



137 SCOTT STREET

JOHN C. GRAHAM HOUSE

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee

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In these days of Winnipeg's building extension it is well to see what, in the way of builders' supplies, she has at home to depend upon. With between 400 and 500 new buildings per month rising in the city the demand for such supplies is enormous, and the question naturally arises, who furnishes the material?

Winnipeg Telegram, Sept. 18, 1906, p.52

This 1906 quote aptly describes the impetus behind the growth of this city's wholesale/retail finished lumber industry after the turn of the century. Exterior and interior wood trim, fancy doors and window sashes, carved door frames, and many other items were all produced by such companies. These firms often evolved from enterprises in Northwestern Ontario that supplied raw lumber. As was the case with many other wholesale firms in Winnipeg, businessmen from other centres moved to fill demand for a product and used the city's strategic location to enhance their interests. As the newspaper article quoted above went on to explain:

The day of rough finish, stereotype style and pressed wood ornamentation is past in the average building trade of Western Canada. The people are growing wealthy and can afford and now demand better things. What is more they will have them, and up-to-date men, like those composing this firm, are resolved to meet this growing demand half-way and lead it rather than attempt the folly of heading it off.

The firm alluded to above was organized in 1905 by John Campbell Graham who had been in the lumber industry for over 20 years. The J. C. Graham Company was a Winnipeg fixture for more than 30 years, and one of the largest suppliers of doors and wood trim in the West. In 1902 Graham, then manager of the Prairie Lumber Company, built a fine wood frame home on the northwest corner of Scott Street and Spadina (now Stradbrook) Avenue in Fort Rouge.

STYLE

The Graham House is a fine example of the Queen Anne style which was popular in the city around the turn of the century. The most common and easily identifiable feature of this style is the steeply

pitched, irregularly shaped roof. Often hipped, the roof also featured lower cross gables.¹ Bay windows and patterned shingles were the most popular devices for avoiding a smooth-walled structure. Partial or full-width, one-storey porches often were added. Decoration was created through spindlework, patterned masonry or 'half-timbering' on the upper levels. Towers, when present, appeared at a corner. Facades were asymmetrical, and door and window surrounds usually were kept simple.²

This style held sway in North American residential construction from about 1880 to 1900 and on into the next decade. It was first popularized in the late 19th century by a number of English architects under the leadership of Richard Norman Shaw. Borrowing mostly from late Medieval models of the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras, Shaw's group was more active in the half-timbered and patterned masonry subtypes. Spindlework designs were the more common North American adaptation of the style.³

CONSTRUCTION

The Graham House is a frame structure with horizontal clapboard siding. The building originally measured 6.7m x 11.6m (22'x38")⁴ and cost \$4,500 to build. It sits on a rock-faced, broken-course stone foundation rising 0.9m (3') above grade on land legally described as 36 St. Boniface, Plan 207A, Lots 129/130.⁵ The house is L-shaped in design and J. T. Hunter was the contractor.⁶

¹ V. and L. McAlester, A Field Guide to American Houses (New York-1984), p.263.

² Ibid., pp. 263-66.

³ Ibid., pp. 266-68.

⁴ Building Permit. #730/1902.

⁵ Assessment Rolls. #317900, old number 6954-1.

⁶ Building Permit. op. cit.

DESIGN

Winnipeg architect William B. Lait's design produced a neat and modestly decorative structure, appropriate given the original owner's occupation. The central hipped roof is steeply pitched with a front-facing gable dormer. A side-facing cross gable on the building's southern elevation creates the L-shape.

Undoubtedly the most decorative feature of the home is the full-width porch that extends from the eastern to the southern facade. This one-storey element offers several interesting features. Roof support is provided by paired unfluted wooden columns with unadorned capitals and unaccented bases. The columns are supported by large pedestals covered with similar siding to the rest of the building, greatly increasing the unified appearance of Lait's work. Unadorned segmented arches connect the columns above, while the open handrail is supported by wooden spindles. A bay window encroaches onto the porch on the east facade. Decorative friezes are present below both the porch and upper-storey eaves. Large paired brackets are used as accents on the second storey.

