



STREET PILLARS

DUFFIELD STREET AT PORTAGE AVENUE

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee
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The early history of St. James, prior to the arrival of Europeans in the 18th and 19th centuries, saw the area's seasonal use, especially along the banks of the Assiniboine River, by local First Nations bands for transportation, hunting and gathering activities and seasonal habitation.

Portage Avenue, the area's main thoroughfare, originated as the main east-west overland trail connecting The Forks, an important hunting and meeting ground, and the western plains rich with herds of bison and other large game. As the fur trade in the region developed and expanded, the trail was an important freighting route for thousands of ox-carts transporting food and other goods. Modern development transformed Portage Avenue into the hub of commerce and transportation for Winnipeg and its western suburbs.

Permanent settlement of the St. James area began as fur traders retired from their years of service and sought to take up land in the vicinity of the Upper Fort Garry (Plate 1). The prevailing system of land organization was River Lots, thin parcels of land stretching back a distance of 2 miles from the river, giving the land owner important access to the water. An additional 2-mile strip beyond the lot could also be obtained. As settlement increased, additional River Lots were established, extending development further west along the Assiniboine.

In 1850, the Parish of St. James was created by a grant of land from the Hudson's Bay Company and comprised property from Omand's Creek (originally known as Catfish Creek and first bridged in 1860) to present-day St. James Street south of the Portage Trail. Here a group of Anglicans built St. James Church in 1852 (today its address is 540 Tylehurst Street and it is referred to as Old St. James Anglican).¹ Around this structure the community grew. A school was built ca.1853.² Early parishioners included Charles and Cornelius Fidler, James Spence, James Foulds, the Bourke family and Gavin Garrioch. The Parish population grew mainly because of the resettling of Selkirk Settler families from the Kildonan area after the disastrous

¹ Mary McCarthy Ferguson, A History of St. James (Winnipeg, MB: Author, 1967), pp. 6-11.

² *Ibid.*, p. 11. Honourable John Norquay, future Premier of Manitoba, taught at the school in 1857.

1852 flood. These farmers sought higher land to avoid future floods and much of the land along the Assiniboine River had remained dry.

After the creation of the Province of Manitoba in 1870, a number of municipalities were established, including the Rural Municipality of Assiniboia, incorporated in 1880, which encompassed the former parishes of Headingley, St. Charles, St. James and part of St. Boniface on both the north and south sides of the Assiniboine River (Plate 2). This large municipality was steadily decreased over the years as new government organizations were formed: the Rural Municipality of Charleswood (1912); Town of Tuxedo (1913); and the Rural Municipality of St. James (1921) – Plates 3 and 4.

The period between the Wars saw little development in St. James, however, the situation changed after World War II and St. James began to expand rapidly. New residential neighbourhoods emerged including Silver Heights, Birchwood, Westwood, Crestview, and St. Charles. Other important developments in west Winnipeg included the founding and expansion of Winnipeg's airport in 1928 (originally Stevenson Field, renamed Winnipeg International Airport in 1958 and James Armstrong Richardson International Airport in 2006) and Polo Park, originally one of Western Canada's premier horse racing facility (1925-1956) and now one of its best known shopping centres (built in 1959 and expanded several times since).

The Rural Municipality of St. James, ostensibly the urban part of the Assiniboine Municipality, became the City of St. James in 1956. In 1967 the Town of Brooklands merged with St. James as did the Rural Municipality of Assiniboia two years later to form the City of St. James-Assiniboia. It was this city that became part of the City of Winnipeg under Unicity in 1972.

