180 SINCLAIR STREET

FIRE HALL NO. 7

(FORMER FIRE HALL NO. 11)

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee

October 1993
Winnipeg's North End, encompassing the land north of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) tracks at Higgins Avenue, has been given a variety of colourful names to match its colourful society: "Foreign Quarter," "New Jerusalem," and "CPR Town" among them. It grew around the massive CPR yards and filled with labourers working for the railway or in one of the dozens of industrial plants located on the main line. By 1906, the North End contained 43 per cent of the City's population in less than one-third of Winnipeg's geographic area.1

The CPR yards were a major contributor to life in the North End. The company was the main employer, 3,500 by 1911,2 it attracted large-scale industrial development along its line and it acted as a boundary, physically dividing the North End from the rest of Winnipeg. In Winnipeg's prosperous Anglo-Saxon society, the phrase "from the wrong side of the tracks" clearly referred to those from the North End. This physical separation combined with the language barrier and difference in culture did not allow people from south of the tracks to understand life in the North End. This reinforced their impressions of the district as a dirty, noisy and dangerous place to be avoided.3 While life was unquestionably harsher in North Winnipeg, it was in part due to the lack of support from and neglect of civic officials and the commercial elite of the time.

That the area was home to many of the city's newly arriving immigrant families is undeniable. In 1916, for example, the area was home to 80 per cent of the city's Jewish and Slavic population, 67 per cent of the Scandinavians and 22 per cent of the Germans.4 The high concentrations of immigrants resulted from a number of factors: a wish to locate near work; a desire to locate within a particular ethnic community; the availability of cheap housing; and the ability to utilize social

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2 Ibid., p. 159.
3 Ibid., pp. 159-60.
4 Ibid., pp. 164-65. A large population of British continued to live in throughout the North End. They too tended to inhabit specific areas that ranged from ghettos near the rail yards to the more opulent neighbourhood around St. John's Park.
services in the area such as the All Peoples' Mission.5

Slowly, into this area moved the civic services. Streetcars, although connection to the rest of Winnipeg remained underdeveloped, began operating throughout the region. Police stations, fire halls, and public baths (swimming pools) were all located north of the CPR tracks for the benefit of all. Because of the overcrowding and the high concentration of cheaply constructed frame houses in the North End, this district was one of the first to receive a second fire station. Built in 1910 according to the 1904 plans, Fire Hall No. 11 was located on the northwest corner of Sinclair Street and Pritchard Avenue, less than a dozen blocks away from Fire Hall No. 7 which had been completed in 1904.

**STYLE**

Combining aspects of a garage, a barracks, and a home, [fire stations] had to be public and private, institutional and domestic, ceremonial and functional all at once.6

Given such demands, designing of a fire station obviously was a test of architectural skill. In the United States (and later in Canada), the job increasingly fell to classically-trained architect from the 1880s onward. Prior to then, fire halls had been little more than sheds, used to house equipment and serve as club-houses for volunteer brigades. The buildings were essentially private and had little or no public function. But changing attitudes towards firefighters and reorganization of their crews created a need for more substantial and ornate accommodations.

The public increasingly saw the fireman as an heroic figure and not as a rowdy, untrained volunteer. It was natural that this new respect for fire departments would be translated into modern facilities. As civic buildings, the stations were also required to reflect their increased stature within the daily lives of the citizenry. Councils, always cognizant of appearances, requested more elaborately

5 Ibid., pp. 161-63.
designed stations, requiring the trained hand of the architect.

In some cities, this move towards ornamentation was balanced by the wish of architects and planners to blend the structures into their residential locations. In other cities, the trend was reinforced by a desire for fire halls to stand out as examples of civic pride and prosperity, and "like other showy civic buildings, constituted political as well as architectural statements." For Winnipeg's aldermen, planners and citizens, the idea of publicly displaying good fortune and growth was firmly entrenched, thus the new fire halls were designed to make a statement of prosperity.

Across North America, architects clothed stations in a variety of styles, often borrowing elements from a number of sources. One author dubbed the 1880-1920 period as the "era of castles and palaces." In Winnipeg, it was not surprising to see the 1904 stations accented with elements of the Richardsonian Romanesque style. Growing out of Chicago in the late 1880s, this style was quickly imitated in Winnipeg, becoming a major influence in the warehouse district by the turn of the century. Its rounded arches, rusticated bases and accents, symmetry, and strong textures gave even small-scale designs an aesthetic strength and stability. For the fire department, it was a perfect image.

