



828 PRESTON AVENUE
ROTHESAY APARTMENTS

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee

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The Wolseley district of Winnipeg's West End runs north from the Assiniboine River to Portage Avenue between Maryland Street on the east and Omand's Creek on the west. It was developed along with the rest of the West End after the turn of the century to help meet demand for new residential areas removed from the commercialized city centre. This outward growth was facilitated by increased mobility based on development of improved roads and a mass transport system.

The area along Portage Avenue originally was surveyed into St. James River Lots which stretched Northward from the Assiniboine. Lot 42 became the site of St. James Church (Tylehurst Street) and Lot 71 was just to the west of Maryland Street.¹ The properties originally were owned by a number of prominent citizens including Andrew Graham Ballenden Bannatyne (1829-1889), Hudson's Bay Company employee, member of the Council of Assiniboia (1868) and of Louis Riel's Provisional Government (1869) and M.P. for Provencher (1875);² Gilbert McMicken (1813-1891), Dominion Lands Agent for Manitoba, assistant Receiver General and M.L.A. (1879-1883);³ and Colonel James Mulligan, constable for the District of Assiniboia, last policeman under the Hudson's Bay Company regime and land speculator.⁴ Slowly the large river lots and holdings were subdivided and residential streets, lots and buildings began to appear.

The small area south of Portage Avenue saw the construction of larger, more expensive homes than did the residential district to the north. Because of its relative proximity both to the river and the exclusive neighbourhood of Armstrong's Point, the Wolseley district soon attained a more exclusive reputation of its own.

¹ Map Room - Land Titles Office and Old Systems - Abstract Book #244, River Lot 66, Parish of St. James.

² Pioneers and Early Citizens of Manitoba (Winnipeg-1971), pp.10-11.

³ Ibid., pp.149-150.

⁴ Manitoba History Scrapbooks, M8, p.69 (P.A.M.)

The building under evaluation is situated on St. James 66, part of the original holdings of William Drever who was born in the Orkney Islands and arrived in York Factory as an employee of the Hudson's Bay Company in August 1821. He remained at the post for 18 years until he retired and moved to the Red River Settlement. Like so many others, Drever obtained a grant of land to farm in the vicinity of Upper Fort Garry, in this case on the Assiniboine River west of what is now the intersection of Broadway and Portage Avenue. In 1849 he settled near what is now Winnipeg's main commercial district and opened a general merchant shop. He died in 1887.⁵

In 1912, with development activity in the West End at one of its highest levels, the three-storey Rothesay Apartments were built on a small parcel of Drever's original land overlooking St. James Park.

STYLE

While this building does not fit neatly into any accepted architectural style, some generalities do exist in apartment block construction that allow for comparisons. The layout of any apartment depended on the capital invested, lot size and prospective tenants' incomes. Two distinct forms appeared in North America in the early 1900s: the communal block and the private structure.

The communal block arose from the European experience where large buildings took on a self-contained stature with retail space at grade and residential sections above. A main entrance with a large lobby encouraged social contact between tenants and strengthened the community feeling of the building.⁶ The Casa Loma apartments (J.H.G. Russell-1909), corner of Portage Avenue and Sherbrook Street, are an example of this type.

The second model an American adaptation, called for a more private organization. Here entrances were numerous, either one per suite or one per small group of suites. No main lobby was included in

⁵ Ibid., p.69.

⁶ D. Spector, Apartment House Architecture in Winnipeg to 1915 (Winnipeg-1980), pp.3-4.

the design, leaving social contact to the discretion of the occupants.⁷ The Pasadena Apartments (Hooper and Hooper-1912), 220 Hugo Street North, are one of this city's extant examples. The Rothesay Block fits into the latter category.

Prospective tenants also had an effect on the outward appearance of apartment houses. The wealthier the tenant, the more substantial a block's ornamentation because (this was also true of interior amenities). The Rothesay Block fits into a more luxurious category. Generally, this type of building was a suburban phenomenon, although downtown examples also existed. The structure usually was located on or near a large expanse of natural recreational space and the interior had varying degrees of luxury amenities, including servants' quarters and rear service entrances.⁸

At the Rothesay, the classical detailing of the front entrance and the treatment of the roof line (with a complete entablature and heavy cornice) give the structure ornamental uniqueness.

