



Building Traditions and Types

This guide is an introduction to some of the most significant building types and traditions employed during the past 150 years of Manitoba's history. There are two other sections—a guide to architectural styles and a glossary of architectural terms—that constitute a complete set for reference.

Building Traditions and Types introduces building traditions and building types that comprise much of the remaining stock of 19th and 20th century architecture in Manitoba. There is only now a growing appreciation for this kind of architecture and this section of the guide is only a brief introduction to this very important aspect of the province's past. Further study will foster greater understanding of each tradition or type. The eight building traditions featured here include:

- Aboriginal Structures
- Red River Frame Structures
- Pioneer Barns
- Mennonite Housebarns
- Ukrainian Houses
- Eastern European Churches
- Large Vernacular Houses
- Small Vernacular Houses

The six building types included here are generally the product of architectural or engineered design:

- Pattern Book Houses
- Pattern Book Barns
- One-room Schools
- Boomtown Structures
- Railway Stations
- Grain Elevators

These kinds of buildings are often called vernacular architecture to distinguish them from architect-designed buildings. They are the building forms and construction methods which evolved as generations of people constructed buildings to meet their everyday needs. Their overall form and the general expression of the details are shaped by local climate, topography and the limits of available materials. The subtlety of plan and detail are often prescribed by religious or cultural requirements. The richness of these buildings can be most forcefully read in the exceptional craftsmanship often employed in the details.

The vernacular architecture for houses and churches of other major settlement groups—Anglo-Ontario and Franco-Manitoban especially—is reflected in the architectural styles that tended to define those groups: Gothic Revival for Anglo-Ontarians and Second Empire and Romanesque for Franco-Manitobans. Those sections of the accompanying entry, **Architectural Style Guide**, should be consulted in those instances.

Because such buildings were meant to appeal to a broad audience, and at a modest price, they were often built from standardized materials and according to standardized designs. Individual buildings are nevertheless of considerable interest. Each can be a reminder of efficient planning and clear detail design.



Aboriginal Structures (5000 B.C.- 1900 A.D.)

The origin of the tipi is unclear, but may date from as early as 10,000 B.C., when people first inhabited Manitoba. Archaeological evidence indicates that tipis were definitely constructed by 5,000 B.C. The structure was well suited to the lifestyle of nomadic hunters and gatherers living on the plains. It was easily transported and constructed entirely of locally available materials.

All tipis were constructed as tilted cones, with the steep side at the rear of the structure set into the prevailing wind. The frame consisted of a series of straight tree poles, each 16 to 33 feet long, four to eight inches in diameter, and usually pointed at one end, trimmed and stripped of bark. The covering for this frame was originally hides, bark, or mats made out of rushes, and after the 1880s, canvas. An opening for ventilation and the protruding pole ends was created at the top of the structure when it was erected. Prior to the mid-19th century, rocks or sod were used to anchor the skin covering to the ground; wooden pegs were used thereafter.

An 1858 photograph by Humphrey Hime shows a group of Ojibway tipis (Courtesy Archives of Manitoba).

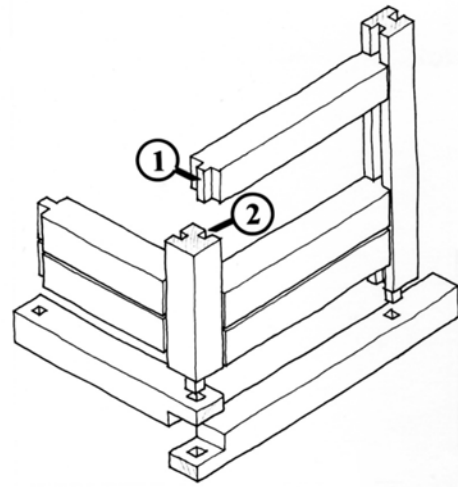




Red River Frame Structures (1820-1870)

Before 1870, Red River frame was the building construction method used by most inhabitants of the Red River Settlement. The procedure was used primarily for houses, but also found favour for public, commercial and religious structures. The technology was introduced to the Canadian West by Hudson's Bay Company employees from Quebec, where a similar technology was popular. The Quebec buildings were derived from French structures of the 17th century. It is also known by its French equivalent, *pièce-sur-pièce*. In Manitoba, few Red River frame buildings remain. Most are concentrated along the banks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers, within the confines of the old Red River Settlement, and many are simple interpretations of the Georgian style.

