

381 SHERBROOK STREET – SHERBROOK POOL
Pratt and Ross, 1930



For more than six decades, the walls of Sherbrook Pool have resounded with the splashing, chatter and cheers of Winnipeggers at play, in competition, or learning to swim and save lives.

Those experiences became a potent force in 1991-92 when citizens successfully rallied against a proposal to demolish the building. Some \$1.7 million subsequently were committed through the City of Winnipeg's capital budget and the Canada-Manitoba Infrastructure Works Program to repair and upgrade the West End facility.

This public support reflected swimming's long-standing popularity as a healthy, relatively inexpensive activity. Up to the turn of the century, however, only privately owned Turkish baths were available to local residents on a year-round basis. The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) established the city's first indoor pool at 276 Portage Avenue (the former Birks Building) in 1901. Other YMCA pools soon followed on Selkirk Avenue and Vaughan Street.

The early 1900s also saw greater willingness among civic voters and politicians to use tax

dollars for amenities such as parks, libraries and bath houses. After considering the question in 1908 and 1910, the City opened its first public pool in 1912 at Pritchard Avenue and Charles Street in the North End. Two years later, a similar structure appeared on Cornish Avenue in Armstrong's Point. Despite requests from other districts, no further municipal baths were developed until Sherbrook Pool was erected as a relief project during the Great Depression.

Opening ceremonies on March 1, 1931 included diving and synchronized swimming displays by the Water Babies, a troupe of girls trained by Mrs. Harrison, the pool's supervisor and wife of George Harrison, superintendent of public baths. As Winnipeg's first and for many years only Olympic-size pool, this facility went on to host many competitions and serve as the training centre for advanced swimmers.

Built by general contractors Hazelton and Walin for \$125,000, Sherbrook Pool consists of reinforced concrete footings, foundation and floor slabs, steel beams, brick walls faced with Alsip red tapestry brick, Tyndall stone accents, and a roof of reinforced gypsum slabs, cork insulation, felt, and gravel.

In design, the structure's sharp, straight edges, symmetry, stepped-back main entrance, and subdued ornamentation are characteristic of the Art Deco style popular in North America in the 1930s. This style emerged from the modernist movement which rejected historicism in favour of more streamlined and simplified visual representations of the machine age.

The front (west) façade is divided into seven bays by thin brick pilasters. The set-back entrance at the northern end is highlighted by stone surrounds. At ground level, each of the other bays originally held sets of three rectangular windows with stone lug sills. All but one of these sets are now covered by concrete slabs. Trios of smaller square openings, also with stone sills, continue to light the second storey. A stone band and pilaster caps are found at the roof line.

The south elevation features three large openings and several unadorned brick pilasters. In contrast, the north wall lacks pilasters and its windows are not organized in sets. In 1961, glass-block units were installed in place of single-pane openings on the west and south façades.

The interior is dominated by the pool which measures 15.3 by 22.9 metres, has both shallow and deep ends, and originally featured a diving tower. The pool's floor occupies much of the basement, along with locker, shower, boiler, machinery, and fuel rooms. A lobby, front desk and committee room, all with terrazzo tile, are on the main floor. Wooden seating takes up the north, east and west sides of the second level. As well, a superintendent's suite is behind the north-end bleachers.

Sherbrook Pool was designed by Ralph Benjamin Pratt (1872-1950) and Donald Aynsley Ross (1878-1956) who began a long-standing association in 1906 and gained prominence across western Canada through their work for the Canadian Northern Railway (CNoR), among other clients.

The partners' local projects included the Rosemount Apartments, Garry (Belgica) Block, Power Building, reconstruction of the Scott Block (1915), numerous facilities for the Winnipeg Electric Railway Co., garages for the Breen Motor Co. and Leonard-McLaughlin Motors, the Horse Show Amphitheatre, Polo Park race track, Deer Lodge Hotel (St. James), and Stanley Mineral Springs and Brewery Co. plant (St. Boniface). They also assisted with development of the Electric Railway Chambers, Northern Electric Building and Winnipeg Civic Auditorium.

Born in London, England, Pratt trained at the South Kensington School of Art. He was in Winnipeg by 1892 and later secured employment with the Canadian Pacific Railway. He switched in 1901 to the CNoR where he designed many stations and shops. He also was president of the Manitoba Association of Architects (MAA) in 1917-19.

Ross was a native Winnipegger who studied in Toronto at Upper Canada College, the University of Toronto and School of Practical Science, obtaining arts and engineering degrees. He was a mining engineer in British Columbia before joining the CNoR in 1901 where he held posts as locating and terminal engineer. He also was president or director of various realty companies, a vice-president of the MAA, and chairman of the Winnipeg Town Planning Commission's Aesthetic Development Committee.