



**ENGLISH GARDEN, 460 ASSINIBOINE PARK DRIVE**

**BOY WITH THE BOOT STATUE**

City of Winnipeg  
Historical Buildings & Resources Committee  
Researcher: M. Peterson  
November 2022

This building embodies the following heritage values as described in the *Historical Resources By-law, 55/2014* (consolidated update July 13, 2016):

- (a) The Boy With The Boot Statue is an early example of a public fountain, financed by a local organization and supported by the City of Winnipeg since its erection in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century;
- (b) The statue is associated with both the public celebration of the British monarchy and the evolution of the facilities at one of Winnipeg's best-known parks, Assiniboine;
- (c) It is one of the earliest public fountains maintained by the City of Winnipeg;
- (d) It is representative of the style of fountains of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and similar statues are found in cities around the world;
- (e) The statue has been located at City Hall and in Assiniboine Park, presently occupying a highly visible location at the English Garden; and
- (f) The statue has not been significantly altered.

## ENGLISH GARDEN, 460 ASSINIBOINE PARK DRIVE

### BOY WITH THE BOOT STATUE

Winnipeg's first City Hall was officially opened in March 1876, the brick structure costing nearly \$40,000 to complete (Plate 1), one of only a few substantial structures in the City that had incorporated two-and-a-half years earlier.<sup>1</sup> But the structure had been built over a poorly filled Brown's Creek. The fill could not hold the weight of the building and cracks began to appear shortly after it opened. An addition was completed in the winter of 1882-1883 but it too was poorly built. The entire structure had to be propped up because of these structural problems, ultimately being torn down in April 1883.<sup>2</sup>

The second City Hall, the famous "Gingerbread" building, was erected amid controversy between 1884 and 1886. Debate over location, construction materials, architect fees and other problems kept the building in the local papers throughout its construction. However, the completed structure was well-built and served the civic government and the citizens of Winnipeg for nearly 80 years (Plates 2 and 3).<sup>3</sup> Three years later the City Market Building was completed to the west of City Hall adding a major retail element to the area (Plate 4).

In 1897, the City, along with the entire British Commonwealth, was preparing for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebration, the official ceremony taking place on June 22<sup>nd</sup>. In April, Mrs. Bidwell Lane<sup>4</sup> came before City Council as a representative of the Christian Endeavor Society, a group that had formed in the early 1880s in the United States and spread throughout the British Empire to minister to youth. The group planned to erect a fountain with a bust of the Queen. Samuel Hooper was reported to be the architect and the cost of \$1,800 was to be raised by "dime

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Begg and Walter R. Nursey, Ten Years in Winnipeg (Winnipeg, MB: Times Printing and Publishing House, 1879), pp. 127-128.

<sup>2</sup> Alan F.J. Artibise, "Winnipeg's City Halls 1876-1965," in Manitoba Pageant, Volume 22, Number 3 (Spring 1977), online version, October 13, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>4</sup> Winnipeg Free Press, June 27, 2020, p. F11.

subscriptions...collected by junior endeavorers [sic]”.<sup>5</sup> Work on the fountain progressed slowly and it wasn't until the following year, on July 16, that the Jubilee Fountain was ready for unveiling, in a ceremony attended by Canada's Governor General Lord Aberdeen. The fountain included the bust of Queen Victoria set on a tall pillar and a bronze statue of a small boy holding a leaking boot set on a shorter limestone base and known as the Boy With The Boot (Plates 5 and 6).

Soon after its unveiling, a question as to who would pay for the water used in the fountain arose. The issue went unresolved and the water was turned off on August 20, 1898. It was turned back on two days later and citizens “signified their approval...by generously patronizing the drinking cups.”<sup>6</sup>

Neither the Queen Victoria bust nor the Boy With The Boot Statue would stay in this location. The Queen Victoria Statue remained in front of City Hall and was still standing during the building's demolition in 1962 (Plates 7 and 8). It was moved across Main Street but because of the construction of the Centennial Concert Hall, it was moved again<sup>7</sup> and in 1967, it was rededicated in the English Garden at Assiniboine Park (Plate 9).

