

North side of Main Street. Birtle never did have a formal hall or theatre, and like most Manitoba communities, relied on second-storey space provided in a commercial establishment for after-hours fun. This kind of activity could be found in the Albert Hall, in the Albert Woods Building, and in the Victoria Hall in the second floor of the old printing office.



Churches

Birtle's collection of churches—five in all—recall the various cultural strands that continue to define our community. Protestant churches of the Anglican, United (former Presbyterian) and Baptist faiths suggest the Anglo-Ontarian roots of the community, while the presence of the Name Roman Catholic Church and the Name Ukrainian Catholic Church are strong reminders of newer arrivals to the community. Each of these buildings, though modest architecturally compared with the churches of larger centres, in their forms and details help to define the physical character of Birtle.

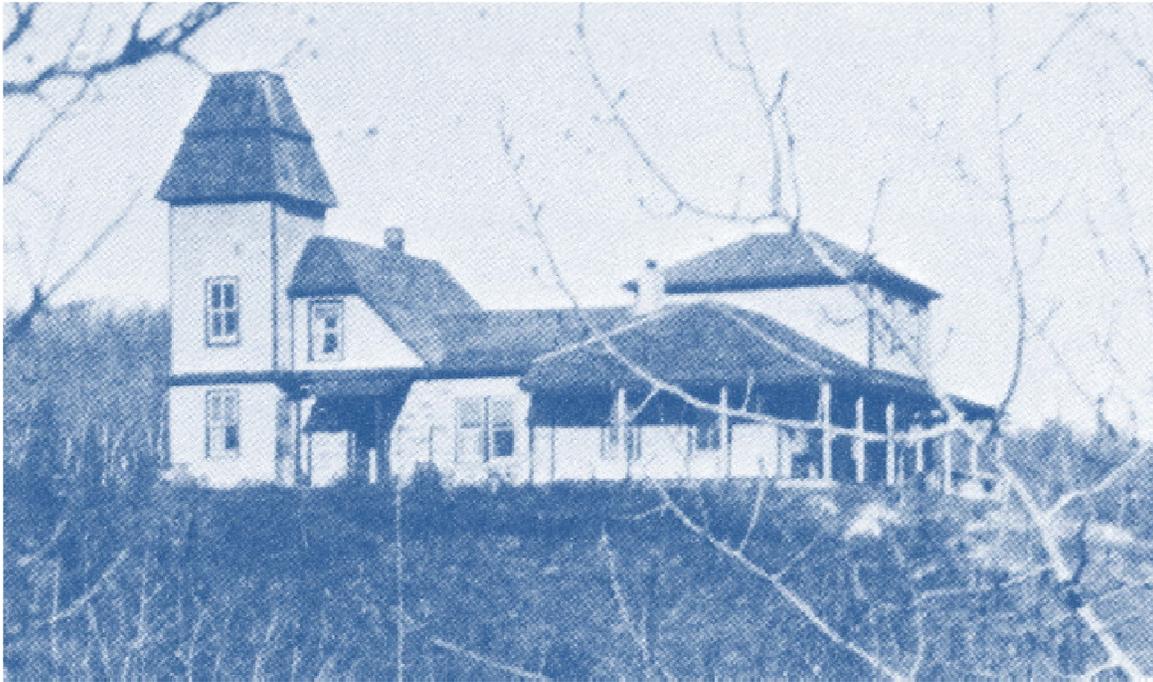
Birtle United Church (originally Presbyterian), built in 1917, features a wealth of Gothic Revival features and details, like the bargeboards and crisply pointed windows on the main facade.



Houses

As noted, Birtle's heritage of residential architecture is a sort of microcosm of the styles, forms, materials and details that described Manitoba's early domestic design accomplishments. This sophisticated inheritance continues to define our community, eloquently expressed in the ongoing care and attention brought by so many of us to the conservation of this vital connection to Birtle's past.

