

Establishment: 1881-1899

With the arrival of the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1882, the population of Winnipeg soared. The charm of the almost rural, wooden churches, such as the 1871 Grace Methodist [Figure 5], was considered unsophisticated and, of course, much too small. All three denominations were quick to build large Winnipeg churches. The second Grace Methodist [Figure 6], dedicated in 1883, was an American-style meeting house: a flat-roofed, brick building, with all the Victorian architectural flair that could be mustered including cupolas, finials and over-sized cornice brackets. The 1881-82 First Congregational Church (later Central United, Joseph Greenfield, architect) [Figure 7] presented a more conventional, ecclesiastical appearance with a body pierced by long Gothic windows and a gable roof dotted by triangular clerestory dormers. The congregation of Winnipeg's Knox Presbyterian (Barber & Barber, architects) had by 1884, raised their third church building [Figure 8], a spectacular High Victorian Gothic work. This structure, boasting no less than three corner spires and two rose windows, succeeded a plainer, but nevertheless large and handsome brick church [Figure 9] built only five years previously, in 1879, to the designs of Kenway & Parr.

A further significance of these three early 1880s churches lay in their adaptation of the auditorium plan. It would appear that almost all earlier Manitoba churches had followed the traditional British plan of straight rows of pews broken either by a central or side aisles and, when a balcony was required, having it placed at the rear of the sanctuary. The auditorium plan, generally considered of early 19th century American origin, was designed to draw laity and clergy closer together. Although presenting a conventional appearance on the exterior, the interior of the church was horseshoe, or U-shaped, with pews curved and set on a sloping floor on the main floor. Often a gallery followed the same wraparound shape. And, in the auditorium-planned church, the service-platform instead of being set back in a chancel or apse, projected forward into the body of the church either from the front centre, or from a corner which set the auditorium seating at a diagonal [Figure 10].



Figure 5.
Grace Methodist, Winnipeg, 1871. Demolished.
(Provincial Archives of Manitoba)

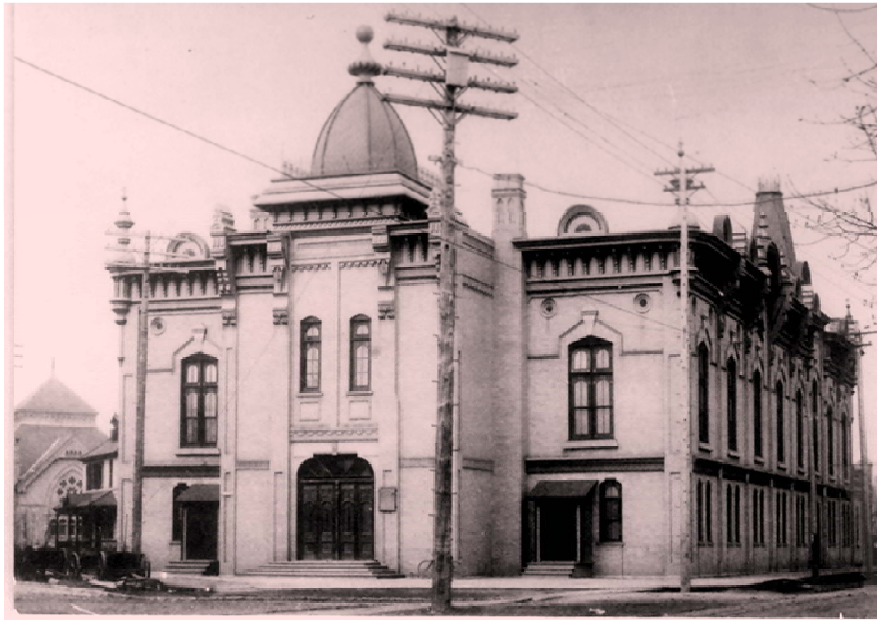


Figure 6.
Grace Methodist, later United, Winnipeg, by
James Chisholm, 1883. Demolished 1957.
(Provincial Archives of Manitoba)



Figure 7.
Central Congregational, later United, Winnipeg,
by Joseph Greenfield, 1881-82. Demolished
1936. (Provincial Archives of Manitoba)



Figure 8.
Knox Presbyterian, Winnipeg, by Barber and
Barber, 1884. Demolished c.1914. (Provincial
Archives of Manitoba)



Figure 9.