CONSTRUCTION
The former Fire Hall No. 11 was built on the northwest corner of Sinclair Street and Pritchard Avenue on land legally described as 37/38 St. John, Plan 53, part of Lots 682, 683 and 684. Like the other stations built according to the standard plans, the two-storey section of the Sinclair Street hall measures approximately 10.37 x 14.34 m. (34 x 47'), with a 3.36 m. (11') square tower rising

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7 Ibid., pp. 89-93, 146.
8 Ibid., p. 155.
9 M. Peterson, "The King Building (Formerly the Ryan Block), 104 King Street," report for the City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee, 1988, p. 2.
10 City of Winnipeg Assessment Record, Roll No. 207180, Ward 3, PC 80. Below as AR.
21.05 m. (69') and a rear, one-storey section measuring 6.41 x 15.25 m. (21 x 50').\textsuperscript{11} Appendix I includes a plan of the ground floor of the station.

The solid, cream-coloured brick walls are 33.02 cm. (13") thick on the ground floor and 22.86 cm. (9") on the second floor. The walls throughout are accented with rough-cut stone elements. The thickness of the stone foundation varies - sections are either 45.72 cm. (18") or 60.96 cm. (24") wide. The ceilings are 2.44 m. (8') high in the basement, 3.97 m. (13') on the ground floor, and 3.05 m. (10') on the second floor.\textsuperscript{12} Pressed tin, an ornamental feature used in a variety of buildings throughout the city, was applied to the main- and second-floor ceilings.

The new station was built with 25 cords of stone, 125 million bricks and 30.56 cu. m. (40 cu. yds.) of concrete by local contractor John Saul at a cost $14,000.\textsuperscript{13}

DESIGN

The standard plans mentioned earlier were used to construct thirteen fire halls in the old City of Winnipeg between 1904 and 1913. Each station, however, often included a unique combination of elements, depending on its location and importance.

The halls can be categorized into Class A and Class B stations (see Appendix II for a list of all stations built during this period). The former was more elaborate and included an oriel window on the front façade, a front-facing corble-stepped gable with a Palladian motif, generous use of stone accents around windows and doors, and an intensely embellished tower. The Fire Hall at 56 Maple Street (originally No. 2), is one of the least altered examples of this style.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{13} City of Winnipeg Building Permit, #1465/1910.
A Class B station was a scaled-down version of the Class A building. The oriel window and corbel-stepped gable were missing, as were the elaborate stone accents and tower ornamentation. The fire hall under evaluation, 180 Sinclair Street (now Station No. 7), stands as one of the least altered examples of this class.

At grade, Fire Hall No. 7 begins with a rusticated stone base, leading to the cream-coloured brick of the superstructure. The Sinclair Avenue (east) façade is plain. Most of the ground floor is taken up by three large, arched doorways. Framed within the arches are the original multi-paned windows that give the façade such character and charm. These windows have been removed or replaced on most other vintage fire stations in the city. Brick drip moulding, another common feature, tops the three vehicle doors and the pedestrian entrance.

The second floor features arched windows with radiating brick heads and rough-cut stone lug sills and keystones. A circular window with keystones marking the four directions of the compass is found in the plain gable end. Corbelled brick accents were used sparingly.

The Pritchard Avenue elevation is similar to the east façade, with its arched and square-headed windows and stone detailing. The rear of the structure includes a one-storey section that does not appear to have been altered. The brick tower is accented with stone and features square-headed and arched windows, corbelled brick panels, a heavy cornice, and a stone-capped, crenellated parapet.

This fire hall has not seen any major exterior renovations in its 80-plus years of existence.

INTERIOR
Firefighters required an extremely flexible structure, one that permitted the efficient and concurrent operation of several roles. For example, all parts of the interior were connected to the equipment storage area behind the large doors leading to the street.
Stables were located at the rear where they could be accessed easily, yet the smell and waste associated with such areas could be kept from the more public parts of the station.

Another important consideration was the need to dry the hundreds of feet of fire hose used by each crew. In many halls across North America, this was accomplished by providing a high main-floor ceiling above a sunken basement. But beginning in the 1890s, towers were installed to perform this function, plus give stations a more conspicuous visage. In some United States cities, the desire to impress led to the placement of towers at the front of the fire hall. Because the trucks were backed in and the hose unloaded and loaded from the rear, this set up would not have been functionally efficient.\(^{14}\) In Winnipeg, efficiency was deemed more important than aesthetics and the towers were placed to the rear.

When one considers the type of advances made in firefighting equipment over the past 80 years, it is a credit to the architects that some of their fire stations still operate today. The design has been flexible indeed, and has been easily remodelled to house the trucks and vans which have supplanted horses and the giant aerial ladder vehicles which have replaced the small hook and ladder wagons.