Windows throughout the building exhibit unadorned wooden surrounds although several have carved wooden sills. Main windows have segmented heads with leaded glass accents in the arches. Oval windows of leaded glass also are included in the home. In all cases, this decorative glass includes a torch framed by ribbon and branches of leaves. The two oval windows include red and clear artificial gems (both smooth and cut) set in the glass.

The north and west facades are unadorned and flat, with unmatched windows and few decorative features. The property is partly enclosed by an iron fence.

INTERIOR

The interior of the Graham House offers interesting contrasts. Because the structure is now used as office space, alterations have been many. However, the owner has seen to it that the changes have been sympathetic to the original. Carved wooden door frames and other wooden accents create this impression. The original den, complete with its intricately carved fireplace opposite the bay window

has been left more or less unchanged. The wooden staircase also has been well maintained. The basement and upper floors are similar in that altered features exist in harmony with some of the original fabric of the home.

INTEGRITY

The Graham House stands on its original site and is in excellent structural condition. As mentioned previously, interior alteration has been substantial yet sensitively undertaken.⁷ Much of the original material used in the interior is still present. It appears that an addition was made to the rear of the building (the west facade), based on comparisons of original plans to the present building and of windows in this area to windows in the front section of the house.

STREETSCAPE

This building is in the midst of a large residential section of the city containing both single-family houses and apartment blocks, many of similar vintage. This house fits well with the existing character of the Stradbrook-Scott-River area.

ARCHITECT

William B. Lait was born in England in 1855 to an architect/surveyor father.⁸ He eventually settled in Winnipeg and produced several outstanding designs. This is the first Lait building to come before the Historical Buildings Committee (for biographical information see Appendix I).

PERSON

John G. Graham was born in St. Catharines, Ontario on November 26, 1860. After being educated

⁷ These alterations cost \$6,000. Building Permit. #683/1980.

⁸ G. Bryce, A History of Manitoba (Toronto-1906), pp. 498-99.

in that city, Graham ran steamboats in 1878 on the Great Lakes from Chicago to Montreal in his father's business. In 1881 he took on office and management duties, continuing until the death of his father in 1882. Graham, his brother George A., and John T. Horne subsequently formed Graham, Horne and Company, a shipping and lumber firm operating in Port Arthur and Fort William. J. C. Graham continued to be connected with this enterprise until its demise in 1894. In 1888 he moved to Winnipeg to manage the Rat Portage Lumber Company (wholesale) and later the Prairie Lumber Company.⁹ In 1905 he organized his own business, the J. C. Graham Lumber Company:

...making a specialty of door stocks, sash stock, hand carving, panels, veneered stock, plain ground, wire-cast, illuminated, coloured and art glass, door and window casings, base and wainscot and cornice work, newel posts, etc., and assembling them in various original and artistic lines, designs and high class workmanship...¹⁰

Graham's company headquarters were at 290-294 Princess Street. The grey brick structure was given two extra floors early in 1906, showing the remarkable growth of the enterprise. By mid-1906 the company employed over 25 full-time workers and a travelling salesman. Among his other business interests, Graham was president of a loan company; the Manitoba Building Society; Marks and Company, another lumber venture; and sawmills throughout Northwestern Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan.¹¹ Ultimately, the J. C. Graham Company would build a second facility for storage purposes on McPhillips Street.

Graham lived at 137 Scott Street until approximately 1923 when he moved into his business block. He remained there until 1930 when Henderson's Directory no longer lists him as a resident of Winnipeg.¹²

⁹ F. H. Schofield, The Story of Manitoba (Winnipeg-1913), p.198.

¹⁰ Winnipeg Telegram. September 18, 1906, p.52.

¹¹ Ibid., and F.H. Schofield, op. cit., p.198.

¹² Henderson's Directory. 1900-35.

After Graham left the Scott residence, W. W. Watson, an inspector with the Royal Insurance Company, moved in. He left after two years and the house stood vacant. In 1927 Mrs. W. A. Windatt took occupancy, although Graham still maintained ownership of the property.¹³ The home also was occupied by Lieutenant Colonel R. O. Alexander, Frank E. Nuttall, University of Manitoba librarian, and George Frank, a contractor. Starting in 1945, the structure became a boarding house, having as many as 17 residents (in 1951).¹⁴ In 1980 the building was converted into offices for legal firms. Present tenants are Alsip and Co., William Martens, Q.C. and Co., and Michael T. Tracy.

