STREET PILLARS

ST. MARY’S ROAD AT WEST FERNWOOD AVENUE

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee
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STREET PILLARS – ST. MARY’S ROAD AT WEST FERNWOOD AVENUE

Frank B. Groff was born in 1884 to parents Samuel and Martha Groff. The family, which included four sons and four daughters, came to Winnipeg in the early 1900s and is listed in the 1906 Canada Census as living at 303 Edmonton Street. Five years later, Frank had married Annie M. Cole and they had a son. Groff seems to have participated in a number of commercial ventures in the city throughout the pre-1920 period, including land development (he was listed as one of the developers of the Deer Lodge Subdivision in St. James), a commission broker and even spent time selling flax on consignment.

By the 1920s, he was living in River Heights and building and selling houses. He then turned his attention to St. Vital, and in 1924, purchased a 3.32-hectare tract of land on Lot 119 St. Boniface, west of St. Mary’s Road. The land immediately beside St. Mary’s was subdivided first, in 1926, by new owners Albert and Agnes Douglas. Six lots were set out on the north and south sides of the newly created thoroughfare, West Fernwood Avenue.

The following year, Groff and his wife subdivided the remaining 2.81 hectares into twenty lots of varying sizes (Plate 1). That year, seven houses were built on West Fernwood Avenue, with seven more during 1928 (Plate 2).

In 1928, Groff erected two ornamental light standards on pillars at the St. Mary’s Road entrance to West Fernwood. Groff and the residents paid fifty per cent of the cost of the standards with the lighting supplied by Winnipeg Electric through the Municipality at a special half-rate. Groff was

1 Canada Census, 1906.
2 Canada Census, 1911. The family apparently was living in Selkirk, MB but moved into Winnipeg in 1911.
4 City of Winnipeg Buildings Permits Ledger Book, 1900-1926. He is listed as the owner, architect and designer of 6 bungalows on Oxford Street in 1925.
5 Plan 3069.
6 Plan 3132.
8 Ibid., 1929, Plan 3132.
commended by the Municipality for his “praiseworthy and valuable development of Fernwood Avenue West.”

**STYLE**
These modest pillars are built in a traditional and understated style based on Classical architecture.

**CONSTRUCTION**
The St. Mary’s Road/West Fernwood Avenue pillars are constructed of poured concrete with ornamental metal light fixtures set on top.

**DESIGN**
The pillars have no base; the square shafts have inset panels, two per face, to mimic fluting (Plates 3 and 4). Each pillar has a low-pointed cap holding the ornate metal light (Plate 5).

**INTERIOR**
N/A

**INTEGRITY**
The pillars stand on their original locations, are in good physical condition and have not suffered major alteration.

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STREETSCAPE
These two pillars act as gate posts to the modest subdivision along West Fernwood Avenue and are an important part of the streetscape.

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS
Developer Frank B. Groff designed and built these pillars at St. Mary’s Road. This is the first work by Groff evaluated by the Historical Buildings Committee.

PERSON/INSTITUTION
The east end of West Fernwood Avenue filled in the 1920-1940 period and, according to one report, two similar pillars were built at its western end ca.1928 (Plate 6).

The west end of West Fernwood, including the streets to the north and south (Bronstone Boulevard and Westdale Place), did not develop until the late 1950s, when Plan 6966 set out lots on both sides of all the streets (Plate 7). Most of the lots were filled with comfortable single family dwellings by the late 1960s.

EVENT
There is no known event connected with these pillars.

CONTEXT
These appear to be the only subdivision pillars found in the St. Vital area. They attempt to bring a level of sophistication to the newly created residential district and a sense of “home” for the new residents.
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 8);
- 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 9); 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 10).

**LANDMARK**

These conspicuous pillars are located on two busy corners of St. Mary’s Road and would be familiar in the neighbourhood.
Plate 1 – Plan 3132, subdividing part of Lot 119 St. Boniface, registered March 19, 1927. (City of Winnipeg.)
Plate 2 – Dates of construction for buildings in the West Fernwood Avenue neighbourhood.
Note that the majority of houses built between the World Wars except for the west end, which was developed in the late 1950s. (City of Winnipeg.)
Plate 3 – St. Mary’s Road Pillars, north pillar, north and west sides, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)
Plate 4 – St. Mary’s Road Pillars, south pillar, south and east sides, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)
Plate 5 – St. Mary’s Road Pillars, cap detail, 2013.  (M. Peterson, 2013.)
Plate 6 – West Fernwood Avenue Pillars, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)
Plate 7 – Plan 6966, subdividing part of Lot 119 St. Boniface and Lot 37 St. Vital, registered February 11, 1959, subdividing the west end of West Fernwood Avenue. (City of Winnipeg.)
Plate 8 – Armstrong’s Point Gates, West Gate and Cornish Avenue, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)

Plate 9 – Nanton Estate Gates, 229 Roslyn Road, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)
Plate 10 – Silver Heights Gates, Mount Royal Road and Traill Avenue, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)