St. James in the early 1900s saw a number of development schemes organized as investors sought to create new residential subdivisions for the growing citizenry of Winnipeg. In April 1911, lawyers Machray, Sharpe and Dennistoun submitted plans for 20 and 21 Parish of St. James to the Assiniboia Municipal Council.³ The new development, called Deer Lodge, was

³ Rural Municipality of Assiniboia Minutes, April 5, 1911, p. 379.

located north of Portage Avenue and included four streets – Duffield Street, Sharp Boulevard, Moorgate Street and Conway Street. Sharp Boulevard was planned as the central thoroughfare with a centre boulevard and a 36.6-metre total width.⁴ Early interest in lots translated into an advertising campaign starting in the spring of 1912 by realtors Stewart and Walker, which included images of paired street pillars (Plates 5 and 6), which must have been completed sometime in early 1912.

STYLE

The original pillar sets were designed in an understated manner and would be considered typical for this period.

CONSTRUCTION

As originally built, the Duffield Street pillars consisted of larger pillars at the street, standing approximately 2.1 metres high with smaller, sidewalk pillars, built 0.9 metres in height.⁵ Constructed of cast concrete, they rested on a shallow base and were finished with a modest concrete cap.

DESIGN

All that remains of the original four pillars are the larger, street pair. Sitting on raised bases, the pillars feature alternating rusticated and smooth blocks that are topped by low-pointed caps with no wording (Plates 7-9).

⁴ Manitoba Free Press, May 13, 1911, p. 21.

⁵ R.R. Rostecki, “Pillars of the Community: Roadside Markers in Winnipeg,” report for the City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee, March 1995, p. 6. Below as “Pillars of the Community.”

INTERIOR

N/A

INTEGRITY

The Duffield Street pillars stand in their original location, appear to be in fair structural condition and have not suffered major alteration, beyond the removal of the shorter sidewalk pillars.

Originally, similar paired pillars were built at Duffield Street, Moorgate Street and Conway Street. At Sharp Boulevard, larger pillars were built, measuring 2.4-2.7 metres tall and embellished with Stewart and Walker's deer head logo for the subdivision (Plate 10). The words "SHARP" and "BOULEVARD" were found above the logo.⁶

STREETSCAPE

The two pillars define the busy intersection on which they stand and are an important part of the streetscape (Plate 11).

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS

It is unknown at this time who designed and built the Duffield Street pillars.

PERSON/INSTITUTION

The early promise of this subdivision quickly stopped when it was announced that Deer Lodge streetcar service was to be halted due to lack of ridership in May 1914.⁷ On the wider stage, World War I effectively stopped development throughout Winnipeg and the surrounding municipalities, including St. James. After the War, the land owners, who owed \$58,000 in back taxes, negotiated

⁶ Ibid., p. 6.

⁷ Elmwood Advance, May 8, 1914, p. 1.

with the newly formed St. James Municipal Council, cancelling the portion of the subdivision north of Ness Avenue.⁸ It would not be until after World War II that the Deer Lodge subdivision finally filled with comfortable single family homes and grew into a mature neighbourhood.

The subdivision's pillars also met with mixed success. As early as 1931, structural issues arose and the Moorgate Street and Sharp Boulevard pillars were straightened.⁹ By 1938, the Conway Street, Moorgate Street and Sharp Boulevard pillars were all leaning and in a dangerous state and the Town Engineer recommended their removal.¹⁰ A final solution came in 1939, when the St. James Council moved the Conway Street and Sharp Boulevard pillars to Bruce Park on the south side of Portage Avenue several blocks east of the subdivision.¹¹ The Sharp Boulevard pillars, with their wording chipped off, are located at the park's Albany Street entrance (Plate 12). The Conway pillars, along with their smaller sidewalk units, were placed on Portage Avenue where the steps descend to the park (Plate 13). The words "BRUCE" and "PARK" are hand-painted on the pillars.

EVENT

There is no known event connected with these pillars.

CONTEXT

These pillars were built to mark the boundary of a large residential development in the growing Municipality of Assiniboia and, in the words of its developers, make the property "more saleable". They have become an important part of the neighbourhood as it has grown and matured.

⁸ "Pillars of the Community," p. 6. The Assiniboine Golf Club would ultimately purchase this land for its course.

