

## Churches of the North

From the earliest days the construction of churches in the north of the province has been marked by two considerations: a scarcity of building materials and a compensating resourcefulness and ingenuity. Consequently they deserve to be treated as a group of their own. One of the oldest surviving churches, St. Paul's, Churchill, is a case in point. Constructed in 1892 by the Reverend Joseph Lofthouse, the church was built of iron, prefabricated and shipped from Great Britain aboard the Prince Rupert in 1890 (Figure 79). This avoided the difficulty of importing timber or hauling it from the interior. Iron buildings of this type were not uncommon in the nineteenth century - examples can be found in Australia and Africa for instance - but they are comparatively rare in Canada. Indeed their use in the north is a fascinating episode. Although St. Paul's is the only known surviving example in Manitoba, it replaced an earlier church of iron, also at Churchill while records indicate a prefabricated structure was sent to York Factory from Britain by the HBC as early as 1783.

Another northern church with important historical associations is Christ Church, The Pas. It is here that the Native Anglican priest, Henry Budd established the first mission north of Red River in 1840. Again like St. Paul's, Churchill, the present church is a late nineteenth century replacement (built in 1897) of an earlier structure. But in this case it is built of wood frame along lines similar to churches found in the south. The nave however is distinguished by framed buttresses (Figure 80). Inside one can see iron tablets displaying the fundamentals of Christian faith in Chippewyan as well as pews and furnishings which date from the late 1840s (Figure 81). These are thought to be the handiwork of men from the Franklin Relief Expedition who wintered here in 1847-48. The tablets, pews and furnishings were all taken from the original church which opened in 1850.



**Figure 79.**  
St. Paul's, Churchill, 1892.



**Figure 80.**  
Christ Church, The Pas, 1897. (PAM)

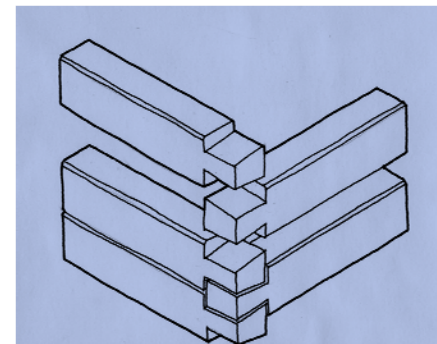


**Figure 81.**  
Interior, Christ Church, The Pas. (PAM)

Although many of the HBC posts in northern Manitoba were visited by Anglican missionaries in the nineteenth century, no other northern churches survive from before 1900. Moreover, the church of St. James, Grand Rapids is one of the few remaining examples from the early twentieth century. Now bereft of its original tower, it was constructed of wood frame in 1902, with a chancel added three years later. Again like Christ Church it conforms to architectural conventions found in the south (Figure 82).

Although wood frame has been and still is the most common technique used in the construction of northern churches, there have been some notable exceptions. During the 1920s parishioners constructed St. James, Thicket Portage of log. It is important, however, to note that the builders of the church employed the dovetail system rather than the Red River frame technique still in use a generation earlier (Figure 83). Also built of log, though larger in size with a monumental tower was St. Alban's, Easterville (Figure 84). St. Alban's was a casualty of hydro-electric development and it has been replaced by a new church of wood frame. Another departure from wood frame was cement block, which can be seen in two churches built at Flin Flon immediately after the Second World War: St. James (1948) and St. Peter's (1952-56) (Figure 85). Together with St. Matthew's, Gilbert Plains (1904), they are the only Anglican churches built of this material in Manitoba.

The post-war period has seen radical changes in the style of northern churches. After more than half a century the ubiquitous wood frame church has given way to a greater individualism in design. From now on even the simplest churches exhibit a greater variety in their plan, their use of materials or their massing and proportion. St. John's, York Landing for instance is organized around a central tower with two low-pitched blocks housing the entrance hall and chapel (Figure 86).



**Figure 82.**  
St. James, Grand Rapids, 1902. (PAM)

**Figure 83.**  
Principles of dovetail log construction.



**Figure 84.**

St. Alban's, Easterville, 1963; burned 1988.  
(PAM)



**Figure 85.**

St. Peter's, Flin Flon, 1952-56.



**Figure 86.**

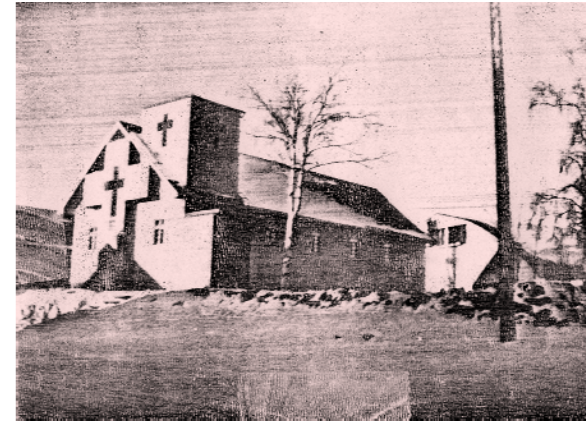
St. John's, York Landing.



