



GATE

WOODHAVEN BOULEVARD AT PORTAGE AVENUE

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee
Researcher: M. Peterson
October 2013

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Located north of the Assiniboine River, St. James occupied the entire northwest corner of what is now the City of Winnipeg.

The early history of St. James, prior to the arrival of Europeans in the 18th and 19th centuries, concentrated on the seasonal use of the Assiniboine River by local First Nations bands for transportation, hunting and gathering activities and seasonal habitation.

Portage Avenue, the area's main thoroughfare, originated as the main east-west overland trail connecting The Forks, an important hunting and meeting ground, and the western plains rich with herds of bison and other large game. As the fur trade in the region developed and expanded, the trail was an important freighting route for thousands of ox-carts transporting food and other goods. Modern development transformed Portage Avenue into the hub of commerce and transportation for Winnipeg and its western suburbs.

Permanent settlement of the St. James area began as fur traders retired from their years of service and sought to take up land in the vicinity of the Upper Fort Garry (Plate 1). The prevailing system of land organization was River Lots, thin parcels of land stretching back a distance of 2 miles from the river, giving the land owner important access to the water. An additional 2-mile strip beyond the lot could also be obtained. As settlement increased, additional River Lots were established, extending development further west along the Assiniboine.

In 1850, the Parish of St. James was created by a grant of land from the Hudson's Bay Company and comprised property from Omand's Creek (originally known as Catfish Creek and first bridged in 1860) to present-day St. James Street south of the Portage Trail. Here a group of Anglicans built St. James Church in 1852 (today its address is 540 Tylehurst Street and it is referred to as Old St. James Anglican).¹ Around this structure the community grew. A school was built ca.1853.² Early parishioners included Charles and Cornelius Fidler, James Spence,

¹ Mary McCarthy Ferguson, A History of St. James (Winnipeg, MB: Author, 1967), pp. 6-11.

² Ibid., p. 11. Honourable John Norquay, future Premier of Manitoba, taught at the school in 1857.

James Foulds, the Bourke family and Gavin Garrioch. The Parish population grew mainly because of the resettling of Selkirk Settler families from the Kildonan area after the disastrous 1852 flood. These farmers sought higher land to avoid future floods and much of the land along the Assiniboine River had remained dry.

After the creation of the Province of Manitoba in 1870, a number of municipalities were established, including the Rural Municipality of Assiniboia, incorporated in 1880, which encompassed the former parishes of Headingley, St. Charles, St. James and part of St. Boniface on both the north and south sides of the Assiniboine River (Plate 2). This large municipality was steadily decreased over the years as new government organizations were formed: the Rural Municipality of Charleswood (1912); Town of Tuxedo (1913); and the Rural Municipality of St. James (1921) – Plates 3 and 4.

The period between the Wars saw little development in St. James, however, the situation changed after World War II and St. James began to expand rapidly. New residential neighbourhoods emerged including Silver Heights, Birchwood, Westwood, Crestview, and St. Charles. Other important developments in west Winnipeg included the founding and expansion of Winnipeg's airport in 1928 (originally Stevenson Field, renamed Winnipeg International Airport in 1958 and James Armstrong Richardson International Airport in 2006) and Polo Park, originally one of Western Canada's premier horse racing facility (1925-1956) and now one of its best known shopping centres (built in 1959 and expanded several times since).

The Rural Municipality of St. James, ostensibly the urban part of the Assiniboine Municipality, became the City of St. James in 1956. In 1967 the Town of Brooklands merged with St. James as did the Rural Municipality of Assiniboia two years later to form the City of St. James-Assiniboia. It was this city that became part of the City of Winnipeg under Unicity in 1972.

At the beginning of the 20th century, as Winnipeg entered a sustained period of nearly unbridled growth, St. James became one of the areas of expansion, both residential and commercial. The extension of streetcar service from downtown to Deer Lodge in 1903 was an important factor (it was suspended in 1914 because of a lack of ridership), as was the opening of Assiniboine Park

(originally City Park) in 1904. Like other communities, the St. James area saw its share of speculative residential developments along Portage Avenue during the 1900-1914 period, including Woodhaven.