The Boy With The Boot Statue was moved before 1913 when a new driveway was built in front of City Hall (Plates 10 and 11). Its new location was in Assiniboine Park on a base of rocks (Plate 12) near the Duck Pond (Plate 13). Winnipeg's first Public Parks Board demonstrated remarkable foresight when it purchased 115 hectares of land along the south side of the Assiniboine River, west of Winnipeg in 1904 for the creation of a city park (Plate 14).<sup>8</sup> The development of Assiniboine Park, originally called City Park, was based on models developed in England and

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<sup>5</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, April 15, 1897, p. 5. Another newspaper report suggests the group collected \$1,500 worth of nickels to pay for the project. Winnipeg Free Press, Jan. 24, 1953, p. 3. In 1899, a concert and lecture were held at Grace Church “...for the purpose of clearing off the balance on the Jubilee fountain.” Winnipeg Tribune, April 15, 1899, p. 8

<sup>6</sup> Manitoba Free Press, Aug. 22, 1898, p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Winnipeg Free Press, January 13, 1966, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> “The History and Development of Assiniboine Park and Zoo in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada,” report for the City of Winnipeg, Parks and Recreation Department (Metro), 1972. Below as “Assiniboine Park and Zoo”.

Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and popularized by the City Beautiful Movement, an early urban planning effort which had its beginning in Canada in 1893.

Frederick G. Todd, a prominent landscape architect was commissioned to design Assiniboine Park. Todd apprenticed with the renown Olmsted firm, founded by Frederick Law Olmsted, co-designer of Central Park, New York- founder of American landscape architecture and the nation's foremost park designer. During Todd's tenure, Olmsted's sons perpetuated their father's designs, ideals and philosophy. Todd was sent to Montreal to implement the firm's design for Mount Royal Park and eventually settled there and started his own practice.

Todd designed Assiniboine Park in the English Landscape Style with large open meadows, curvilinear roads and free-form bodies of water. The park officially opened on Victoria Day 1909 with a zoo with bear pits and corrals for native animals, formal gardens, a Pavilion designed by J.D. Atchison, and duck pond and later a Palm House. Other amenities followed: cricket pitch, Leo Mol Sculpture Gardens, Lyric Theatre, and more recently, The Leaf-Canada's Diversity Gardens. It is all accessed from the north by a concrete footbridge built in 1931 to replace earlier pontoon bridges crossing the river. Today, the Park covers nearly 4,500 hectares.

In the early 1950s, the Park Board decided to enhance one of the Park's popular attractions, the English Garden. Established in 1927, it featured 1.2 hectares of flowers, shrubs and trees along its winding paths. In 1952, a new formal entrance was planned, which included a rockery, pool, circular path, ornamental gates and the Boy With The Boot Statue (Plate 15). The cost of the new entrance was funded by the Order of Rotary International Fellowship and it was dedicated in June 1953 as the International Goodwill Garden.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> "Assiniboine Park and Zoo," op. cit.; Winnipeg Free Press, June 21, 1952, p. 3, January 24, 1953, p. 3, May 21, 1953, p. 14, and June 16, 1953, p. 33; Winnipeg Tribune, August 21, 1952, p. 16; and C. Macdonald, A City at Leisure: An Illustrated History of Parks and Recreation Services in Winnipeg, 1893-1993 (Winnipeg, MB: City of Winnipeg, Parks and Recreation Department, 1995), p. 102.

## **STYLE**

The statue is based on traditional examples of fountains, and in the case of this particular subject, there are a number of examples still standing in the United States, Europe and even Cuba. Presently, the statue in Sandusky, Ohio, erected in 1876, appears to be the earliest known example. The Winnipeg statue of 1897 would be considered one of the earlier versions and the only one yet identified in Canada.