The most distinctive feature of Red River frame structures is the log construction procedure, in which short logs are squared and set between upright squared logs. Most such buildings are rectangular in plan, generally with a **gabled** roof; those examples covered with a **hipped** roof are often combined with Georgian influences. Small rectangular windows are set between short vertical logs, and the single door is usually set against a vertical log on one of the long walls.



Top Right: The distinctive quality of Red River frame is presented in this detailed cut-away view of a typical corner connection. The tongue (1) on the horizontal log is slipped into the groove (2) chiselled into the vertical log.

Right: Ross House, Winnipeg, 1854. In this building, the first post office in western Canada, the exposed logs clearly reveal Red River frame construction. Georgian influences can be read in the hipped roof and the symmetrical composition of the façade.





Pioneer Barns (1870-1900)

The major settlement groups that opened the province during the 1880s and 90s—Anglo-Ontarians, Quebeckers, Icelanders, Mennonites and Ukrainians—introduced a variety of new barn designs and building technologies. Each group produced structures that can be identified by their distinctive form and construction details. Barns from Icelandic and Ukrainian traditions are typically small, gable-roofed log structures connected with saddle-notch or dovetail joints. Mennonite barns are attached to houses and have distinctive window and door trim details. Southern Ontario-style barns are typically built into a hill bank to permit ground level access to both the stable level and the loft above it; loft features include heavy timber construction. French barns were built with heavy timber framework and board and batten siding.



Below: A barn dominates an early Manitoba farm view. Right: Most early barns featured heavy timber frame construction.





Mennonite Housebarns (1875-1920)

During the 1870s almost 8,000 German-speaking Mennonites (religious refugees from Czarist Russia) settled on two large land reserves in southern Manitoba. The new settlers recreated traditional farm-village communities in the new land and built traditional housebarns. A housebarn combined, in one long unit, family living quarters and an attached barn. By 1900 there were over 100 farm villages on the two reserves. Each village was laid out along a street usually a kilometre in length. The housebarns might be situated on one or both sides of the street, with a school and church located towards the village centre.

Early housebarns are small, of rough log construction, and covered with a **thatched roof**. Later examples more closely follow tradition, featuring large timber-framed barns and commodious houses attached in a long linear unit. The house portion usually has a steeply-**pitched** roof, broad rectangular plan, **shuttered** windows and Dutch doors (a divided door in which the upper and lower halves move independently of each other), while the barn portion is usually slightly wider and higher than the house. It often has **shed-roofed** sections on one or both sides. Barns feature either a row of small square windows or **ribbon windows**, with the main barn doors often being distinguished by geometric designs created as part of the door construction. Examples from the early 1900s often have T-shaped plans; North American influences, like light **wood frame** construction and roof **dormers**, became more common as time went on.

Traditional Mennonite housebarn, Manitoba.





Ukrainian Houses (1896-1920)

Like other immigrant groups who settled the rural areas of Manitoba, Ukrainian pioneers arriving in the last years of the 19th century relied on traditional building designs for the construction of their early homes. Two distinct regional variations have been identified in Manitoba. Settlers from Galicia, then a province of Austria, built houses that were typically small and unpretentious. Settlers from the neighbouring Austrian province of Bukovyna relied on traditional house designs that were often larger and more elaborate. Traditional house architecture was used until the 1930s, by which time most settlers had adapted their homes to Canadian building technologies and current North American architectural styles.

These buildings are typically small, single-storey structures built on a south-facing rectangular plan; houses were oriented to face south with a small room on the west side and a larger room on the east side. A large clay oven at the centre of the house was used for cooking during the day and, because it retained heat at night, as a sleeping area for children. Galician houses are distinguished by a **gable** roof and two-room plan, while Bukovynian houses are identified by a **hipped** roof and three-roomed plan. In both cases the log walls are covered with a thick mud plaster coating on both sides. Both exterior and interior walls are often **whitewashed** and occasionally decorated with painted designs. Early examples of these buildings are covered with **thatched roofs**.

