



An Architectural Review of Knox Presbyterian Church

630 Spadina Avenue (at Harbord)

Architect: James Wilson Gray (died March 28, 1922)

Cornerstone laid: January 26, 1907

Service of Dedication: January 10, 1909

Seating Capacity: 1000+-

In 1906, it was decided to move the location of Knox Church to Spadina Avenue. Land was purchased for \$32,000, and a new school house was built in yellow brick at the back of the sanctuary. James Wilson Gray, an architect in the congregation, designed the new church, and a stained glass window is dedicated in his honour. The cornerstone was laid by another member of the congregation, His Honour William Mortimer Clark, who became Lieutenant Governor of Ontario in 1903. In 1961 the Knox Fellowship Centre was added to the Church and Schoolhouse. In 1974, the church was renovated and the pulpit was restored to its original position.

Knox Church was built as a combination of what is called *Romanesque Revival* and *Gothic Revival*. *Romanesque Revival* was practiced between about 1890 and 1910. Examples of this style are Old City Hall (1899), the Ontario Legislative Building at Queen's Park, and University College in the University of Toronto. *Gothic Revival* was practiced between about 1830 and 1890. Examples of this style are the British Parliament Buildings (1836), the Canadian Parliament Buildings in Ottawa (1859 and 1917), and St. James Cathedral (1853) at Church and King streets.

Romanesque Revival is an adaptation of Romanesque architecture that was built mainly in France between 650 and 1200 A.D. The Roman Empire had collapsed in Europe 300 years earlier. Conquering tribes had settled and they had been converted to Christianity. Under kings such as Charlemagne monasteries and cathedrals were built as spiritual and intellectual centres offering help and refuge to the poor. Note the heavy solid-looking stone buildings, steep roofs, small-arched windows, irregular roof lines, and bell tower. The three-door entrance was developed at this time as a symbol for the Trinity. Carvings of leaves and plants were used as decoration.

Slowly from about 1100 to 1600 Romanesque changed to Gothic (1100 is about the time the Normans invaded Britain). This also began in France and spread to Germany, Britain, the Low Countries, and Italy. The pointed arch was invented. Less stone is needed in wall construction and this enabled larger windows to be used. Stained glass windows with Biblical scenes were used. Buttresses and gargoyles were seen on the building exteriors. High, vaulted ceilings, and a cross-shaped floor plan were used.

Elements from the Reformation are also evident at Knox. In 1517, Martin Luther began the Reformation of the church in Germany, which had been corrupted by medieval teachings and practices. Reformers sought to restore the church to its early purity in doctrine and discipline, stressing the truth of the Bible. Protestant architecture is generally less ornate so that emphasis can be placed on the Bible lecture and pulpit for the preaching of the word of God.

The church seats about 1000 people and is cross-shaped in design. The present Casavant organ was installed after WWII, and it commemorates those who died in both World Wars. Flags from the Toronto Scottish Regiment were brought to Knox on three separate occasions. In 1939, 1965, and 1974, Elizabeth the Queen Mother, a colonel in the regiment, participated in these ceremonies.

Stained glass is a medium that came to the fore during the Gothic period. Knox was regarded as having the finest stained glass windows in Toronto when it opened. They were designed and installed by the firm Robert McCausland Ltd. of Toronto. Founded in 1850 here in Toronto, they are the earliest continuing stained glass window studio in North America.



Construction of Knox Church, 1908

Primary source: notes by John Corcoran, former member of Knox Presbyterian Church, edited and revised by Jason Vanderhill

Ministers:

Dr. Alexander B. Winchester, 1906 - 1921

Dr. John Gibson Inkster, 1921 - 1939

Dr. T. Christie Innis, 1939 - 1944

Reverend Robert Barr, 1947 - 1953

Dr. William Fitch, 1955 - 1972

Dr. J. Glyn Owen, 1974 - 1986

Dr. Mariano DiGangi, 1987 - 1992

Dr. John A. Vissers, 1995 - 1999

Dr. J. Kevin Livingston, 2000 - present