



525 WARDLAW AVENUE

CRESCENT-FORT ROUGE UNITED CHURCH

PREPARED BY PETERSON PROJECTS – DECEMBER 2009



525 WARDLAW AVENUE CRESCENT-FORT ROUGE UNITED CHURCH

Date of Construction: 1910

Building Permit: 411/1910 (Plans at City Storage)

Architect: Russell, John Hamilton Gordon

Contractor: Malcom Brothers

ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

Another of Fort Rouge's fine early 20th century church buildings is Crescent-Fort Rouge United, located at the northeast corner of Wardlaw Avenue and Nassau Street North.

The front (west) façade of this red brick structure features a unique two-door entrance located atop a wide set of stairs. The doors, and the stained glass window between the two doors, are framed in stone with a pointed arch top and gable-like stone-capped embellishments above. Beyond this element is the main building, highlighted by three large stained glass windows with smooth stone frames and rounded arched. In the apex of the gable end is a set of arched window-like elements. On either side of the main building are the two large, square towers, the southern tower built taller than the northern element. Both towers feature stone accenting, round arched openings, corbelled brick, stone belt courses and other ornamentation and are both topped with stone. Both sides of the



Front (west) and north façades, 2009

elongated main building feature tall round arch windows filled with stained glass panels and separated by brick and stone buttresses. The rear includes a large curved extended area with numerous windows with stone sills and heads.

The interior, finished in wood, includes a horseshoe-shaped balcony in the sanctuary and a Casavant organ. The building stands on its original site, appears to be in good structural condition and has not suffered major exterior alteration.

This is one of Winnipeg's fine Gothic Revival style churches. 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."¹

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."² 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.³

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



Rear (east) and south façades, 2009

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; Knox, along with Augustine and Westminster were three of the more conspicuous local examples.⁴

The building is in remarkably good condition and has suffered little exterior alterations, except for the construction of an addition to the structure's north side.

Building designer J.H.G. Russell (1862-1946) was born in Toronto, Canada West (Ontario), in 1862, the son of a dry goods dealer. After attending school in that city, he went to work for H.B. Gordon, a prominent area architect. Russell was with Gordon from 1878 until his departure for Winnipeg in 1882. From 1886 to 1893, Russell travelled throughout the United States, learning civil engineering, surveying and architecture in centres such as Chicago, Illinois, Spokane and Tacoma, Washington, and Sioux City, Iowa.

In 1895, two years after returning to Winnipeg, he set up his private practice, coinciding with the city's period of unbridled growth. His designs were (and are) scattered throughout the city, province and Western Canada, covering a variety of building types, sizes, costs and uses. His business continued to be steady during World War I and after, when many architects struggled to find commissions.

Russell was president of the Manitoba Association of Architects (1925) and served for three terms as the president of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (1912-15). His chairmanship of the Presbyterian Church Board of Managers and his devotion to



South façade, 2009

Presbyterianism partially explain the large number of churches he designed for the denomination in Winnipeg and Western Canada. Russell died in 1946.

A complete list of his designs would be very lengthy, included among his more notable local projects would be J.H. Ashdown Warehouse additions, 157-179 Bannatyne Avenue, (1899-1911, Grade II), Lake of the Woods Building, 212 McDermot Avenue (1901, Grade II), Hammond Building, 63 Albert Street (1902, Grade III), Adelman Building, 92-100 Princess Street (1903, Grade II), Franklin Press, 168 Bannatyne Avenue (1904, Grade III), R.R. Wilson, 545 Broadway (1904, Grade III), J.H. Ashdown Store, 211 Bannatyne Avenue (1904, Grade III), Porter Building, 165 McDermot Avenue (1906, Grade III), Child's (McArthur) Building, Portage Avenue (1909, demolished), Casa Loma Building, Portage Avenue (1909, Grade II), Glengarry Block, 290 McDermot Avenue (1910, Grade III), Westminster Presbyterian (United) Church, 745 Westminster Avenue (1910-12, Grade II), Dingwall Building, 62 Albert Street (1911, Grade III), YMCA, 301 Vaughan Street, with Jackson and Rosencrans of New York (1911-13, Grade II), J.H. Ashdown, 529 Wellington Crescent (1913, Grade II) and St. John's Presbyterian (United) Church, 250 Cathedral Avenue (1923, Grade III). He has been given 20 points by the Historical Buildings Committee.



One of the fine stained glass windows, church website, no date

HISTORICAL INTEREST:

The Fort Rouge Methodist congregation was formed in 1883, a mission of downtown Winnipeg's Grace Methodist. The other founding congregation of the present church was Crescent Congregational, which had built a church at the corner of Arbuthnot Street and McMillan Avenue in 1910 and renovated in 1927. In 1935, a two-year trial union of the now United Church congregations was begun, in 1937 the groups amalgamated to form the Crescent Fort Rouge congregation, worshipping in the former Methodist building on Wardlaw Avenue.⁵

RECOMMENDATION TO HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE:

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

- its historical importance- an excellent example of the type of well-appointed, large and comfortable religious structure built by an established congregation in the pre-World War I era in neighbourhoods throughout Winnipeg;
- its associations- its long-term connections to the Methodist and later United churches in Winnipeg and Fort Rouge;
- its design- a good example of the Gothic Revival style;
- its architect- J.H.G. Russell was a respected and important practitioner;
- its location- defines an important intersection and contributes greatly to the historic streetscape of two major arteries within its neighbourhood; and
- its integrity- its main façades continue to display many of their original elements and design.



Front (west) and south façades, 1978

ENDNOTES:

- ¹ John Fleming, et al., The Penguin Dictionary of Architecture, Third Edition (London, U.K.: Penguin Books, 1908), p. 142.
- ² Neil Bingham, A Study of the Church Buildings in Manitoba of the Congregational, Methodist, Presbyterian and United Churches of Canada (Winnipeg, MB: Department of Culture, Heritage and Recreation, Historic Resources Branch, 1987), p. 14.
- ³ Ibid., p. 14.
- ⁴ J. Fleming, op. cit., pp. 236-273.
- ⁵ Crescent Fort Rouge United Church website, no date.