⁹ Rural Municipality of St. James, Council Minutes, August 18, 1931, p. 8, no. 713.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, November 1, 1938, p. 2, No. 2109 and November 15, 1938, p. 11, No. 2207.

¹¹ St. James Leader, April 6, 1939, p. 1.

The City has recognized the importance of these building types by designating three gates:

- Armstrong's Point Gates, East Gate, Middle Gate and West Gate @ Cornish Avenue: built in 1911 and designed by H.N. Ruttan, these stone and iron gates mark the entrance to Armstrong's Point, one of the City's most exclusive residential districts of the pre-1915 era (Plate 14);
- Nanton Estate Gates, 229 Roslyn Road: these stone and wrought iron gates were built in 1900, designed by J.H.G. Russell for Sir Augustus M. Nanton, influential businessman as the entrance to his two-hectare estate and mansion (Plate 15); and
- Silver Heights Gates, Mount Royal Road at Traill Avenue: designed by William D. Lount in 1950-1951 to mark the southern entrance to his father's new residential sub-division, Silver Heights, these modern gates are built of brick with wrought iron accenting and a concrete canopy (Plate 16).

LANDMARK

These conspicuous pillars are located on two busy corners of Portage Avenue and would be familiar in the neighbourhood.

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Plate 1 – The Honourable James McKay (1828-1879), ca.1870, one of St. James’ early and influential citizens. McKay was a member of the Council of Assiniboia in 1868, Manitoba Legislative Council, Minister of Agriculture and a founder of the Winnipeg Board of Trade (1873). His fine home was located on the site of the present-day Deer Lodge Hospital, 2109 Portage Avenue. ([Archives of Manitoba](#))

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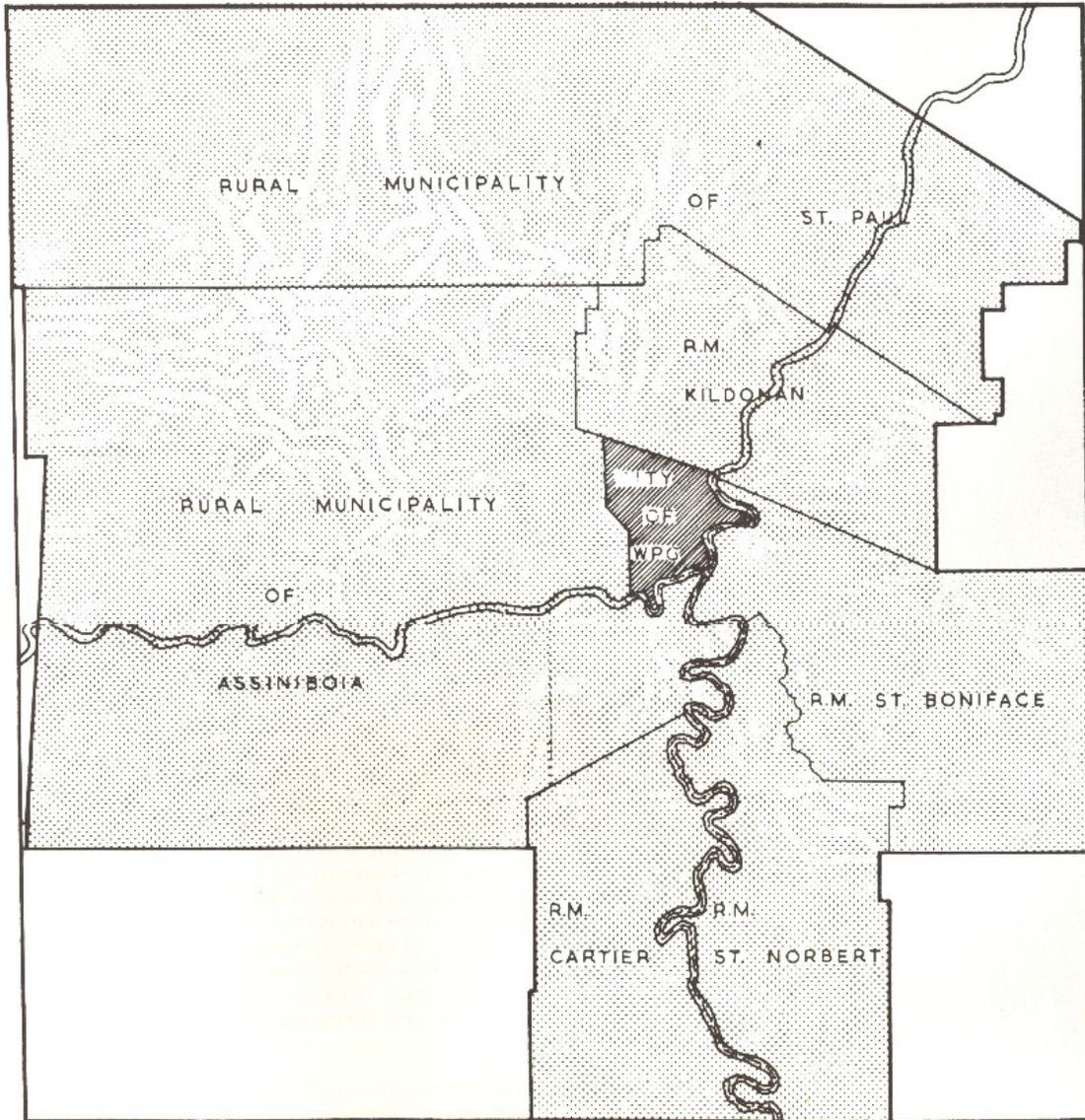


