745 WESTMINSTER AVENUE

WESTMINSTER UNITED CHURCH

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee

February 1992
The Presbyterian Church of Canada had its start in the late 18th century when early immigrants from Scotland and other parts of the British Isles brought their church to what would become the Maritime provinces, Ontario and Quebec. By 1875 these Church of Scotland congregations had joined with the followers of smaller related connected churches to form the Presbyterian Church of Canada. During the 1891 census, this was identified as the largest of the Protestant denominations.\(^1\)

By World War I the church had spread throughout Canada, with missions in China, India and throughout the Caribbean.

In western Canada, Presbyterianism was introduced by the Selkirk settlers, many of whom belonged to the Church of Scotland. Between 1851 and 1854, Kildonan Presbyterian Church was erected, from which occurred the dissemination of the church onto the prairies. When Manitoba became a province in the Canadian Dominion, the always independent-minded western Presbyterians chose to organize their own Presbytery, that of Manitoba and the North-West.\(^2\)

The independence fostered over the next 50 years expressed itself in 1925 when the question of church union arose. On June 10, 1925, almost all Methodist and Congregational Church adherents voted to form the United Church of Canada, while approximately two-thirds of all Presbyterians voted likewise.\(^3\) The subsequent experience of individual Presbyterian congregations differed, but most often those members who opposed union left the established church to form a new congregation and build their own structure. The Presbyterian Church of Canada thus was

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reorganized, mainly with support from Ontario and Quebec congregations, but also with members from Winnipeg and other parts of western Canada.

Westminster United Church originated as a Presbyterian congregation in October 1892. In 1910, the members began using the basement of their new church at the northwest corner of Westminster Avenue and Maryland Street. This continued to be their meeting place until the superstructure was completed in 1912, opening formally on June 16 (Plate 1).

**STYLE**

While still giving preference to the renewal of bygone styles, the Beaux-Arts encouraged many architects to design the plan according to a strict system of corresponding axes.

The Beaux-Arts Gothic style used here is employed in a number of Winnipeg churches, Westminster United being one of the better examples. The first decade of the 20th century saw an evolution of the Gothic Revival style that had been popular in Canada since the early 19th century. The new Beaux-Arts Gothic designs included not only the ornate exterior detailing of the Gothic Revival school, but also classically inspired floor plans.

Most influential on the North American scene was the American firm of Ralph Cram and Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue. Their churches and other public structures had an important and almost immediate effect in Canada. Two churches, one built in Halifax in 1906 (Plate 2) and the other in Toronto, planned in 1911 but not built (Plate 3), exemplified the new style, the architects expressing

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a "concern for simplification by emphasizing a pure, highly geometrical arrangement of volumes...[using] an amplitude of masonry surfaces that heighten the monumental character of the composition."\(^7\)

With the adoption of the new style, the architect did not have to sacrifice the logical arrangement of the interior space in order to use the popular elements of the Gothic style. Educational and religious structures most often used the style in western Canada but other public structures and residences displayed it as well.\(^8\)

It was the architecture of the pointed arch, flying buttress, and rib vault coupled with the conscious attempt to reduce or at least interrupt flat wall space. Used in concert, these elements represented "a system of skeletal structure with active, slender, resilient members and membrane-thin infilling or no infilling at all."\(^9\)

In Winnipeg, the Anglican, Baptist and Lutheran churches all raised buildings that exhibited similar Gothic elements, borrowing from their common Protestant background. The three denominations that ultimately formed the United Church also drew from this source, basing many of their early designs on the humble parish churches of Britain, "the most common arrangement for rural churches in Manitoba until about 1945."\(^10\) The lack of ornamentation of the early Manitoba churches was a consequence of both the austerity of the frontier community and the congregational wariness of ornate designs which tended to be associated with the Roman Catholic church.\(^11\)