Woodhaven was initially registered in the Winnipeg Land Titles Office in 1900, Plan 576, subdividing Lot 12 Parish of St. James and Lot 122 St. Charles (south of Portage Avenue). The scheme saw the creation of 22 agricultural lots and was the brainchild of realtors Herman B. Harrison (ca.1869-?) and Christopher O’Kelly (1864-?). One of the early issues of the development was Sturgeon Creek which left the south end of inaccessible.³ It did not, however, stop the two from advertising the property, touting it as a “Suburban Pleasure Resort” and complete with a 20-acre lake created by damming the creek (Plate 5).

In September 1913, Plan 2154 was registered, creating the developments major thoroughfare, Woodhaven Boulevard, along with several building lots. Harrison and O’Kelly, through their company, the City and District Land Company Limited, were gambling that once the subdivision was moving forward, the Municipality would build a bridge across Sturgeon Creek. But the end of Winnipeg’s realty boom in the early 1910s and the start of World War I meant many plans, including Woodhaven, were shelved.

As the War ended, Harrison and O’Kelly made a concerted effort, lobbying the Municipal Council for sewer and water hook-ups for Woodhaven Boulevard and a Sturgeon Creek Bridge. Council finally acquiesced, granting the contract for the bridge to A. McCarey in late March 1920. City and District Land Company Limited then offered six lots to Council for Woodhaven Park, which was started in the summer of 1920.⁴ Included in the bridge construction work was the construction of electrically-lit stone pillars at the north end. Small boulders were to be used and the total cost was approximately \$100. As planned, the pillars were to include gates, although it is unknown at

³ R.R. Rostecki, “Pillars of the Community: Roadside Markers in Winnipeg,” report for the City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee, March 1995, pp. 19-20. Below as “Pillars of the Community”.

⁴ Rural Municipality of Assiniboia Minutes, March 5, 1919, No. 307; March 19, 1919, No. 348; March 17, 1920, pp. 1-2; May 19, 1920, p. 2; September 1, 1920, p. 3; and September 2, 1920, p. 1; and Manitoba Free Press, March 29, 1920, p. 7.

present if they were ever built. The Woodhaven residents constructed a street railway waiting room at the northeast corner of the park entrance.⁵

These pillars lasted until the early 1950s. In 1953, the Province of Manitoba widened Portage Avenue to accommodate the Trans-Canada Highway and ploughed the pillars into the creek.⁶ Area residents requested replacement of the pillars, but the Provincial government refused until 1957, when the Manitoba Highways Department agreed to pay for the work of reconstruction, as long as it was done by the City of St. James.⁷ Because the two sides of Woodhaven Boulevard were different heights, it was decided to design a planter for one side of the boulevard, the structure being built on the west side, ca.1961.⁸

STYLE

This is an understated gate with little architectural detailing.

CONSTRUCTION

The gate is built of red brick with stone accenting and rests on a gravel base.

DESIGN

The gate features a low planter section on the north and a taller pillar-like section on the south, the east and west faces bearing stylized metal “Woodhaven” lettering (Plates 6-8).

⁵ “Pillars of the Community,” pp. 19-20.

⁶ Rural Municipality of St. James Minutes, August 18, 1953, no. 1193; St. James Leader, July 18, 1957, p. 1; and Winnipeg Free Press, December 2, 1953, p. 3.

⁷ “Pillars of the Community,” pp. 19-20.

⁸ Winnipeg Free Press, September 7, 1960, p. 52. A delegation from the neighbourhood complained to St. James City Council in September 1960 that the pillars had not been rebuilt and that the park was being used as a “dumping ground.”

INTERIOR

N/A

INTEGRITY

The gate stands on its original locations, is in good structural condition and has not suffered major alteration.

STREETSCAPE

The gate marks the entrance to the Woodhaven neighbourhood located west of Sturgeon Creek and south of Portage Avenue.

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS

It is unknown at this time who designed and built this gate.

PERSON/INSTITUTION

Little is known about the original developers of Woodhaven, Herman B. Harrison and Christopher O'Kelly⁹ or their company City & District Land Company Limited, although the Company had offered to build small bungalows throughout the City in 1919. In Woodhaven, the homes were priced between \$5,000 and \$8,000, with the new owners paying \$45 cash and \$45/month. By the fall of 1919, 11 bungalows had been completed on Woodhaven Boulevard.¹⁰ But by the early 1920s, the company was embroiled in controversy that prompted a Provincial inquiry into questionable financing and construction of hundreds of poorly built homes in St. James that the

⁹ O'Kelly's son, Major Christopher Patrick John O'Kelly (1895-1922) won the Victoria Cross at Passchendaele in 1917.