Knox Presbyterian, Winnipeg, by Kenway and Parr, 1879. Demolished in the 1880s. (Provincial Archives of Manitoba)

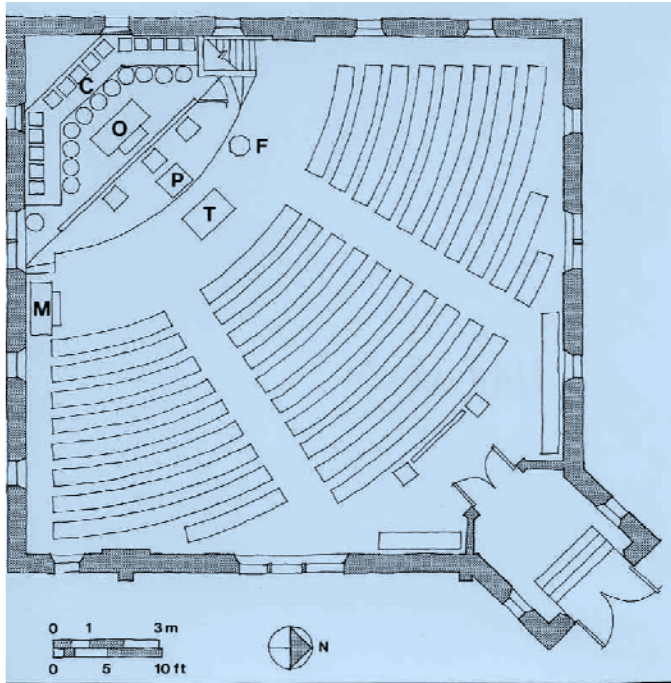


Figure 10.

Plan of St. Paul's United, Boissevain, originally Methodist, by Edward Lowry, 1893, illustrating a corner pulpit=-platform auditorium plan.

C=choir, F=baptismal font, M=piano, O=organ, P=pulpit, T=communion table.



Figure 11.

The sanctuary of Trinity United, originally Presbyterian, Portage la Prairie, by Smith & Gemmel, 1897.

These platforms were virtually concert stages, approached by side stairs, often with a backdrop of soaring organ pipes, tiers of choir stalls, and a prominent pulpit usually backed by a couch or three large chairs for the ministers. Down below rested the communion table. It was also common practice to place a lectern and baptismal font at the base of the platform for easy accessibility by members of the congregation.

The auditorium plan became de rigueur for larger Presbyterian and Methodist churches in Manitoba until around 1930. It is not possible, however, to illustrate an auditorium planned church in Winnipeg from the 1880s or 1890s because, astonishingly, no Congregational, Methodist or Presbyterian churches of the period remain to serve the Presbyterian and United communities. Almost all of Winnipeg's early churches were removed to make way for larger premises as the city grew. McDougall Memorial Methodist Church, Winnipeg (1891, Lowry & Lowry) is the only ecclesiastical survival, and this building has been altered externally by the addition of Eastern domes and internally by its required adaptation to meet its new role as an Orthodox Church.

But excellent auditorium planned churches from before the turn of the century continue to serve the province's larger towns. Fine examples of substantial auditorium planned buildings from before 1900 include St. Paul's United, Boissevain (originally Methodist, 1893, Edward Lowry), Knox Presbyterian, Neepawa (1892, James White), Neepawa United (originally Methodist, 1892), Trinity United, Portage la Prairie (originally Presbyterian, 1897, Smith & Gemmel [Figure 11], and Knox United, Souris (originally Presbyterian, 1897-98, now an Elk's Lodge).

As prestigious symbols of faith, and the growing prosperity of the Canadian prairies, these churches also boast richly appointed interiors; although in keeping with Methodist and Presbyterian tradition, emphasis was placed upon dignity of materials and design rather than on ornamentation. For example, the ceiling of Trinity United, Portage la Prairie, is covered in stained wooden planking; and the barrel-vaulted ceiling of Neepawa United is a glistening pattern of pressed tin.