Leacock House, locally known as The Castle, was built in the early 1880s. This early example of the ambitions of an early Birtle resident, once a landmark on the north hill, has been reduced to only a small section of this once amazing place.



The Shepherd House, from 1895, is Birtle's finest stone building, a strong but fair statement for a community with a treasure of stone buildings. This grand house, what might be called a symphony in local granite, is being carefully restored.





Left and Below: Two other notable Birtle houses suggest the amazing variety and impressive quality of our heritage of residential architecture. The Brown House (top), from 1898, is a beloved local landmark, noted for its exquisite stonework by Charles Durham and for its picturesque and eclectic design, with Gothic Revival forms and details as well as a distinctive clipped gable roof. The Corr House (below) from 1892 is a good example of the kind of grand houses built in many small Manitoba towns for the merchant class of the early 20th century. The house is an important and fascinating example of building technologies and styles. It combines typical Queen Anne-style forms and details (in particular the corner tower and wealth of wooden details in the gable ends and porch), with concrete block construction.





Three final examples help sum up Birtle's exceptional heritage of historic residential architecture. The examples at left are important reminders of the kind of architectural quality possible even in more modest buildings. The Barteaux House, from about 1900, is one of many local houses built from a patternbook, in this case apparently from plans provide by the Eaton's Department Store. The other house, from around 1920, is an excellent example of a Craftsman-style house. This Birtle example, which is quite rare in a small-town Manitoba context, is a textbook example of the type, with a low-pitched roof, deep eaves, exposed rafters and decorative brackets, and a broad front porch. The John Patterson House, below, from 1904 is a truly exceptional design, mostly in the Queen Anne style (popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries), but also with qualities reflecting more up-to-date architecture of the opening decades of the 1900s, in particular Arts and Crafts.

Government Buildings

As is often the case in a small town, the crucial links to the country's democratic foundations—and thus to government—are often now reduced to the federal post office and a modest municipal office. But the post office can still elicit profound feelings of community and common purpose. Birtle's Post Office, a typical design employed in many small Canadian communities, is nevertheless still a sophisticated tribute to one community's proud civic character.

Monuments

Two important Birtle sites are key connections to an inevitable aspect of any community's history – death. It's not a subject that defines us, but in the memorials we put up it does reflect us. The first such site in Birtle is the old cemetery. Now unused, a small collection of old marble tablets, typical of late 19th funerary design, still dot a small patch of ground overlooking the Birdtail Valley. Standing in this quiet, dignified place, overlooking the town, it is possible to contemplate the linkages between the history of a community and the history of an individual. The other memorial site, our War Monument on Main Street, is at once a proud and poignant expression of our enduring connection to the boys we lost during the carnage of World Wars I and II.



The Birtle Post Office, built in 1938, is a simple but dignified presence on Birtle's Main Street, a modest but effective Art Deco design whose character is most evident in the entrance pavilion.



Gravemarker in the Old Cemetery.

Construction and Craftsmanship

Birtle's defining stone legacy often is connected with one name – Charles Durham, who undertook many masonry commissions over the years. His handiwork is visible in many buildings, invariably straight and solid after almost 120 years, and expressing to citizens and visitors alike a key aspect of our identity: strong, solid, enduring, and in the many details a pride in craftsmanship and fine eye for proportion.



The work of master mason Charles Durham, expressed in these two examples, is a major part of Birtle's identity.



Two final images are employed to punctuate this exploration of how our buildings and sites help define our identity. On the one hand (right), is the Lime Kiln Site, a now rare reminder of the kind of pioneer industrial and manufacturing activity required in the construction of our buildings. It was here that the lime used for the production of mortar was produced by burning limestone (which is abundant in Birtle); the mortar produced here was used in the construction of nearly every foundation in town and in all the masonry buildings as well. And on the other hand (below) is the elegant and sophisticated architecture of the John Patterson House – one of the town’s finest buildings. These two architectural qualities—the humble nature of a foundation and the elegance of a tower—also express key sides of Birtle’s character.