\(^7\) Ibid., p. 27.
\(^8\) Ibid., pp. 28-9.
By the 20th century, however, technological advances in building materials and engineering and the rise of an affluent population in urban centres pointed towards more monumental structures, heavily ornamented with Gothic elements. Following the Beaux-Arts Gothic lead of eastern Canada and the United States, Winnipeg acquired numerous monumental Gothic-inspired churches dating from the late 1890s. Between 1900 and 1930, Beaux-Arts Gothic was the style of choice for almost all Presbyterian (and United) churches, Knox United (Plate 4) and St. Augustine United (Plate 5) being two of the more conspicuous examples.\textsuperscript{12}

The other significant change in church design involved interior organization. Because early churches had only to seat a small congregation, they opted for the traditional British plan of straight rows of pews. The rows were interrupted by a central aisle or side aisles; if a balcony was included, it was usually placed at the rear of the sanctuary.\textsuperscript{13}

By the 1890s, the American style or auditorium plan (Plate 6) had become the choice for many Winnipeg churches and continued to be built almost exclusively until the 1930s. The plan called for a horseshoe or U-shaped sanctuary, with curved pews and a floor that sloped towards the front, thus increasing the visibility of the pulpit. The pulpit/platform area often extended into the body of the church, whereas the straight plan often set this area back in a chancel or apse. The extended platform became a stage, used for the large pipe organs and choirs that had become part of the worship services.\textsuperscript{14}

**CONSTRUCTION**

Westminster church was built in two phases, the basement and foundation being erected under City of Winnipeg, Building Permit 2433/1910, and the superstructure being completed under Permit

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Ibid., pp. 236-273.
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 18.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 18.
\end{itemize}
884/1911. The basement was comprised of stone walls resting on concrete footings. Interior support was achieved through a series of cast iron columns (24 @ 15.2 cm. or 6") and steel I-beams. This initial work required 220 cords of stone, 38 million bricks and 190 cubic metres (250 cubic yards) of concrete.

The superstructure, measuring approximately 29.3 x 64.0 m. (96 x 210'), is three storeys in height and built entirely of stone, both rough- and smooth-cut, 600 cords in total. It includes two towers, rising 30.5 m. (100') at the southeast corner and 21.3 m. (70') at the northeast corner.

The entire building cost $158,603.77 and was paid out as follows:

- Saul and Irish - foundation and general contracting, $137,299.12
- G.H. Vincent - excavation contractor, $2,626.00
- J. Deighton - plumbing, $104.00
- Shipman Electric Co. - wiring, $2,927.05
- C.C. Young Co. - ventilating, $7,196.00
- Luxfer Prism Co. - leaded glass, $3,611.60
- Valley City Seating Co. - seats, $4,150.00
- Miscellaneous - $690.00

Roof support is supplied through wooden rafters and beams held in place by a series of five rows of tension rods running the entire length of the roof. The row at the peak of the roof is comprised of 3.8 cm. (1.5") rods; the other four rows on the roof slopes have 3.2 cm. (1.25") rods.

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15 City of Winnipeg, Assessment Record, #902601, Ward 1, PC 90 (below as AR).
16 City of Winnipeg, Building Permit (below as BP), 2433/1910.
17 BP #884/1911.
18 AR.
DESIGN

Westminster Church is another example of the excellence and creativity of Winnipeg's J.H.G. Russell. As with all monumental Beaux-Arts Gothic or Gothic Revival structures, the corner buttress, thin tracery window and pointed arch are all used. In this case, two towers with battlements and corner pinnacles add to the imposing nature of the structure. The east facade holds the main entrance to the church, consisting of two large doors at the top of a set of stone stairs. The towers frame the central gable end, which holds the leaded, stained glass rose window, 4.3 m. (14') in diameter (Plates 7 and 8). Interestingly, a small clear space in the centre of the window was positioned so that the solstice sun (June and December 22nd) at 11:00 a.m. would shine through the opening and light a bible placed on the Communion Table.21

There are two gable ends on the south side of the church. The one closest the front of the building holds a stained glass window 7.3 m. (24') high, while the gable end to the west contains window triplets on each level, the small square openings at grade leading to rectangular windows 2.6 m. (8'6'') on the first floor and 2.8 m. (9'3'') windows with pointed arches on the upper level.22 The gable ends frame the second entrance to the church, which leads to the offices, library, Sunday school and other related service spaces within the building, all located to the rear of the sanctuary. The north elevation contains a similar gable end and stained glass window as the south facade, but does not include an entrance or second gable to the west.23

Smooth-cut stone is used throughout the church as coping on roof lines, battlements and gable ends; as accents around windows; for exterior staircases; and as caps for the many corner buttresses. The walls and buttresses are of uneven coursed, rough-cut stone.

