

UNITED AND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES OF MANITOBA

An Architectural History Theme Study



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On the cover:

Illustration for a church. Published in the Reverend James Robertson's *Presbyterian Church and Manse Building Fund -Manitoba and the Northwest Report*, 1886.

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PREFACE

This booklet has been adapted from a larger publication developed in 1987 by the Historic Resources Branch of Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Tourism. That report, *A Study of the Church Buildings of the Congregational, Methodist, Presbyterian and United Churches o Canada*, should still be available in public libraries.

That original study was intended to assist interested Church authorities to gain a better understanding of their architectural heritage, and thus to undertake better educational, tourism, designation and conservation programs. To that end, this original work also contained a substantial inventory of 452 buildings in the province. A pdf copy of the original study and another of the inventory are available by contacting the branch:

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This present extract from the 1987 report contains the contextual essay that was developed after a close review of the inventory results, and an examination of documents and information from Presbyterian and United Church archives. This essay presents the many important and interesting themes that have attended the development of these faith groups' church architecture in Manitoba, and will be useful for anyone interested in this important story.

THE DENOMINATIONS

The United Church of Canada was created in 1925 by the union of the Congregational, Methodist and the majority of Presbyterian congregations. By this merger, the new United Church inherited more church buildings in Manitoba than were in the possession of any other religious group. Moreover, although members of the continuing Presbyterian Church lost much of their property and many of their buildings, they still maintained and went on to build many fine structures.

The Congregational Church

The Congregational Church was a Protestant denomination which evolved out of the English Puritan strain of the 17th century. In Canada, the Church sprang from two distinct strands. Congregationalists first arrived during the 1750s in Nova Scotia via New England. The American War of Independence isolated the Acadian Congregationalists from their American brethren with the consequence that their members declined severely. Further to the west, however, in Upper Canada, English Congregational immigrants became well established.

The Congregational Church was not one of Canada's major denominations. A stoutly independent church, its loosely knit structure reflected the individual nature which Protestantism can take. The central organization of the Church was not strong; rather, congregations depended upon the authority of their preacher. The Congregationalists were thus slow in entering the missionary field in Western Canada and did not arrive in Manitoba until 1879, well behind the major denominations. Even then, they were principally an urban ministrations, performing poorly in the country away from their middle class base.

In the decade preceding the First World War, Congregationalism in Manitoba peaked. But the War, financial burdens and personality conflicts signalled a dramatic change in the Church's fortune. The Congregational Union of Canada, the official name for the body formed by the major consolidation of Congregational sects in 1906, limped into the United Church in 1925.

The Methodist Church

Methodism began as a part of the established church. John Wesley (1703-91), a Church of England clergyman, found himself unwillingly at odds with the Church hierarchy. Having experienced a religious rebirth, the "heart strangely warmed" sensation which characterizes Methodist faith, Wesley set about to organize classes and societies in order to propagate a disciplined, or as detractors said, a methodical Christian way of living. Barred from church pulpits, Wesley eventually ordained his own ministers and set up, through an Act of Parliament, a legal religious denomination. It proved a most popular movement.

Methodism established itself in North America during its founder's lifetime. Following the American Revolution, the Church took on a democratic form in the United States, with elected bishops - an episcopacy - acting as administrators for a distinctly American church body. Meanwhile, during the 1770s, a strong group of English Methodists had arrived in Nova Scotia. Although for a time tinged by American influences from arriving Methodist Loyalists, the Maritime Methodists remained tied to the Wesleyan Conference in England. In the Canadas, however, a more independent Canadian form of Methodism arose; a mixture of the conservative English tradition and the American evangelical approach.

When Methodism entered what is today Manitoba, it arrived bearing John Wesley's overpowering faith in the gift of conversion. Wesley himself spent more than half of the 18th century travelling endlessly around Great Britain, preaching that God bestowed His grace upon the repentant. Missionary work was a significant condition of the Methodist Church. Interestingly, it was the English, not Canadian, Wesleyan Missionary Society who considered the employees of the Hudson's Bay Company, the Métis and the Native Indians in need of a Methodist mission.

The Rev. James Evans arrived at Norway House in 1840; and although recalled six years later under thin criminal evidence, he left an indelible mark upon the West with his development of a Cree syllabic for translating the Bible.

