



484 MARYLAND STREET FIRST ENGLISH LUTHERAN CHURCH (CITY CHURCH)

Date of Construction: 1911

Building Permit: 2921/1911 (Plans at City Storage)

Architect: Smith, R.L.

Contractor: Bruce and Bostrom

ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

An important facility in any immigrant community is its church. Built seven years after the founding of this congregation, First English Lutheran Church became a well-known structure to the predominantly Icelandic neighbourhood in the West End where this structure has stood for nearly 100 years.

The dark hued brick superstructure rests on a raised limestone foundation and is accented by smooth-cut limestone around window and door openings and elsewhere on the main elevations. A tall, crenellated tower is located in the building's southeast corner and the front (east) façade includes a wide set of stairs giving access to the pointed arch doorway. Above this entrance is the magnificent rose window and this central section is finished with a stone capped gable end with cross at its apex. A shorter crenellated tower is located in



Front (east) façade detail, 2009

the northeast corner. Brick buttresses with stone accenting are found at all corners and framing the main entrance.

The south and north façades continue the ornamental treatment of the front; buttresses divide the faces into a number of bays, each holding a pointed arch window. The rear (west side) of the building is plain, with a single pointed arch window. There is a one-storey entrance located at the building's southwest corner (built ca.1955).¹

The church stands on its original site, appears to be in good structural condition and does not appear to have suffered major exterior alteration.

This is one of Winnipeg's finer religious structures designed in the Gothic Revival style. The style, recognizable by its use of the pointed arch, flying buttresses, and rib vault, was a conscious attempt to reduce or at least interrupt flat wall surfaces. The style has been described as "a system of skeletal structure with active, slender, resilient members and membrane-thin infilling or no infilling at all."²

In Winnipeg, the Anglican, Baptist and Lutheran churches all raised buildings that exhibited similar Gothic elements, borrowing from their common Protestant background. The three denominations that ultimately formed the United Church – Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational – also drew from this source, basing many of their early designs on the humble parish churches of Britain, "the most common arrangement for rural churches in Manitoba until about 1945."³ The lack of ornamentation of the early Manitoba churches was a consequence of both the austerity of the frontier community and a wariness of ornate designs that tended to be associated with the Roman Catholic church.⁴



Rear (west) and south façades, 2009

By the 20th century, however, technological advances in building materials and engineering and the rise of an affluent population in urban centres led to the construction of more monumental structures, heavily ornamented with Gothic elements. Following the congregations in eastern Canada and the United States, Winnipeg saw a dramatic rise in the number of monumental Gothic-inspired churches built beginning in the late 1890s. Between 1900 and 1930, Gothic Revival and its early 20th century evolution, Beaux-Arts Gothic, were the styles of choice for almost all Presbyterian (and United) churches.

Nothing is known about the architect, R.L. Smith, at this time. His name only appears four times in the City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books between 1899 and 1926, the earliest is 1904 when he renovated his own house on Nassau Street; the other three include this church (1911), a house for J.M. Suttie on Fisher Street (1911) and the Winnipeg Lutheran Tabernacle Church on Victor Street (1912).



Rear (west) and north façades, 2009

HISTORICAL INTEREST:

In 1904, a group of local adherents met at the British and Foreign Bible Society Building on Ellice Avenue to discuss the formation of a Lutheran congregation. In June of 1905, the congregation was formally organized and by January 1906 had dedicated their first church on Ellice Avenue at Agnes Street. Growing quickly, the congregation sought larger quarters and in November 1913 dedicated its second church on Maryland Street.⁵

The church continued until 2005 when the congregation chose to amalgamate and move to Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, Minto Street.⁶ The church building stood vacant for only a short time and in 2008, Grant Memorial Church opened City Church, an "internationally intercultural congregation in the core area of Winnipeg."⁷



Front (east) façade rose window, 2009

RECOMMENDATION TO HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE:

Under the Historical Buildings By-law, this building meets a number of important criteria:

- its historical importance- an early Lutheran church built in a predominantly Icelandic neighbourhood of the West End in the pre-World War I era;
- its associations- its long-term connections to early Lutherans in Winnipeg's West End;
- its design- an excellent example of the Gothic Revival style;
- its architect- R.L. Smith was a known practitioner;
- its location- contributes greatly to the historic streetscape and skyline of its neighbourhood; and
- its integrity- its main façades continue to display many of their original elements and design.



Front (east) façade detail, 1978

ENDNOTES:

- 1 Fiftieth anniversary 1905-1955: First English Lutheran Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba (Winnipeg, MB: First English Lutheran Church, 1955), p. 7. Below as 50th.
- 2 John Fleming, et al., The Penguin Dictionary of Architecture, Third Edition (London, U.K.: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 142.
- 3 A Study of the Church Buildings in Manitoba of the Congregational, Methodist, Presbyterian and United Churches of Canada (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Department of Culture, Heritage and Recreation, 1987), p. 14.
- 4 Ibid., p. 14.
- 5 50th, op. cit., p. 7.
- 6 Information from Our Saviour's Lutheran Church website at www.oslcmb.ca/about.html, no date.
- 7 Information from Grant Memorial Baptist Church website at www.grantmemorial.ca, 2009.