregation.¹⁴ Like the Baptist Church, this was also the pioneer Pentecostal Church in western Canada and a base for expansion of the sect.

Because they place a great deal of stress upon Christian education, Sunday School classes and Bible study sessions for adults are a major part of the Pentecostal belief. To this end, two major additions were made to the original brick church, a Sunday School building appended to the east side in 1955 or 1960 and a modern Christian Education Centre added to the west side of the church along

Cumberland Avenue in 1962.¹⁵

In 1974, a new Calvary Temple was constructed across the lane to the north of the big brick church. With a seating capacity of 2,400, this was said to be the largest church in Western Canada. The old church then became used for Sunday School classes and meetings.

The Pentecostals had redecorated the former First Baptist Church for their own fiftieth anniversary year in 1957. Green paint was used on the walls and beige covered the pipes. The organ woodwork was not painted. Green was also applied to the exterior trim of the church at this time. The two major additions in the last three decades have altered the appearance of the church considerably, yet the main body of the 1893 structure remains.

This fine brick church has been the mother church for two large Winnipeg congregations. True to their origins, the Baptists have again decentralized into numerous large and small congregations throughout the city. Its two most famous preachers, Rev. Grant and the equally inspired orator Rev. McNeil, continuously preached to overflow audiences in the days when religion played a major part in the lives of most citizens. Oldtimers recall accompanying friends and relatives to the church to hear the pastor preach on a celebrated topic.¹⁶ First Baptist was very familiar to a great number of Winnipeggers of all faiths, as Calvary Temple is now.

FOOTNOTES

1. S.D. Clarke, Church and Sect in Canada, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1948, p. 101.
2. Ibid., p. 164 & 349.
3. Rev. C.C. McLaurin, Pioneering in Western Canada: A Story of the Baptists, published by the author, Calgary, 1939, p. 78 & 93.
4. "First Baptist Church, Winnipeg," The Colonist, June, 1895, p. 279-80.
5. William Denby, Lost Toronto, Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1978, p. 34, 82-86, 115-7.
6. "First Baptist Church," op. cit., p. 279.
7. Trinity Baptist on Gertrude and Nassau Streets was constructed at a later phase and features magnificent greens and blues stained glass.
8. "First Baptist Church," op. cit., p. 280.
9. McLaurin, op. cit., p. 131.
10. City of Winnipeg Building Permits, No. 951, 25 June 1904.
11. "First Baptists Occupy Fine New Edifice Tomorrow," Manitoba Free Press, 28 January 1905, p. 15.
12. R.J. Wilson, Church Union in Canada After Three Years, The United Church Publishing House, Toronto, 1929, p. 16-17.
13. Walter E. Ellis, "Baptists and Radical Politics in Western Canada (1920-1950)," in Jarold K. Zeman, ed. Baptists in Canada, G.R. Welch Co. Ltd., Ontario, 1980, p. 176.
14. "Jubilee Year for Calvary Temple," Winnipeg Free Press, 12 January 1957, and "A Pentecostal Golden Jubilee," Winnipeg Free Press, 4 May 1957.
15. W.E. Ingersoll, "When the West's Churches Were Crowded," Winnipeg Free Press, 3 March 1962.

APPENDIX I

J.H.G. Russell

John Hamilton Gordon Russell was born to a large family in Toronto in 1862. Here he studied architecture before moving to the United States. After working in Washington and Chicago,¹ he moved to Winnipeg in 1893. His family built one of the earliest homes on Wellington Crescent, which later became his own home.

In 1895, Russell opened his own office. With the economy of Winnipeg booming, and construction at a peak, Russell had an active business. He was prolific. Not given to specialization, J.H.G. Russell designed houses, churches, warehouses and commercial buildings in good numbers. We are particularly fortunate in having an archival record of his account books, which itemize suppliers and costs for most of his works.² An incomplete photographic record of Russell's work also survives.

His best-known buildings include Augustine Church (1903), the McArthur Building (now Childs) (1909), Westminster United Church (1912), the J.H. Ashdown house (1912) on Wellington Crescent (now Khartum Temple), and the magnificent Knox Presbyterian Church (1914) on Edmonton Street.

Russell was president of the Royal Architecture Institute of Canada in 1912, the first year that it included all the provincial bodies. He was on the examining board of the Manitoba Association of Architects, involved in several local businesses, and Chairman of the Presbyterian Church Board of managers.

Russell died in Winnipeg in 1946.

¹ F.H. Schofield, The Story of Manitoba, Vol. III, The S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., Winnipeg, 1913, p. 156.

² J.H.G. Russell Collection, MG11 E2 P.A.M.

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Plate 1 – First Baptist Church, Hargrave Street, 1900. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N7136.)

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Plate 2 – First Baptist Church, ca.1910. Architect J.H.G. Russell's 1904 addition is seen on the left.
(Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

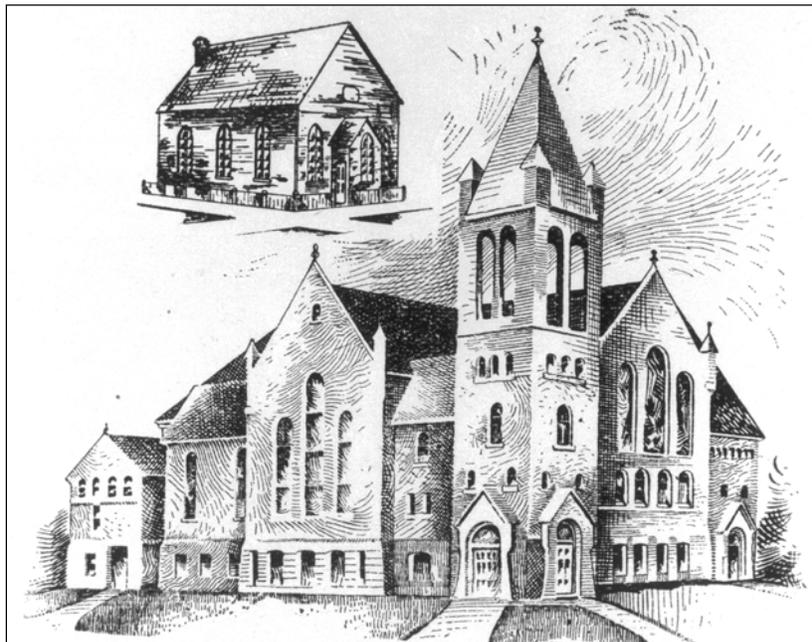


Plate 3 – A sketch of the original First Baptist Church on Rupert Avenue from 1875 to 1893 above the new Hargrave Street facility. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

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Plate 4 – First Baptist Church, no date, showing a pencilled-in second addition on the far left. It was never built. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N7137.)



Plate 5 – Interior of Calvary Temple, no date. (Courtesy of City of Winnipeg, Planning Department.)