Due to its continued use as a fire hall, 180 Sinclair Street retains its basic interior organization and some of its original finishes. The basement is used for storage and shows little sign of seepage. The ground floor holds the vehicles, while the rear (originally the stable) has been converted into a kitchen and space for clothing and equipment storage. The second floor boasts five bedrooms or offices, a bathroom, and a small common room. Two metal poles (one has been closed off) originally gave quick access to the ground floor. Pressed tin ceilings are still evident on the main and second floors. The tower is still used for hose drying and the original wooden staircase still extends to the top, although they have condemned above the second floor.

\(^{14}\) R. Zurier, op. cit., p. 113.
INTEGRITY
Fire Hall No. 7 stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition. The original wooden doors of the main floor have been replaced by aluminum elements, but the arches remain, as do their multipaned windows. The aesthetic changes thus have been minor.

STREETSCAPE
This building is nestled in a large residential district that includes many blocks of small- to medium-size single-family dwellings, apartment blocks, and commercial enterprises of all description. The use of the yellow brick gives the station a softer appearance, while the tower and scale of the structure tend to make it stand out from its neighbours. It does, however, fit into the general building stock of the district.

ARCHITECT
The architects responsible for this and numerous other stations in Winnipeg were brothers Alexander R. and William N. Melville. The pair began working in the city in the early 1900s and designed a number of varied buildings throughout Winnipeg (see Appendix III for biographical information). They have been given 10 points by the Historical Buildings Committee.

INSTITUTION

Winnipeg was incorporated as a city Nov. 8, 1873 and the concerned citizens of the young community, already accustomed to the storms of winter, grasshopper plagues and flooding, were aware of the ever-growing danger of fire. Other struggling communities across the breadth and width of the land had experience the disaster of fire and the ambitious council under the colourful, controversial mayor Francis Cornish Q.C., began preparations for fire fighting within the city's boundaries.  

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A volunteer fire brigade was formed on September 24, 1874 and included Thomas Ryan, J.H. Ashdown, Daniel McMillan, W.F. Luxton and Stewart Mulvey, all of whom became influential men in the city. Volunteers received $1 for each fire attended and 50 cents for alarms where no equipment was used. Fines were levied for each fire missed ($1) and for each weekly drill missed during the summer (25¢).  

During the next two decades, the City of Winnipeg matured and developed late in the 19th century, its streets, once dotted with one-storey frame buildings, became lined with many newer structures. These buildings filled a variety of roles: residential, storage and retail (and sometimes all of the above). They differed from their predecessors in that they often were taller and much closer to neighbouring buildings. Use of wood still prevailed, however, since brick, stone and other building materials were costly and difficult to import and local sources of supply were slow to develop, especially during the 1870s to 1890s.

On April 19, 1877 Winnipeg City Council, recognizing a need for a more substantial brigade, reorganized the force into a full-time, volunteer department with Daniel McMillan, later Manitoba's lieutenant-governor, as chief. Two, 20-man companies, the hose and engine and the hook and ladder teams, were organized. Five years later, as the construction boom fuelled by the arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway subsided, the City created a paid force. The new Winnipeg Fire Department consisted of Captain W.O. McRobie, his assistant Alexander Aiken, 36 firefighters, 17 horses, four steam pumpers, three chemical wagons, three horse-drawn hose wagons, one hook and ladder wagon, and 2,652 m. (8,700 ft.) of hose.

With technological advances in firefighting equipment and the growth in manpower, the need for modern facilities became acute. In January 1883, a new Central Station (No. 1) on William Avenue was opened. By year's end, Station No. 2 or the south hall at York Avenue at Smith Street and Station No. 3 or the north hall at Fonseca (now Higgins Avenue) at Maple Street were both

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16 Ibid., pp. 21-22.
17 Ibid., pp. 22-25.
operational. But the press and firefighters complained that the buildings were poorly planned and uncomfortable.

During this period, three basic pieces of horse-drawn equipment were used to fight fires: steam pumpers, chemical engines and ladder trucks. The steam pumpers of the 1880s and 1890s were heavy and needed a long warm-up period. Chemical engines, using carbonate of soda and vitriol in a water chamber produced carbon dioxide in under 20 seconds, but were dangerous to use. Early ladder trucks were bulky and had little vertical range.

After the turn of the century, firefighting gained a higher public profile. The bravery, heroism and unselfishness of the firemen was romanticized in newspapers and popular journals. As one journalist described it,

> In whatever form it is, the struggle is a noble one and when, as often happens, the brigade wend their way back to the station in the early morning light, bearing on their truck the charred remains of some poor comrade, is it any wonder that his name is inscribed among the list of heroes and that his brother fire-fighters are looked upon with pride and gratitude.