Plate 2 – The municipalities surrounding the City of Winnipeg as they appeared in 1880. (City of Winnipeg.)

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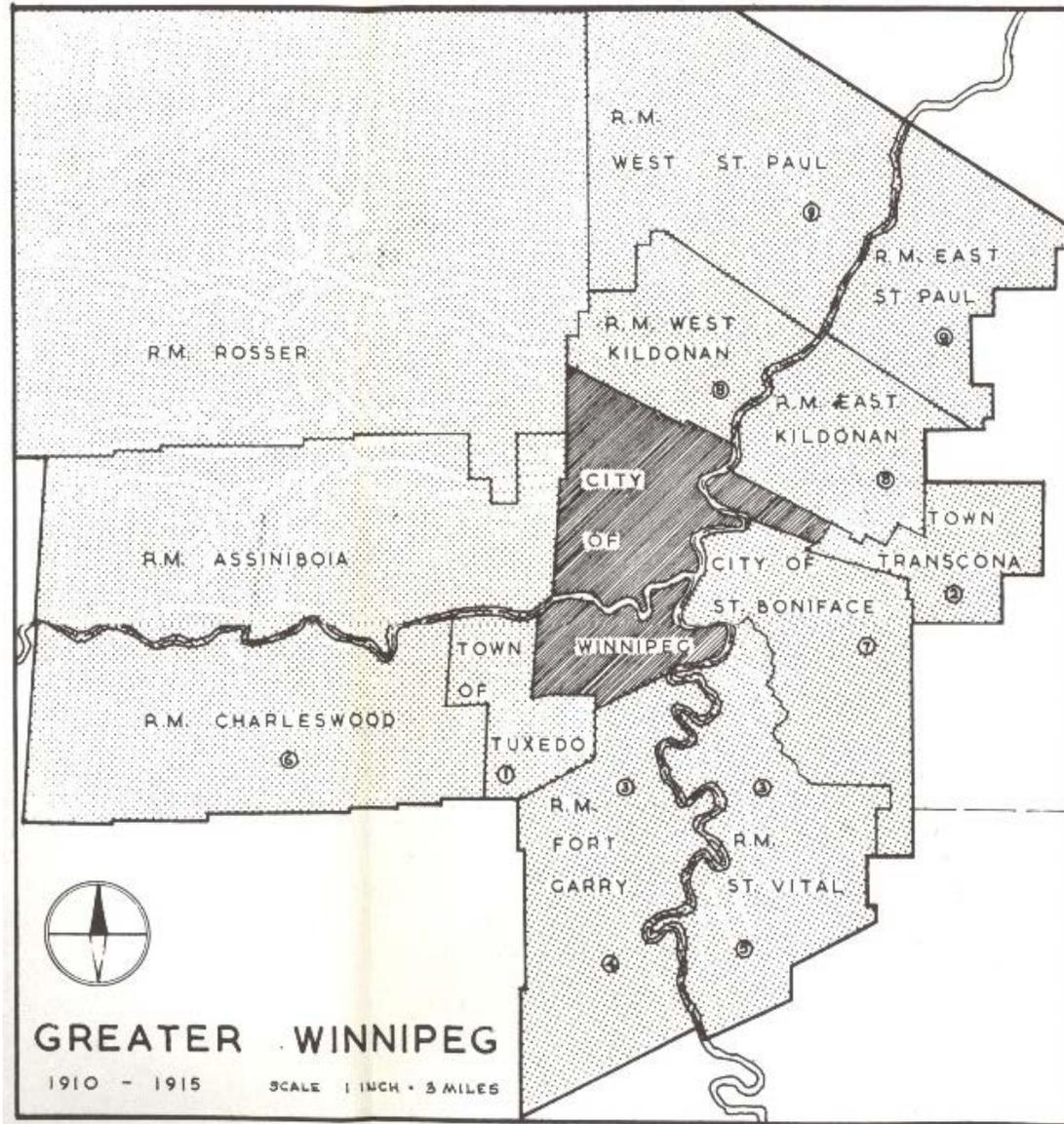