## **CONSTRUCTION**

The bronze Boy With The Boot Statue is 1.2 metres tall and weighs approximately 140 kilograms. Its construction history is unclear and the origin of the reason for its creation range from remembering a drowned Italian newspaper seller, to a Civil War drummer-boy who carried water to his fallen comrades, to a young firefighter who used his boot in a bucket chain or emptied it after the fire was out.

The earliest known reference to the statue appears in the 1875 catalogue of the J.L. Mott Iron Works Company of New York, NY and originally called “The Unfortunate Boot” (Plates 16-17).<sup>10</sup>

Most articles on the topic agree that the statues erected in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were likely cast in Italy.

## **DESIGN**

The statue depicts a young boy, with loose fitting shirt, long pants held up by a single suspender strap, and a cap. The boy is wearing a boot on his left foot while his right hand holds the leaking boot from his right foot (Plates 19-22). Water flows from the boot. At present, the boy stands on a simple round base at the edge of a pool of water.

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<sup>10</sup> K. Patowary, “The Boy And His Leaking Boot,” [www.amusingplanet.com](http://www.amusingplanet.com), March 23, 2015.

**INTERIOR**

N/A

**INTEGRITY**

The statue has stood at the entrance to the English Garden since 1952. The original entrance has been updated (Plate 23).

The statue appears to be in good condition despite numerous incidents of theft and vandalism. Several times, park officials have found the statue with the boot missing and in 1994, a local fraternity stole the entire statue. After several months it reappeared in the garage of a popular local radio host with a note that read, “Timmy went on a journey, Timmy is lonely and wants to go home.”<sup>11</sup> The Parks Department repaired and reinstalled the statue.

**STREETSCAPE**

The statue has welcomed visitors to Assiniboine Park’s English Garden for over half a century.

**ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS**

It is unknown where the design for the statue originated or what firm cast it.

**PERSON/INSTITUTION**

This statue has been supported by the City of Winnipeg and the local chapters of two international benevolent societies over its history: the Christian Endeavor Society, who collected money to have the original statue built; and the Order of Rotary International Fellowship who paid to have the statue relocated and refurbished at the English Garden.

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<sup>11</sup> Winnipeg Free Press, September 20, 1994, p. 13.

**EVENT**

There is no known significant event connected with this resource.

**CONTEXT**

Winnipeg, like other major centres in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, has erected numerous statues, fountains, sculptures and other forms of public remembrance and celebration. Often connected to royalty or the military, early examples in Winnipeg include:

- Volunteer Monument (Little Black Devil; North West Rebellings) Monument, Main Street, erected 1886 in front of City Hall, moved across Main Street and re-dedicated 1968 (Plate 24);
- Seven Oaks Monument, Main Street, unveiled in 1891 (Plate 25);
- Midwinter Park Monument, erected 1911 (Plate 26);
- Waddell Fountain, Central Park, unveiled 1914 (Plate 27);
- City Hydro Fountain, Memorial Boulevard, dedicated 1962 (Plate 28); and
- Centennial Fountain, Broadway at Donald Street, unveiled 1970 (Plate 29).

**LANDMARK**

The Boy With the Boot Statue is well-known to Winnipeggers because of its prominent location in one of the City's busiest parks.