CONSTRUCTION

This brick building rests on a stone foundation (a material) usually brought in from Stony Mountain at a cost of \$7.50 per chord⁹ that rises 2.1 m (7') above grade.¹⁰ The front facade is comprised of St. Louis face brick costing from \$38 to \$45 per 1,000, the balance being a sand-lime brick manufactured either in Balmoral or St. Boniface and sold for \$11 per 1,000.¹¹ Stone accents and the entrance are of Tyndall, Manitoba stone costing \$0.80 to \$1 per cubic foot when dressed on two

⁷ Ibid., pp.3-4.

⁸ J. Hancock, "The apartment house in urban America" in A.D. King (ed.), *Building and Society*, (London-1980), pp.164, 170-171.

⁹ H.C. Baker, Jr., "Winnipeg Apartment Houses," *The Canadian Engineer*, Vol. 20, No. 4, (Jan. 26, 1911), p.211. (Below as Baker, Jan 26)

¹⁰ Assessment Records #827050, Ward 1, P.C. 19, condo #142.

¹¹ Baker, Jan. 26, p. 212.

faces.¹² The building measures approximately 33.8 x 33.1 x 12.2 m (111 x 108.5 x 40'), all brick walls being 33.0 cm (13") thick and foundation walls measuring 40.6 cm (16") thick.¹³

Located on the southeast corner of Preston Avenue and Home Street, the site is legally described as 66 St. James, Plan 17942, Block 7, Parcel "A". The old legal description was 66 St. James, Plan 1221, Block 7, Lots 22/23. The building cost \$100,000 to construct and the contractor was Smith and Kirkpatrick.¹⁴

DESIGN

The structure has an 'H' shape, which was a popular method in apartment block design to provide natural light and ventilation to all suites. A number of indentations and glazed, screened balconies also were used to increase the sun and air available to the Rothesay's tenants.

The rusticated stone foundation rises above grade and is finished with a smooth stone belt course. The symmetrical front (north) façade (Plate 1) is highlighted by a recessed entrance with stone steps, a stone landing with stone railing, carved stone door surrounds, a round bevelled-glass transom and bevelled-glass side lights (Plate 2).

The front also exhibits two pairs of three-storey brick balconies with stone foundations and decorative wooden panels. All corners of this façade are finished with brick quoins. Windows other than those on the balconies have smooth stone lug sills and brick heads, while the balcony openings have plain wooden trim. Above the third-storey windows is a full entablature finished with a large metal cornice and carved wooden brackets. Completing the façade is a metal-topped brick parapet with a balustrade over the north facade balconies and the west elevation stairwell except for the balconies. In the centre is a set of wooden stairs used as service entrances (and fire escapes) for

¹² Ibid., p.211.

¹³ Assessment Records, op.cit.

¹⁴ Ibid. and Building Permit #1099/1912. (Below as B.P.)

suites on all levels.

On the east side, the front design continues around the northeast corner and runs a short distance to the first indentation on this elevation. The remaining wall consists of plain brick, with rectangular windows, cement sills and radiating brick heads. As with the west side, a centrally located wooden staircase is present (Plate 3).

The rear of the block contains feature of both the east side and the west sides. The southwest corner is a continuation of the highly ornamented west facade, complete with heavy cornice, brick quoins and ornate windows. The remainder of the wall is a continuation of the sparse east side. There are two indentations, each containing wooden fire escapes running off the hallways of each floor.

INTERIOR

Upon entering the Rothesay, the tenant or visitor is treated to the same high degree of ornamentation visible on the exterior. The foyer is finished with marble walls and stairs, small circular scenic paintings on the walls, and an ornamentally painted ceiling. A second door, raised several steps above the foyer floor, features additional use of bevelled glass. The interior hallway, suite doors and main staircase are finished in oak. The staircase is partially lit by a skylight.

Hallway floors have been replaced throughout with tile, except for parts of the third level where the old wooden flooring is still visible. The north walls of the second and third floors (i.e. above the main entrance) display stained glass depictions of a vine with red flowers in bloom. These elements include bevelled glass, increasing their beauty.

While exterior service entrances were furnished for most of the suites, eight units each had interior staircases leading from the basement affording their tenants a higher degree of privacy.

The overall design of each floor, with all suites running off a main hall, follows one of the accepted conventions of the time (Plate 4). The other type of organization of floors provided for private

hallways within each suite, increasing tenant privacy (Plate 5).¹⁵

INTEGRITY

The block stands on its original site and is in good structural condition. Permits listed against the structure are:¹⁶

| | |
|------------------------|------------|
| #2479/1936 (piles) | - \$ 500 |
| #3197/1939 (piles) | - \$ 500 |
| # 313/1979 (repairs) | - \$12,000 |
| #7978/1979 (upgrading) | - \$18,000 |

STREETScape

The Rothesay Block sits on the southern edge of Vimy Ridge Park, a 2.428 ha. (6.0 ac.) tract of land originally names St. James Park. The site was purchased in 1894 for \$6,002.78 and became one of the City's earliest designated greenspaces (by the end of the year there were eight in total). When first organized, St. James Park was set up as a formal space, with landscaped massing of trees and shrubs, natural curvilinear walks and open lawns. By the time of construction of the Rothesay, there were over 20 urban and suburban parks¹⁷ (Plate 3), but the fact that this block was situated so close to a park would have made it both attractive and exclusive.

