

Consolidation: 1900-1924

Manitoba, on the whole, prospered in those years from the turn of the century to just after the First World War. And Winnipeg positively flourished. The business, political and community leaders of the city were predominately of Anglo-Saxon origin. Many of them, and their families, were also the leaders of the larger Methodist and Presbyterian congregations. It was these congregations, riding high on the boom which preceded the War, who erected many of Winnipeg's largest and finest churches.

J.H.G. Russell (1862-1946) was the undisputed premier church architect in Winnipeg during this century's first years. His church buildings, which dominated the skyline of the city's more affluent section south of the Assiniboine River, are mature statements of a master architect. In each of his four major churches, he successfully employed a different architectural style, although none of them may be said to be of a pure revivalist nature. Augustine United, Winnipeg (originally Presbyterian, 1903-04) [Figure 23], with its commanding tower and spire, is Gothic in tenor but, with its textured limestone facing and squat corner tower, owed much to the Richardsonian Romanesque. With Crescent-Fort Rouge United, Winnipeg (originally Methodist, 1906-11), Russell changed not only style but materials; incorporating the rounded arches of the Romanesque Revival into the straight edges of bright red brick walls. Westminster United, Winnipeg (originally Presbyterian, 1911-12) [Figure24] marked a return to a rough limestone dressing. For its design, the architect turned to the cathedrals of Europe. The front façade of Westminster is punctuated by a large rose window, opened by a pair of central doors with Tudor arches, and flanked by pinnacled towers of unequal height. With the fourth, Knox United, Winnipeg (originally Presbyterian, 1914-17) [Figure25], Russell gathered all his designing and structural knowledge to produce a magnificent Gothic Revivalist work. By using a modern, steel frame skeleton, Russell was able to break the massive stone walls with large Decorated Gothic windows and thus avoid the necessity of cumbersome buttresses.



Figure 23. Augustine United, originally Presbyterian, by J.H.G. Russell, 1903-04, photographed in 1904 as the tower nears completion. (Provincial Archives of Manitoba)



Figure 24.
Westminster United, originally Presbyterian, by
J.H.G. Russell, 1911-12.



Figure 25.
Knox United Church, originally Presbyterian, by
J.H.G. Russell, 1914-17.

Of course, Russell was not the only architect of Winnipeg's larger Methodist and Presbyterian churches. James Chisholm & Son's Young United, Winnipeg (originally Methodist, 1906-11) bears a striking resemblance to Russell's Crescent-Fort Rouge; although as both architects registered their designs on the same day, it would be difficult to accuse either firm of plagiarism. S.R. Badgley and James McDiarmid's St. Stephen's Presbyterian, Winnipeg (today Elim Chapel, 1903 and 1910, remodelled 1974 following a fire) is a most refined Gothic limestone church from the century's first decade. McDiarmid was also responsible for Point Douglas United, Winnipeg (originally Presbyterian, 1905, now a Catholic Church); a robust and compressed work.

Purpose-built mission buildings were also a feature of Winnipeg's post-War years building scene; the majority of which still survive. The most well-known mission of the period was undoubtedly the Methodist's All People's Mission which had begun simply in 1889 when Dolly Maguire had gathered groups of immigrant children together to teach them English and to read them stories from the Bible. The great social reformer, Rev. J.S. Woodsworth was named superintendent of All People's in 1907, and within three years had erected two centres in Winnipeg's North End: Sutherland Avenue Mission (1908, James Chisholm) and Stella Avenue Mission (1909, James Chisholm). In plan and design, the All People's buildings served as models for the Presbyterian's Robertson Memorial Institute (1911, J.H.G. Russell), the Congregationalist's Pilgrim Institute (1914, now the Ukrainian Catholic Centre), and the Methodist's post-war Maclean Mission (1921).

Commonly, a gymnasium was placed in the basement of the mission buildings, and a hall for church services and rooms for adults and children to gather occupied the upper two storeys. Stylistically, these were unpretentious buildings: constructed of brick, with the majority of windows plain and rectangular, and entered through a door with prominent surrounds. These were functional, well-used structures.

Outside Winnipeg, too, most of the major towns were erecting substantial churches in the years leading up to the War. In Brandon, Walter Shillinglaw designed the largest building of his career, Central United, Brandon (originally St. Paul's Presbyterian, 1901) [Figure 26]; a Romanesque Revival building whose great sweeping interior was planned, as were all of Manitoba's Methodist and Presbyterian churches of any size, in the auditorium arrangement. Brandon's other major architect of the period, W.A. Elliott, drew up the plans for Victoria Avenue Methodist, Brandon (1909-10; today Christian Reform Church), which cleverly incorporated a skylight over the auditorium.

Many of the streetscapes of Manitoba's towns are still dominated by substantial brick churches from the pre-War boom period. For example, architect James White designed both the Methodist and Presbyterian churches at Carberry: Carberry United (originally Methodist, 1903) being in a Romanesque style, while as not to compete Knox Presbyterian (1909) was fashioned in the Gothic [Figures 27 and 28]. Or, James McDiarmid's St. Andrew's United, Manitou (originally Presbyterian, 1901) [Fig 29], an excellent building, sitting high on a fieldstone foundation, and decoratively enhanced by a polygonal tiered tower of shingles and brackets.