22 Plans.
23 Ibid.
INTERIOR

The church is luxuriously appointed throughout with dark wood accents. The sanctuary, in the form of a Maltese Cross, contains the curved pews and sloping floors of the auditorium-style plan, along with a curved gallery at the rear (eastern end of the sanctuary). The pulpit is located in the centre of the west wall, in front of the choir area and the pipes of the organ. The organ was built in 1912 by the famous Casavant Freres of St. Hyacinthe, Quebec, who gave the church a special price in order to have one of their instruments located west of Toronto. With the excellence of construction and constant upkeep, this organ remains one of the city's best.25

Originally, the basement of the church held a gymnasium and social room measuring 19.1 x 11.1 m. (62'6" x 36'3"), the engine room for the organ billows, a fan and boiler room encased in masonry walls, a club room, showers, lockers and a kitchen and pantry area. The space below the sanctuary was and continues to be a storage area.26 Still located there is a large wooden box that held massive blocks of ice, originally used to cool the sanctuary above. At present, the gymnasium space remains unaltered; however, the rest of the space around it has been changed to accommodate a daycare and a larger kitchen which occupies the entire west end of the structure. A new heating system also was added recently to the basement.

The first floor contains an entrance lobby, 4.9 m. (16'2") wide, leading to the sanctuary that measures approximately 30.2 x 19.7 m. (99' x 64'8"). This space has remained virtually unaltered since construction. To the rear was a large lecture hall and ladies' parlour occupying the entire north half of the building. The lecture hall remains unaltered, but the parlour was converted into a small chapel in the 1950s. A primary classroom was located across the hall from the lecture room, a space

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24 Winnipeg Tribune, June 3, 1972, p. 18.
26 Plans.
now taken by the church offices, library and archives. The second floor of the structure includes the balcony at the front (east) end and the vaulted ceiling of the sanctuary. The rear of the building originally held the male choir vestry, a secretary's room (both intact), a large auditorium with stage (upgraded ceiling and flooring), a library (renovated), and two large classrooms (altered). Along the north and west walls were 8 small classrooms with sliding dividers between them. These spaces could be opened to both the auditorium and each other, or closed to allow for private lessons. However, many of the sliding doorways have been replaced by permanent walls, the offices within rented to local groups.

The attic of the church holds a one-bedroom apartment, complete with hallway, bathroom, kitchen and living room. It has been used by church officials, caretakers and various tenants, and has seen renovation.

INTEGRITY
The church stands on its original site, is in good structural condition and has seen some alteration, including $18,000 worth of interior alteration in 1958, $25,000 in renovations in 1959 and $10,000 worth of interior work in 1968 (see Appendix II). Even with this work, the church displays many of the interior elements of the original design, especially in the sanctuary, where alterations have not changed the basic organization or finishes.

STREETSCEAPE
Westminster United Church is located on a busy intersection, surrounded by a large residential neighbourhood of similar age and with a high degree of ornamental treatment. The church fits well into this environment.

Ibid.
ARCHITECT
John Hamilton Gordon Russell (1862-1946) was one of Winnipeg's most prolific and successful architects of the 19th and early 20th centuries. His work included warehouses, homes, churches, apartment blocks, commercial buildings and office structures. He has received 20 points from the Historical Buildings Committee.

INSTITUTION
The congregation at Westminster will be celebrating its 100th anniversary in 1992, and its 80th year in the present church. In October of 1892 eighteen members of St. Andrews Presbyterian Church collected 56 signatures on a petition asking for the organization of a more centrally located congregation. On New Year's Day, 1893, 200 people attended the first service in Victoria Hall on Notre Dame Avenue. August 5, 1893 saw the new congregation hold dedication services in their new church, then only a basement at the southeast corner of Notre Dame Avenue and Charlotte Street. By the following summer, the super-structure was completed, costing nearly $40,000 (Plate 9).