Also after 1900, it became obvious that new stations were needed to house men more comfortably and to better organize the new and bulky equipment. It was also obvious that the new stations were needed to serve the burgeoning suburbs around Winnipeg. Similar to other North American centres, Winnipeg's City Council decided to build its new stations as variants of a single set of plans completed in 1904. These plans proved so successful that they were used in the construction of 13 stations in Winnipeg and another in St. Vital between 1904 and 1914.

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18 Ibid., p. 25.
21 The Morning Telegram (Winnipeg), December 24, 1898, p. 9.
The life of the fireman has certainly changed since the organization of a professional department in Winnipeg. Yet some of the fire halls built at the turn of the century still function in their original role, an illustration of their flexibility and the excellence of their design.

EVENT

One of two fire halls to serve Winnipeg's North End, 180 Sinclair Street was part of events ranging from catastrophic conflagrations to the mundane, daily life of the firefighters between calls.

CONTEXT

This station can be placed within the context of the delivery of services by the City of Winnipeg to its outlying areas. As more and more facilities were requested by the suburbs, City Council, partially to appear unbiased and partially to save money, adopted a policy of matching its suburban facilities. Similar police substations were built in 1911 in the North End (Charles Street at Magnus Avenue) and Fort Rouge (Jessie Avenue at Nassau Street).\(^2\)\(^2\) The St. John's Branch of the public library (500 Salter Street) and the Cornish Library in Armstrong's Point (20 West Gate) were both completed in 1915 and were alike in layout and design.\(^2\)\(^3\)

This fire station can also be placed in the context of the neighbourhood, illustrating the development of social and civic facilities within the large immigrant population of the North End. As previously mentioned, police substations and library branches were built in the North End, as were a public swimming pool (at the northwest corner of Pritchard Avenue and Charles Street, built in 1911),\(^2\)\(^4\) and a Young Men's Christian Association Branch on Selkirk Avenue opened in 1912.\(^2\)\(^5\) After 180

\(^2\)\(^2\) M. Peterson, "North End Police Station - 200 Charles Street," report for the City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee, May 1990, pp. 3 and 6.

\(^2\)\(^3\) M. Peterson, "20 West Gate - Cornish Library," report for the City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee, August 1992, p. 2 and Plate 3.


Sinclair Street was completed in 1910, the North End boasted two fire halls, the other located within 10 blocks at 349 Burrows Avenue (originally Fire Hall No. 7). Given the heavy concentration of cheaper frame houses on smaller lots, it is not surprising that two fire stations were required for fire protection.

**LANDMARK**

Fire Hall No. 7 has served the city and the immediate district for over 80 years. Its size relative to neighbouring structures, its location on a busy corner, and the importance of its function all increase its conspicuousness.
APPENDIX I

Address- 180 Sinclair Street
Name- Fire Hall No. 11
Type- fire station

Roll Number (Old)- 207180 (3393) District- 3 PC- 80

Legal Description- 37/8 St. John, Plan 53, part of Lots 682 to 684

Physical Description- northwest corner Pritchard Avenue

Year Built- 1910 Storeys- 2 + B

Construction- brick, stone and stone foundation

Building Permits [('P')] indicates plans are available]-
- 1465/1910 $15,000 (original)

Information-

- 99, 174 cu. ft. of interior space

- ceilings: Basement - 8'
  1st - 14'
  2nd - 11'