Elaschuk House, Roblin area, 1910. A rare surviving example of Ukrainian folk architecture that still sports a thatched roof. The building is a Provincial Heritage Site.





Eastern European Churches (1898-1940)

Ukrainian, Romanian and Russian immigrants to Manitoba constructed church buildings with reference to the varied architectural traditions of their homelands. Churches are usually distinguished by the use of onion domes (also called banyas); a variety of such shapes were used, ranging from squat to tall and slender, with the majority being a distinctive bulbous shape. Round-arched windows are common and detailing may be in Romanesque, Classical or even Gothic Revival styles. Smaller churches are usually built on a rectangular plan and usually feature a gable roof topped with a small onion dome. Larger churches are often cross-shaped and more complex, with reference to the grand urban churches of eastern Europe; the external character of the structure is expressed by the number, size and variety of domes; many of these churches have large domes that open into the interior, filling the space below with light. Interiors are often richly decorated, featuring murals, banners, icons (religious paintings on wood) and icon screens.

Top: St. Michael's Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church, Gardenton area, 1898-99. Below: Exemplary examples of onion domes (also called banyas) on the Ukrainian Catholic Church of the Holy Ascension in Winnipegosis.





Large Vernacular Houses (1890-1920)

Vernacular architecture refers to buildings designed with reference to local needs, materials and traditions rather than to formal styles from elsewhere. Once used for what we might call “folk” architecture with a strong regional or ethnic tradition—for example, Mennonite housebarns—the term now includes buildings that are the product of craftsmen rather than formally-trained architects. Designs may be based on photographs or drawings or on other buildings in the vicinity, so although these buildings may resemble examples elsewhere, regional characteristics may also be evident.

Most of these types have no formal name, and so it is left to observers to develop names that describe and categorize according to an overall form, a defining feature, a general sensibility, or a reference to a period. Some suggestions are provided here and in the next entry.



The “Foursquare” is a common type and may be found in frame or masonry, with concrete block being popular. It is 2 or 2 ½ storeys with a centre-hall plan and a hipped roof. Foursquares often have front and sometimes side porches. Ornament is sparse, and usually classical.



A grand and commodious house often categorized as “Edwardian Vernacular.” Edwardian houses typically have plainer exteriors than their Victorian forebears.



“Manitoba Shingle” houses were common in urban areas from about 1905 to 1915. They are typically 2½ storeys, with a shingled second storey. Most are three bays across, with a wide possible range of dormered roofs, central or asymmetrical plans, bay windows, towers etc. Front porches are nearly ubiquitous on this type.



Small Vernacular Houses (1890-1920)

As noted in the previous entry on Large Vernacular Houses, most of these kinds of buildings have no formal architectural designation, and so it is left to observers to develop terms that describe and categorize according to an overall form, a defining feature, a general sensibility, or a reference to a period. Some suggestions are provided here for common smaller house types.



The “Cottage-style” House has a centre-hall plan, dormers and a hipped roof.



Variations of the essential “Gable-fronted” House include different fenestration (including bay windows), varying amounts of ornament, and the addition of a porch, adjoining wing or ell.



The “Gable Ell” is typically two storeys, with an intersecting gable roof and an irregular floor plan. Usually the long wing faces the road, often with a porch sheltering the doorway nestled into the angle. Bay windows are common, and there may be decorative millwork details.



The wealth of details suggests a “Victorian Vernacular.” This example has a protruding central bay and fretwork, but they may vary considerably in plan and elevation, with a range of window types, but typically with some form of gable roof.



