

MAKE

HISTORY.

Preserve Manitoba's Past.

AN INTRODUCTION TO MANITOBA'S ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY

Fur Trade & Red River Settlement (1812–1869)

The earliest buildings in Manitoba recall the province's fur trade origins and the fledgling little Red River Settlement inaugurated by Lord Selkirk in 1812 that became the basis for subsequent agricultural settlement of Western Canada.

The grandest of these remnants are the great stone forts built by the Hudson's Bay Company as the defensive, administrative and working sites of the fur trade. The complexes at Lower Fort Garry (completed in 1837), near Selkirk and Fort Prince of Wales (completed in 1772) on the shores of Hudson Bay near Churchill, are impressive reminders of the power and reach of the fur trade in Canada. Immense stone walls, battlements and, at the Lower Fort, several large stone buildings make these some of Canada's most important historic sites. Only the gate remains at the most significant of these old forts, Upper Fort Garry, completed in 1837 and dismantled in 1882.

The architectural legacy of the Red River Settlement, which was focused on the Red and Assiniboine rivers in and around present-day Winnipeg, is most impressively revealed in the collection of churches built for the first Anglican, Roman Catholic and Presbyterian congregations in the province. The original churches, and later cathedrals, of St. Boniface (1818) and the one at St. John's Parish (1822) were both replaced several times. But nearly all

of the rest of the Settlement's churches still stand. The grandest, St. Andrew's Anglican (1845-49), the oldest church in Western Canada, and St. Peter's Anglican (1865), built by its Aboriginal congregation, are simple, powerful early Gothic Revival buildings carried out in local limestone. Even those few churches that were built with logs, like the dainty little St. James Anglican (1853), using a distinctive local log-building technology known as Red River frame, have survived.

The thousands of buildings that would have formed the ubiquitous architectural landscape of the province at this time—farm houses, barns, outbuildings, wind- and gristmills—have almost all been lost. And so a better sense of the domestic and work worlds of the people of Red River – Métis, Orkney Scots, French Quebecois, retired HBC employees, Country Born, can only be guessed at. Just a handful of these simple buildings, almost all constructed using Red River frame, in which short logs are squared and set between upright squared logs, have survived. Their rarity has often meant that they are carefully preserved as museum sites. The oldest house in the province, the William Fraser House of 1837, is at Lower Fort Garry. And the largest Red River frame building, the Grey Nuns' Convent in St. Boniface (1846-51), is devoted to all aspects of early French-Canadian life in Manitoba.

Top: Young's Mill and view of Upper Fort Garry in a sketch by Paul Kane. (Archives of Manitoba)

Below: St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Lockport area, 1845-49.



Transition (1870–1880)

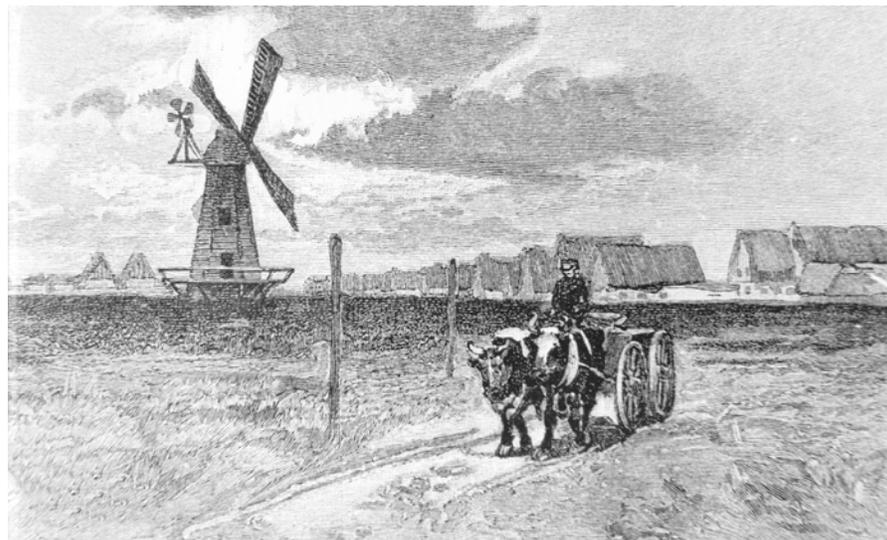
The entry of Manitoba into the Canadian Confederation in 1870, and the incorporation of Winnipeg as a city, seminal events in the province's history, brought only modest changes to the architectural landscape of the Red River Settlement. For the next 10 years, before the arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway line, the new province experienced a fitful and difficult existence. The old Settlement society, and its architecture, gradually faded as the upstart arrivals, mostly from Ontario, who were bringing brash new ideas about commerce and politics, also introduced new ideas about buildings.