Canadian Methodists from Ontario finally took over responsibility for Indian missions in Rupert's Land in 1854. And with the founding in 1868 of a mission for the white settlers of Red River by Rev. George Young from Toronto, Ontario-based Methodism became firmly entrenched in the Canadian West. Young was responsible for two significant acts. Shortly after his arrival at Fort Garry, he set out to minister to the furthest edge of the settlement; an eagerness characteristic of Methodist preachers on the whole who, fired by devotion to the Gospel, doggedly pursued the scattered settlers no matter how great the challenge. These travels were to set the pattern for prairie Methodist ministering. Young's second achievement was the construction of Grace Church in Winnipeg during 1871, the mother church of prairie Methodism.

During the first decades of Methodism in Manitoba, two important unions strengthened the Church in Canada by bringing together various denominational groups. The first, occurring in 1874 between the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Canada and a number of smaller bodies, resulted in the so-named Methodist Church of Canada. The second, in 1884, was an even greater alliance, involving the Primitive Methodist Church in Canada, the Bible Christian Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church of Canada and the Methodist Church of Canada.

The new organization simply was called The Methodist Church. Meanwhile, in 1882, George Young had received the appointment of Superintendent of Missions for the newly created, and fairly independent, Conference of Manitoba and the North-West. As such, Young directed the efforts of the new Methodist preachers who were being sent to minister to the great throng of immigrants advancing with the railway across the Canadian West. Conversion, organization and church building were amongst Young's primary objectives.

The Methodist Church in Manitoba, until the Union of 1925, retained a steadily increasing membership which maintained it as the fourth largest denomination in the province, following the Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Presbyterians. As a church open to many opinions - a consequence of an emphasis on pragmatism rather than theology - Methodism in Manitoba attracted a diverse, and at moments, seemingly contradictory membership. Amongst Manitoba's most prominent Methodists were the social activist and superintendent of All Peoples' Mission J.S. Woodsworth, businessman and hardwareman James Ashdown, railway builder Donald Mann, the historian Rev. Dr. J.H. Riddell, politician and newspaper owner Clifford Sifton, and feminist Nellie McClung.

There is, incidentally, one Methodist denominational survivor, the Free Methodist Church, an American organization based in Indiana which entered Canada through Ontario in the early 1870s, not arriving officially in Manitoba until 1898. The Free Methodists never joined in the great Methodist unions of 1874 and 1884, and thus were not affected greatly by the formation of the United Church in 1925. In recent years, the Free Methodist Church in Canada has been making strenuous moves to gain a greater independence from their American affiliations and to create an historical link with the Canadian Methodist tradition. But it is a very small body in Canada, the majority of its members residing in Ontario. And with only four church buildings in Manitoba today, all built in the last 30 years - in Grandview, Killarney, Roblin, and Winnipeg - the Free Methodist influence on Manitoba church history and its architecture may be said to have been minimal.

The Presbyterian Church

The Presbyterian Church in Canada is an offshoot of the Calvinist tradition of the Church of Scotland as established by John Knox (1515-72), the spiritual leader of the Scottish Reformation. During the late 18th century, Presbyterianism, in its various forms, arrived in the Maritimes and Central Canada with Scottish and Ulster immigrants and with Empire Loyalists from America. The factionalism which characterized Canadian Presbyterianism, especially following the Free Church Disruption in Scotland during the 1840s, was healed by the great union of Presbyterian denominations in 1875. Thus, by 1891, the Presbyterian Church formed the largest Protestant denomination in Canada.

Presbyterianism flourished in Manitoba. Many of the Selkirk settlers were from the Church of Scotland fold, as were the hardy men from the Orkney Islands who comprised the main workforce of the Hudson's Bay Company. But not until the arrival of the Rev. John Black in 1851 did the Canadian West receive its first permanent Presbyterian minister. The erection of Kildonan Presbyterian Church between 1851 and 1854 and the departure in 1866 of the Rev. James Nisbet from the Red River Settlement to found the Presbyterian mission of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, marked the visible establishment and dissemination of Presbyterianism on the Canadian prairies.

When the great settlement of Manitoba began in the early 1880s with the coming of the railway, the Presbyterian Church was well ready to cope with the new arrivals. In 1870, the formation of the Presbytery of Manitoba and the North-West spelt a great measure of independence from the Home and Foreign Missions Committees in Toronto. Decisions could be made locally. But even more critically astute was the appointment of the Rev. James Robertson in 1881 as Superintendent of Home Missions for the Presbytery.

