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St. Andrew's Church, Red River: An Historical and Architectural Survey

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As the oldest stone church in Western Canada, St. Andrew's, located on the west bank of the Red River near Lockport, Manitoba, played an important role in the establishment of the Anglican Church in the vast territory once known as Rupert's Land. The arrival in Red River in 1820 of missionary John West, of the London-based Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS), was to have a significant effect upon the social and cultural development of the West, as well as the acculturation of native peoples within its boundaries. Evangelically motivated and integrally involved in the 19th century expansion of the British empire, the Church Missionary Society sent recruits to the far flung corners of the globe. As clerics, teachers and agriculturalists CMS representatives believed it their moral duty to promote Anglo-Christian social theory and communicate British values and "civilization" to the "heathen" peoples of the world. Established first at St. John's parish near the Forks, the Anglican CMS ministered to a population of retired Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) traders, English-speaking "Halfbreeds," a handful of European settlers, as well as the Cree and Ojibwa residents of the Red River colony.

In 1825 the Society sent the Rev. William Cockran to Red River. Cockran was stationed first at the upper settlement, but by 1828 was making visits to the lower part of the colony. This included the newly settled community of retired traders and their native families who had settled on riverlots near the rapids just upstream from the site of Lower Fort Garry. In 1829 Cockran moved to the "Grand Rapids," as the area came to be known, and constructed a log dwelling that served as a residence, church and school on lot 62 on the west bank of the Red River. By July 1830 the missionary was making plans to construct a wooden church at the Rapids. Opened for services in May 1832, the new church was a wood, Red River framed structure measuring 52 feet by 23 feet. It had a stone foundation, 10-foot-high Red River frame oak walls and a thatched roof. The exterior and interior walls were plastered with lime whitewash. This church, with a number of modifications, served the pastoral needs of the Rapids community for another 17 years until the completion of a new stone church in 1849.

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The Construction of the Stone Church

By 1844 Cockran had determined that the wooden church at the Rapids was too small for the growing population of the lower settlement. In late December of that year the minister held a public meeting with about 160 men who lived in the surrounding community to discuss the building of a new stone church. "Silver and gold they have none," Cockran wrote enthusiastically in his journal in 1844, "but stones, lime, shingles, boards, timber and labour were cheerfully contributed; and to such an amount as perfectly astonished me."[1] According to the minister, the lime burners promised 400 bushels of lime each, the shingle-makers 10 000 shingles, the masons promised to dress and lay a quantity of stone for free, while "boards and timber were promised in the same liberal manner."[2] The proposed expense of the new edifice was calculated at just under £1200. (It eventually cost £1500.) The congregation promised the donation of materials and labour valued at around £700, with Cockran hoping to make up the shortfall from "our Christian brethen in England who I trust well sympathize with us and help us through our difficulty."[3] A committee of directors was appointed to help superintend the project and to raise additional funds and labour. While Cockran supervised the building, stonemason Duncan McRae, who had helped in the construction of Lower and Upper Fort Garry as well as a number of other stone buildings in the settlement, was put in charge of working the limestone for the walls of the church. (It was while working on the church that McRae suffered a serious injury when he fell from the scaffolding. While the Scottish stonemason was able to continue to practice his trade, he was no longer able to do heavy construction work.)

Actual work began on the new building in May 1845. A foundation trench was dug to the depth of the frost line and stones were laid for the foundation. By the beginning of July the substructure was completed to a depth of five feet enclosing an area, according to Cockran, of 87 ½ feet by 48 feet with 21 foot by 21 foot tower on the west side.[4] (The actual dimensions of the building, however, measure 81 feet by 40 feet while the tower is 20 foot by 20 foot. Stonework on the tower extends upward approximately 50 feet, the wooden spire, with louvered arches, rising another 50 feet.) The cornerstone was laid on July 4, 1845 by the Rev. John Smithurst, CMS minister at the St. Peter's settlement. In his journal Smithurst notes that the laying of the cornerstone was done privately "in order to avoid expense." Only Rev. Cockran, his wife Anne, the Rev. James Hunter (on a visit to the settlement from Cumberland House), Smithurst and the workmen were present. In a 1933 article in *The Beaver* M.L. Kennedy claims that Mrs. Samuel Leask, a young girl at the time of the building of the church, told her that she believed the cornerstone was laid at the southwest corner of the building and contained coins and records.