Larger wood frame buildings also were built during the consolidation period; although brick remained the favoured material for the town church. Isabella United (originally Presbyterian, 1911) is a very fine wooden church. It is a simple rectangular frame building with a charming tower and steeple placed at the centre front; more the exception than the rule as the years passed, for towers were positioned at the building's corner in the majority of Methodist and Presbyterian churches.



Figure 26. the sanctuary of Central United, originally St. Paul's Presbyterian, Brandon, by Walter H. Shillinglaw, 1901. The church was destroyed by fire in 1986. (Provincial Archives of Manitoba)



Figure 27.
Carberry United (originally Methodist, 1903), by James White.



Figure 28.
Knox Presbyterian in Carberry (1909) by James White.



Figure 29.
St. Andrew's United, Manitou (originally
Presbyterian, 1901), by James McDiarmid.

The first decade of the century also witnessed the development of new building materials and techniques. Steel frame construction incorporated, for example, by Russell in Knox United, Winnipeg, was one such lasting innovation. Concrete blocks, on the other hand, enjoyed but a brief popularity. Manitoba has few examples. Zion United, Birnie (originally Presbyterian, 1906) is the only survivor from this period.

But the simple wooden, rectangular box churches, with a few pointed windows along the side walls continued to find favour during the consolidation period, just as they had during the settlement years. Tamarisk United, near Grandview (originally Methodist, 1907) - unique in that its walls were originally of concrete block, but later replaced by a wood frame - has been fortunate not to have met the modernizing trend of so many of its contemporaries and serves as a fine illustration of the pioneer church with a simple but expressive interior [Figures 30 and 31]. The inside walls and ceiling are covered in richly stained wood planking; there are no pews, just chairs; heat radiates from an iron stove whose pipe snakes across the ceiling; a choir platform, complete with pump organ, presses against the front; while on a lower platform stands the pulpit with, below this, the communion table. Even the faded scriptorial proclamations "GOD IS MY STRENGTH", "IN HIM WILL I TRUST" still speak to the congregation.

The War, and the immediate depression it left in its aftermath, did not halt church construction in Manitoba. But, for Methodists and Presbyterians, it was a period of definite building slow down and re-evaluation. One reason, of course, was that congregations were not as financially solvent as they had been in the pre-War years; especially in the rural areas, where there simply were enough church buildings. In fact, there were too many. Church enrolment had been shifting since before the War. In 1914, the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches jointly published a report on the state of Manitoba rural churches in the District of Turtle Mountain, and another on the District of Swan River Valley. The studies concluded that many of the pioneering farmers were retiring to urban centres and out-of-province.



Figure 30.
Interior of Tamarisk United, near Grandview,
1907, showing the use of chairs rather than the
usual pews.

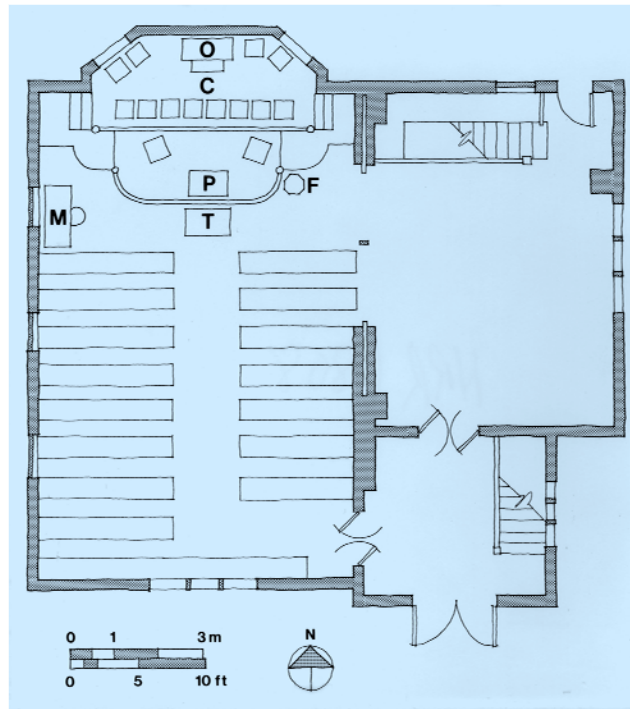


Figure 31.
Plan of Tamarisk United, originally Methodist,
near Grandview, 1907. C=choir, O=organ,
P=pulpit, S=stove, V=vestry.

The new population resisted church going; and, if they did attend, supported the churches erected by the latest wave of non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants. Statistically in the Turtle Mountain region- which included the municipalities of Whitewater, Morton and Winchester- membership figures stood at 22% stationary, 34% gaining, 44% losing.³² As a result, although Methodist and Presbyterian churches were not being closed down wholesale, resources were being stretched to the limit. Ministerial circuits, for example, were being combined. Such circumstances were important considerations in favour of church union.

Even with union pressing in, Methodists and Presbyterians alike still continued to build churches in the few remaining areas in which they were needed. In Winnipeg, which felt the membership pinch less sharply than the rural districts, the Presbyterians pressed ahead with two major commissions in the early 1920s, both by Russell: the present St. John's United, Winnipeg (originally Presbyterian, 1923) and Riverview United, Winnipeg (originally Presbyterian, 1925). In the country- where many united congregations had been calling themselves Union Churches since 1913- Charles Bridgman's Cypress River United, which opened in 1921, was built specifically as a Union Church.