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Researching Winnipeg Part II

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Resources for the Study of Urban History in the Public Archives of
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PART II - Researching Winnipeg

If the example of Winnipeg is any indication of the availability of source material for Canadian urban studies, the student of recent urban history has at his disposal a mass of sources. Indeed, the very prodigality of source materials bars completeness and the student of Canadian urban development can only sample the wide variety before him and compensate by the judiciousness of his choices for the inevitable omissions.

The list which follows is thus in no sense an exhaustive bibliography; it does not include all the sources used in the study of Winnipeg for the period 1874-1914. It only attempts to outline the types of material used, and to evaluate the more important of them.

Public Documents: Since the City of Winnipeg has no organized city archives, MUNICIPAL DOCUMENTS are scattered throughout the City's public buildings. As might be expected, the largest concentration was found in the City Clerk's Office. The public documents located here include City Council Minutes (in printed form after 1900), by-laws, general correspondence, departmental correspondence, special committee minutes and correspondence, letter books, lists of electors, municipal manuals, and so on.

The incoming correspondence was the single most useful source material for my study of Winnipeg. This

correspondence is organized chronologically and is remarkably intact; at no time was I annoyed by missing items. The utility of this correspondence stems not only from its completeness, but also from the large number of supporting documents found with the letters. Correspondence from various municipal officials and departments often had attached special and/or annual reports. More important, since such items were also available in the specific civic department's records, were the large number of documents from private agencies and individuals. The Margaret Scott Nursing Mission, for example, included extensive statistics and explanatory statements in their annual requests for financial assistance. Finally, the correspondence file contained leads to provincial and federal documents. A letter from the Department of the Interior, for example, would have a file number which was most useful for locating items of importance on Winnipeg in that department's records in Ottawa.

Other civic departments also have valuable collections of records. Two of importance are the City's Health and Engineering Departments.

For a general and official view of urban development in Winnipeg during this period these municipal documents were ample. Indeed, in many cases I found excellent material that could not be utilized in a general survey. The annual reports of Winnipeg's Building Inspector, for example,

contain extensive data on housing. All new buildings are recorded in the records with such information as location, cost, type of foundation, list of utilities, etc. Since small area data for Winnipeg is scarce, these reports have special value.

PROVINCIAL DOCUMENTS contain a good deal of excellent material on Winnipeg. Sessional papers, the annual reports of the Provincial Board of Health and the Department of Agriculture and Immigration, and several royal commissions are indispensable. These public documents not only illuminate the steady and often tangled relationship between the City of Winnipeg and the provincial government, but provide much useful information on such urban problems as public health, water supply, and prostitution. No historian of Winnipeg can safely ignore this material.

FEDERAL DOCUMENTS were a fairly important source, especially for such subjects as immigration and railways. The records of the Departments of Agriculture, Immigration, and Public Works were those most often consulted. Newspapers: The Public Archives and Provincial Library of Manitoba have complete runs of all English-language newspapers published in Winnipeg during this period. These include the Manitoba Free Press, 1872-1914; the Winnipeg Daily Times, 1879-1885; the Manitoba Sun, 1886-1889; The Daily Nor'Wester, 1894-1898; the Winnipeg

Telegram, 1898-1914; the Winnipeg Tribune, 1890-1914; and several other newspapers of short duration. Together, these newspapers furnish the historian of Winnipeg with a continuous account of urban life. As the newspapers multiplied and expanded, they included more and more city news, printed official notices, published letters from citizens, and carried extensive statistics, maps, and photographs. In short, newspapers are easily one of the most useful sources for a history of Winnipeg.

One area of great potential that was not looked at for this particular study of Winnipeg was the immigrant press. Winnipeg had numerous newspapers published in various foreign languages and with very few exceptions none have been examined by serious researchers. Since these newspapers often furnished the foreigners' only reading material, the editorials and stories that attracted their readers are the most sensitive mirrors of what went on in immigrant minds. In short, until these newspapers are examined closely, all histories of Winnipeg will remain incomplete. Fortunately, the Public Archives and Provincial Library of Manitoba, and the Winnipeg Public Library, have fairly complete runs of most ethnic newspapers.