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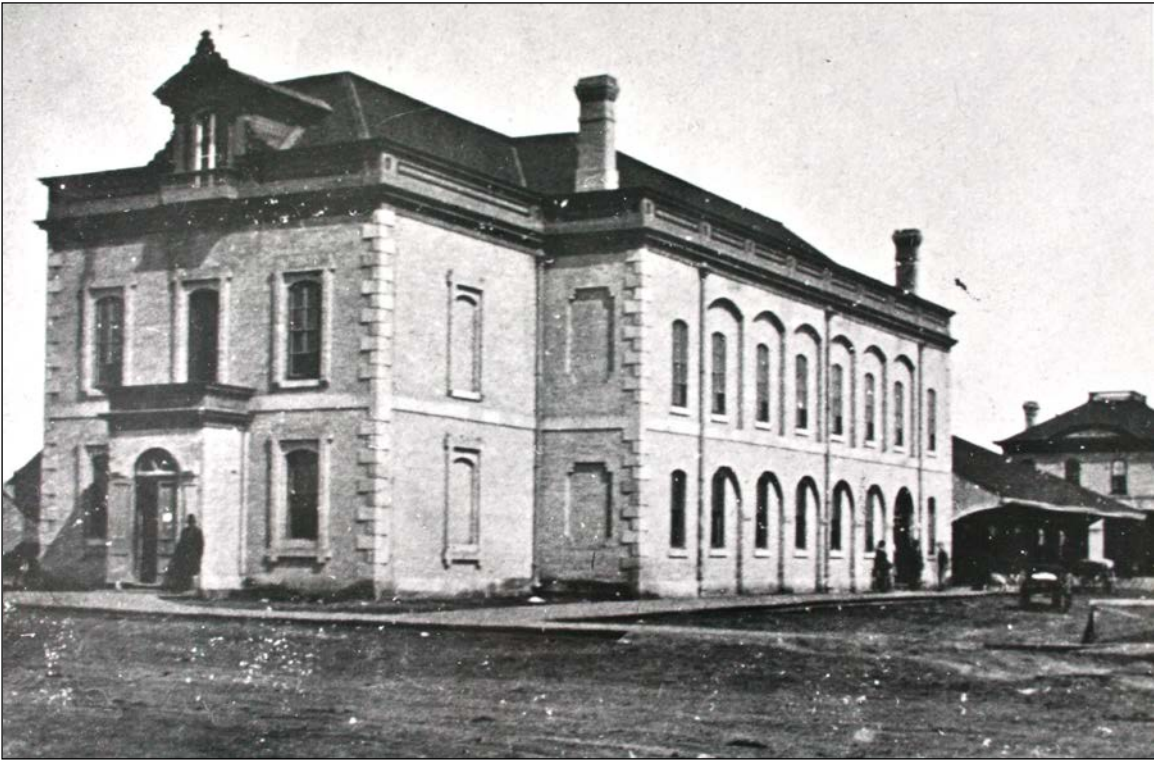


Plate 1 – Winnipeg's first City Hall, Main Street, ca.1877. ([Archives of Manitoba-Winnipeg-Buildings-Municipal-City Hall \(1875\)-1 N118.](#))

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Plate 2 – Winnipeg’s second City Hall, Main Street, ca.1902. ([Archives of Manitoba-Winnipeg-Buildings-Municipal-City Hall \(1886\)-7, N9088.](#))

