

**294 BURROWS AVENUE – ST. GILES PRESBYTERIAN (UNITED) CHURCH
(BETHLEHEM ABORIGINAL FELLOWSHIP)
*C.S. Bridgman, 1907***



In the heady decades of Winnipeg's early development, established churches often were called on to sponsor missions as a temporary means of accommodating new congregations in rapidly growing residential districts. That was how St. Giles Church, the first Presbyterian congregation in the North End, got its start.

It was formed in 1884 as the North Presbyterian Mission with support from St. Andrew's Church on Elgin Avenue and students at Manitoba College. Prayer meetings initially were held in a store at Main Street and Burrows Avenue. As membership expanded, the group was able to build its own facilities.

Its first church (1885-86) was a small frame structure at Main Street and Limit (Aberdeen) Avenue. The second (1888-89) was a brick building on Selkirk Avenue, but it too was soon

outgrown. In 1906, the congregation chose a new site, the southwest corner of Burrows Avenue and Charles Street. The following year, local architect Charles S. Bridgman prepared the plans and the Imperial Plumbing and Building Co. began construction at a cost of \$35,000. The premises were dedicated in March 1908.

St. Giles Church is of solid brick construction. It rises two storeys from concrete footings and a rough-cut stone foundation to a superstructure of iron columns and brick walls topped by a complex hip and gable roof. Red brick and stone accents provide the exterior finishes. Several arched and/or flat-headed windows light each elevation, including the raised foundation.

Typical of Protestant churches of its era, St. Giles displays the Modern or Late Gothic Revival style of architecture. As such, its design emphasizes massing rather than elaborate ornamentation. Key features include pointed arches above the main doors and windows, a crenellated tower at the northeast corner, and tracery-adorned Palladian windows on three façades. Smooth-cut stone bands mark the divisions between the foundation and superstructure, and the first and second storeys. Another belt course doubles as a continuous sill under pairs of louvered arches in the upper part of the tower. Additional stone details include coping, sills, buttress and merlon caps, and a finial atop the front (east or Charles Street) entrance. Also of note are two circular windows (oculi) in the tower.

The front, north (Burrows Avenue) and south elevations are similar in design. The rear (west) façade has an angled two-storey extension that originally contained a gym, clubroom, and rooms for the choir and minister. A cross-gable roof encloses the main part of the complex. The roof also has a central hip section that is topped by a four-sided, gable-shaped lantern.

The sanctuary holds up to 1,100 people. At the west end are a platform, Tudor archway and raised choir and organ loft. Wooden pews divided by centre and side aisles radiate outward from the platform. A horseshoe-shaped gallery provides additional seating.

Architect Bridgman (1875-1965) designed at least two other local churches – St. Luke's Anglican and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Cross – prior to his St. Giles commission.

An Ontarian, Bridgman came to Winnipeg in 1903 after working as an architect in New York City for several years. He subsequently planned numerous commercial and residential blocks, warehouses and institutional buildings, including the historically designated Anvers and DeBary apartments and Dawson-Richardson Warehouse. He moved to London, Ontario in the latter 1930s, planned air-training stations during World War II, and later worked with his architect-brother Gordon Bridgman.

St. Giles Church has not been altered significantly since its construction. Over time, however, its congregations experienced considerable change. In the mid-1920s, St. Giles became part of the United Church of Canada. Membership later peaked, then began to dwindle due to attrition, the movement of families from the inner city to the suburbs, and other factors. The congregation eventually disbanded. Its building stood vacant for a period before being sold in 1973 and occupied by the Elmwood Bethel Mennonite Church. That congregation, in turn, has been succeeded by the Bethlehem Aboriginal Fellowship, part of the Baptist Union of Western Canada.