The City of Winnipeg lurched into formality in 1873, focused on the small concentration of buildings about half a mile north of Upper Fort Garry. A flurry of building activity throughout the 1870s brought a new architectural aesthetic to the province. The early commercial nature of the community produced wood frame instead of log buildings. Nevertheless, they were still rough and modest in their appearance – simple boxes with basic boomtown fronts for commercial enterprises. In 1878 the construction of a modest rail line from Pembina, North Dakota to St. Boniface provided security for the export of grain, but also for the import of all kinds of goods, especially building materials. The variety of products that would be needed to transform the old architectural character of the province—brick, lumber, paint, wallpapers, architectural gewgaws—were regularly available. Substantial buildings began to rise in Winnipeg, as well as at other communities along the rail line, particularly in Emerson and Morris.

Beyond the familiar and supportive setting of the Red and Assiniboine rivers, where settlement was firmly lodged, a few Anglo-Ontario pioneers began clearing land to make way for farms. The buildings they constructed were typically rudimentary log structures, not appreciably different from those of the Red River era, except that they occasionally sported a rough interpretation of the Gothic Revival style that was gaining popularity in Eastern Canada. At the edges of the new province, small, but equally auspicious changes were being made to the old order as exotic European building traditions were being used by other new arrivals. In the southeast, Mennonites arriving from Russia in 1874 brought a tradition of farm village strips with distinctive housebarns, simple churches and windmills. Along the shores of Lake Winnipeg, where Icelanders first settled in 1875, log cabins and the tall spires of the Lutheran faith appeared.

Top: Winnipeg's Main Street in the late 1870s.
(Archives of Manitoba)

Below: Traditional Mennonite Village, ca. 1876.
(Archives of Manitoba)



Establishment (1881–1899)

When the CPR finally arrived, in Winnipeg in July of 1881 and to Brandon by December of that same year, it was like a decade's worth of pent-up energy was suddenly released. The next 20 years were ones of turmoil, at least architecturally. A wild variety of buildings were thrown up, and in many cases just as quickly torn down and replaced.

The first generation of significant Manitoba public buildings began to rise between the early chaos of the early 1880s real estate boom and 1885. Government buildings were constructed in Winnipeg and in smaller developing communities like Brandon, Neepawa and Emerson. During this period architects began arriving and found enormous opportunity to design the first generation of buildings with sophisticated architectural character. With elaborate and exuberant Victorian styles, teeming with details inside and out, these new buildings were palpable symbols to citizens and newcomers alike of the "arrival" of the province. Impressive churches and schools in Winnipeg, Brandon and Portage la Prairie added to the vivid expression of the wealth and growing sophistication of the new cities.

By the mid-1880s, with a population of about 20,000, Winnipeg was a bona fide city, and its physical contours were gradually worked out. Neighbourhoods that early on had contained a welter of activities—residential, commercial, manufacturing—gradually settled on one dominant function. The placement of the CPR's east-west line, and the opening for development of the old Hudson's Bay Company Reserve along the Assiniboine River, established the basic framework that the city would take: the commercial strip along Main Street; the well-to-

do in the south; the poor across the tracks in the north, cheek by jowl with industry and manufacturing; and the middle class south of the tracks and to the west. The buildings that accompanied the development of these neighbourhoods was typically Victorian. The homes of the wealthy sported the newest styles – dramatic Italianate, Gothic and Second Empire revivals, usually carried out in brick. Meanwhile, the more modest wooden homes of the middle class assumed similar stylish pretensions without the level of detail or craftsmanship. And in the North End, poverty defined buildings that were made of the most rudimentary forms and materials.

Beyond the hubbub of growing Winnipeg, in scores of smaller urban centres and out in the countryside, it was likewise a time when the built character of the province was established. In small cities and towns, thriving commercial streets sprang up and grand homes, large public schools and impressive town halls confirmed their success. In the country, pioneer log buildings were quickly removed and replaced by small but notable wooden buildings. By 1890, however, even these new farmhouses were deemed by successful farmers as insufficient to their needs, and their exalted positions in the rural community. Large houses and barns began to replace earlier ones. Just as established farmers were upgrading to the latest North American architectural conventions, a new wave of immigrants from Eastern Europe, mainly Ukrainians, were recreating their ancient architectural traditions. Onion-domed churches were the most impressive of these, but carefully constructed log houses were also a striking contrast to prevailing trends.