This building is surrounded by rows of medium and large-size homes on small lots. The adjacent area also is dotted with churches and other apartment houses of similar design and size, making the Rothesay an extremely compatible part of the landscape.

¹⁵ H.C. Baker, Jr., "Winnipeg Apartment Houses," The Canadian Engineer, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Jan. 19, 1911), p.185.

¹⁶ Assessment Records, op.cit.

¹⁷ M.E. Cavett, et. al., "Social Philosophy and the Early Development of Winnipeg's Public Parks," Urban History Review, Vol XI, No. 1 (June 1982, pp. 31-33.

ARCHITECT

The architect of design was Herbert E. Matthews.¹⁸ He arrived in Winnipeg in c. 1905 and immediately began working as an architect, first privately and later in the Dominion Public Works Department (see Appendix I for biographical information). He has received 20 points from the Historical Buildings Committee.

PERSON

The original owners of the Rothesay Apartments were the contractors who built the structure, Peter Smith and George H. Kirkpatrick.¹⁹ Their firm continued as owner until 1946, with Kirkpatrick staying in the building into the mid-1940s.²⁰ During this first 34 years, tenant numbers ranged from a high of 116 in 1936 to a low of 79 in 1931 and 1932. Children (under 16) ranged from 22 in 1941 to four in 1946.²¹

The building was sold to Benjamin Cohen of Winnipeg, the retired owner of the Manitoba Upholstering Company (281-285 Selkirk Avenue).²² Cohen (or his estate) owned the property until the late 1970s when it was again sold to local interests. During the block's second 34 years, children were less numerous, with a high of six in 1953 and a low of one in 1949. Tenant populations also were down, the high being 97 in 1953.²³

Original occupants included a CPR superintendent, a T. Eaton Company department manager, several presidents and company owners, and a number of managers. Given the relative

¹⁸ Note, while B.P. #1099/1912 lists the architect as Smith and Kirkpatrick, architectural plans #1099/1912 are signed by the architect H.E. Matthews.

¹⁹ Assessment Rolls #827050 (old no. 14743), Ward 1.

²⁰ Henderson's Directory, 1930-50.

²¹ Assessment Rolls, op.cit.

²² Ibid. and Henderson's Directory, 1940-55.

²³ Assessment Rolls, op.cit.

luxuriousness of the block, it is surprising to find no original tenants were still present 10 years later as turnover in this type of structure usually was not so rapid.²⁴

By the mid-1930s tenants were employed as clerks, cashiers, bank managers, salesmen, and inspectors, underlining the change taking place in the district's socio-economic make-up.

EVENT

There is no known significant event connected with this structure.

CONTEXT

Data from the Permit Book-1912 for only those buildings costing \$2000 or more reveal that 266 structures were built that year in the Wolseley area at a total cost of \$1,714,875. Five of these were apartments, costing an average of \$57,000; there was one church, two schools and 258 houses averaging over \$4,500 each. This price tag was considerably higher than the Winnipeg average. The Rothesay thus was identified with one the area's busiest construction periods.

As for the architect and contractor, the volume of their businesses in 1912 differed. For H.E. Matthews, the year saw a total value of designed buildings of \$309,000 including a factory on Notre Dame Avenue, an addition to St. James Park Church (northwest corner of Preston and Home) and design of the St. Matthews Episcopal Church. Smith and Kirkpatrick, in contrast, constructed only two houses costing a total of \$15,000 (one was designed by Matthews) in addition to the Rothesay.

This apartment block also fits into several other contexts: acceptance of large blocks within residential neighbourhoods; the segmentation of income groups aided by these large blocks; and the influence of civic government policy on block designs.

²⁴ Henderson's Directory, 1912-present.