Manuscripts: This type of source is very uneven. On the one hand, the papers of such organizations as the Margaret Scott Nursing Mission, All Peoples' Mission, the Winnipeg Board of Trade, The Canadian Club of

Winnipeg, the Western Canadian Immigration Association, and the Winnipeg Development and Industrial Bureau are not only readily available, but are especially significant. They contain descriptions, analyses, and statistics of all segments of Winnipeg society. In short, these reports and records greatly simplify the task of charting the social, intellectual, economic, and political life of Winnipeg. On the other hand, personal papers are very scarce. Indeed, only the J. S. Woodsworth Papers at the Public Archives of Canada contained significant data on Winnipeg. This lack of personal papers was keenly felt in my research on Winnipeg and this is one area where efforts must be made to reach private resources. The search for such manuscripts should include the papers of ordinary citizens as well as civic leaders, for the former can often illuminate otherwise hidden aspects of a community's development.

Contemporary Accounts: The number of addresses, articles, monographs, and pamphlets written by contemporaries is quite large. The Public Archives and Provincial Library of Manitoba have rich collections, as does the Winnipeg Public Library. The most useful journals are the Manitoba Historical Society Transactions (Series I), The Canadian Magazine, The Dominion, University of Toronto Studies, and the Canadian Annual Review.

Three contemporary periodicals deserve special mention. The Canadian Municipal Journal (1905-1914) and the Western Municipal News (1906-1914) contain numerous articles on Winnipeg, as well as short biographies of leading Winnipeggers. More important, these two periodicals, with their extensive coverage of Canadian municipal affairs, are a valuable source of reference for general urban development. The third "periodical" is Henderson's Directory of Winnipeg, published annually from 1881. It contains lists of adult residents, their addresses and occupations, and sometimes their place of origin. Henderson's also published business directories of Winnipeg. An interesting example of how these directories can be put to systematic use is R. D. Fromson, "Acculturation or Assimilation: A Geographic Analysis of Residential Segregation of Selected Ethnic Groups: Metropolitan Winnipeg, 1951-1961," unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1965.

Like statistics, these contemporary sources must be read and used with care. Frequently they constitute more of an accurate reflection of the author's biases than a description or analysis of what was happening. As such, however, they serve as an index to the intellectual history of the period, a convenient atlas of the city's mood.

Statistical: The volumes of the Canadian census contain general statistics on Winnipeg. Unfortunately, these are

rarely broken down into wards or other small areas. I did find, however, that the local newspapers carried large amounts of small area data. Although this information must be used with extreme care, its compilers were, for the most part, quite candid. The reports of city departments include not only statistics, but explanatory comments on the state of Winnipeg as well. The annual reports of the Winnipeg Health Officer and the Building Inspector are especially noteworthy. Without them the human dimension of Winnipeg would have been most difficult to capture. The annual reports of federal and provincial departments also contain useful data, as do the papers of private agencies.

Visual: Both the Provincial Archives and the City Clerk's Office contain maps and pictures of all kinds. Other useful sources are newspapers, the reports of both private and public agencies, city departments, and a number of contemporary accounts. An excellent collection of maps of Winnipeg for the pre-1914 period can be found in H. A. Hosse, "The Areal Growth and Functional Development of Winnipeg from 1870 to 1913," unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1956.

Notwithstanding all this material, I found it necessary to compile several maps from a wide variety of sources to illustrate specific aspects of urban development. The point is that such

an exercise is possible because of the wealth of material available. For example, the sources used for a map of the growth of street railway trackage between 1882 and 1914 included the annual reports of the street railway companies, newspapers, city by-laws, other contemporary maps, and one or two articles in journals.

It should also be noted that much of the physical configuration of pre-1914 Winnipeg remains intact, despite the great changes which have occurred since the outbreak of World War I. Walking about in the sections of Winnipeg where the artifacts of the period still stand, or once stood, is a useful way to cultivate the historical imagination necessary to order the fragments of the census return and the library.

Secondary Works: Apart from a growing number of M.A. and Ph.D. theses, scholarly secondary works on Winnipeg are scarce. The Manitoba Historical Society Transactions (Series III) are, of course, significant exceptions to this generalization. They contain numerous specialized articles on Winnipeg. Unfortunately, the various studies of Manitoba's ethnic groups are weak when it comes to dealing with Winnipeg. The exception is V. Turek, Poles in Manitoba (Toronto, 1967), which contains some excellent material on Winnipeg. Turek's work goes a long way toward indicating what can be done when foreign language source material is used. Since the City of Winnipeg plays so important a

role in Manitoba's history, it is natural that W. L. Morton's, Manitoba: A History, contains considerable reference to Winnipeg. Indeed, this work is still the best interpretive introduction to the history of Winnipeg.

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