Limestone for the building was quarried along the riverbank at a location three miles below the church.[5] Quarrying the stone was an arduous, time-consuming and expensive task. Cockran wrote:

> The rock is covered with gravel and clay to the depth of 8 feet which has to be wheeled off before it can be worked. And after all our expense and labour, there is only one strata about 3 feet thick above water ... The second strata is under water everytime the North wind blows, consequently we shall be able to work it occasionally ... The rock must be blasted with powder which [costs] 1/6 per lb., and our wedges and other implements are also expensive from the high price of Iron and Steel.[6]

By the fall of 1845 Cockran's men had cleared a large piece of stone at the quarry and the minister hoped to have enough rock removed so as to complete the side walls and to eventually finish the church by the spring of 1847. Evidently, however, the pace of the quarrying activities slowed, as Cockran mentions at the end of November that the masons "were at a stand for want of assistance." The minister became discouraged, he claims, when at times his other duties took him away from superintending the building project and the "Directors invariably allow them [the workers] to disperse."[7] When the river froze hard by mid-December of that year work at the quarry ceased and the masons began work on dressing the quarried limestone.

In his report to the general secretary of the CMS at the end of 1845 Cockran noted that they were "proceeding vigorously with the new Church." The side wall of the "substantial and commodious edifice" had risen 5 ½ feet above the ground while the west (tower) wall was now 7 feet high.[8] On May 6, 1846 the masons began work on the church again. Fine weather allowed them to move quickly and by June 10 Cockran remarked in his journal that the walls were now at a height of 10 ½ feet above ground. The limestone used in the building of the church was quarried in the late summer and fall, while the winter, spring and summer were used for dressing the stone and erecting the walls and tower. There is no mention in the Cockran papers of whether the stone was dressed at the quarry site or transported to the church property before being worked. The large quantity of lime mortar used in the project was produced at a nearby kiln. Wood for the large timbers used in the construction of the roof trusses came from a wooding camp at nearby Bird's Hill.

As mentioned, much of the labour and materials that went toward the building of St. Andrew's were provided by parishioners. Among the surviving records of the parish is an account book covering the years 1844-52 which contains a list dated February 28, 1849 entitled "Materials furnished by Subscribers towards Payment of their Subscriptions." This account book is in the Anglican Diocesan Archives in Winnipeg. A total of 105 individuals are listed alphabetically and beneath each is their material and labour contributions, as well as the monetary value in pounds, shillings and pence. Materials provided included a specified quantity of "toise" of stone (a French linear measurement of just under 2 metres), planks, bushels of lime, shingles, rations, draught oxen, tools and nails. Labour donated to the project included masonry work, carpentry, hauling stones, hewing wood and making lime. John Tait, for instance, did much of the carpentry and was responsible for the building of the pulpit, reading desk and box pews. James Corrigal provided 150 bushels of lime, and 1 "toise" of stone, as well as £2 9s. of labour. Donald McDonald, another local settler, provided 334 bushels of lime, mortar box, 36 pounds of dried meat and 15 days of labour all valued at £10 10s.6d. The total monetary value of the material and labour (as payment for pledged subscriptions) was £355 3s.11 ½d.[9] Other donations to the church building fund included £100 from the Hudsons's Bay Company, £50 and two of the three bells from David Anderson, the first bishop of Rupert's land, as well as contributions from the CMS and a handful of its wealthy supporters in England.[10] Although many of the materials needed for construction such as wood, stone and mortar could be secured locally, others such as glass, paint, putty, and the bells, had to be ordered from England.

In June 1846 Cockran decided to leave Red River. Since the late 1830s the Anglican missionary had complained to his superiors in London of ill-health, but had agreed to stay on until a suitable replacement could be found. With the impending arrival of a successor, the Rev. Robert James, Cockran and his family travelled east by the HBC express canoe and steamer to Toronto, where he remained for a year.

With Cockran's departure the superintendency of the work at the church was handed over to the "directors" and to the new incumbent Robert James. (Most likely the day-to-day work on the building was supervised by stonemason Duncan McRae.) James arrived at the Rapids in the late summer of 1846 and besides his duties there was also given charge of the parish at Middle Church, situated south of the Rapids at Image Plain. Perhaps because his extensive pastoral duties kept him busy, or because he lacked interest in the building project at the lower parish, James made few comments in his journal and letters concerning progress on the church. When Cockran returned to Red River in 1847 he was stationed at the upper settlement (St. John's), but also supervised the building of the stone church at the Rapids. Unfortunately none of Cockran's correspondence or journal diaries exist for the period from his return in 1847 until his move to the St. Peter's Indian mission in the early 1850s. While James makes the occasional reference to the building project, his remarks reveal little about the day-to-day work being carried out at the site. Apparently, things did not go smoothly after Cockran's departure. In the winter of 1847 James commented that at a meeting of the subscribers there was "much bickering respecting some portion of the work. I grieve," James continued, "that Mr. Cockran neither did not stay to

finish the building or leave its affairs on a different footing."[11] No details are given by James as to the exact nature of the problem, however, work on the building did progress slowly over the next year. In the summer of 1847 James wrote to Rev. Davies of the CMS in London that:

> Our New Church is a noble building and by far the best in Prince Rupert's Land. I am appealing to some of my friends in England to raise another hundred pounds to enable us to complete it. Many poor men in their godly enthusiasm have given donations of £10 and to pay it forestaked two years wages.[12]

James hoped to have the roof on by winter of 1847 and to open the church sometime the following summer. However, by 1848 the building was still a ways from completion although work was "proceeding fast under the superintendence of Mr. Cockran. The roof is finished and all the stone work. What remains to be done," James wrote to the Secretaries in August 1848, "is the spire and the interior. It will be opened in a few months [sic]."[13] A year later, however, in August 1849, James wrote to the Society to describe how the

> outside work [on the church] is completed and the inside has gone on vigorously. The ceiling is finished and the windows are all in. The flooring is being laid and the pews are all made. John Tait, our active and ingenious carpenter, is going on with the pulpit and desk. Our intention is to have it ready for opening by the latter part of September.[14]

The fall of 1849 also marked the arrival in Red River of Bishop David Anderson. It was the hope of Robert James, as well as that of the congregation at the lower settlement, that Anderson make the Rapids church his headquarters. Anderson's initial plans to reside with his two children and sister Margaret at Lower Fort Garry (near St. Andrew's) were altered after the death of John McCallum, the master at the Red River Academy located at the upper settlement. Anderson moved into quarters at the Academy, effectively making St. John's the diocesan seat for Rupert's Land. On December 19, 1849 Anderson consecrated the newly completed church at the Rapids, naming it St. Andrew's after the patron saint of Scotland. James' journal entry for that date described the opening of the new church:

> Today the new stone church at the Grand Rapids was consecrated by the Bishop. Five years has it been building and a wonder unto many. About £1500 has been expended upon it, a marvel to all who know our abilities. I doubt not the real fact that God was honoured by the magnificence of the design and carried us through without loss of life or credit. Several individuals contributed in a princely way, especially Mr. Cockran. Perhaps the most pleasing of all to myself, this day was to see for the first time in God's house my whole congregation, young and old. Long and anxiously have we laboured and I looked for this day. The service was shared by the Bishop [Anderson], Mr. Cockran, Mr. Smithurst, Mr. Hunt and myself. The spacious church was filled. It was the first consecration they had ever witnessed. I will not attempt a description of what in my people this day felt.[15]

Architectural Significance[16]

St. Andrew's Church was constructed between 1844 and 1849 under the supervision of the Rev. William Cockran of the Anglican Church Missionary Society. Built with limestone quarried from the bank of the Red River, St. Andrew's is an example of an architectural style known as Gothic Revival. Popular in England in the 18th century, Gothic Revivalism characterized much of the church architecture in that country after 1818. The style appeared in Canada in the 1820s (at least in respect to church architecture) with the construction of Notre-Dame de Montréal, designed by New York architect James O'Donnell and opened in 1829. While Notre-Dame represents a major, monumental example of the Gothic Revival style, St. Andrew's was built on

a much smaller scale and, according to architectural historian Leslie Maitland, is comparable with the many small stone churches constructed in eastern and central Canada in the 1820s and 1830s.

The style and layout of St. Andrew's is an example of what is known as a pre-Tractarian church design. (Tractarianism was the name given to the religious principals of the Oxford "High Church" movement of the early to middle 19th century.) The evangelical movement of the late 18th century, with its emphasis on the sermon rather than the formal service, favoured the open hall and gallery, lack of chancel and centrally located pulpit. The CMS, who sponsored Cockran as well as other missionaries in the West, were led, at least in the early years, by individuals with definite evangelical sympathies. The original location of the altar at the side in favour of the central pulpit represented the elevation of the sermon over the service or mass. With the decline of the evangelical influence in Red River after the arrival of Bishop David Anderson in 1849 and the new High Church emphasis of the Tractarians, the pulpit at St. Andrew's was moved in 1857 to the south side of the church, the reading desk to the north, and the altar relocated to the centre, beneath the east window. While some changes were made to the interior layout, St. Andrew's remains architecturally a fine example of a pre-Tractarian church in Western Canada.[17] Constructed of locally quarried limestone, the church also fit into the Scottish tradition of 19th-century stone construction in Red River. In 1974 St. Andrew's Church was commemorated with a plaque by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, the building's architectural and historical significance long recognized in the West.