As opposed to the United States where apartment buildings were seen as a disruptive force to "the stability of existing single-family neighbourhoods,"²⁵ Winnipeggers saw them as necessary and in fact something "of which we are prod."²⁶ Most observers saw them as additions to neighbourhoods and, because many of the city's new arrivals were unattached males, apartment suites were both easier to maintain and much more affordable.²⁷

Segmentation of the population along income lines was prevalent throughout North America; in turn apartment blocks were regularly designed to cater to the specific income group of the surrounding area. In this case, the Rothesay was designed with enhanced ornamentation and private service entrances.

In response to the popularity of apartment house construction, the civic government passed By-Law 5850 in 1909: "A By-Law of the City of Winnipeg to regulate the erection, ventilation and safety from fire or accident of Tenement Houses, hereafter erected or altered." The By-Law covered most details of block construction including their overall size, their classification as fireproof or non-fireproof, limitations on height, and minimum greenspace requirements.

One obvious result of the By-Law was the almost exclusive use by architects and contractors of a three-storey plan. Under the By-Law, any block taller than three storeys had to be constructed using all fireproof materials. The prohibitive cost of such materials and the severe restrictions on wooden buildings gave a virtual monopoly to three-storey brick apartment houses (only two of the 56 blocks issued permits in 1912 were not brick and only four were not three storeys high).

In summary, by 1912 the Wolseley district of the West End had become a popular area for residents with higher incomes. We find a local contracting firm following the lead of countless other small to

²⁵ J. Hancock, op.cit., p. 182.

²⁶ Manitoba Free Press, Dec. 06, 1906, p.54.

²⁷ See M. Peterson, "745 Wolseley Avenue - The Allison Apartments," Report to the Historical Buildings Committee, August 1990, p. 2-4.

medium-size businesses by investing in an apartment block to realize a steady return,²⁸ and a local architect literally forced by a City By-Law and the affluence of the neighbourhood to create a three-storey brick apartment block with many luxurious features. This was the Rothesay.

LANDMARK

Situated on the edge of a large greenspace, Vimy Ridge Park, and boasting an impressive and eye-catching front facade, the Rothesay Apartments are conspicuous in their surroundings.

²⁸

Ibid., p.4.

APPENDIX I

Herbert E. Matthews

H. E. Matthews came to Winnipeg in 1905 and immediately began to practice architecture. In that year alone, he designed ten structures totalling \$103,000 in construction value. These structures included large and small homes, warehouses and a business block. For 2 building seasons, 1910-1911 Matthews formed a partnership with Fred F. LeMaistre. The firm designed numerous structures throughout the city but by late 1911, Matthews was back on his own.¹

In 1921, Matthews was hired as an architect for the Dominion Department of Public Works, a position he held until his retirement in 1938. His name leaves the Henderson's Directory in 1942 but what became of him is unknown at present. Matthews became the first president of the Manitoba Association of Architects in 1914 "for a term of two and a half years"² with J.B. Mitchell acting as Vice-President and J.H.H.G. Russell as Secretary. A list of buildings designed by Matthews, taken from the City of Winnipeg Building Permits Books, is as follows:

1905:

Dwight House, Wellington Crescent
Perrin Warehouse, Portage Avenue East
5 houses for Robert Wyatt, Norquay Street
William Weld and Co. Block, Princess Street
Simpson House, Academy Road
Bell Warehouse, Portage Avenue East

1906:

Myers Iron Fence Co. factory, Chambers Street

1907:

McIntyre House, Broadway

¹ This information, along with the list of buildings, is gleaned from the Building Permits Book.

² J. Chivers, "A History of the Manitoba Association of Architects", Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Manitoba 1966 p.31

Matthew's designs, continued:

1908:

St. James Park Church, Home Street
House, Maryland Street

1909:

Apartment Block, Matheson Avenue
Humphries House, Harvard Avenue

1910:

Congress (Boylston) Apartments, 300 River Avenue (Grade II)
Drewry Stables, Redwood Avenue
Mrs. Derby House, Florence (now Baltimore Road)

1911:

Two houses for A. Slipchenko, Burrows Avenue
Shaw House, Banning Street
Mrs. E. Hayward House, Weatherdon Avenue

1912:

Three stores, Furby Street
St. Matthews Episcopal Church, Maryland Street
Rumley Products Co. warehouse, Dufferin Avenue
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1914:

Drill Hall for the Department of Public Works, Machray Avenue

1915:

Sharpe and Colledge Warehouse, Henry Avenue

1919:

Spiers-Parnell stable, 666 Elgin Avenue

--and several additions and alterations to churches, business blocks, warehouses and houses.

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Plate 1 – Rothesay Apartments, 828 Preston Avenue, front (north) façade. (M. Peterson, 1991.)