Pattern Book Houses (1885-1940)

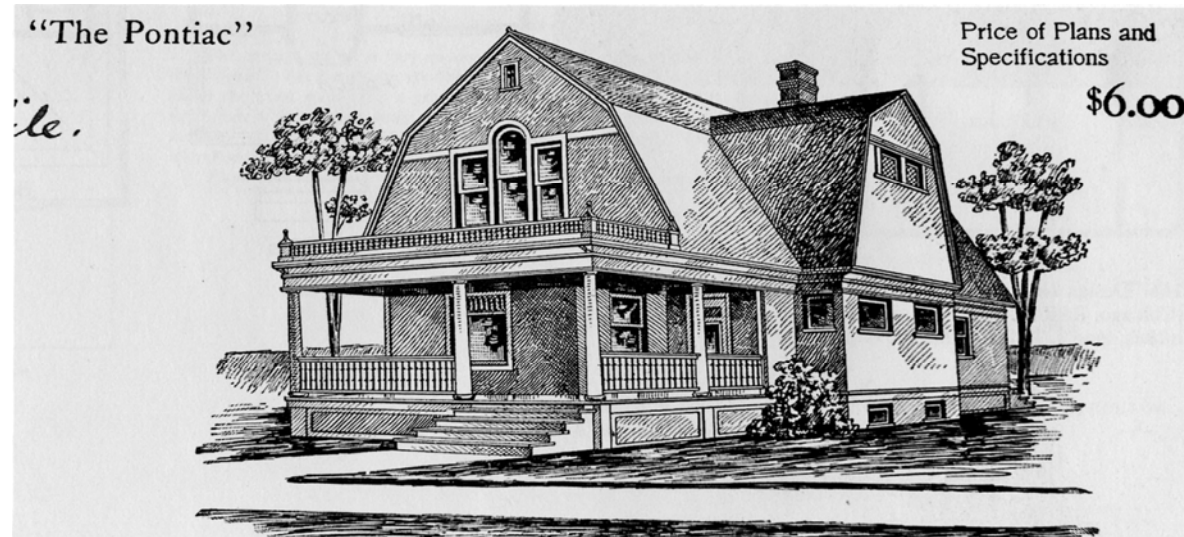
The rush to settle the West created a vast market for pattern book buildings. Pattern books, produced by mail-order and lumber companies, offered the public a wealth of well-crafted and economical house designs. These designs might be produced simply as plans and sold for as little as \$6, or promoted as prefabricated building packages, right down to the nails. Building developers relied on many of the ideas promoted in pattern books to create their own versions of those designs. One of the most popular schemes for larger homes was known as the four-square. These were usually 2½ storeys high with a low pyramidal roof and at least one front dormer.

Examples of the kind of architectural character available from pattern book designs (upper right a Four Square; below Dutch Colonial). (Courtesy Archives of Manitoba)



EASTBOURNE
EATON PLAN BOOK
E15

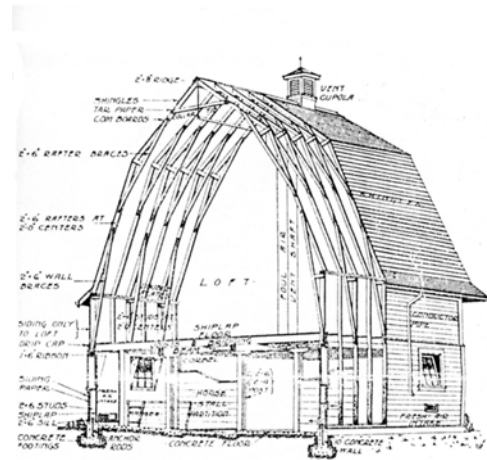
An exceptionally well planned home of the modern type of square house, which is the one type where you obtain the maximum of space at the minimum of cost of both material and labor. The treatment of the lower walls with siding and the upper walls with shingles produces a pleasing and well balanced effect.