¹⁰ Manitoba Free Press, October 18, 1919, p. 36.

Council of Assiniboia had advanced loans for.¹¹ By 1924, the men were in provincial court for failure to make income tax returns from 1917-1922, claiming they were “too broke” to properly argue their case.¹²

Woodhaven developed into a summer resort-like community with small cottages built along the creek and river and some of the earliest dwellings are still standing (Plate 9). The area filled in time, some newer housing has been built on the east side of Glendale Boulevard after the demolition of Woodhaven School (127 Glendale Boulevard, built 1956, demolished in the mid-1990s).

EVENT

There is no known event connected with this gate.

CONTEXT

The gate at Woodhaven Boulevard, built ca.1961, is a modern example of a neighbourhood marker/gate structure. The City has recognized the importance of these building types by designating three gates:

- Armstrong’s Point Gates, East Gate, Middle Gate and West Gate @ Cornish Avenue: built in 1911 and designed by H.N. Ruttan, these stone and iron gates mark the entrance to Armstrong’s Point, one of the City’s most exclusive residential districts of the pre-1915 era (Plate 10);
- Nanton Estate Gates, 229 Roslyn Road: these stone and wrought iron gates were built in 1900, designed by J.H.G. Russell for Sir Augustus M. Nanton, influential businessman as the entrance to his two-hectare estate and mansion (Plate 11); and
- Silver Heights Gates, Mount Royal Road at Traill Avenue: designed by William D. Lount in 1950-1951 to mark the southern entrance to his father’s new residential sub-division, Silver Heights, these modern gates are built of brick with wrought iron accenting and a concrete canopy (Plate 12).

¹¹ Manitoba Free Press, 1920-1923. This issue continued to be a source of debate and study late into 1923 and was known as the “Assiniboia Housing Probe”. Judge George Paterson was given the task of running the inquiry and afterwards, many of the homes were upgraded or repaired although many others stood vacant.

¹² Manitoba Free Press, April 2, 1924, p. 6.

LANDMARK

This single gate is located on a busy corner of Portage Avenue and would be familiar in the neighbourhood of Woodhaven and the region of St. James.

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Plate 1 – The Honourable James McKay (1828-1879), ca.1870, one of St. James' early and influential citizens. McKay was a member of the Council of Assiniboia in 1868, Manitoba Legislative Council, Minister of Agriculture and a founder of the Winnipeg Board of Trade (1873). His fine home was located on the site of the present-day Deer Lodge Hospital, 2109 Portage Avenue. ([Archives of Manitoba](#))