Plate 2 – Detail of front (Preston Avenue) entrance. (M. Peterson, 1991.)

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Plate 3 – Rothesay Apartments, front (north) and west façades. (M. Peterson, 1991.)

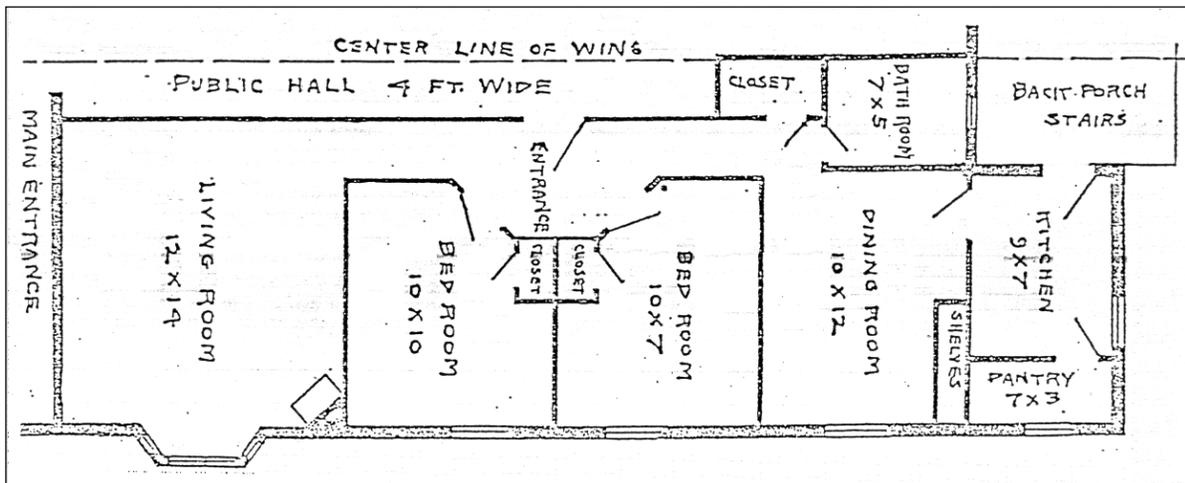


Plate 4 – Typical floor plan of a five-room suite with public hallway, one suite on each side of the hall. (Reproduced from H.C. Baker, Jr., "Winnipeg Apartment Houses," in *The Canadian Engineer*, Vol. 20, No. 3, January 19, 1911, p. 185.)

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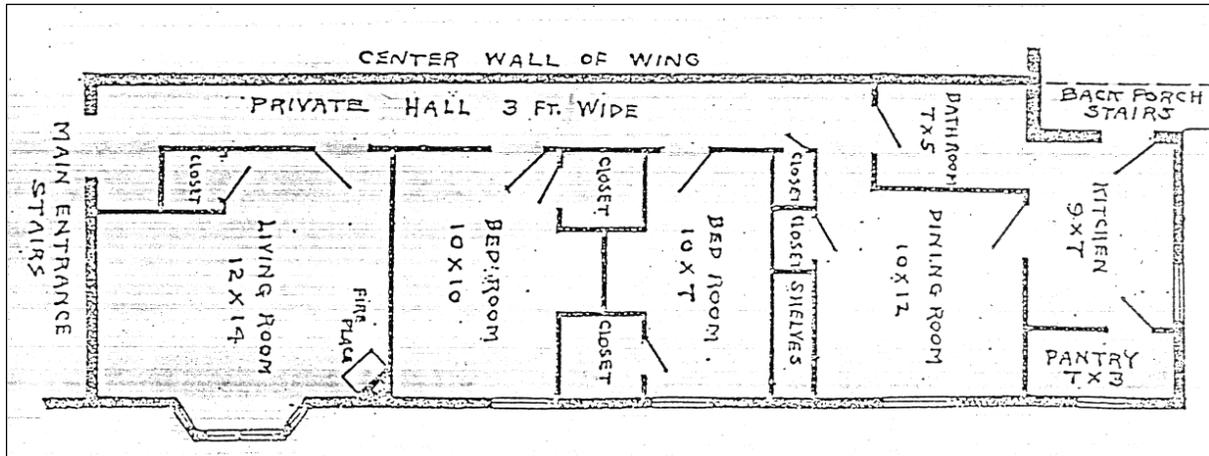


Plate 5 – Typical floor plan of a five-room suite with private hallway. (Reproduced from H.C. Baker, Jr., "Winnipeg Apartment Houses," in *The Canadian Engineer*, Vol. 20, No. 4, January 26, 1911, p. 214.)