Among larger churches, St. Simon's, Lynn Lake (1959-60) is an early example of the way changing taste affected church design even where economy of means was of paramount importance (Figure 87). Built of frame construction with stucco cladding the church is particularly striking for its use of the Latin cross. This motif dominates the façade and is repeated on the tower and in the windows of the nave.

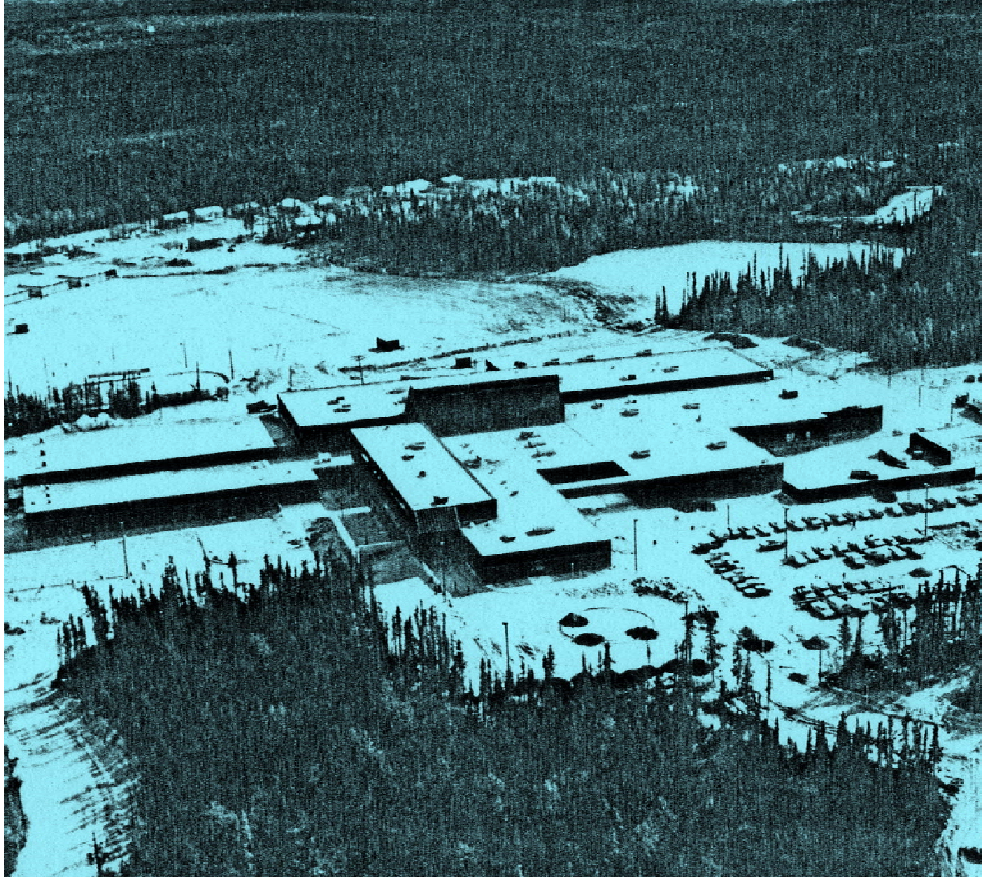
While the 1950s and 60s were marked by innovations in design it would be a mistake to think that congregations did not build with an eye to the past. At St. John the Baptist, Split Lake, volunteers from "Operation Beaver" helped construct a spacious frame church, utilitarian in form and detail, but introducing a familiar steeple rising high above the gable end. At St. Andrew's, Gillam, a steeple is similarly employed to signify function, since the main body of the church is housed in a building brought from the former radar site at Bird. The grafting of traditional ideas or familiar forms on to a contemporary design can also be seen at St. Mark's, Norway House. Here the main body of the church is purely functional, but the plan with offset tower and two entrances on the liturgical south side of the church is rooted in the English tradition (Figure 88).

Recent years have been marked by a continuing adaptation to local conditions, especially in resource based towns. At Leaf Rapids Anglican, services are now held in an ecumenical chapel housed within the glass and steel town centre designed by architects Stecheson and Katz (Figure 89).



**Figure 87.**  
St. Simon's, Lynn Lake, 1959-60.

**Figure 88.**  
St. Mark's, Norway House, 1965.



**Figure 89.**  
Cross of Faith Ecumenical Church, Leaf Rapids.