Top: Brandon commercial street, 1883. (Archives of Manitoba)

Below: Winnipeg's Main Street in 1894. (Archives of Manitoba)



Consolidation (1900-1913)

The 13 years following the tumultuous pioneer and settlement eras saw Manitoba glide into a veritable golden age. It was a time of sunny optimism. Architecturally, it was a period of unsurpassed activity. For when it became apparent that money could be made—from real estate, grain farming, grain export, banking and insurance, manufacturing, the retail and wholesale trade—the province positively boomed. Winnipeg especially grew, almost exponentially, from a population of 42,000 in 1901 to 136,000 by 1911. Grand aspirations and grand buildings arrived in a big way.

Buildings got bigger. Much bigger. With the introduction of new technologies—elevators and building cranes being the most important—it was possible to replace two- and three-storey commercial buildings typical of the previous decade. Office towers of ten and more storeys rose along Main Street in Winnipeg, housing legions of workers in the burgeoning financial industry. These buildings invariably recalled the towers of Chicago, and indeed many of the architects who worked on these new symbols of civic success were trained in the Chicago offices of trailblazers in tall building design.

Warehouses in Winnipeg's Exchange District attained great size and bulk, with robust Romanesque Revival styles. Some of the same architects who worked on the elegant towers also devoted their talents to these important new buildings. Classical Revival bank buildings, designed by top architects from Toronto, Montreal or even New York, were carried out in marble, brass and gold, and filled in gaps left by the new skyscrapers. Two huge railway stations, for the CPR and the Union Station of the

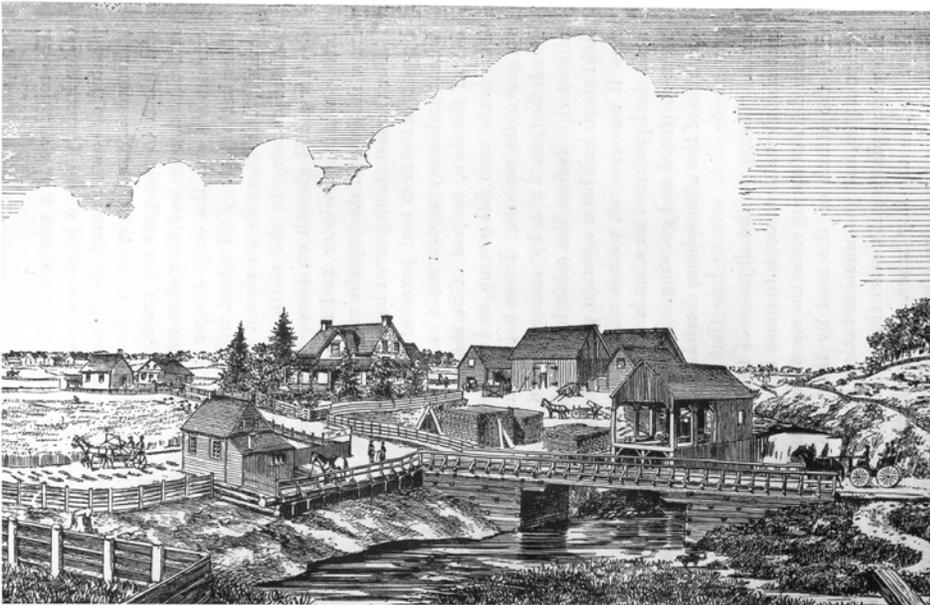
Canadian Northern and Grand Trunk Pacific, whose complex also included the nearby Hotel Fort Garry, were built in Winnipeg. Smaller centres also gained fine new stations.

If buildings didn't get taller they often got more sophisticated, and more expensive. Great mansions for Winnipeg's millionaires, and the sub-millionaire strata, dotted the south side of the Assiniboine River in Winnipeg, in the Roslyn Road area, along Wellington Crescent, and in a new area called Crescentwood. Usually designed by Winnipeg's "society" architects, these majestic buildings were the domestic extension of the power and prestige expressed in the skyscrapers downtown. In the city centre, as well as the new suburbs of Elmwood, Wolseley and Norwood, smaller, comfortable middle class homes, with delicate Queen Anne flourishes, were rising rapidly.