Lime Kiln Site.

John Patterson House.



Birtle's Heritage Sites

The following list of buildings and sites constitutes the Birtle Heritage Advisory Group's recommendations to the community about those places that have major claims for local heritage significance. Each building and site listed below is also presented on the following pages, with an accompanying Heritage Value Statement that elucidates that building or site's key heritage attributes. A map locating these sites is also included.

- Spring Park
- Birtle United Church
- Peters House
- Shepherd House
- Patterson House
- Lime Kiln Site
- Pratt Block
- Former Union Bank
- Birtle Post Office

The development of this short list of significant sites was the result of careful and studied deliberations using standard heritage evaluation criteria, processes and scoring regimes that were applied to the 52 sites in our Special Places inventory. This work was carried out by the Birtle Heritage Advisory Group with assistance from staff of the Historic Resources Branch of Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Tourism.

We are grateful to the branch for their generous support and patient attention in this particular endeavour.

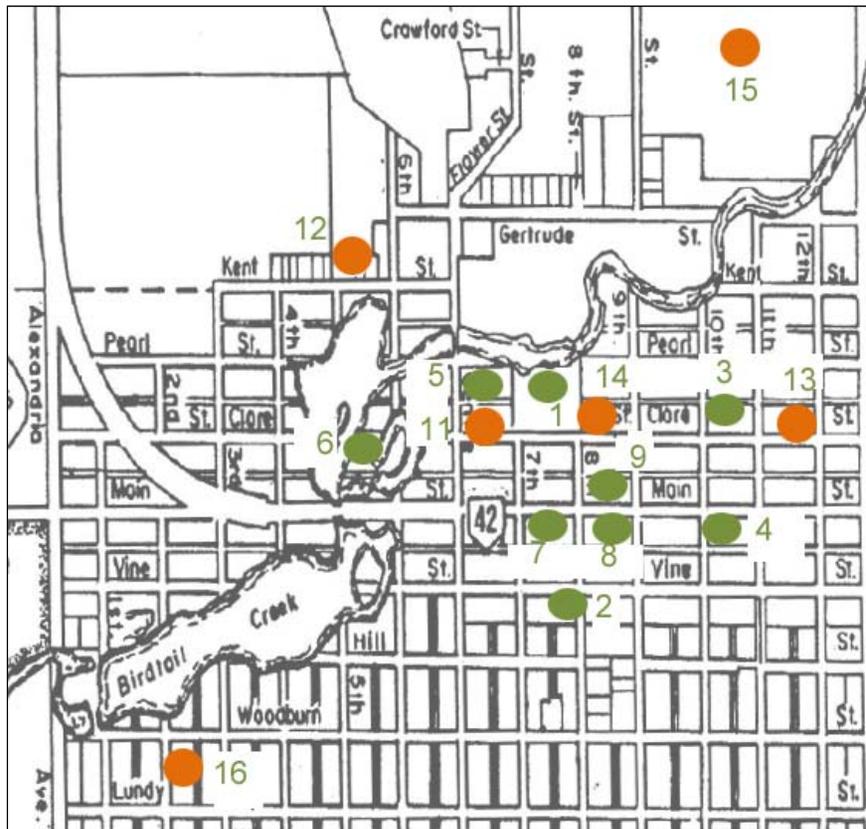
As a collection, these nine buildings and sites define many aspects and themes from Birtle's past, and do so through places that are at once significant, but also interesting and attractive. These are places that the people of Birtle can look to with pride. These places remind us of past glories, but also suggest an enduring sense of community, and are a beacon for its future.

The group also noted in its evaluation exercise that a collection of six other Birtle buildings of slightly lesser heritage significance should be identified for the record as Sites of Heritage Interest; these are also featured in this booklet:

- Herchmer House
- Hatch House
- Corr House
- Craftsman-style House
- Former Birtle Indian Residential School
- St. Peter's Ukrainian Catholic Church

Sites Map

This map highlights those nine buildings and sites (with green dots) that have major heritage significance. Orange dots locate six other buildings with slightly lesser heritage value.



