



37 EDMONTON STREET

HENRY M. BELCHER HOUSE

PREPARED BY PETERSON PROJECTS – JANUARY 2007



37 EDMONTON STREET HENRY M. BELCHER HOUSE

Date of Construction: 1900

Building Permit: 146/1900

Architect: Browne, George Creeford

Contractor: Ames, T.E.

ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

This early residential district of Winnipeg boasted many fine homes and mansions, many of which featured highly ornate façades. This house, built in 1900 for an important local businessman and his family, is one of the best of the remaining houses in the neighbourhood.

The 2½-storey solid brick building rests on a rusticated stone foundation rising above grade. The front (west) façade features a wealth of ornamentation: two-storey round bay window topped by heavy overhanging eaves with wood bracketing and exposed rafters; unusual front facing gable end with wood cladding and a pair of windows in a circular element with wood railing; wrap around open porch with unfluted wood columns, pediment and other wood detailing; corner tower with conical roof and wood finial; wide bands of rusticated stone forming continuous heads for the bay window openings and thin stone



Detail of gable end and tower, west side, 2006.

bands for continuous sills; and the oval windows on the ground floor (vertical) and second floor (horizontal).

The north façade is much plainer, the thin stone bands continue along its length and a side-facing gable is also present. The south side includes the wrap around porch, although it has been partially enclosed and the second floor area has also been closed in and stuccoed over. The rear of the building (east) features a small brick addition at its south end and a larger addition at the north end. The rear slope of the truncated hipped roof angles into a gable and a wood fire escape runs from this area to the ground

It is a visually complex and pleasing design that cost \$7,300 to complete,¹ a large sum in 1900.

The building stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition. Alterations to the exterior have included the replacement of original windows (many with tracery), with newer, unsympathetic single pane units. The wrap around porch has also seen some renovation although none of these changes have seriously affected the appearance of main façade.

The house is a fine example of the Queen Anne Revival style as applied to a residential structure.² The style borrowed heavily from English architecture of the 15th century, blending classical and medieval motifs into a picturesque form. Asymmetry was achieved through combinations of porches, bay windows, projecting wings, balconies and other devices. Roofs were usually irregular and complex, with dormers, gables and ornamental chimneys. Variations in materials and colours were also used to animate the façades. Given this freedom



Front (west) façade, 2006.

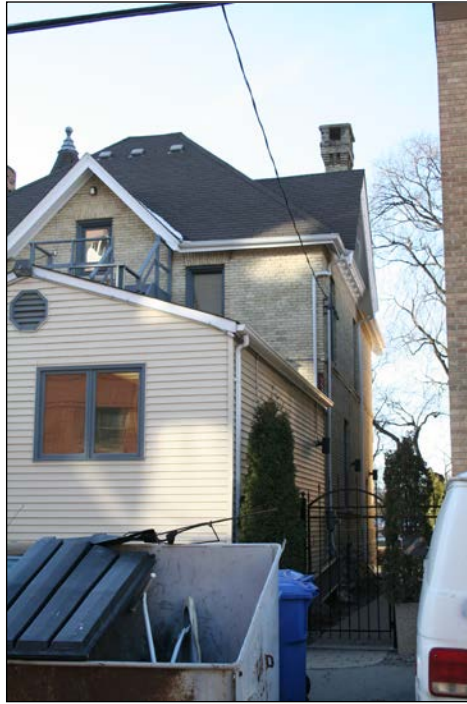
of design, however, accomplished designers were still able to create balance in the structures, offsetting busy surfaces by placing calmer elements nearby.³

The popularity of the style in Canada began in the 1880s and lasted until World War I. On the prairies, pre-1900 examples of the style were not numerous because large-scale development occurred after the turn of the century. Post-1900, it was quickly adopted for use in the growing residential districts, especially the more affluent neighbourhoods where its showy qualities were greatly admired.

George C. Browne was the architect of this house. Browne was born in Montreal in 1852, the son of architect George Browne, a prominent designer and major real estate holder. After finishing high school, he immediately went to work in his father's office. At the age of eighteen, he went to New York and worked for Russell Sturgis, one of that city's leading architects. After three years, Browne resigned and left for Europe to study design history.⁴

He spent over three years in England, Ireland, France, Italy and Switzerland, and won an international design competition in England. He returned to Montreal in 1877⁵ and in 1879 he inexplicably gave up architecture to homestead on 129.5 ha (320 acres) of land in the Tiger Hills district south of Holland, Manitoba.⁶

Browne moved to Winnipeg in 1882⁷ and set up a private architectural practice. He continued to design buildings throughout Manitoba and Western Canada into the new century, although by 1904 City of Winnipeg Building Permits show little work attributed to his office. In 1907, he had his name officially changed from George Browne to George Creford Browne.⁸ His work ranged from small houses and cottages to major office structures and warehouses. Perhaps his two most famous designs were the Public Market Building behind City Hall, built