Plate 3 – The municipalities surrounding the City of Winnipeg as they changed between 1910 and 1915. (City of Winnipeg.)

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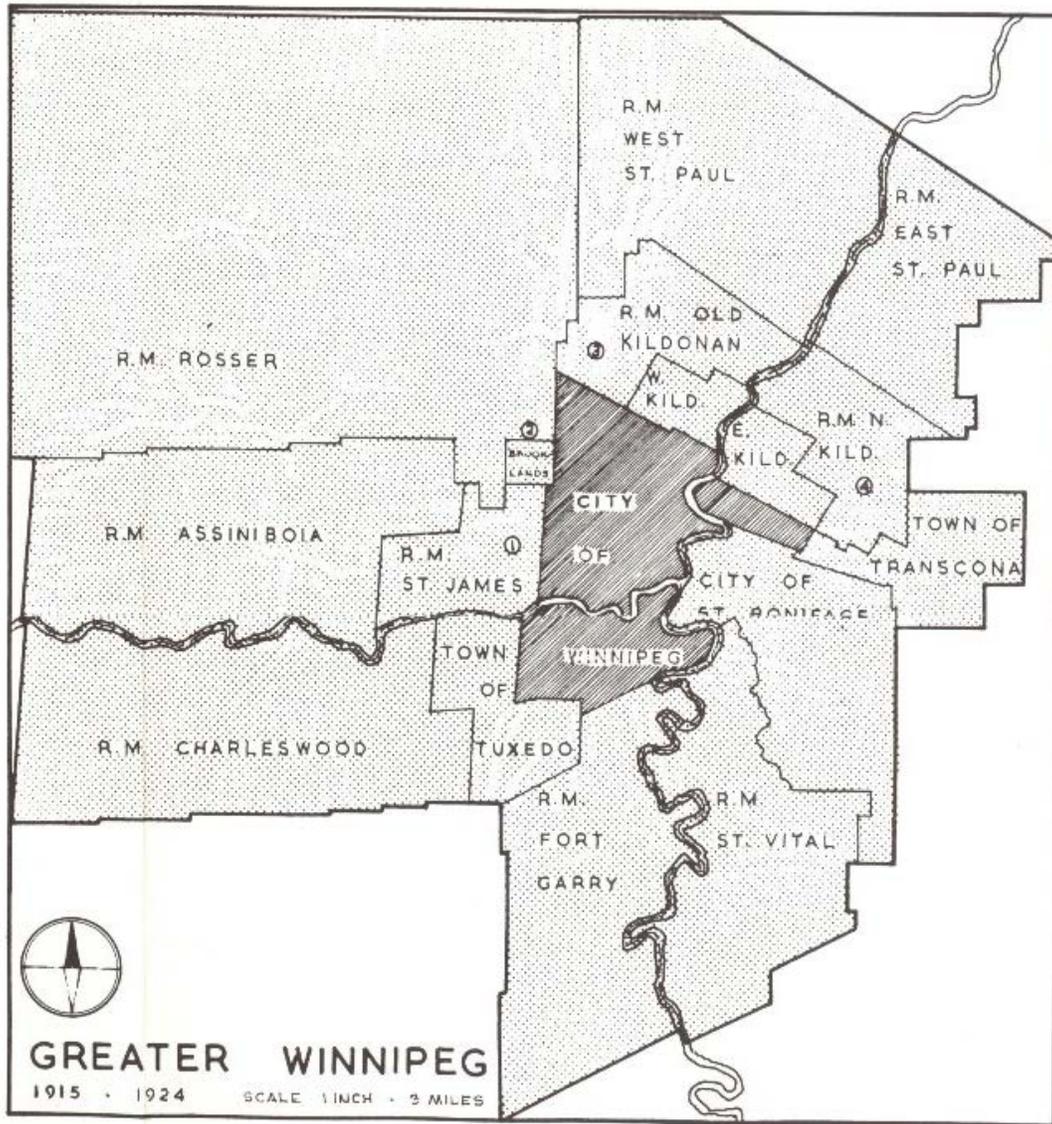
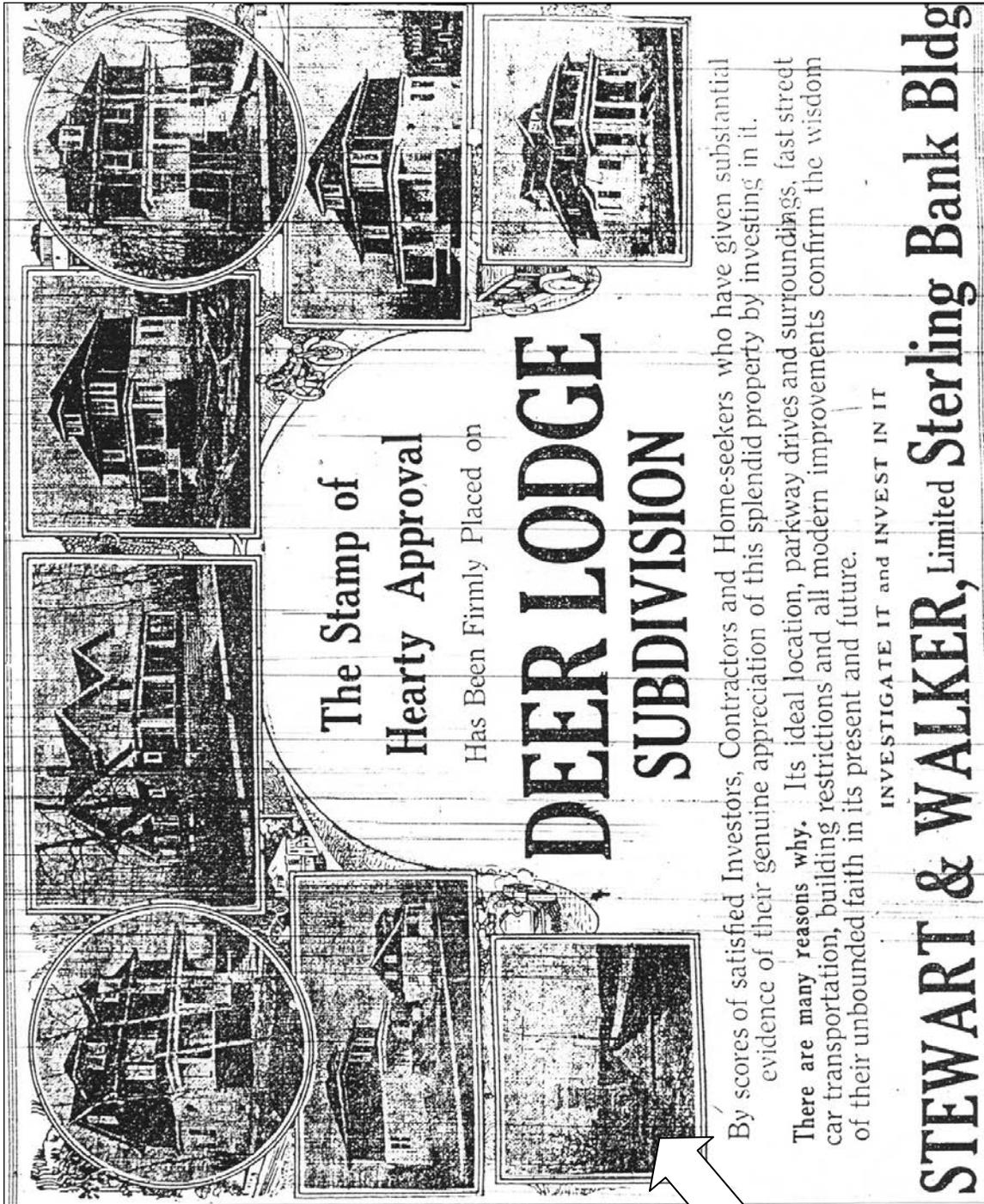