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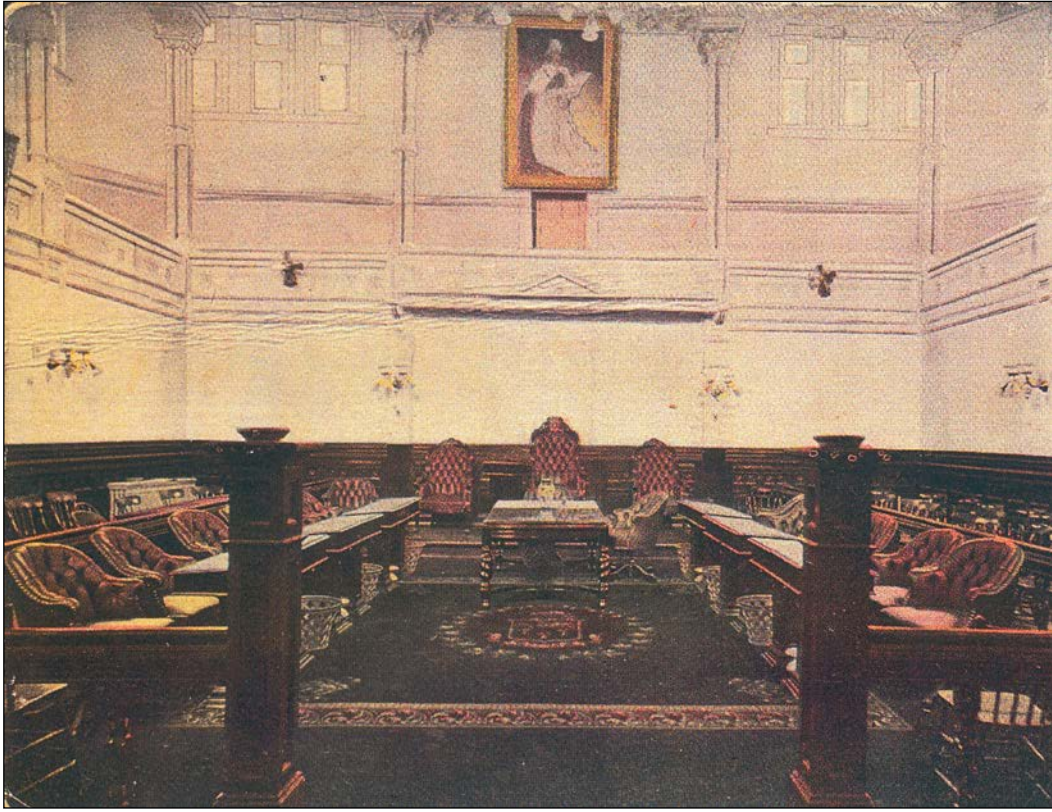


Plate 3 – Council Chambers, Winnipeg’s second City Hall, Main Street, no date. (Winnipeg Public Library, Rob McInnes Collection.)

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Plate 4 – City Market Building, with City Hall to the right (east), ca.1900. (Reproduced from William H. Carre, Art Work on Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada [W.H. Carre & Co., 1900], Part 9, p.5.)

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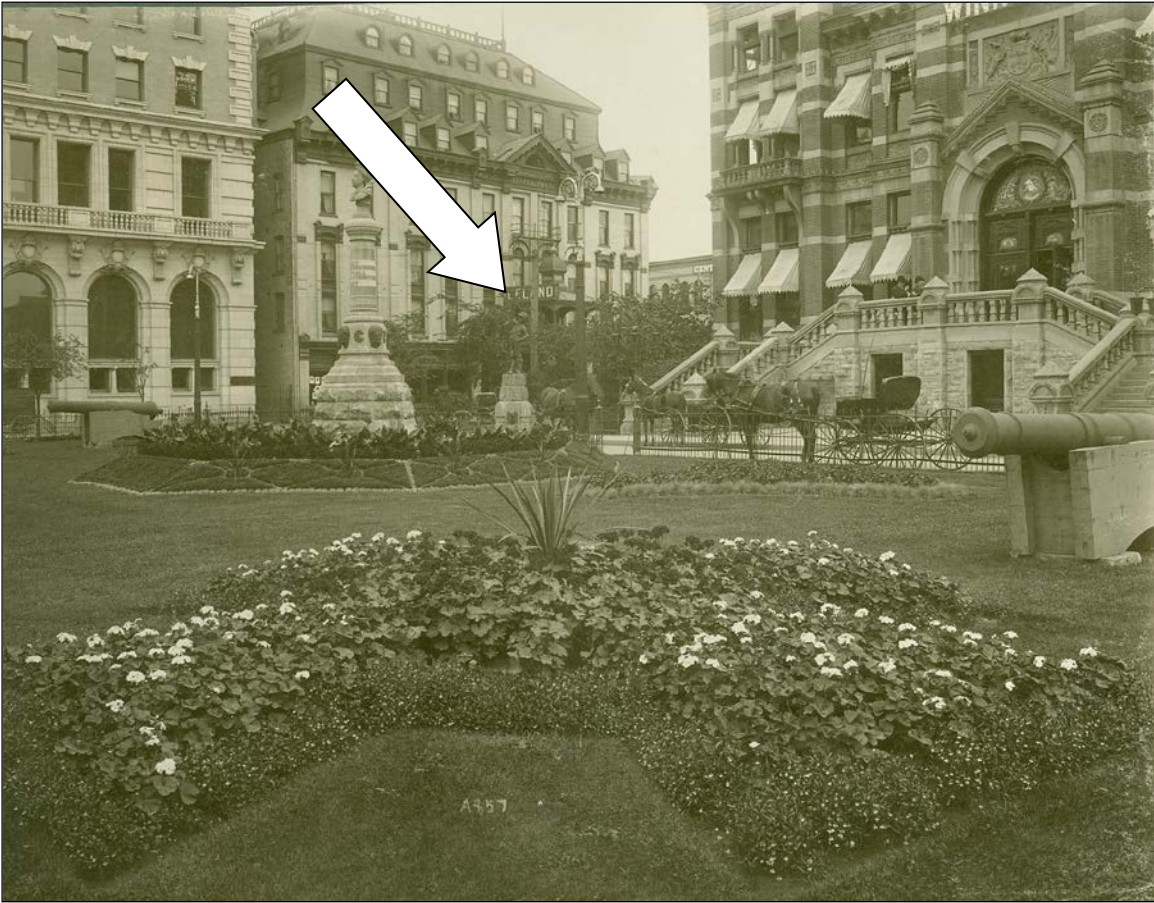