As for architectural style, all these churches looked to the medieval character that was fashionable in church architecture during the later 19th and early 20th centuries. In fact, classically styled Methodist and Presbyterian churches are extremely rare in Manitoba, with Zion United, Winnipeg (originally Methodist, 1904, James Chisholm) [Figure 12] very much an exception to the rule. The picturesque qualities of the Gothic and Romanesque were more to the tastes of Manitoba's early church designers. Thus, with Knox Presbyterian at Neepawa, the architect James White chose to light his church interior by elongated Romanesque windows emphasized by rusticated stone arches set in contrast to the smooth surface of brick walls [Figure 13]. Similarly, this use of bold building materials to accentuate the Gothic style is also noticeable at St. Paul's United, Boissevain, with its walls of roughly hewn blocks of local fieldstone thrown in juxtaposition to the expansive Gothic windows; and also at Trinity United, Portage la Prairie, with its playful marriage of brick and stone geometric patterning [Figure 14].

In Manitoba, Congregationalism proved an urban religion. Of the six church buildings erected by the Congregationalists in the province - and five of these were built before 1900 - four were in Winnipeg, one in Portage la Prairie, and one in Brandon. Unfortunately, all these Congregational structures have fallen under the wrecker's hammer.

The Methodists and Presbyterians, in contrast, flourished in the rural Manitoba of the 1880s and 1890s. Both denominations were highly organized and ready to meet the challenge of creating congregations and erecting new church buildings. The Methodist superintendent, the Rev. James Woodsworth Sr., and especially the Presbyterian superintendent, the Rev. James Robertson, were both instrumental in bringing ministers out from Eastern Canada, in lobbying and cajoling their respective General Assemblies into supporting church and mission extension in the Canadian West, and in nurturing the most isolated of congregations.



Figure 12.

Zion Methodist, later United, by James Chisholm, 1904. Destroyed by fire in 1970. (Provincial Archives of Manitoba)



Figure 13.

Knox Presbyterian, Neepawa, by James White, 1892.



Figure 14.

Detail of arches above the front doors of Trinity United Presbyterian, Portage la Prairie, by Smith & Gemmel, 1897. (HRB)

In the new settlements of Manitoba, it was almost inevitable to find the Presbyterian missionary and the Methodist missionary holding services in friendly competition. In the first years of settlement, small congregations of both denominations often would combine in building a church for separate, and in some cases, joint services. For example, Brandon Hills United - an architectural gem built in 1896 to the designs of well-known Brandon architect Walter H. Shillinglaw, and modelled on the Picturesque Gothic style of a Nova Scotian church in Durham - served both Presbyterians and Methodists, who held Sunday services at different hours.

The majority of the first rural church buildings, however, were erected by a singly formed congregation, without the aid of an architect, and in a style as simple as the prairie landscape itself. In his autobiography, *Breaking Prairie Sod*, the Methodist preacher, Rev. Wellington Bridgman, recalled the raising of the first Methodist church outside Brandon, at Chater, (now gone) during the winter of 1882-83.

The Methodist church officials in Brandon secured the site, and by means of a subscription list sufficient funds were secured to pay for the lumber and other material, all of which were purchased in Brandon and sent to Chater by freight. All material on the site, the next thing to do was to appoint a foreman carpenter to lay out the work. The word was sent to all the homesteaders and ranchers. This was a building everybody could work on. The church building was perfectly plain, 24 x 36 in size, three plain windows in each side, 10 feet to the plate, and half pitch roof. The nationality of the workers was English, Irish and Scotch, and from Huron and Bruce [Ontario]. The homesteader is a most adaptable man. He is handy with tools of any kind. Brought up on a farm, he comes by the best technical education of any class of boys. These men had built their own houses and stables and granaries. There was no lack of life or jollity or fun. Someone always had some joke or story to tell, or some witticism to contribute, and the spirit of the enterprise seemed to give impulse to

everything. With ten or twelve men such as we had there every day we soon had the siding on and the roof covered and the floor laid. The shingling was the coldest job. I remember we heated the shingle nails in a tin pan, and this helped to warm our numb fingers.

The circumstances surrounding Chater's first Methodist church were typical of the period. The builders were of British stock, and brought with them the basic building skills and traditions of their origins. These simple structures of wood, or perhaps of brick or brick veneer where the congregation was larger or wealthier, were well constructed and well crafted. And sometimes, when a local settler or groups of settlers possessed special skills, the resulting church was of an exceptional character. The few remaining fieldstone churches from the establishment period, for example, display the talents of the stonemason's art. Particularly outstanding are Breadalbane Presbyterian, near Lenore (1897) [Figure 15] and Griswold United (originally Presbyterian, 1898) [Figure 16]. Nearly identical in design, these structures are unique in Manitoba: Gothic in spirit, with thick fieldstone walls strengthened by small buttresses, deep inset pointed windows, and gable ends decorated with geometric laid shingles and wooden bargeboards and crosses.