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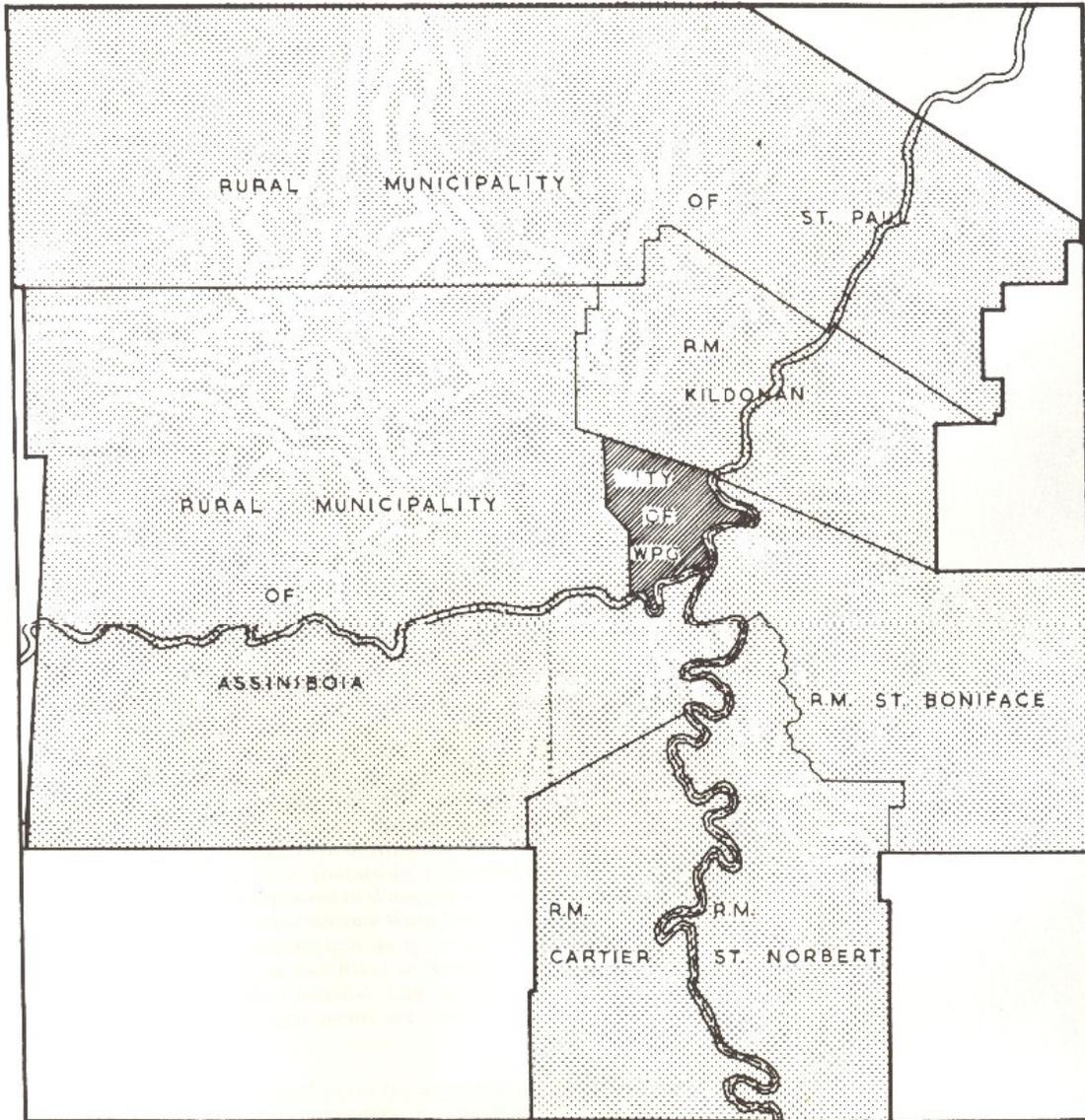


Plate 2 – The municipalities surrounding the City of