Dynamic, fervent, foresighted - Robertson was responsible for everything from organizing new arrivals into congregations, to supplying them with simple plans for church buildings. Across the vast plains he distributed his legion of preachers, often sending them to the very edge of the frontier so as to be ready to welcome the new settlers. In no small way due to Robertson's active labours, the membership of the Presbyterian Church rose 168% in the Canadian West during the last decade of the 19th century; a substantial figure when compared to the population increase of 83% over the same period. Upon his death in 1902, the Presbyterian Church was the strongest denomination in Manitoba.

As with the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church in Manitoba exhibited an enthusiasm for tackling moral and social issues rather than for grappling with theological debate. The Methodists and Presbyterians thus found that they had many goals in common: from the desire to tame an irreverent frontier by establishing theological centres (in Winnipeg, the Presbyterians founded Manitoba College in 1871 [Figure 1] while the Methodists established Wesley College in 1877 [Figure 2]) to the addressing of social ills by running rescue-mission houses.

But the Presbyterian Church has always displayed a fiercely independent streak. Thus, when in 1925 the United Church of Canada was formed by the union of the churches of the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian faiths, a minority of Presbyterian congregations opted out and regrouped as the continuing Presbyterian Church in Canada. The post-1925 Presbyterian Church had to struggle: it lacked ministers, suffered from financial difficulties, and found itself with little church property. Today, however, the Presbyterian Church is much healthier, and stands as the fourth largest denomination in Canada. In Manitoba, because only a small percentage of Presbyterians remained out of union, the Church today ranks eighth.

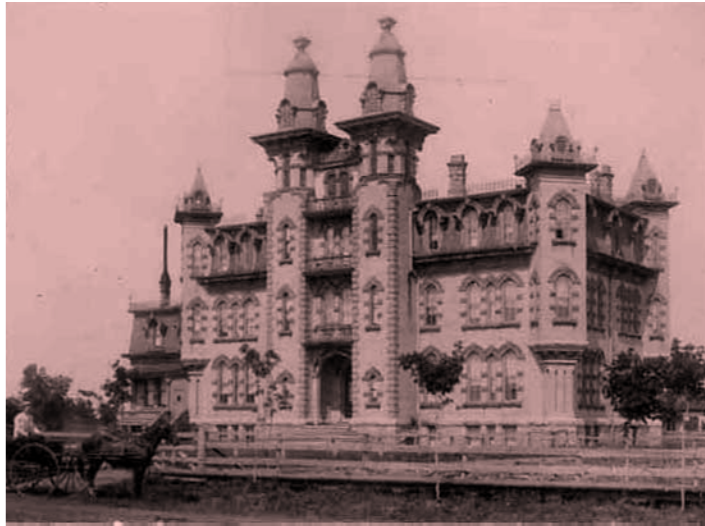


Figure 1.

Manitoba College, Winnipeg, by Barber and Bowes, 1881-82, photographed c.1895. Demolished. (Provincial Archives of Manitoba)



Figure 2.

Wesley College, now University of Winnipeg, by S.F. Peters and George Brown, 1896, photographed in 1900. It is the finest Richardsonian Romanesque building in Manitoba. (Provincial Archives of Manitoba)

The United Church

Dr. George Bryce, the Presbyterian historian, formally broached the subject of a merger between the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches of Canada at the 1902 Conference gathering of the Methodist Church in Winnipeg. The motion to study the possibility of union was favourably met.

At the time "church union" was a popular proposition. The three Churches had much in common. Historically, they all sprang from the British Protestant movement. Morally and socially, they were attempting to meet the same challenges, especially in the advocacy of prohibition, in the nurturing of overseas missions, advancing Sunday schools, and the cultivation of new immigrants into good Canadian citizens. In their governments, the three Churches were similarly organized. No oligarchies existed. Ecclesiastical decisions lay in the hands of members; a circumstance which therefore would allow the administrative transformation to proceed smoothly.

Optimism tempered by pragmatism spurred church union on. The decade before the First World War was an economically prosperous one for Manitoba and the Canadian West. The Presbyterian and Methodist churches - the dominant denominations in the union negotiations - had forcibly established themselves on the plains. In fact, they had been at first too competitive in forming congregations. By around 1910, town and country alike were over-churched: there were too many churches and often not enough ministers for the number of attending members. The passing of the Basis of Union in 1908, and the 1911 agreement by the Methodists and Presbyterians not to compete in new territory or to place new congregations within six miles of one another, informally allowed existing congregations to unite in local unions. Ministers, services and church buildings could thus be shared.