St. Andrew's Church is laid out in the traditional rectangular form and measures 81 feet by 40 feet with a 20 foot by 20 foot stone bell tower capped with a wooden spire. (While much like the original, the spire has been replaced on more than one occasion over the years.) The limestone used in the construction of the church is rough dressed, however, the stone around the doors, windows and eaves have been extensively and laboriously worked. Small repairs have been made on the stonework and mortar over the last century and a half and the east wall and southeast corner were completely rebuilt in the early 1930s. A new roof was added in 1983.

The church's interior has changed little over the years. The pews on the main floor date from late in the last century (although original box pews are still located in the unused gallery), and the pulpit and reading desk are original to the building. More recent changes include the creation of an office at the west end of the building below the gallery, and the replacement of the floor.

Repair and Restoration, 1849-1989

In the first few decades after the completion of St. Andrew's only minor alterations were made to the church. The bells for the spire and belfry were shipped from England in 1850. In 1857, in keeping with the Anglican Church's emphasis on the service rather than the sermon, the Rev. James Hunter re-arranged the chancel area. The pulpit was moved to the right, the reading desk to the left, the altar was located in the centre and a screen was installed in order to create a vestry area beneath the east window.[18] In 1868 a new spire had to be erected and the north wall repaired after a fierce storm caused extensive damage to the church.

By the early part of this century cracks began to appear in the stone walls of the church, especially in the east wall.[19] Flax straw was used to repair the disintegrating mortar and metal sheeting employed to help keep out the elements. As well, the wooden timbers of the tower were reported that same year to be "quite rotten." Deterioration of the east wall in particular had become so acute by 1930 that the church was declared unsafe and forced to close.

In 1931 a committee was formed to help raise funds from individual subscriptions for restoration work on the building. An architect, Gilbert Parfitt, recommended to the parish vestry that the walls be repointed and waterproofed at grade, the gable wall be dismantled and rebuilt, portions of the other wall be rebuilt, new window arches and frames be installed, damaged sills replaced, new woodwork installed in the tower, and new eavestroughing be set. Contractors

Campbell and Mitchell estimated the cost of the repairs at $5000. Money for the project was raised by the parish vestry with the help of the St. Andrew's Oldtimers Association. Local men who helped in the work donated 16 percent, or more, of their wages. The restoration work was carried out in 1931, as was repair work on the balcony and interior walls. Flagstones were also installed on the floor of the tower. During the restoration work partitions were set up under the balcony to create a small chapel which could accommodate up to 60 people. The cost of the repair work actually came in $1000 under budget.

One year later, in October 1932, the southeast corner of the building collapsed and the church was forced to close once again. A 1934 parish memo outlined the problem:

> The stonework which has now failed was not touched during the course of the [1931] repairs, owing to the lack of funds and partly the fact that it was not considered necessary. Early in July 1932, however, it began to show signs of movement and it gradually became worse. In the following October [1932] it was thought that footings should be put under it and concrete beams extended beyond the walls to spread the weight. It was during the carrying out of this work that th corner finally gave way and induced the movement of the east wall.[20]

The cost to repair the southeast corner was estimated at $1500 and funds were once again sought from the community. Large beams were used to temporarily support the wall while the memorial windows were removed. Money for the project was eventually raised and the repair work was completed by July 1934. The church re-opened at that time. Eight years later concrete piles were put under the southeast, southwest and northeast corners at a cost of $600. In the 1950s the narthex floor was replaced with new boards laid over concrete pads and beams.[21] Structural work in the 1960s included another rebuilding of the wooden spire, as well as repairs to the tower and balcony.[22]

By the 1960s the small repairs of the previous decades had failed to halt much of the disintegration of the masonry and the buckling of the stonework. In 1966 a St. Andrew's Restoration Committee was formed by Bishop Anderson with a view to raising funds for major repairs on the church as the 150th anniversary project of the Diocese in 1970. (That year would also mark the centennial of Manitoba's entry into Confederation and the 300th anniversary of the Hudson's Bay Company.) Architects Libling, Michener and Associates were hired in 1967 to assess the structural condition of the church. They recommended that steel trusses be installed in the roof along with new shingles, that the walls be dismantled at the bulging sections, the foundation be underpinned and the floor replaced. They also suggested the installation of new heating and electrical systems. Unfortunately, problems arose with the fund-raising efforts of the committee and restoration plans were put on hold.[23]