Winnipeg as they appeared in 1880. (City of Winnipeg.)

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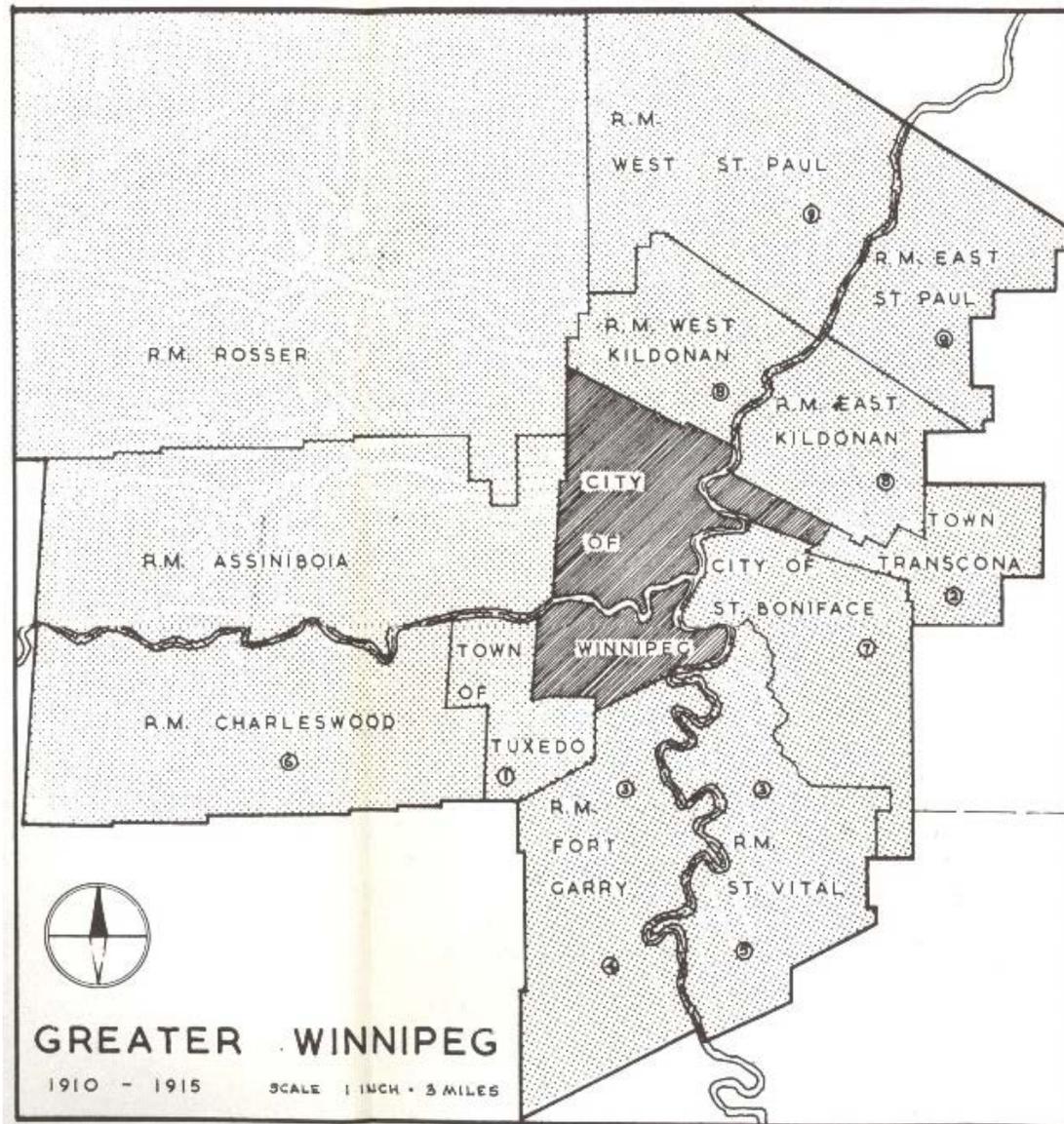