By 1909 the congregation began to look for larger accommodations. Given that the downtown area was adequately served by other churches and that many of its members were residing in the Wolseley district, the church sought land in the latter area. On April 29, 1911, His Excellency Earl Grey, Governor-General of Canada, laid the cornerstone for the new building at the northwest corner of Westminster Avenue and Maryland Street. The new church was officially opened with a service on June 16, 1912.

The call and vote for church union in 1925 was not greeted with unanimous support as 129 of the

28 "75th Anniversary, p. 5.
30 Ibid., p. 7.
698 votes cast at Westminster opposed union. Of the 129, 124 chose to leave the church, forming their own Presbyterian congregation and building yet another magnificent structure, First Presbyterian, 61 Picardy Place, in 1927.\textsuperscript{31}

The new United congregation had 1133 members in 1925,\textsuperscript{32} and grew steadily through the 20th century. In the interim, Winnipeg's downtown expanded to the point where today, Westminster is again considered a downtown church, as it was in the very beginning of the congregation almost 100 years ago.

\textbf{EVENT}

There is no known significant event connected with the church.

\textbf{CONTEXT}

This church can be placed both in the context of the growth of Winnipeg and the new residential neighbourhoods that developed around the growing business section.

The land along the Assiniboine River west of the growing community of Winnipeg was surveyed into the St. James river lots, stretching northward from the riverbank in the usual long, thin pattern. Lot 42 became the site of St. James Church (Tylehurst Street), while present-day Maryland Street is slightly to the east of Lot 71.\textsuperscript{33} The lots were bought and settled by some of the area's most prominent men, including Gilbert McMicken (1813-1891), Manitoba's Dominion Lands Agent, and Andrew Graham Ballenden Bannatyne (1829-1889), member of the Council of Assiniboia (1868),

\textsuperscript{31} 75th Anniversary, p. 9; and \textit{A Study of the Church Buildings}, p. 242.

\textsuperscript{32} 75th Anniversary, p. 9.

Riel's Provisional Government (1869) and Parliament.\textsuperscript{34}

Slowly the large holdings were subdivided into lots, as the City of Winnipeg began to grow. The entire area became known as the West End, containing street after street of middle-income detached housing and small apartment blocks.

One area that did not follow this pattern was what became the Wolseley District. It quickly established itself as one of the more exclusive residential neighbourhoods, located close to Armstrong's Point (which is still considered one of the city's finest residential districts). The Wolseley District is bound by the Assiniboine River on the south, Portage Avenue to the north, and Omand's Creek and Maryland Street to the west and east, respectively. Between 1900 and 1914, hundreds of middle- to upper-income families moved into the area, settling in the large homes located on the small city lots. The area was close enough to the business district to be convenient, and yet far enough removed to increase its exclusiveness.

Many of the parishioners of Westminster began to move into the area as it developed; thus it became a logical choice for the construction of the new church. Attracting members from the new housing, the established residents of Armstrong's Point and ultimately from throughout the city, Westminster United Church has grown to become one of the city's largest United congregations.

\textbf{LANDMARK}

Its massive design, high towers and location all combine to make the building one of the more conspicuous and familiar city landmarks (Plate 10). The present chimes were installed in the late 1940s but the church tower has held bells or chimes since construction. It is a familiar neighbourhood sound, reminding all who hear it of special events or the passing of time.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 1.
APPENDIX I

John Hamilton Gordon Russell

J.H.G. Russell was born in Toronto, Canada West (Ontario) in 1862, the son of a dry goods dealer. After attending school in that city, he went to work for H.B. Gordon, a prominent area architect. Russell was with Gordon from 1878 until his departure for Winnipeg in 1882. From 1886 to 1893, Russell travelled throughout the United States, learning civil engineering, surveying and architecture in centres such as Chicago, Illinois, Spokane and Tacoma, Washington, and Sioux City, Iowa.