In 1974 St. Andrew's Church was plaqued by the federal government as a national historic site. With the signing of the Canada-Manitoba "Agreement for Recreation and Conservation" (ARC) in 1978 it was hoped that government funds could be allocated for structural repairs to the church. Monies were not available at that time, however, and instead in 1979 the Diocesan Memorial Building Fund was used to repair cracks in the walls, repair the roof and chimney, paint the spire and enlarge the furnace room. In 1983 ARC funds were allocated to replace the roof with cedar shingles and reinforce the roof trusses. As well, a four-foot crawl space was excavated beneath the nave and the floor was re-installed on an independent foundation. Interior work was also carried out at this time and included the installation of new carpeting and a natural gas furnace.

Unfortunately, the structural work that had been carried out to this point had only served to slow down the deterioration and buckling of the walls. Temporary repairs (patching the larger cracks) were carried out in 1987-88 and a parish Restoration Committee was re-formed at that time to solicit government assistance. The Manitoba Heritage Federation funded a report by engineer A.F. Eshmade in 1988 recommending to the vestry the necessity of a number of major structural repairs. These include the installation of a new pile foundation around the whole of

the building, a rebuilding of the north and south walls, possible restoration of the east and west (tower) walls, work on the roof trusses and the installation of a new floor in the narthex. A funding campaign to help finance structural intervention and restoration at the church is currently being undertaken by the parish. The level of intervention that will be required to help stabilize and repair the building is currently under review.

Conclusion

St. Andrew's Church has been recognized by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada as being of national historical and architectural significance. As the oldest stone church in Western Canada it represents a tangible reminder of the role of Anglican missionaries in the history of the West. Moreover, St. Andrew's continues today to be a thriving parish community, a link with the past, and an important part of this province's collective heritage.

Endnotes

1 Provincial Archives of Manitoba (hereafter PAM), Church Missionary Society Archives (hereafter, CMSA), A78, Journal of William Cockran, December 31, 1844.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., July 4, 1845.
5 Ibid., September 25, 1845.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., November 28, 1845.
8 Ibid., William Cockran to Secretaries, CMS, December 29, 1845.
9 See Appendix C "List of Subscribers and Amounts Subscribed for the Building of the Stone Church at St. Andrew's 1849" in R. Coutts, *St. Andrew's Parish, 1829-1929 and the Church Missionary Society in Red River*, Canadian Parks Service, Microfiche Report No. 361, 1986.
10 PAM, CMSA, A92, Robert James to Secretaries, Nov. 28, 1849.
11 Ibid., A78, Journal of Robert James, February 1, 1847.
12 Ibid., Robert James to Davies, August 6, 1847.
13 Ibid., Robert James to Secretaries, August 2, 1848.
14 Ibid., August 6, 1849.
15 Ibid., A78, Journal of Robert James, December 19, 1849.
16 Much of the data used for this section of the report on the architectural significance of St. Andrew's was taken from the 1988 Agenda Paper prepared for the HSMBC by architectural historian Leslie Maitland.
17 Ibid., p. 243.
18 National Archives of Canada, MG19, E6, John Smithurst Papers, James Hunter to John Smithurst, July 2, 1857.
19 Information on the repairs made to the church in the 20th century has come from research carried out in the Anglican Diocesan Archives by Margo James of the St. Andrew's Restoration Committee. I am indebted to Mrs. James for allowing me to use her extensive notes.
20 Diocesan Archives, Winnipeg, ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.

