

Transition: 1870-1880

By the 1870s the world which had produced the churches of Red River was beginning to disappear. The decade was a transitional one dividing the era of Red River and the fur trade from the beginnings of the modern world. In Winnipeg the new parishes of Christ Church and Holy Trinity were established and new churches built to serve the growing population (Figure 15). Away from the rivers, settlers began to establish themselves on the open prairie.

From the architectural point of view, the 1870s are particularly interesting as a decade when new wood framing techniques began to enter Manitoba and replace the ubiquitous Red River frame of an earlier generation. For instance, Christ Church, Fort Alexander (c. 1870) and All Saints, Victoria (1877), near Stonewall, was constructed of log (Figures 16 and 17), but in this case using dovetail joinery. In contrast, St Luke's, Emerson (1876) was built of wood frame using milled lumber (Figure 18). During the 1880s the use of wood frame became commonplace throughout the province.

Surprisingly, very few churches built during this transitional decade stand today. Indeed, apart from those already mentioned the only other church which survives, at least in part, from the 1870s is St. Paul's, Middlechurch. Built by volunteer labour in 1876, it replaced an earlier church of 1844 which gained a certain notoriety as a staging ground for John Schultz and his band during their attack on Louis Riel's provisional government in 1870. (Figures 19 and 20)

Besides the date of construction, another significant feature of St. Paul's, Middlechurch is the presence of a separate chancel, that is a space for the clergy and high altar, which is extended out from the liturgical east side of the nave. This was an idea recommended by theoreticians of the Gothic Revival, though not always followed because of the cost. From the late 1870s onwards a separate chancel becomes de rigueur in all but the smallest churches. In some cases, and St. Peter's Dynevor is a good example of this, a chancel was added to an already existing church.



Figure 15.
Holy Trinity, Winnipeg, c. 1865. (PAM)



Figure 16.
Christ Church, Fort Alexander, c. 1870.



Figure 17.
All Saints, Victoria, 1877.



Figure 18.
St. Luke's, Emerson, 1876.



Figure 19.
First church of St. Paul's, Middlechurch, 1876.
(PAM)



Figure 20.
Present St. Paul's, Middlechurch.