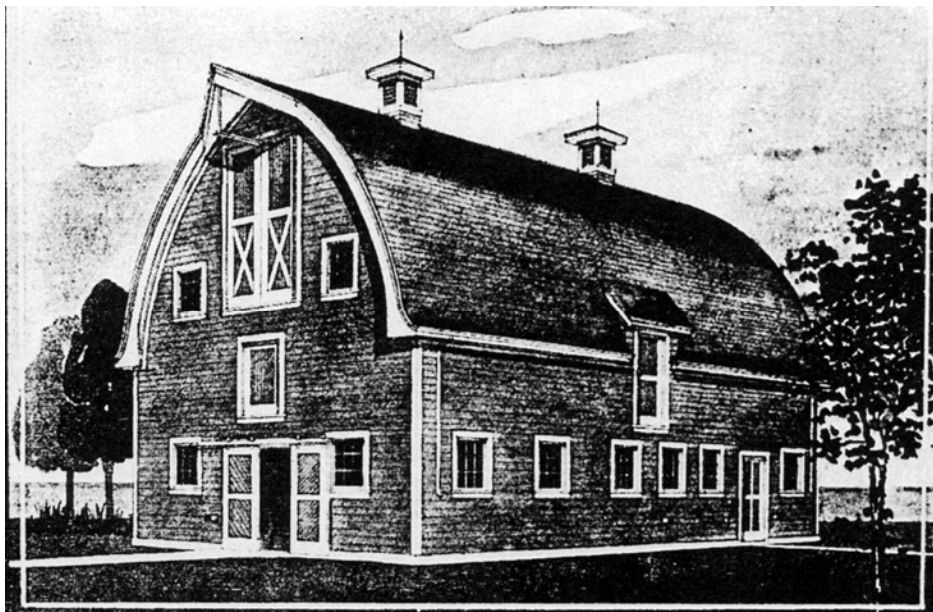


Pattern Book Barns (1885-1930)

By the turn of the century the introduction of new farm machinery, innovative construction techniques and scientific planning greatly altered the appearance of barns. The hay sling and the grain auger provided easier, more economical ways to move hay and feed, while the introduction of tractors around 1900 led to the decline of the horse as the principal source of farm power. All of these developments allowed for new barn design options. Mail-order and lumber companies offered a variety of barn designs and kits which included all materials. Engineered truss rafters were used to create huge unobstructed loft spaces. New roof shapes--the gambrel and the vault--created even greater loft capacity.



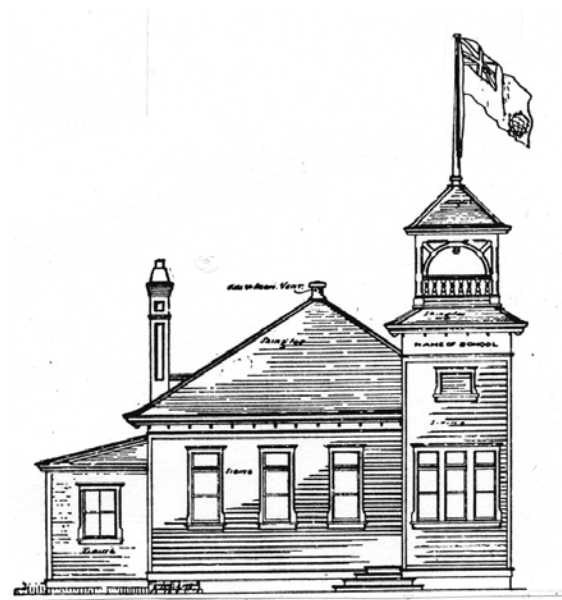
Below: The crisp form and details of a pattern book barn. Right: The engineered trusses within.





One-room Schools (1885-1940)

One- and two-room schools were built throughout Manitoba between 1880 and 1940. As early as the 1890s provincial standards were applied to the construction of school buildings. By the turn of the century, carefully crafted school building designs from well-known local architects were widely available to local school districts. Almost all one- and two-room schools were built on a rectangular plan with a gable or hipped roof. Most schools had a distinctive window wall in which all the windows of the building—usually the north—were concentrated. Almost all extant buildings are of wood frame construction. Details are usually modest. Contrasting colours might be used and brackets and window heads provide small delights.



Below: A fine one-room school. (Courtesy Archives of Manitoba). Right: One of the standardized designs provided by the Department of Education.





Boomtown Structures (1885-1930)

With the arrival of the railways in the 1880s the Canadian West was opened to settlement. The ensuing years are often called the Boom years and it was during this era when entire prairie communities sprang up virtually overnight. The commercial centres in these new towns typically consisted of simple wood frame structures hidden behind boomtown or false-fronted façades. By extending the gable front up past the eaves and beyond the roofline, small buildings could be made to look larger and more dignified. In Manitoba, boomtown fronts were most frequently used on stores, small office buildings, blacksmith shops, livery barns and church and community halls. The most common boomtown façades were flat-topped or step-topped.