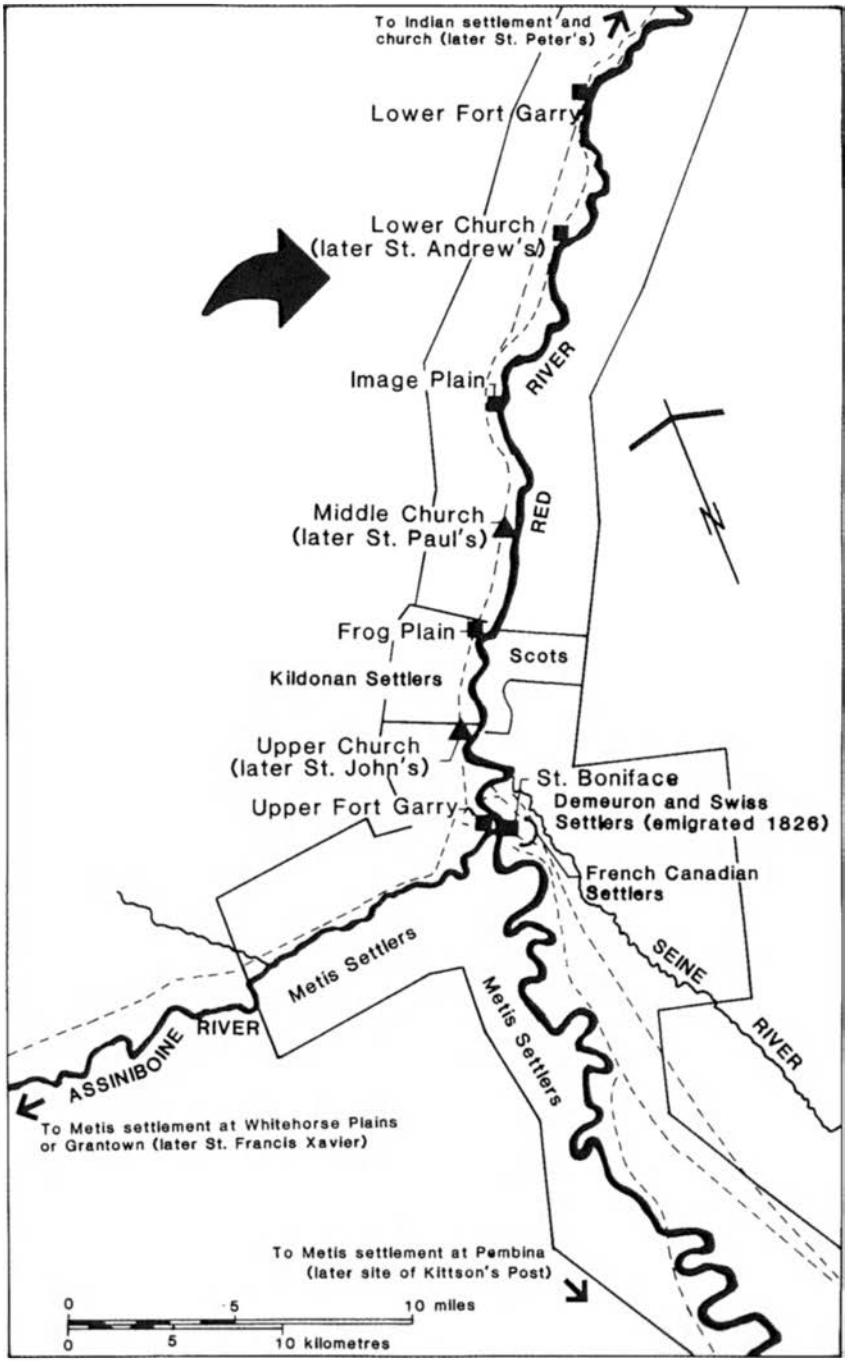

Fig. 1 The Red River Settlement in 1835. The "Lower Church" (later St. Andrew's) is indicated with arrow. (From L.G. Thomas, ed. *The Prairie West to 1905*)