- 69' tower
### APPENDIX II

**Winnipeg and Suburban Fire Halls built between 1904 and 1914:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ORIGINAL NUMBER</th>
<th>ADDRESS</th>
<th>YEAR BUILT</th>
<th>CLASS</th>
<th>PRESENT STATUS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fire Hall No. 4</td>
<td>470 Gertrude Avenue</td>
<td>1904</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>demolished ca.1959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Hall No. 5</td>
<td>354 Sherbrook Street</td>
<td>1904</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>commercial property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Hall No. 6</td>
<td>66 Pearl Street</td>
<td>1904</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>demolished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Hall No. 7</td>
<td>349 Burrows Street</td>
<td>1904</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>active fire hall (No. 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Hall No. 3</td>
<td>56 Maple Street</td>
<td>1904</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>vacant, proposed Firemen's Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Boniface Fire Hall</td>
<td>212 Dumoulin Avenue</td>
<td>1904</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>St. Boniface Fire Hall Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Hall No. 8 (Elmwood Hall)</td>
<td>325 Talbot Avenue</td>
<td>1906</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>youth centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Hall No. 9 (Weston Hall)</td>
<td>1470 William Avenue</td>
<td>1909</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Winnipeg Fire Department repair shop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Hall No. 10</td>
<td>825 Sargent Avenue</td>
<td>1910</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>active fire hall (No. 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Hall No. 11</td>
<td>180 Sinclair Street</td>
<td>1910</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>active fire hall (No. 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Hall No. 12</td>
<td>1055 Dorchester Avenue</td>
<td>1911</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>apartment block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Hall No. 13</td>
<td>410 Cathedral Avenue</td>
<td>1911</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>apartment block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcona Fire Hall</td>
<td>Victoria Avenue West</td>
<td>1912</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>demolished ca.1955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Hall No. 14</td>
<td>161 Lipton Street</td>
<td>1913</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>private residence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire Hall No. 15</td>
<td>524 Osborne Street</td>
<td>1913</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>City of Winnipeg Ambulance Station #10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assiniboia Fire Hall</td>
<td>200 Berry Street</td>
<td>1913</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>active fire hall (No. 11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Vital Fire Hall</td>
<td>598 St. Mary's Road</td>
<td>1914</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>City of Winnipeg Ambulance Station #3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. From M. Peterson, "Winnipeg and Suburban Fire Halls Inventory," inventory for the City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee, October 1993.
APPENDIX III

Alexander R. and William N. Melville

The Melville brothers, Alexander and William, began their partnership in Winnipeg shortly after the turn of the century. While they are best known today as the designers of many of the early fire halls, they also were responsible for a number of other buildings of various functions throughout the city.

Alexander Melville was born in 1873 in Fraserburgh, Scotland and received his architectural and civil engineering degrees in Aberdeen. For many years he was a member of the Manitoba Association of Architects and one of its early council members (1919-20). From 1913 to the late 1940s, A. Melville operated a private practice in Winnipeg. He was also a provincial government draftsman for a short period prior to his retirement. He died in 1949.

Little is known biographically about William Melville, who came to Winnipeg and opened an architectural office ca.1903. In 1904, the same directory lists both Melville brothers as residents, and the firm of A. and W. Melville, architects and civil engineers is also listed. In the 1913 list, the two brothers appear to have dissolved the partnership. By 1915, William Melville is no longer listed in the directory.

An incomplete list of Melville brother designs includes:

Fire Halls: 56 Maple Street, 1904
            349 Burrows Avenue, 1904
            470 Gertrude Avenue, 1904 (demolished)
            66 Pearl Street, 1904 (demolished)

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1 "Alexander Melville" file at the office of the Manitoba Association of Architects.
2 M. Peterson, "56 Maple Street - Fire Hall No. 3 (Fire Hall No. 2)," report for the City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee, October 1990, Appendix I.
3 Henderson's Directory (Winnipeg), 1900-1905.
4 Ibid., 1900-15.
A. & W. Melville designs, continued:

Fire Halls: 354 Sherbrook Street, 1904
325 Talbot Avenue, 1906
1470 William Avenue, 1909
825 Sargent Avenue, 1910
180 Sinclair Avenue, 1910
410 Cathedral Avenue, 1911
1055 Dorchester Street, 1911
161 Lipton Street, 1913
524 Osborne Street, 1913
596 St. Mary's Road (St. Vital), 1914

Other designs: G.A. Glines House (Tremblay Apartments), 55 Hargrave Street, 1906
A. Stewart House, 67 Harvard Avenue, 1907
Ashford Apartment Block, 381 Balmoral Street (demolished)
Broadway Court Apartments, 251 Broadway, 1906 (demolished)
T. Thompson House, Canora Street, 1912
Touraine Apartments, 410 Ellice Avenue (demolished)
Coliseum Dance Hall, 225 Fort Street, 1912 (demolished)
Colonial Theatre, 634 Main Street, 1912 (demolished)
Rex Moving Picture Theatre, 646 Main Street, 1912-13
Manitoba Telephone System Building, Portage Avenue East, 1930-1931
Telephone Exchange Building, Elkhorn, Manitoba, 1932
Plate 1 – Fire Hall No. 7, 180 Sinclair Street, 1993. (M. Peterson, 1993.)
Plate 2 – Architect’s plans for Fire Hall No. 7, 1910, “Front Elevation.”  (City Archives, Plan #1465/1910.)
Plate 3 – Architect’s plans for Fire Hall No. 7, 1910, “End Elevation.” (City Archives, Plan #1465/1910.)
Plate 4 – Architect’s plans for Fire Hall No. 7, 1910, “Ground Floor Plan.”  (City Archives, Plan #1465/1910.)

Plate 5 – Architect’s plans for Fire Hall No. 7, 1910, “First Floor Plan.”  (City Archives, Plan #1465/1910.)