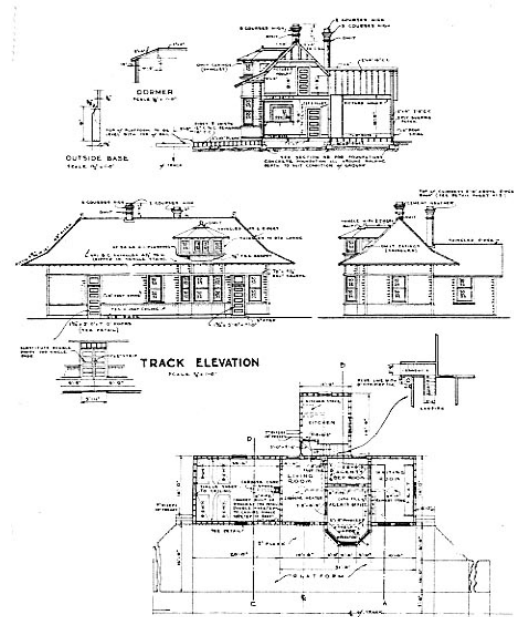
Below: An evocative boomtown façade. Right: A detail that suggests the actual structural composition of a boomtown façade.





Railway Stations (1885-1930)

The Prairie Provinces were opened to settlement during the 1880s and 90s by the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Canadian Northern (later Canadian National) Railway. Both companies identified a hierarchy of communities and produced a range of standardized station designs to serve them. Large towns--identified in the hierarchy as significant regional distribution points--had a standardized "Second Class" station. Smaller communities had one of several available standardized "Third" or "Fourth Class" stations. The roof was the most distinctive feature of all station designs. Roofs were normally hipped and could have dormer windows. Broad overhangs were supported by distinctive curved brackets.



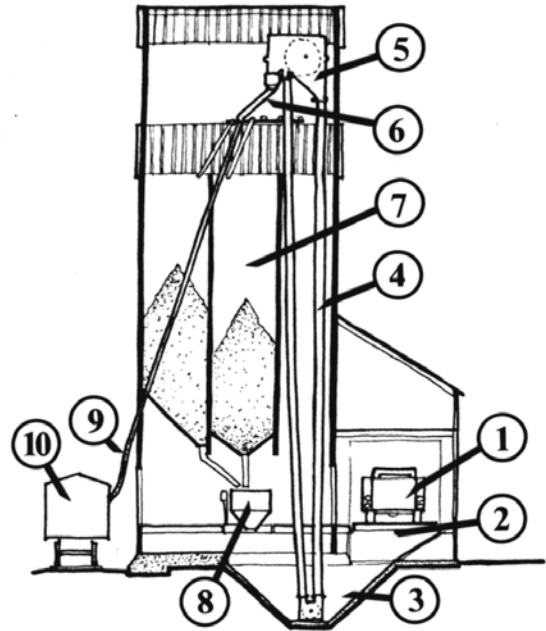
Below: The CPR Station at Virden, with its distinctive roof. Right: Example of the plans that attended the construction of standardized stations.





Grain Elevators (1885-1930)

A vital component of the distribution and storage network of the emerging agricultural economy in Manitoba were the country grain elevators. By 1910 there were 707 grain elevators in this province. Elevators were usually located eight to ten miles apart, a convenient distance that allowed a farmer to deliver his grain and return home the same day. The familiar elevator form is defined by its function: grain bins form the thick, windowless vertical shaft of the building. The cupola, a small gable- or pyramidal-roofed section atop the structure, sheltered the head of the elevator leg and the distributor box. Walls were of cribbed construction: 2"x4" or 2"x6" lumber was stacked and nailed horizontally to create extra strong bin walls.



Below: Line of grain elevators at Birtle.
(Courtesy Archives of Manitoba) Right;
Schematic cut-away showing the internal
workings of a grain elevator.