Plate 4 – The municipalities surrounding the City of Winnipeg as they changed between 1915 and 1924. (City of Winnipeg.)



The Stamp of
Hearty Approval
Has Been Firmly Placed on

DEER LODGE SUBDIVISION

By scores of satisfied Investors, Contractors and Home-seekers who have given substantial evidence of their genuine appreciation of this splendid property by investing in it.

There are many reasons why. Its ideal location, parkway drives and surroundings, fast street car transportation, building restrictions and all modern improvements confirm the wisdom of their unbounded faith in its present and future.

INVESTIGATE IT and INVEST IN IT

STEWART & WALKER, Limited Sterling Bank Bldg

The advertisement features several illustrations of houses in various styles, some in circular frames and others in rectangular frames. A white arrow points to a specific house illustration in the lower-left quadrant of the ad.

Plate 5 – Advertisement of Deer Lodge Subdivision showing a pillar at the lower left-hand corner (arrow). (Reproduced from Manitoba Free Press, May 9, 1914, p. 11.)

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Plate 7 – Duffield Street pillars, east pillar, south and west sides, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)

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Plate 8 – Duffield Street pillar, west pillar, north and east sides, 2013. ([M. Peterson, 2013.](#))

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Plate 9 – Portage Avenue looking east from the west side of Duffield Street, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)