Public buildings marked the pinnacle of the era's architectural advances. Grand Gothic and Romanesque revival churches, like the Presbyterian churches of Augustine (1904) and Westminster (1912), and the Roman Catholic Cathedral of St. Boniface (1906-08) expressed the tenor and wealth of the times. Impressive public school buildings, veritable mansions from the outside, rose in the province's largest centres. The provincial government undertook its own major building program, adding many excellent buildings to Manitoba's communities. An enormous and architecturally refined new Legislative Building was proposed for Winnipeg. New courthouses, land title offices, hospitals and asylum complexes brought a whole new sense of grandeur and permanence to the province.

Top: "After Thirty Years in the Bush" – a view of a Manitoba Farm. (Archives of Manitoba)

Below: Winnipeg's Portage Avenue, ca. 1910. (Archives of Manitoba)



Wars and Depression (1914–1945)

The outbreak of the Great War in 1914 slowed construction projects and over the next four years the province was brought to a virtual standstill. All energy went into the war effort. Building projects were shelved or abandoned, and it was not until the early 1920s that a revival of economic conditions created the environment that allowed for a modest resumption of architectural activity.

The early 1920s saw the completion of many pre-war projects. The Legislative Building was finished and one of the largest churches in the province, Knox Presbyterian, was completed. But the confidence that had defined the architecture of the first decade of the 20th century had been shattered. Modesty came to define many projects. When a whole raft of school buildings became a necessity in Winnipeg during the 1920s, architects looked to the examples of domestic architecture—the bungalow—or to a modest version of the Collegiate Gothic for inspiration. Optimism and ambition died hard for some, however. One of the grandest public school projects ever contemplated in Manitoba—for Daniel McIntyre Collegiate— was proposed in 1922, although only a small portion of it ever was built.

Any glimmer of hope for a return to the grandeur of the decade before World War I was dashed as the Depression of the 1930s dried up land and dreams alike. Only a few major public works projects, like the Civic Auditorium and Federal Building, in Winnipeg—striking Art Deco designs—allowed for any suggestion of activity. The entry of Canada into the Second World War prolonged this period of inactivity for another five years. At its conclusion in 1945 it would be another five years before Manitoba embarked on significant building projects.

Winnipeg Civic Auditorium, 1932, built as a government relief project during the Depression. (Archives of Manitoba)



Modern (1946–Present)

The 1950s and '60s marked a return to the optimistic sensibility that had defined the first decade of the 1900s. The immediate engine of this change was the phenomenal birth rate—the Baby Boom—that accompanied the return of servicemen from the War. A complement was the institution of federal government home loans to veterans. Manitoba, especially Winnipeg, was primed for a building boom that rivalled the one that had transformed the city in the 1880s.

New buildings of all sorts sprang up beginning in the early 1950s. The most visible manifestation of growth and prosperity were the new suburbs, with curving streets, low-slung ranch-style bungalows, International-style schools and A-frame neo-Gothic churches. These buildings, along with various government structures and new commercial and industrial buildings of the same time, created a dramatic architectural contrast with those from the turn of the century.

The source of this major shift in architecture was the acceptance of the modern movement, which after 1945 changed the way buildings looked. In Manitoba, the rise of the School of Architecture at the University of Manitoba was vital, and the training of designers steeped in modernism ensured that local expertise and sensitivity was brought to projects. The new approach to

building design, however, also affected attitudes to old buildings, which were seen as symbols of decay and sentimentality. In an effort to renew downtown cores, in Winnipeg but also in smaller centres, entire blocks of old, sometimes derelict buildings were removed and shiny new visions in steel and glass rose in their place. The most visible expression of this revolution occurred in the 1960s in Winnipeg when City Hall and whole blocks of neighbouring commercial buildings were razed to make way for a major civic complex containing a city hall, police station, concert hall, theatre, museum and planetarium.

Northern Manitoba, once an important hinterland for the fur trade of the 18th and 19th centuries, regained an economic base in the mid-20th century with the development of major mining sites and huge hydroelectric projects. Major cities and towns sprang up, including Thompson and Leaf Rapids, and a whole contingent of modern buildings was constructed. Leaf Rapids is notable, as its whole civic system—city hall, library, recreation facilities and commercial services—was placed in an eye-catching, award-winning complex.

J.A. Russell Building, School of Architecture, Winnipeg, 1959, is an exceptional Manitoba example of International-style architecture.