Plate 5 – Lawn in front of City Hall, Main Street, ca.1910 with the Jubilee Fountain, with bust of Queen Victoria and Boy With The Boot Statue (arrow). (HBRC Collection.)

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Plate 6 – Public Parks Board Annual Report, 1909, p. 4. The Jubilee Fountain is pictured as is the Little Black Devil Monument (arrow), which was ultimately relocated across Main Street beside the Centennial Concert Hall. (City of Winnipeg Archives, Box A1241, Folder 1.)

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Plate 7 –The Queen Victoria Bust in front of City Hall, ca.1944. ([City of Winnipeg Archives, i01438.](#))

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Plate 8 – Demolition of old City Hall continues, the bust of Queen Victoria still stands in its original location, 1962. ([City of Winnipeg Archives, i01473.](#))

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Plate 9 – Bust of Queen Victoria, English Garden, 460 Assiniboine Park Drive, 2010. This monument was moved and rededicated on this site in 1967. (M. Peterson, 2010.)

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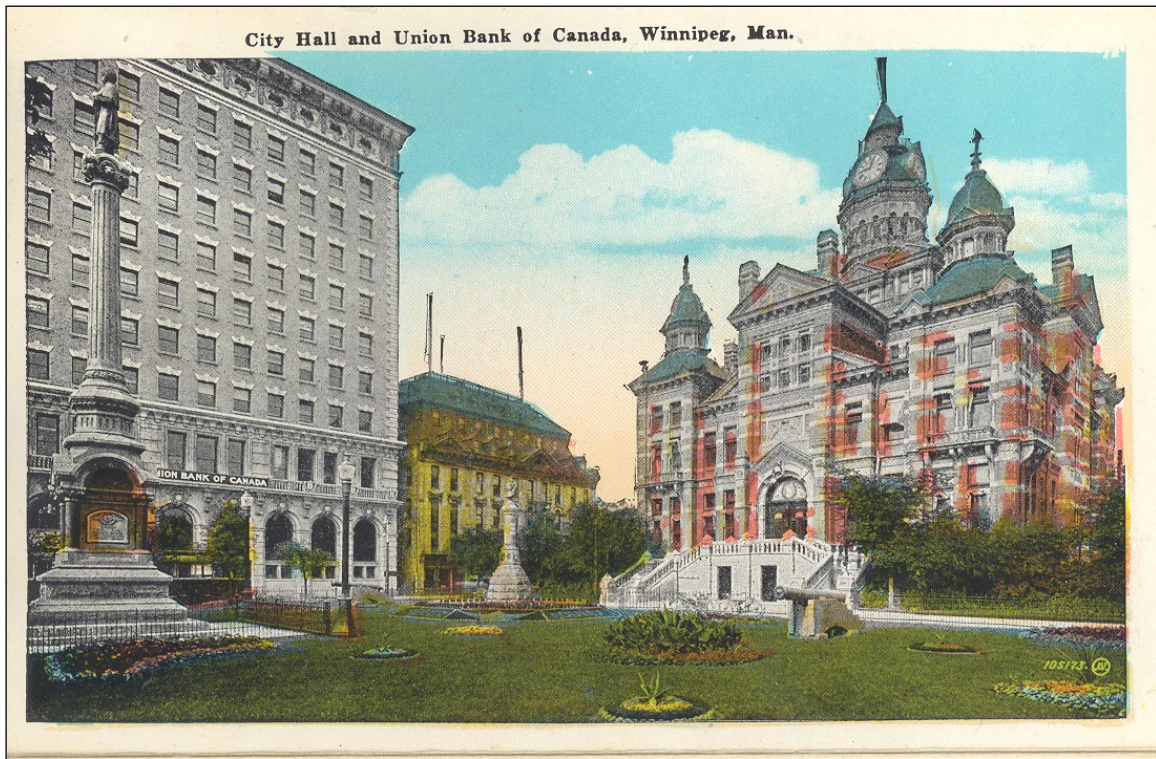