Negotiations for Union, which slowed during the War, were dramatically resumed in 1921 with the discovery of a sharp split in the Presbyterian Church. Nevertheless, following heated Parliamentary debate, the United Church of Canada Act received Royal Assent in 1924. All Congregationalists and Methodists, and approximately two-thirds of the Presbyterians entered the new church. At a service in Toronto on 10 June 1925, the United Church of Canada was inaugurated.

Upon its creation, the United Church formed the country's largest Protestant church. It still maintains this position. The religious historian, John Webster Grant, has termed the United Church "the most self-consciously Canadian of all churches, in principle it includes all ethnic groups". In character, it is a liberal body; a church, in following its antecedents, exhibiting a great social consciousness. Women have been included in the ordained ministry since 1936.

Responsibility for making national policies within the United Church of Canada lies with the General Council which meets approximately every two years. The administration, however, is largely regional, with the country divided into 12 Conferences. The province of Manitoba falls within the Conference of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario. Its headquarters are in Winnipeg. In the 1981 Canada Census, 240,395 persons claimed an affinity with the United Church in Manitoba; that is approximately 24% of the province's population.

THE BUILDINGS

Architecturally, it is difficult to distinguish between church buildings constructed by Congregational, Methodist, and Presbyterian congregations in Manitoba. A common historical background and a relatively similar theological viewpoint allowed these denominations to borrow freely from one another in the field of architectural style and design. Moreover, the Anglicans (Church of England), Baptists and Lutherans - being from a common Protestant pool - raised church buildings that fall within the same, wider tradition. But in a more narrow sense, the architecture of the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches, as in their faiths, formed the closest of all Protestant ties.

The history of the Methodist and Presbyterian denominations in Manitoba - and the Congregationalists, too, although playing but a small role - can for the sake of convenience be divided into chronological units reflective of growth and change. The architecture of these church bodies are best studied within these historical periods. The assignment of dates to these stages must be considered only as approximate.

1. Early Settlement: 1812-1880. Very few church buildings survive from this period of the Red River Settlement, pre-boom immigration, and isolated missionary outposts.
2. Establishment: 1881-1899. With the arrival of the railway came the great wave of immigration and church building.
3. Consolidation: 1900-1924. In the prosperous years before the First World War, the Methodists and Presbyterians built many of the Province's largest churches. The aftermath of the War and the approach of Union spelt a slowdown in church construction.
4. Post-Union: 1925-1945. A period of struggle for the Presbyterians who remained out of Union and were obliged to rebuild. Members of the new United Church continued, on the whole, to worship in the better of the pre-Union buildings. Merging congregations, however, spelt the demise of redundant structures, especially in the rural areas.

5. Modern: 1946-the present. A re-evaluation with the past led to a new expression in church architecture. Many of the earlier church buildings disappeared in the wake of dwindling membership, high cost of building maintenance and a desire for the new and modern.

Early Settlement: 1812-1880

The fifth Earl of Selkirk's settlement on the banks of the Red River in 1812 marked the establishment of the first Presbyterian congregation in the Canadian West. But half a century was to pass before the Presbyterians received a minister and built a church. As they awaited the arrival of a preacher of their own faith, the Presbyterians joined the growing number of Anglican settlers in worshipping at St. John's Church, built in 1823.

In 1851, the Presbyterian Church of Canada sent out from the East the Rev. John Black (1818-82) to be the first resident Presbyterian minister in the West. Kildonan Presbyterian, the church raised by John Black's congregation between 1851 and 1854, today still serves faithfully as a Presbyterian Church [Figure 3]. Located in present-day Winnipeg, it is a landmark building, both for its importance as the mother church of Western Canadian Presbyterianism and for its architectural value.

Kildonan Presbyterian Church is a Red River church, and thus shares much in common with its contemporaries St. Andrew's Anglican (1845-49) and St. Peter's Anglican at Dynevor (1853). All three churches were executed under the direction of the Hudson's Bay Company's mason, Duncan McRae, and are constructed of large, roughly cut limestone blocks, although the exterior walls of the Kildonan church have since been stuccoed over.