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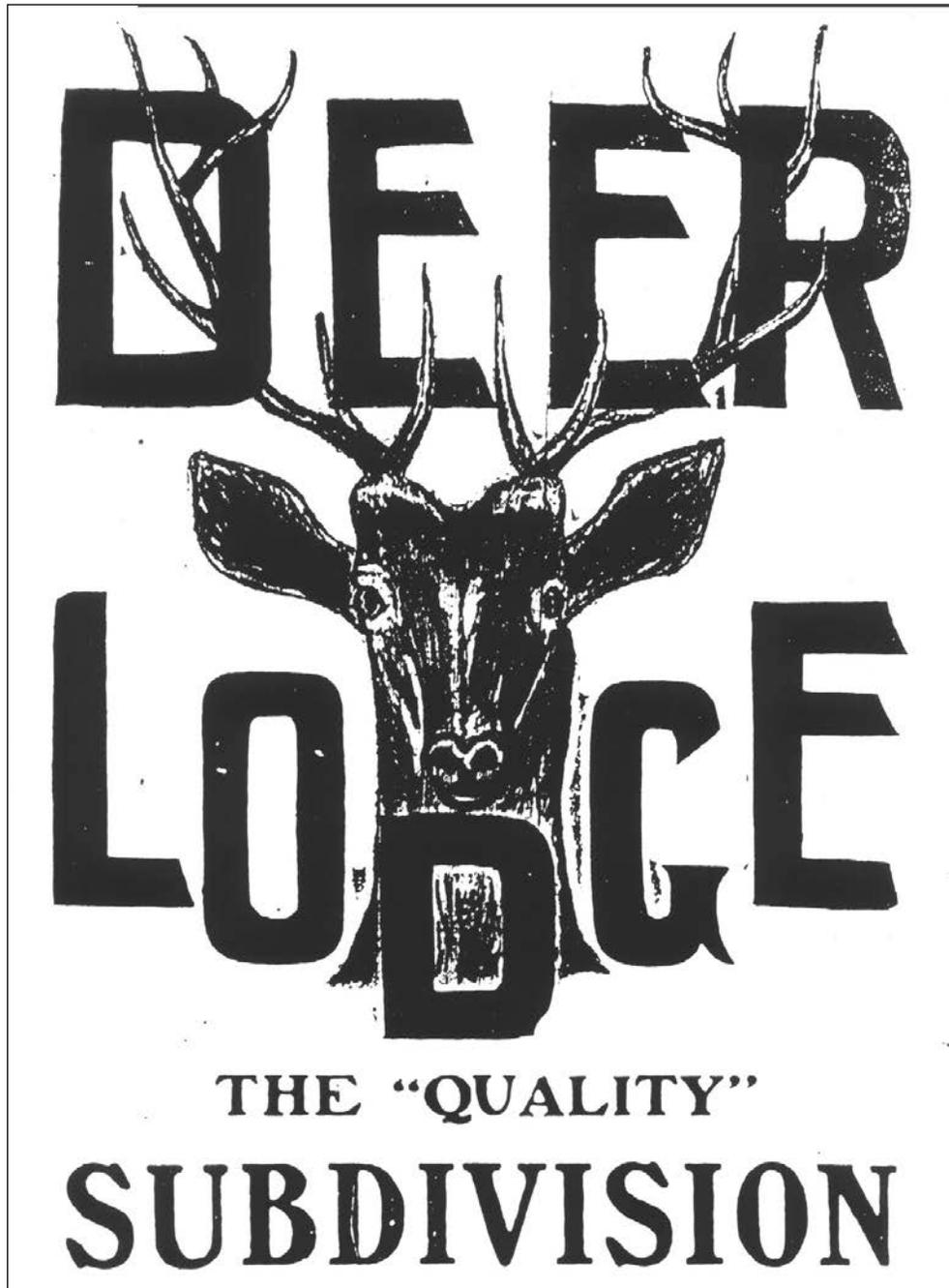


Plate 10 – Advertisement of Deer Lodge Subdivision with the Stewart and Walker logo that became the basis for the embellishments on the Sharp Boulevard pillars. (Reproduced from Manitoba Free Press, June 8, 1912, p. 17.)

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Plate 11 – Looking north on Duffield Street from the south side of Portage Avenue, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)



Plate 12 – Sharp Boulevard pillars at Bruce Park, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)

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Plate 13 – Conway Street pillars at Bruce Park, 2012. (M. Peterson, 2012.)

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Plate 14 – Armstrong’s Point Gates, West Gate and Cornish Avenue, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)



Plate 15 – Nanton Estate Gates, 229 Roslyn Road, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)

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Plate 16 – Silver Heights Gates, Mount Royal Road and Trill Avenue, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)