Presbyterians settling in Manitoba during the establishment period had the added advantage of being able to draw upon the "Church and Manse Building Fund for Manitoba and the North-West". This fund was the creation, and the great undertaking, of the Rev. James Robertson. Robertson, a Scotsman trained at Knox College, Toronto, arrived in Manitoba in 1874 to find that Presbyterian ministers were forced, in the words of his biographer the Rev. Charles Gordon (Ralph Connor), to worship in places "often redolent of other than the odour of sanctity."



Figure 15.
Breadalbane Presbyterian Church, near Lenore,
1897.



Figure 16.
Griswold United (originally Presbyterian)
Church, 1898.

As Superintendent of Western Canada, Robertson solicited money for the fund by travelling and preaching in Eastern Canada and Britain. His battle cry during his campaigns was "visibility and permanence." Once the subscriber had pledged his amount, as Manitoba's first Chief Justice, Alexander Morris had done in 1883, not even death released the amount due. When Morris died in 1903, owing the fund \$500, the Building Fund chairman demanded, and received, the overdue payment from the executors of the deceased's estates.

The Church and Manse Building Fund, instituted in 1883, allowed congregations to receive grants up to one-fifth the amount of the building cost and to borrow loans up to 50%. As well, the church property was often held in trust by the fund. And, Robertson, a man of great persuasiveness, secured from the Canadian Pacific Railway the right to transport all building materials at two-thirds their ordinary rate.

Every opportunity was afforded Presbyterian congregations the chance to build a church. Robertson even went so far as to commission simple plans and perspective drawings from Winnipeg architects [Figures 17, 18, 19]. And congregations did employ these designs. Knox Presbyterian, Stonewall [Figure 20] was built in 1883, and replicates the designs that Robertson had secured from architects Chesterton and McNicol of Winnipeg. Here, again, is the simple rectangular plan. But with vertical, horizontal and diagonal strips of wood siding, the decorative quatrefoil motif in the gable end, and the little belltower on its ridge, it is a church of much distinction. Other churches deviated further from the pattern-book examples, but retained the same character. St. Paul's Presbyterian, Hartney, built in 1896, is such an example.

It is safe to presume that almost every Presbyterian church built in rural Manitoba during the establishment period, and even many in the larger urban centres, received assistance from Robertson's fund. When Robertson died in 1902, the fund had administered the erection of 419 churches, 90 manses, and 4 schoolhouses across Manitoba and the Canadian West.

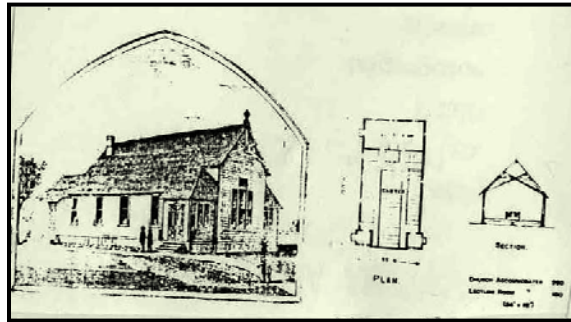


Figure 17. Perspective and plans for a church. Published in the Reverend James Robertson's *Presbyterian Church and Manse Building Fund - Manitoba and the Northwest Report*, 1886. The church design was prepared by G.W. Stewart.