In 1895, two years after returning to Winnipeg, he set up his private practice, coinciding with the city's period of unbridled growth. His designs were (and are) scattered throughout the city, province and Western Canada, covering a variety of building types, sizes, prices and uses. His business continued to be steady during World War I and after, when many architects struggled to find commissions.

Russell was president of the Manitoba Association of Architects (1925) and served for three terms as the president of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada (1912-15). His chairmanship of the Presbyterian Church Board of Managers and his devotion to Presbyterianism partially explain the large number of churches he designed for the denomination in Winnipeg and western Canada. Russell died in 1946.

A complete list of his designs would be lengthy indeed. Many of his earlier works have been demolished and therefore usually are no longer included in inventories of his portfolio.

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Among his projects were:

Outside Manitoba-
  Knox Presbyterian - Prince Albert, Sask.
  Knox Presbyterian - Kenora, Ont.
  St. Andrews Church - Moose Jaw, Sask.

Manitoba-
  Starbuck Presbyterian (United) - 1904
  Treherne Presbyterian (United) - 1907-08 (originally Chambers Presbyterian)
  Pilot Mound Public School
  Killarney Public School
  Foxwarren Public School

Winnipeg-
  Churches -
    Augustine Presbyterian (United), 444 River Avenue, 1903-4
    Crescent-Fort Rouge Methodist (United), 525 Wardlaw Avenue, 1906-11
    Westminster Presbyterian (United), 745 Westminster Avenue, 1910-12
    (Grade II)
    Robertson Memorial Presbyterian (United), 648 Burrows Avenue, 1911
    Robertson Memorial Presbyterian Institute, Burrows Avenue, 1911
    Knox Presbyterian (United), 400 Edmonton Street, 1914-17
    Home Street Presbyterian (United), 318 Home Street, 1920
    St. John's Presbyterian (United), 250 Cathedral Avenue, 1923 (Grade III)
    Riverview Presbyterian (United), 360 Oakwood Avenue, 1925

  Residences -
    J.H.G. Russell, 237 Wellington Crescent (demolished)
    R.R. Wilson, 545 Broadway, 1904 (Grade III)
    H. Archibald, 176 Roslyn Road, 1909
    Ormsby, 119 Campbell Street, 1910
    J.H. Ashdown, 529 Wellington Crescent (now Khartum Temple), 1913
    (Grade II)
    R.R. Wilson, 680 Wellington Crescent, 1925

  Commercial -
    Addition to J.H. Ashdown Warehouse, 157-179 Bannatyne Avenue, 1899-1911 (Grade II)
    Lake of the Woods Building, 212 McDermot Avenue, 1901
    Hammond Building, 63 Albert Street, 1902 (Grade III)
    Porter and Company Building, 368 Main Street, 1902-03 (demolished)
    McKerchar Block, 600-02 Main Street, 1902-03
Winnipeg-
Commercial- (continued)
Additions to McClary Building, 185 Bannatyne Avenue, 1903 & 1904
(Grade III)
Thomson Block, 499 Main Street, 1903 (demolished)
Adelman Building, 92-100 Princess Street, 1903 (Grade II)
Bole Warehouse, 70 Princess Street, 1903
Additions to the Bright and Johnston Building, 141 Bannatyne Avenue,
1903 & 1907 (Grade III)
Silvester and Willson Building, 73 Albert Street, 1904
Green and Litster Block, 235-7 Fort Street, 1904 (demolished)
Franklin Press, 168 Bannatyne Avenue, 1904 (Grade III)
Addition to Daylite Building, 296 McDermot Avenue, 1904 (Grade II)
J.H. Ashdown Store, 476 Main Street, 1904
Allman Block, 592-4 Main Street, 1904
Porter Building, 165 McDermot Avenue, 1906 (Grade III)
Child's (McArthur) Building, Portage Avenue, 1909 (demolished)
Glengarry Block, 290 McDermot Avenue, 1910 (Grade III)
Dingwall Building, 62 Albert Street, 1911 (Grade III)
Great West Permanent Loan Company Building, 356 Main Street, 1912
(demolished)
Eastman Kodak Building, 287 Portage Avenue, 1930 (demolished)

