

29 RUSKIN ROW – R.R. SCOTT HOUSE
J.N. Semmens, 1914



Accompanying Winnipeg's rapid expansion and prosperity from the 1890s to the 1910s was the establishment of prestigious residential districts such as Armstrong's Point, Crescentwood, and portions of Fort Rouge and River Heights.

Here, old and new wealth blended in large, architecturally diverse homes, often nestled in generously treed and landscaped settings, and occupied by the city's leading business and political families. These neighbourhoods also shared a geographic feature - proximity to the meandering Assiniboine River in the city's south end.

Development of Crescentwood, on the river's south side across from Armstrong's Point, began in the late 1880s. However, the main thrust of activity - and adoption of the district's name - did not occur until the turn of the century under the auspices of the C.H. Enderton realty company. It was during the latter stages of the area's development that fruit wholesaler Robert Ross Scott had a Tudor house built at the southwest corner of Ruskin Row and Kingsway.

This 2½-storey dwelling has a concrete and stone foundation, load-bearing brick construction on the main floor, and frame upper levels. Its steeply pitched hip roof is punctuated by paired gable dormers on the east and west sides, and by cross gables forming the building's north and south wings. Common to the Tudor style, all elevations are finished with brick on the first floor, and decorative half-timbering and stucco infill above. All windows are multi-paned, rectangular, and set in wooden frames underlined by smooth-cut limestone lug sills.

The projecting main entrance on the front (east) facade is topped by a second-storey balcony. The gable dormers overhead are adorned with bargeboards and hip knobs. One dormer contains an oriel window; the other, a plain opening. The builder's rear (west) elevation is similar in design, but lacks an entrance and oriel window. The north side features double gable ends, stone stairs leading to a small entrance door, a large bay window on the first floor, and a balcony above. To the south is an attached, one-storey brick garage.

The main-floor interior includes a sitting room with African mahogany panelling and fireplace; a formal dining room finished in cherry wood; an oak-panelled hallway and main staircase; and a kitchen and servants' stairway which can be closed off from the rest of the house. Three panes of stained glass at the second-floor landing provide light to the main staircase. A pair of similar panes appears at the entrance to the basement.

The second-storey includes a master bedroom with fireplace and original plumbing in separate bathrooms, one for the toilet, the other for the bath and sink. The building's complex roof provides an interesting arrangement of sparsely-ornamented, third-floor rooms which likely were the living quarters for household staff.

Floors throughout are wood, while door and window frames are finished in dark wood. The basement originally included a formal recreation room and open fireplace.

The house was designed by John N. Semmens and built by the J. McDiarmid Co. for \$20,000. Semmens (1880-1961) was born in Toronto, studied at Wesley College and the University of

Pennsylvania, then settled in Winnipeg to practise architecture and serve with the Winnipeg grenadiers. After services overseas during World War I, he returned to his profession and became progressively involved in design work for the Winnipeg School Division.

His portfolio encompassed a range of building types across western Canada, including Winnipeg's RCMP Barracks, St. Boniface Sanatorium, Grace Maternity Hospital, Turner-Walker warehouse, participation in the main Bank of Montreal and Civic Auditorium projects, and schools such as Daniel McIntyre Collegiate Institute and Isaac Newton Junior High. Semmens also maintained his military linkages, organizing the 2nd Battalion of Grenadiers and commanding Camp Shilo during World War II.

R.R. Scott, a native of Pickering, Ontario, came to Winnipeg in the early 1880s as a buyer and salesman for the Macpherson Fruit Company. By 1896, he was general manager of western operations, holding this post until the company dissolved. With four partners, including prominent local jeweller D.R. Dingwall, Scott organized the Scott Fruit Company Ltd. in 1912. The business expanded quickly, opening branches throughout the Prairies and in Minneapolis. Scott's son, Stewart M., became the firm's vice-president and the president.

R.R. Scott died in 1924. His widow remained at 29 Ruskin Row until 1930 when the property was acquired and occupied by George Russell Ryan, president of Ryan Brothers Limited, a butcher supply business. Subsequent owners included Dr. George W. McIntosh and, from 1966-1991, James E. Coyne, a native of Winnipeg who served as governor of the Bank of Canada from 1955 to 1961, then was associated with the Bank of Western Canada.