Plate 3 – The municipalities surrounding the City of Winnipeg as they changed between 1910 and 1915. (City of Winnipeg.)

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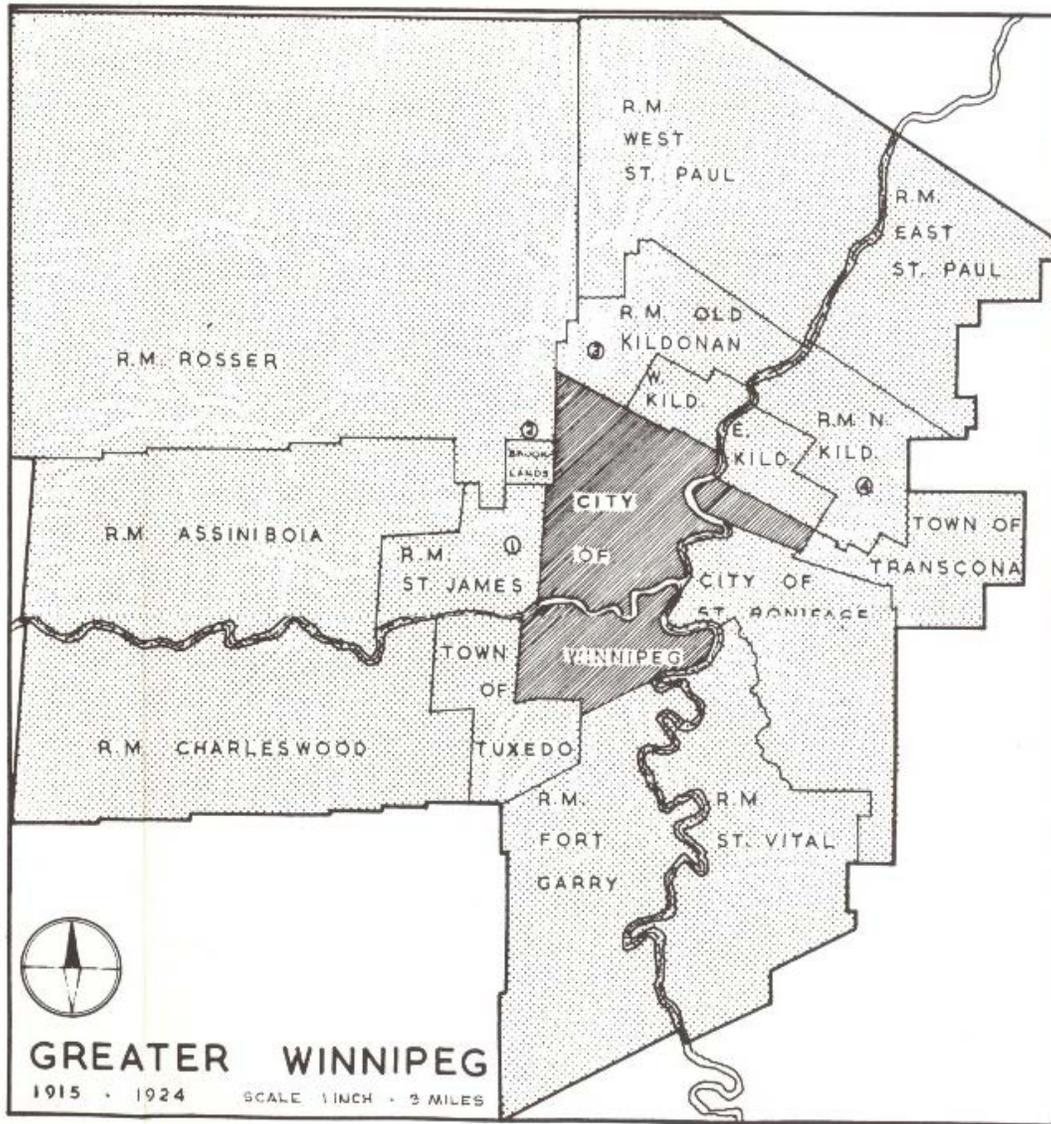
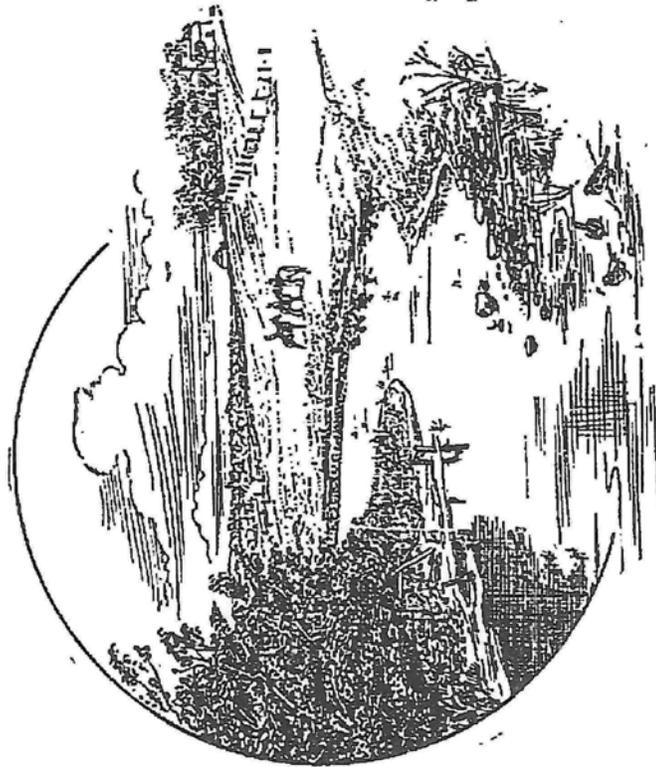


Plate 4 – The municipalities surrounding the City of Winnipeg as they changed between 1915 and 1924. (City of Winnipeg.)

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NEW SUBURBAN PLEASURE RESORT FOR WINNIPEG



On the Left is Shown a Natural Basin in Sturgeon Creek, Across Which a Dam Will Be Thrown, to Secure the Fifteen Acres of Water Which Will Comprise Sturgeon Lake. The Other Cut Shows a Portion of the Assiniboine River Frontage of Sturgeon Park.

Plate 5 – 1910 newspaper advertisement for “Sturgeon Lake”, Woodhaven. (Manitoba Free Press, April 30, 1910, p. 19.)

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Plate 6 – Woodhaven Gate, Portage Avenue at Woodhaven Boulevard, east side, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)



Plate 7 – Woodhaven Gate, Portage Avenue at Woodhaven Boulevard, west side, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)

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Plate 8 – Woodhaven Gate, Portage Avenue at Woodhaven Boulevard, lettering, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)



Plate 9 – Woodhaven neighbourhood, Sunnyside Boulevard looking south from Emo Avenue, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)

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Plate 10 – Armstrong’s Point Gates, West Gate and Cornish Avenue, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)



Plate 11 – Nanton Estate Gates, 229 Roslyn Road, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)

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Plate 12 – Silver Heights Gates, Mount Royal Road and Trill Avenue, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)