Green Dots

- 1 Spring Park
- 2 Birtle United Church
- 3 Peters House
- 4 Shepherd House
- 5 Patterson House
- 6 Lime Kiln Site
- 7 Pratt Block
- 8 Former Union Bank
- 9 Birtle Post Office

Orange Dots

- 11 Herchmer House
- 12 Hatch House
- 13 Corr House
- 14 Craftsman-style House
- 15 Former Birtle Indian Residential School
- 16 St. Peter's Ukrainian Catholic Church

Spring Park

St. Clare Street



SPRING PARK is valued primarily because of its association with the origins of the community. As a stopping place for fresh water that was well known even in the early 19th century, the site became a notable camping spot for fur traders and then settlers in the 1870s. As agricultural settlement expanded in the late 1870s, and small villages sprang up, the Town of Birtle was a natural spot for community growth. The spring site is now a park, with a lovely gate and fence, set right in the heart of town.

Birtle United Church

684 Vine Street



BIRTLE UNITED CHURCH is the community's most important church building. The church is first a major connection to the Protestant roots of the founding settlement groups who were originally from Ontario, and secondly the best expression of the Gothic Revival architecture that defined such buildings in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Other examples that might also have expressed this quality have either been lost (Anglican, burned and replaced in the 1950s) or much-altered for new uses (Baptist as the Tourist Centre). Birtle United is an excellent example of those traditions, with fine woodwork and windows.

Shepherd House

902 Main Street



The SHEPHERD HOUSE is valued primarily because it is the community's best example of the kind of building technology that has defined Birtle since its inception – construction in stone. Built by Charles Durham, a master mason who also built several other surviving Birtle landmarks (Hatch House and Stewart House), the building is an exceptional example of a mason's skill, with stones laid expertly and to eye-catching effect. The house is valued because it has survived almost intact, with high levels of integrity both inside and out, and thus is one of the town's most complete and effective expressions of the Victorian/English way of life that defined Birtle's first decades. The house is also valued as a very good local example of the Gothic Revival style, the most popular architectural expression of the day, and defined here by its overall form, steep roof and many fine details.

John Patterson House

240 Centre Street



The PATTERSON HOUSE is valued for its architecture and for its connections to a celebrated Birtle family. A truly exceptional design, mostly in the Queen Anne style (popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries), but also with qualities reflecting more up-to-date architecture of the opening decades of the 1900s (in particular Arts and Crafts), the house is a local masterwork. The house also is significant for its mostly intact interior, which still boasts original floorplans, fine woodwork and staircases. The Pattersons were a notable Birtle family for more than 75 years, important players in the origins of the town and then for its development and success over the next many decades.

Peters House

737 St. Clare Street



The PETERS HOUSE is one of Birtle's important examples of stone construction, a defining architectural quality of the community. With long-standing connections to the Brown family (from 1898 until 1956), the house is a beloved local landmark, noted for its exquisite stonework by Charles Durham and for its picturesque and eclectic design, with Gothic Revival forms and details as well as a distinctive clipped gable roof.

Lime Kiln Site

Mill Park



The LIME KILN SITE is an important, and now rare, reminder of the kind of pioneer industrial and manufacturing activity required in the construction of buildings. It was here that the lime used for the production of mortar was produced by burning limestone (which is abundant in Birtle); the mortar produced here was used in the construction of nearly every foundation in town and in all the masonry buildings as well.

Pratt Block

688 Main Street



The PRATT BLOCK is one of Birtle's most important buildings. A landmark on Main Street, a fine example of stone construction (especially with both its north and east facades clear to view) and with notable connections to various of Birtle's business elite, the building is one of the community's proudest heritage sites.