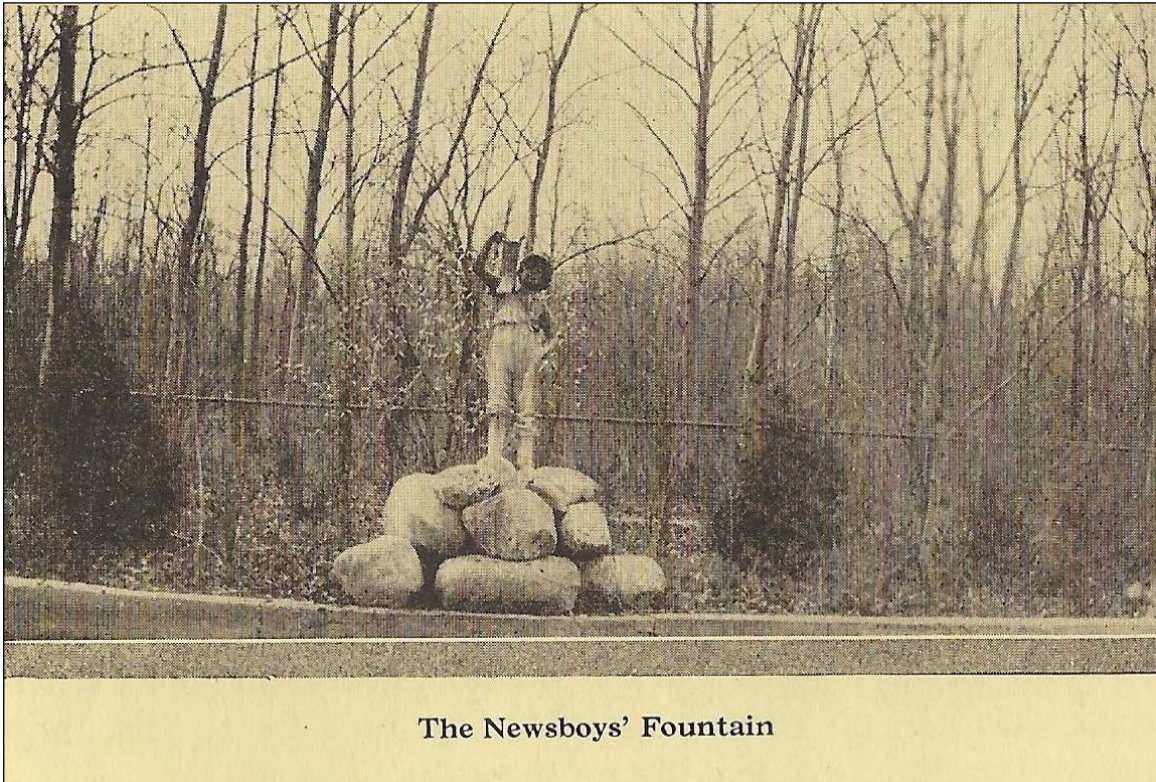
Plate 10 – This colourized post card, ca.1925, shows the Queen Victoria Statue in the fountain with the Boy With The Boot Statue removed. (M. Peterson Collection.)