Figure 3.

Kildonan Presbyterian Church, Winnipeg, 1851-54. Photographed before the stone walls were stuccoed. (Provincial Archives of Manitoba)

The plan of Kildonan Presbyterian is a simple rectangle, enclosed by a gable roof and pierced along its side walls by pointed Gothic windows. So basic and uncomplicated is this plan - one derived from the humbler parish churches of Britain - that it formed the most common arrangement for rural churches in Manitoba until about 1945.

The interior appearance of Kildonan Church follows Presbyterian, and for that matter, Methodist precedent. Focus is directed upon the pulpit. For John Calvin and John Knox, the power of the word was considered of the greatest importance. At Kildonan, as in the majority of Presbyterian and Methodist churches, the pulpit was placed front and centre of the raised platform. On either side of the pulpit platform are arranged pews for the choir; singing was considered an integral part of the service of worship, a further emphasis upon the appeal to the ear.

The appeal to the eye, however, in the history of the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches, has played a less important role. Calvin and Knox were both wary of architectural ornament because of its connotations with the Roman Catholic Church. By the time Methodism and Presbyterianism reached Manitoba, the taste for austere church interiors still lingered; although in Manitoba this plainness also had much to do with the austerity which comes from living on the frontier of civilization. In Kildonan Church, the walls are therefore plainly plastered, broken only by a few, later, memorial plaques. The stained glass windows, too, are later decorations; one of the few iconographic features that the Presbyterians and Methodists delighted in.

Kildonan Church houses the oldest Presbyterian congregation in present-day Manitoba. The oldest United Church congregation within the same territory is of Methodist origin and worships at James Evans Memorial Church, Norway House. The original church building raised by the Rev. James Evans in about 1841 at this northern Manitoba Indian mission - a journey of more than 425 km north of Winnipeg - has long disappeared. In its stead, the 1932 Memorial Church building also serves as a museum in tribute to the founder of the Cree syllabic.

Manitoba was created a province in 1870. During the ensuing decade, the prairie grasslands began to be transformed into agricultural fields. It was a period of settlement, but one of scattered subsistence, waiting in intense anticipation for the coming of that great lifeline to the outside world, the railway. Methodist and Presbyterian preachers followed the new Manitobans out onto the barely tamed landscape, usually drifting between settlements, dispensing comforting services to those who wanted to hear the gospel, and issuing haranguing sermons to those who did not. Irreverent bar rooms and settlers' front parlours alike were pressed into service as meeting places.

By the mid-1870s, the Presbyterians could claim twelve church buildings in Manitoba: Kildonan, Knox in Winnipeg, Little Britain, Mapleton, Headingley, High Bluff, Portage la Prairie, Burnside, Palestine (now Gladstone), Springfield and Rockwood. Today, only Kildonan and Little Britain (now United) survive. And Little Britain is the community's second church: an 1872-74 stone replacement of an earlier log meeting house. Again, Duncan McRae supervised the erection of this, one of the last substantial buildings from the Red River Settlement period [Figure 4]. As a result, it bears a striking resemblance to Kildonan, both within and without: chunky fieldstone walls, rectangular plan - the tower was added in 1920 - simple pointed windows, and a plain but vigorous interior. Moreover, the Little Britain Church is of considerable historical importance as it serves the oldest United Church congregation of Presbyterian origin in Manitoba and the Canadian West.

By the late 1870s, only the few, principal centres of Manitoba could support substantial church buildings. And this primarily meant Winnipeg. Selkirk, down the Red River about 30 km, appeared for a time as a potential rival, manoeuvring to lure the approaching main railway line coming from the East away from Winnipeg. An indication of Selkirk's optimism at the time may be measured by the size and quality of its first churches.



Figure 4.
Little Britain United, originally Presbyterian,
1872-74. (Provincial Archives of Manitoba)

Knox Presbyterian, Selkirk dates from about 1876. Although much enlarged in 1904, the original sanctuary is of brick, making it amongst the oldest brick churches in Manitoba still extant. Selkirk Wesleyan Methodist was built in 1877. Although superficially altered on the exterior by a portico of columns when it later served as a Roman Catholic Church, it is a standard, rectangular wood frame building. Together, these two churches constitute Manitoba's oldest surviving urban churches built by the Presbyterians and Methodists in the 1870s. Winnipeg can claim no such survivors.