Former Union Bank

738 Main Street



The FORMER UNION BANK, now the Birdtail Country Museum, is valued first as the site of a critical (and typical) service for any community – a bank. First developed as a Union Bank, the most ambitious banking operation active in small Manitoba communities in the early decades of the 20th century, the building eventually served as a Royal Bank from 1925 until 1969. The building is valued today as the site of the Birdtail Country Museum, the repository for the community's irreplaceable artifacts and historic documents.

Birtle Post Office

719 Main Street



The BIRTLE POST OFFICE is valued as the one historic government function that still serves Birtle. With the loss long ago of a land titles office, and more recently of St. Mary' Hospital and the old fire hall, the Post Office is the solitary reminder of the theme of civic activity. Built in 1938, the building is also important as a very good example of the kind of modest Art Deco style that the Federal Government was using at the time to distinguish its important role in small communities.

Sites of Heritage Interest

The following six buildings of slightly lesser heritage significance are noted here as Sites of Heritage Interest.

Herchmer House

675 St. Clare Street



The Herchmer House is the oldest building in Birtle, dating to 1882. While greatly altered over the years, the house still bears hints of its former self (in its interior configurations, wall heights and some finishes), and is well known for its stone foundation, being one of the places in Birtle that contains visible signs of the immovable boulders that still grace many town basements (walls and even floors). The house is historically associated with Lawrence Herchmer, an important government official who came to the Birtle area as the Indian Agent in 1876. Herchmer also served as Farm Instructor at the Birdtail Sioux Band, and as Divisional Agent for all reserves and bands within a 50-mile radius of Birtle. Herchmer became NWMP Commissioner in 1886, at which time he left the community.

Hatch House

401 Kent Street



The Hatch House has importance as the site of an informal maternity hospital, where midwife Mrs. Hatch brought more than 100 babies into the world. But the house also has importance architecturally, as a fine example of the craft of stone construction. With nary a crack, straight and solid after almost 120 years (it was built in 1896), and expressing a beautiful sense of proportion and placement of the stones, the walls are a tribute to the mason, Charles Durham, who undertook many other masonry commissions in Birtle over the years.

Corr House

907 St. Clare Street



The Corr House is a good example of the kind of grand houses built in many small Manitoba towns for the merchant class of the early 20th century. Dating to 1902, the house was home to the family of Allan Corr, who was a major retail operator in Birtle for more than 25 years. The house is also valued as an important and fascinating example of building technologies and styles. It combines typical Queen Anne-style forms and details (in particular the corner tower and wealth of wooden details in the gable ends and porch), with concrete block construction.

Craftsman-style House

691 St. Clare Street



This house, from around 1920, is an excellent example of the Craftsman style, a very popular architectural form used for domestic design in North America from about 1890 to 1930. The name of the style comes from a popular magazine published in the early 1900s by furniture maker Gustav Stickley called *The Craftsman*, which featured house and furniture designs. This Birtle example, which is quite rare in a small-town Manitoba context, is a textbook example of the type, with a low-pitched roof, deep eaves, exposed rafters and decorative brackets, and a broad front porch. The interior has been well preserved, with many of the typical features of the style— exquisite woodwork and Frank Lloyd Wright-type details—still intact.

Former Birtle Indian Residential School

North Hill



The Birtle Indian Residential School is one of only two sites that remain in Manitoba to recall the history of residential school activity. The site is thus one of Birtle's most notable places. However, all the buildings at the site, and especially the old school, are in very dilapidated condition and some other form of commemoration will likely have to be considered.

St. Peter's Ukrainian Catholic Church

672 Lundy Street



St. Peter's Ukrainian Catholic Church is valued primarily as an expression of the changing face of Birtle in the mid-20th century, as Catholics from the Rossburn and St. Lazare areas began moving into the community. This church is also valued as a good example of Ukrainian church architectural traditions, with its typical form, round-arched windows, signature banyas (towers) and colourful interior.



Parting thoughts

The strength of a nation is derived from the integrity of its homes.

— Confucius

A country without a past has the emptiness of a barren continent; and a city without old buildings is like a man without a memory.

— Graeme Shankland