

99 EUCLID AVENUE – BARBER HOUSE
Architect Unknown, ca.1865



At one time, 99 Euclid Avenue was simply the modest North Point Douglas home of pioneer journalist and businessman E.L. Barber. In recent years, however, the two-storey log structure has stood vacant behind a protective chain-link fence, the subject of historical and public controversy.

Uncertainties about the background of the house and its original owner, coupled with only a partial completion of measures to preserve and restore the site, have masked three points on which there is apparent agreement:

- this building is a rare surviving link to Winnipeg's colonial past.
- It is on land continuously occupied by members of the Barber family for nearly a century.
- It also is a rare urban example of the Red River frame construction method employed by early settlers.

Edmund (or Edmond) Lorenzo Barber (1834-1909), a native of Hamden, Connecticut, migrated to the St. Paul area in 1854. He worked for the *Minnesota Democrat*, then associated with cousin George Brott in a land company and dry goods business. In 1859 or 1860, he located to the Red River Settlement as Brott's agent.

Barber subsequently opened at least one dry goods shop and traded in furs, hides and firewood. His 1862 marriage to Barbara Logan connected him with a well-established Red River family. He also developed business ties with John Christian Schultz, a rising entrepreneur and political figure, through involvement in Schultz's *Nor'Wester* and some joint real estate transactions. Historical researchers have been unable to verify, however, a commonly told story that Barbers aided Schultz when he escaped custody of Louis Riel's provisional government during the 1869-70 rebellion.

Upon their marriage, the Barbers occupied Thistle Cottage on what was then Lot 227 in the northwestern part of Point Douglas. Origins of that two-room building are uncertain. Some sources suggest it was erected by Barber in 1862; others hypothesize that it was established at an earlier date by a previous owner/occupant, or that it had been moved to the property from another location.

Whatever its background, the cottage soon was inadequate for Barber's growing family. By 1868, a two-storey, seven or eight-room log house had been added to the site. This is the dwelling that remains today at 99 Euclid Avenue. Its exact construction date is unknown. It also is not certain that the house was built by or for Barber. Some records suggest he may have acquired an existing building and relocated it to Lot 227.

The home sits on rough-hewn blocks of stacked, bedded and mortared local river limestone. Its superstructure consists of hand-squared, solid oak logs organized in the vernacular Red River frame style, with a gable roof and end wall major façade. Distinctive original features include a slide hall plan and diamond-shaped gable window on the front (southeast) elevation.

Red River frame was an adaptation of the post-on-sill building method popular in New France. It involved setting vertical logs into a sill by use of tenons, then fitting horizontal logs between the grooved uprights. A wall plate completed the structural frame. Windows and doors were set between minor posts or beside major uprights. In the case of Barber House, joints were filled with mortar through a flush pointing technique; rough-cast plaster coated the exterior; and the roof had hand-split wooden shingles.

The home's front elevation had two rectangular windows and an east-end entrance at ground level. Above were three smaller openings and the gable window. A one-storey veranda topped by a balustrade once extended across this façade, while a wooden enclosure sheltered the doorway. It is not known whether these were original elements or later additions. Most of the veranda was demolished sometime after 1959. Prior to then, it had been enclosed with windows and the balustrade had been removed.

Various other changes were made to the premises over the years. The exterior was stuccoed in the early 1920s, save for the gable ends which had wood siding, and the roof was clad with asphalt shingles. A balloon frame porch on a foundation of stacked and mortared bricks was added to the west side, while a wood frame annex with gable and shed roofs stood at the rear from c. 1905. A separate limestone block foundation indicates that the annex was preceded by another structure, perhaps Thistle Cottage.

Interior changes included the addition of wood paneling, floor coverings, and various layers of paint and wallpaper. The staircase was altered, and a Carron stove situated in the wall between the hallway and parlour was removed after a 1960 fire. Nonetheless, much remains of the original woodwork and fittings.

99 Euclid Avenue initially stood in a pastoral setting, not far from the Logan estate and winding Red River. During 1870-74 when the Province of Manitoba and City of Winnipeg were being formed, it appeared that Point Douglas would become a fashionable residential district. Barber was among the real estate investors who banked on that expectation. He also tried to capitalize on the economic and population changes that occurred after 1870, becoming involved in a store

at Portage la Prairie, a saloon at Pembina, a farming venture, the Winnipeg Ice Co., Manitoba Soap, Candle and Oil Works, and efforts to revive the *Nor'Wester* which ceased publication in 1869.

Most of these endeavours failed, forcing Barber by the mid-1870s to sell some of his property to satisfy creditors. From 1881 until his death, he operated a real estate office and also issued marriage licenses. However, he was dogged by debt for much of that period and remained on the periphery of the city's social and business elite.

Point Douglas also did not realize its early promise. Other areas, particularly in the Hudson's Bay Reserve and south of the Assiniboine River, provided attractive residential alternatives – even more so after the Canadian Pacific Railway's main line and shops arrived on the Point in the early 1880s, stimulating development of heavy industry, warehouses, cheap workers' accommodation, and eventually a Red Light district.

The Barbers retained a large lot as part of their holding, thus permitting some semblance of their former environment, complete with a barn, greenhouse and other outbuildings. After Mrs. Barber died in 1925, two daughters, Harriet Graham and Lily Sparrow, occupied 99 Euclid Avenue up to the late 1950s. The house continued in family ownership, but was rented out to other parties until its purchase in 1974 by the City of Winnipeg as part of a local revitalization program.

Assessment by the City's Historical Buildings Committee in 1979 proposed a Grade II listing for Barber House. However, it also was recommended that the building be recorded and carefully dismantled because of its poor structural condition. Subsequent negotiations led in 1985-86 to government support for restoration of the dwelling under the auspices of a community group. Considerable work occurred in 1986 and 1988-89. As well, Barber House was declared a provincial historic site in 1987. However, various problems left the project incomplete by the end of 1990.