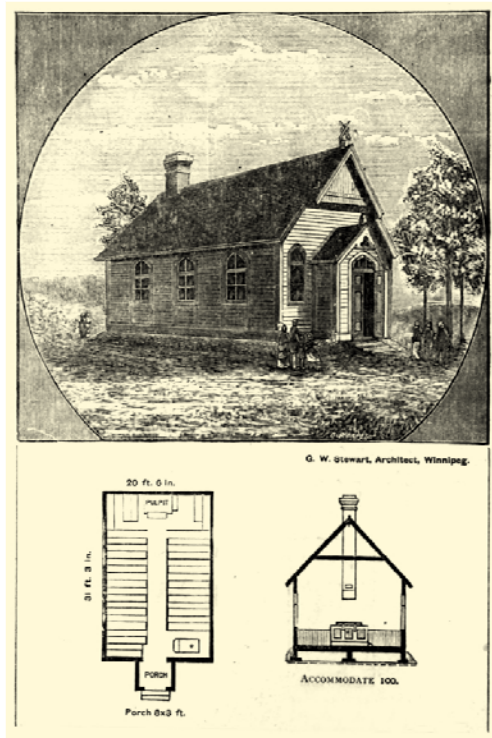


Figure 18. Perspectives and plans for a church. Published in the Rev. James Robertson's *Presbyterian Church and Manse Building Fund - Manitoba and the Northwest Report*, 1886. The sketch, plan and section was done by Chesterton & McNicol.



Figure 19.
 Perspective and plans for a church. Published in the Reverend James Robertson's *Presbyterian Church and Manse Building Fund - Manitoba and the Northwest Report*, 1886.



Figure 20.
 Knox Presbyterian, Stonewall, by Chesterton & McNicol, 1883.

During the 1880s and 1890s, simple rectangular wood frame churches dominated Manitoba rural church plans. But as rural and small town congregations grew and prospered, they often replaced their first buildings with larger premises. That is what happened to Bridgeman's 1882-83 Chater Methodist (later United). In 1899-1900 it was superseded by a much more substantial structure. Although originally built of wood frame construction, the church assumed an L-shape plan, dominated at its inner corner by an entrance tower. This design, presumed to be from the drawing board of the prolific Brandon architect, W.A. Elliott, was repeated in several instances, as for example at Justice Methodist (later United) in 1910 [Figures 21 & 22]. And it reappeared in 1913 for the Sparling Presbyterian (now St. Andrew's Presbyterian, Virden), but this time attributed to John Chisholm & Son, well-known Winnipeg church architects. A brick version also exists at Shiloh Methodist (now United), near Kenton, built in 1903. This L-shape plan was a small church variation upon the so-called Akron plan; a mid-19th century American Methodist practice of church layout in which the Sunday School room was placed adjacent to the sanctuary and made so it could be partitioned off by sliding doors or folding screens. To find the Akron plan being used in these instances, especially when it was associated with large city or town churches, makes these churches, and such other examples as Kenton United (originally Presbyterian, 1903), of particular interest.



Figure 21.

Interior of Justice United, originally Methodist, attributed to W.A. Elliott, 1910. The sliding doors on the right in the photograph led to the Sunday School room.

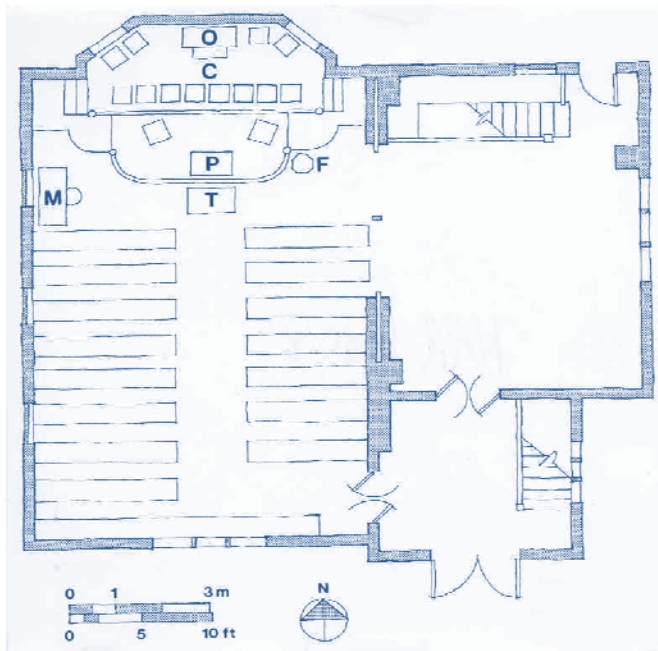


Figure 22.

Plan of Justice United, originally Methodist, attributed to W.A. Elliott, 1910, illustrating a variation to the Akron plan by placing the Sunday School room alongside the sanctuary, divided by sliding doors. C=choir, F=baptismal font, M=piano, O=organ, P=pulpit, T=communion table.