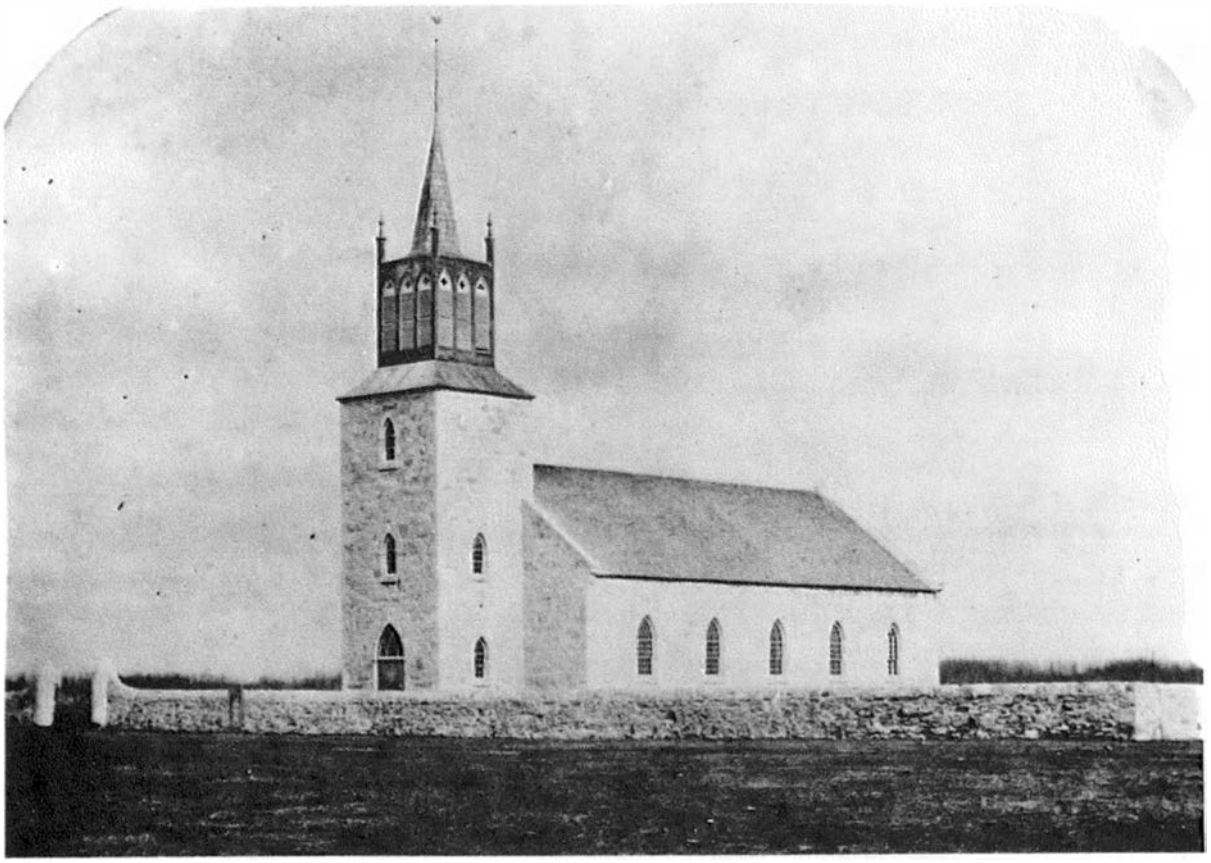

Fig. 2 St. Andrew's Church by H.L. Hime, 1858. This is the first known photograph of the church. (Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N12547)

Fig. 3 St. Andrew's Church and Rectory by M.L. Kennedy, ca. 1899. This photograph was taken from a location east of the church, looking west. The wooden schoolhouse is also visible just beyond the church. (Provincial Archives of Manitoba)

Fig. 4 Reconstruction of east wall, St. Andrew's Church, 1931. (Provincial Archives of Manitoba)