Other- Gladstone School, Pembina Street, 1898 (demolished)
Casa Loma Block, Portage Avenue, 1909
Chatsworth Apartments, 535 McMillan Avenue, 1911
YMCA, Selkirk Avenue, 1911
YMCA, 301 Vaughan Street, 1911-13, with Jackson and Rosencrans of New
York (Grade II)
Guelph Apartments, 778 McMillan Avenue, 1912
Addition to the Marlborough (Olympia) Hotel, 321 Smith Street, 1921-23
Odd Fellows Home, 4025 Roblin Boulevard, 1922
Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Portage Avenue, 1928
Hugh John Macdonald School, William Avenue, 1929
Aurora Court Apartments, 543 Ellice Avenue, n.d.
Central Park Block, 389 Cumberland Avenue, n.d.
Johnson Apartment Block, 524 Sargent Avenue, n.d.
Building Address: 745 Westminster Avenue

Building Name: Westminster United (Presbyterian) Church

Original Use: church  
Current Use: church

Roll No. (Old): 902601 (15323)

Municipality: 12  
Ward: 1  
Property or Occupancy Code: 90

Legal Description: 71 St. James, Plan 1993

Location: northwest corner Westminster Avenue and Maryland Street

Date of Construction: 1911-12  
Storeys: 3

Construction Type: stone

- 2433/1910 $22,000 (foundation); 884/1911 $135,000 (superstructure); 4430/1955 $2,000 (pilings);
4293/1958 $18,000 (interior alterations); 2505/1959 $25,000 (alterations); 4105/1962 $900 (alterations);
835/1968 $10,000 (alterations)

Information:

- 151,000 cu. ft.
- ceilings: B- 12’; 1st- 20-39’; 2nd- 10½-20’; 3rd- 9’
- 8” brick walls surrounding boiler room in basement
- towers, approximately 100’ and 70’ from grade
- 3 x 12” joists on steel beams
- 24 x 6” steel posts
Plate 1 – Westminster United (Presbyterian) Church, 745 Westminster Avenue, ca. 1932; built 1910-12, architect John H.G. Hamilton. (Photo courtesy of Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Collection 17, #31.)

Plate 2 – All Saints Anglican Church, 5732 College Street, Halifax, Nova Scotia; built in 1906, architects Cram and Goodhue. (Reproduced from M. Brosseau, Gothic Revival in Canadian Architecture, 1980, p. 177.)
Plate 3 – St. Alban the Martyr Anglican Cathedral, 100 Howlands Avenue, Toronto, Ontario; designed in 1911, architects Cram, Goodhue and Ferguson, never built. (Reproduced from M. Brosseau, Gothic Revival in Canadian Architecture, 1980, p. 177.)

Plate 4 – Knox United (Presbyterian) Church, 400 Edmonton Street, ca. 1928; built 1914-17, architect John H.G. Russell. (Photo courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg- Churches- Knox (4) #4.)
Plate 5 – Augustine United (Presbyterian) Church, 444 River Avenue, n.d.; built 1903-47, architect John H.G. Russell. (Photo courtesy of the Western Canada Pictorial Index, #701-21278.)
Plate 6 – St. Paul's United Church (Methodist), Boissevain, Manitoba; built in 1893, architect Edward Lowry; showing auditorium plan interior. (Reproduced from N. Bingham, A Study of the Church Buildings in Manitoba of the Congregational, Methodist, Presbyterian and United Churches of Canada, 1987, p. 18.)
Plate 7 – Construction of Westminster United Church, 745 Westminster Avenue, note the framing for the rose window, 1911. (Photo courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, J.H.G. Russell Collection, #94.)

Plate 8 – Construction of Westminster United Church, 745 Westminster Avenue, 1911. (Photo courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, J.H.G. Russell Collection, #98.)
Plate 9 – Westminster Presbyterian Church, southeast corner Notre Dame Avenue and Charlotte Street, 1900; built in 1893-4, demolished. (Provincial Archives of Manitoba, #N1291.)
Plate 10 – Westminster United Church, 1992. (M. Peterson, 1992.)