Rear (east) and north façades, 2006.

in 1889-90 (demolished in 1964), and Wesley College (University of Winnipeg), Portage Avenue, built in 1895 (Grade II). It was announced in 1904 that he was retiring and moving to New York State.⁹ He died in South Nyack, New York on March 12, 1919.¹⁰

A list of his major work includes: Massey Building, 294 William Avenue (1885, Grade II); Miller, Morse and Company Warehouse, 86 Princess Street (1887, Grade III); Mackenzie and Powis Warehouse, 78 Princess Street (1891, Grade III); Court House, Portage la Prairie (1894-95); Young Men's Christian Association Building (Birk's Building), 276 Portage Avenue (1900, Grade II); and Gault Building, 92-104 Arthur Street (1900, Grade II). He has been given 10 points by the Historical Buildings Committee.

HISTORICAL INTEREST:

This area was known, starting in the 1880s, as The Hudson's Bay Reserve or The Reserve, and developed into one of Winnipeg's earliest prestigious residential neighbourhoods. It filled with the mansions, large homes and manicured grounds of Winnipeg's business and social elite. For the next several decades, it was one of the most desirable addresses in all of Western Canada, with tree-lined Broadway running down its centre. This residential activity fostered the development of related facilities such as churches, schools and terraces.

As Winnipeg's downtown expanded, many of the city's elite chose to relocate further away in rapidly developing neighbourhoods such as Armstrong's Point, River Heights, Fort Rouge, Crescentwood and Wolseley. Many of The Reserve's original properties were



Rear (east) façade, 2006.

subdivided, allowing more modest infill housing to dot the streets and avenues. Many of the larger dwellings were converted into boarding houses, their interiors seriously altered. A relatively new form of housing, the apartment block, also found expression in The Reserve through the construction of luxury blocks on both sides of Broadway and on cross streets. Again, as time progressed, smaller, less ostentatious blocks were built in the area.

Henry M. Belcher was the managing director of Gault Brothers Limited when this house was built for his family in 1900.¹¹ Gault Brothers was a Montreal dry goods wholesaler who was looking to join the growing number of Eastern Canadian firms taking advantage of Winnipeg's geographic location between the manufacturers in the east and the growing markets to the west, and the city's favourable freight rates. The company remained a fixture on the local scene until the 1970s. Belcher was also president of the Winnipeg Board of Trade from 1908-1909.¹²

Belcher lived at 37 Edmonton Street until the early 1920s, the building then went through a number of owners, resident and non-resident, and numerous tenants. Retiree Michael Kuziw was the owner/resident in the 1960s. By the 1980s the house had been converted into offices (a common fate for many of the large homes in the downtown) and was occupied by Flower & Beattie, land surveyors.¹³



Rear (east) and south façades, 2006.

RECOMMENDATION TO HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE:

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

- its historical importance- one of a handful of pre-1915 built single-family dwellings in the east Broadway area known as The Reserve and an excellent example of a home built for an affluent family at the turn of the century;
- its associations- its long-term connections to early and influential retail/wholesale personality H.M. Belcher;
- its design- an excellent example of the Queen Anne Revival style;
- its architect- G.C. Browne was a respected and important practitioner;
- its location- contributes greatly to the historic streetscape of Edmonton Street; and
- its integrity- its façades continue to display many of their original elements and design.



Front (west) façade, 1978.

ENDNOTES:

- 1 City of Winnipeg Building Permit, #146/1900.
- 2 Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg: Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, 1991), p. 17; L. Maitland et al., A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1992), p. 102; and L. Maitland, The Queen Anne Revival Style in Canadian Architecture (Ottawa: Environment Canada, 1990), p. 64.
- 3 L. Maitland et al., op. cit., p. 98.
- 4 G. Bryce, A History of Manitoba (Toronto: The Canada History Company, 1906), pp. 483-84.
- 5 W.P. Thompson, "Browne, George, Jr." The Canadian Encyclopedia (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1988), Volume 1, p. 289.
- 6 Winnipeg Daily Tribune, August 1, 1891, p. 13.
- 7 Men of Canada, p. 222 (unidentified article in the Department of Culture and Heritage, Historic Resources Branch files).
- 8 Statutes of Manitoba, 1907, Chapter 51, p. 11 (Historic Resources Branch files).
- 9 Canadian Architect and Builder, Vol. 17 (1904), Issue 5, p. 85.
- 10 W.P. Thompson, op. cit., p. 289.
- 11 City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls, Roll No. 12-092646000, 1898-1905.
- 12 R.R. Rostecki, "92-104 Arthur Street – Gault Block," Canadian Inventory of Historic Buildings, Historic Building Report, 1976, n.p.
- 13 ARo, 1915-1990; and Henderson's Directory, 1915-1990.