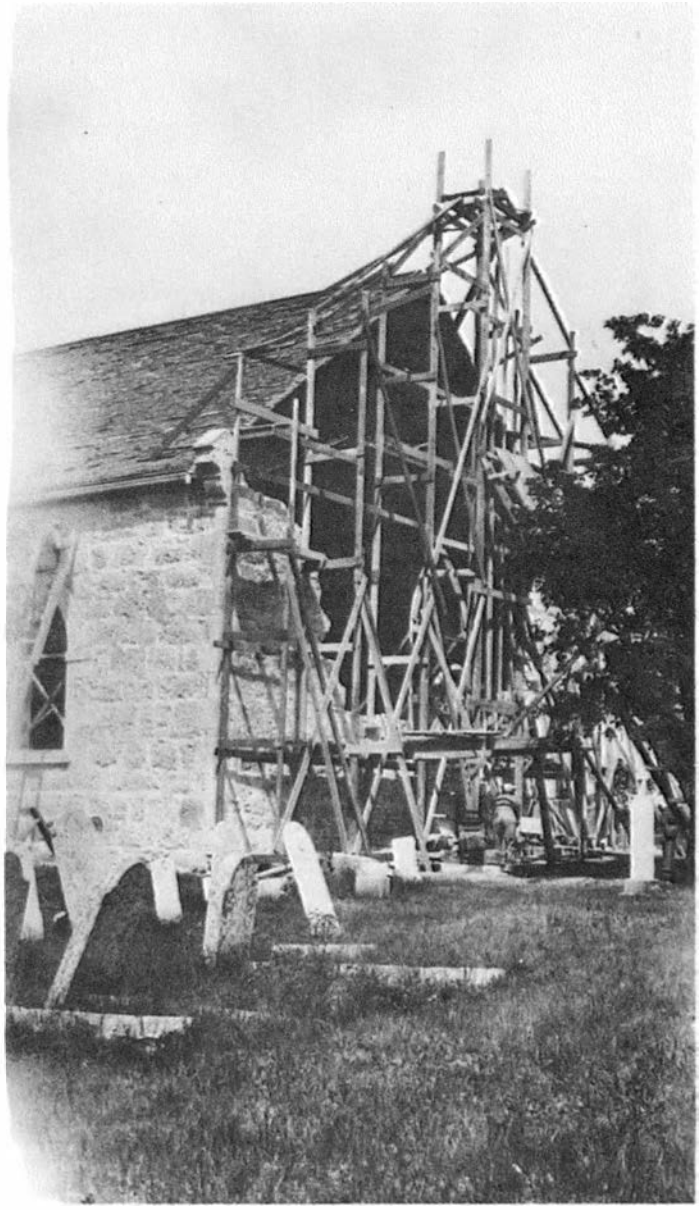

Fig. 5 Reconstruction of east wall, St. Andrew's Church, 1931. (Provincial Archives of Manitoba)

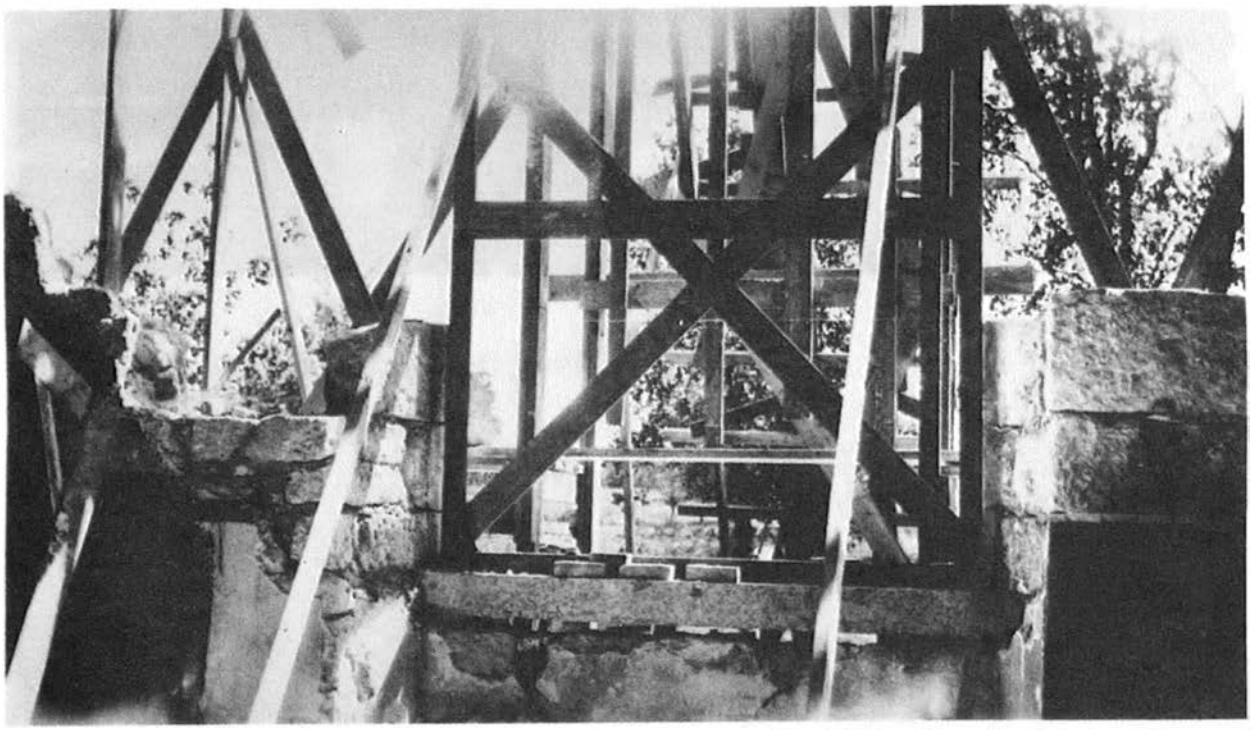

Fig. 6 Close-up of reconstruction work on east wall, 1931. (Provincial Archives of Manitoba)

Fig. 7 Interior view of St. Andrew's Church, 1943. (Provincial Archives of Manitoba)