EVENT

There is no known event connected with this house.

CONTEXT

Built in 1902, the Graham house fits into the development of the 'new' area of Fort Rouge, the city of Winnipeg and all of Western Canada. Fort Rouge after 1900 rapidly became one of Winnipeg's more elite residential neighbourhoods, the site of some of the finest buildings in Winnipeg. On the larger scale, this was a period of rapid growth for all of Winnipeg and Western Canada, one in which many citizens became capable of leading more luxurious lifestyles, often reflected in their homes.

LANDMARK

This home is situated on a relatively busy corner and its exterior appearance makes it conspicuous in the neighbourhood.

¹³ Assessment Rolls. op. cit., 1900-28. Unfortunately, the records from 1928 to 1945 are missing.

¹⁴ Henderson's Directory. 1929-present.

APPENDIX I

William Barnes Lait

W. B. Lait was born in Folkestone, England on May 30, 1855. The son of a professional architect and county surveyor, Lait was educated at Kinton Middle Schools. At the age of seventeen he left school to article with a Birmingham architect. After four years as an apprentice, he returned home to work for his father, and supervised many private and public structures.¹

In 1890, Lait came to Toronto, his first design being the Wycliffe College building. After two years, he moved to Winnipeg and worked as superintendent and general assistant to one of the city's best known architects, George Browne.² In 1897 he began designing on his own account, which he continued until 1907. In 1908 he took on the position of building inspector and the next year he left the city.³

An incomplete list of Laid structures includes:

- Supervising alterations to the Richardson Block into the Bank of Hamilton Building, corner Main Street and McDermot, (1898)
- Brownrigg Terrace, Carlton Street, \$6,500, (1898)
- Brick terrace, Hudson Bay Reserve, \$16,000, (1898)
- J. G. Robertson House, (1898)
- J. G. Treleaven Block, Killarney, \$8,000, (1898)
- University of Manitoba, Agricultural College, (1898)
- Interior alteration to Northwest Fire Insurance Block, 371-73 Main Street, \$4,000, (1900)
- Alterations to Lizzard Warehouse, \$700, (1900)
- Emmerson and Hague Tent Factory, Portage Avenue East, \$22,000, (1902)
- G. Lennox House, Roslyn Road, \$6,000, (1902)
- Hotel, McDermot Avenue East, \$15,000, (1902)
- J. C. Graham House, Scott Street, \$4,500, (1902)
- Lutheran Church, Bannatyne Avenue, \$22,000, (1903)

¹ G. Bryce, A History of Manitoba (Toronto-1906), pp.498-99.

² Ibid.

³ Henderson's Directory. 1895-1910. Also Building Permits, 1900-10 and Manitoba Free Press, May 20, 1898, p.8.

W.B. Lait designs continued:

- W. Blair House, Ellice Avenue, \$3,000, (1902)
- H. Wise House, Dufferin Avenue, \$3,500, (1903)
- Marriagi Hotel, alterations and additions, Albert Street, \$1,000, (1903)
- N. Stevens Warehouse, Henry Avenue, \$4,500, (1903)
- Clarke House, River Avenue, \$3,500, (1903)
- Glines Block, Portage Avenue, \$40,000, (1904)
- A. E. Spera House, Furby Street, \$4,500, (1904)
- A. F. Banfield Warehouse, Young (now Barber), \$5,500 (1905)
- S. Blackwell, 2 houses, Elgin Avenue, \$6,500, (1905)
- G. Clark House, alterations, 317 Langside Street, \$2,000, 1905)

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Plate 1 – John C. Graham House, 137 Scott Street, front (east) and side (north) façades, 1988. (M. Peterson, 1988.)



Plate 2 – J.C. Graham House, side (south) and rear (west) façades, 1988. (M. Peterson, 1988.)

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Plate 3 – J.C. Graham House, newel post, 1988. (M. Peterson, 1988.)