STREET PILLARS

WEST FERNWOOD AVENUE

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee
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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. ¹ Five years later, Frank had married Annie M. Cole and they had a son.² 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.³

By the 1920s, he was living in River Heights and building and selling houses.⁴ 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.⁵

The following year, Groff and his wife subdivided the remaining 2.81 hectares into twenty lots of varying sizes (Plate 1).⁶ That year, seven houses were built on West Fernwood Avenue,⁷ with seven more during 1928 (Plate 2).⁸

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.”

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 3). Most of the lots were filled with comfortable single family dwellings by the late 1960s.

Two pillars, similar to those found at St. Mary’s Road and West Fernwood Avenue, were constructed just east of where West Fernwood intersects with Westdale Place and Bronstone Boulevard. It is unknown whether these pillars were built ca.1928 to demark the western edge of the West Fernwood development or built ca.1960 as part of the Bronstone/Westdale extension.

**STYLE**
These modest pillars are built in a traditional, understated and Classical style.

**CONSTRUCTION**
The West Fernwood pillars are constructed of poured concrete with ornamental metal light fixtures set on top.

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DESIGN
The pillars have no base; the square shafts have inset panels, two per face, to mimic fluting (Plates 4 and 5). Each pillar has a low-pointed cap holding the ornate metal light (Plate 6).

INTERIOR
N/A

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

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

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS
It is unknown at this time who designed and built these pillars, although they are based on the St. Mary’s Road pillars (Plate 7), designed by subdivision developer Frank B. Groff in 1928.

PERSON/INSTITUTION
This subdivision has seen little change since most of the single-family dwellings were completed in the 1960s and early 1970s, although some in-fill construction has occurred.
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 a quiet residential street would be familiar only to the nearby residents.
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 – 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 4 – West Fernwood Avenue Pillars, north pillar, south and east sides, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)
Plate 5 – West Fernwood Avenue Pillars, south pillar, north and east sides, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)
Plate 6 – West Fernwood Avenue Pillars, cap detail, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)

Plate 7 – St. Mary’s Road and West Fernwood Avenue Pillars, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)
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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.)