

838 WOLSELEY AVENUE – MOYSE HOUSE
P.M. Clemens, 1913



Winnipeg's West End developed rapidly after the turn of the century and by 1913 was a distinct community with a new school, banking facilities, churches and grocery stores. The district bounded by the Assiniboine River and Portage Avenue became inhabited by the middle class of British origin.

On Wolseley Avenue, between Chestnut and Canora Streets, there are four distinctive brick houses on river lot properties that illustrate the exclusive nature of the neighborhood. Built between 1909 and 1913, two were homes for executives of the Manitoba Bridge and Iron Company, the third was for the president of an insurance firm. The house at 838 Wolseley Avenue was built as a residence for John Moyse, an entrepreneur who owned a livery and stable business on William Avenue, near the Market Square, from which he boarded, rented, and sold horses. Moyse chose Paul M. Clemens, the architect of the house next door, to design his house.

Clemens was born in Ireland, and in the late 1880s immigrated to Chicago where it is presumed he received his training in architecture. He came to Winnipeg after the turn of the century and became part of a body of Icelanders, who as contractors, skilled craftsmen and labourers worked

cooperatively and used their native language on the worksite. He designed a number of apartment blocks and tendered for the Legislative Building in 1912.

The beginning of the twentieth century saw the rise of “women’s” magazines, such as *Homes and Gardens*, *House Beautiful*, and western Canada’s *Western Home Journal*, which offered not only advice for decorating and furnishing, but also provided house plans and commentaries about appropriate styles for domestic residences. The Colonial Revival style (Georgian Revival) was considered as “the gentlest, purest, the most humane of domestic styles.” Based on Palladian and classical vernacular tradition models, the typical ornamentation recalled the Georgian and Adamesque period (1770-1820).

Paul Clemens designed the Moyse house in a simpler variation of this style with a dominating hipped roof and a full width porch. Built on a stone foundation, the red brick house has a symmetrical front façade which once featured a grand porch that had paired columns with Ionic capitals, a full entablature with a projecting cornice and a handsome balustrade. The paired main floor windows have multi-pane glazing in the upper sash. The main doorway, with narrow sidelights and a tan transom, is typical of stately homes built in Ontario in the 1820s. The windows have projecting keystones with radiating brick heads. The cornice is decorated with modillions while the hip roof is punctuated by an elaborate projecting dormer.

The symmetrical west elevation faces a public reserve and has a Palladian motif window arrangement on the second floor. The building’s rear elevation, facing the river, is just as magnificent. Composite order capitals embellished with Ionic volutes and Corinthian foliage sit atop four unfluted giant order shafts that are raised by pedestals. The classical motif is continued with an entablature that is punctuated with modillion blocks. The Neo-classical porch was to signify the status of the owner to the upper class living across the river on Wellington Crescent.

The house was sold in 1923 and by the late 1950s was split into three suites. The intact main floor still has exquisite inlay work in the hardwood floors. Plaster coving gives the ceiling a richness of detail while elegant wood wainscoting lines the hallway, living room and dining room.

The severe deterioration of the rear porch resulted in the owner seeking designation for the building in order to qualify for a grant provided by the newly introduced Provincial Heritage Resources Act.