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Plate 11 – City Hall, 1961, with the driveway and parking area that necessitated the removal of the Boy With The Boot Statue. (City of Winnipeg Archives, i03474, Henry Kalen, photographer.)

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The Newsboys' Fountain

Plate 12 – The Boy With The Boot Statue in its new location in Assiniboine Park, ca.1911.  
(Winnipeg Public Parks Board Annual Report, 1912, p. 10)

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Plate 13 – The Boy With The Boot Statue with the Duck Pond at Assiniboine Park in the background, 1948. (Winnipeg Free Press, September 29, 1948, p. 19.)

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Plate 14 – The John Smith family poses for this photograph in front of their farmhouse and barn in ca.1903. A large, prosperous venture, the land was bought in 1904 by the City of Winnipeg, reportedly for nearly \$40,000, to create City Park, today’s Assiniboine Park. (Archives of Manitoba, “Agriculture- Farms- 88,” N15653.)

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Plate 15 – This undated postcard shows The Boy With The Boot Statue at the former entrance to the English Garden, Assiniboine Park. (Reproduced from [www.hippostcard.com](http://www.hippostcard.com).)

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Plate 16 – “Unfortunate Boot” statue as illustrated in the J. L. Mott Iron Works Company Catalogue, 1925. (Reproduced from [Wikimedia Commons](#).)

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Plate 17 – *El Nino de la Bota* (Child with a Boot), erected in 1925 in Parque Vidal, Santa Clara, Villa Clara, Cuba, no date. (Reproduced from [www.easybookingcuba.com](http://www.easybookingcuba.com).)

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Plate 18 – Boy with the Leaking Boot, Cleethorpes, North East Lincolnshire, England, no date.  
Originally erected in 1918. (Reproduced from [www.mapio.net](http://www.mapio.net).)

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Plate 19 – The Boy With The Boot Statue, entrance to English Garden, 460 Assiniboine Park Drive, 2022. (M. Peterson, 2022.)



Plate 20 – The Boy With The Boot Statue, entrance to English Garden, 460 Assiniboine Park Drive, 2022. (M. Peterson, 2022.)

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Plate 21 – The Boy With The Boot Statue, entrance to English Garden, 460 Assiniboine Park Drive, 2022. (M. Peterson, 2022.)

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Plate 22 – The Boy With The Boot Statue, entrance to English Garden, 460 Assiniboine Park Drive, 2022. (M. Peterson, 2022.)

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Plate 23 – The Boy With The Boot Statue, entrance to English Garden, 460 Assiniboine Park Drive, 2022. (M. Peterson, 2022.)

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Plate 24 – Volunteer Monument, 555 Main Street, 2009. (M. Peterson, 2009.)

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Plate 25 – Seven Oaks Monument, 1625 Main Street, 2021. (M. Peterson, 2021.)

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Plate 26 – Midwinter Park Monument, Midwinter Avenue, 2011. (M. Peterson, 2011.)

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Plate 27 – Waddell Fountain, Central Park, 410 Cumberland Avenue (water turned off), 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)

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Plate 28 – Winnipeg (City) Hydro Fountain, Memorial Park, Memorial Boulevard, 2022. (M. Peterson, 2022.)



Plate 29 – Centennial Fountain, Broadway at Donald Street (water turned off), 2019. (M. Peterson, 2019.)