

2373 MAIN STREET

NISBET HALL

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
Researcher: M. Peterson
February 2019

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

(a) This school house was opened in 1865, making it one of the oldest such structures in Western Canada;

(b) It is associated with the very early European-based permanent settlement of the area around Winnipeg by the Selkirk Settlers and was built by the Presbyterian congregation;

(c) Its austere design is an excellent example of the type of architecture used throughout the West during this period;

(d) It is built of solid stone, a common material for the mid-19th century in Western Canada;

(e) N/A (the building has been moved to its present location); and

(f) The building was carefully taken apart and rebuilt on a new site and therefore has suffered alteration.

2373 MAIN STREET –NISBET HALL

The permanent non-Indigenous settlement history of Western Canada, began with the organization, journey and final arrival of the Selkirk settlers at the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine rivers on August 29, 1812. These and subsequent arrivals were mainly Scottish, many had come from Helmsdale, Sutherlandshire where they were devout members of the Church of Scotland at the Kildonan Presbyterian Church.

The Settlement's organizer, Lord Selkirk, had promised the settlers the quick establishment of their church in the new land. However, they still had no church or minister when Lord Selkirk visited the colony in 1817. It was then that he named the area Kildonan (present-day West Kildonan) and set aside land for a church and school.[1]

But the Anglicans of the colony were the first Protestants to receive proper ministering with the arrival in 1820 of Reverend John West. He was followed by other Anglican ministers who not only preached to their own denomination, but also ministered to the Kildonan Presbyterians. It was more than thirty years after West's arrival before the promise of a Presbyterian minister was finally kept and Reverend John Black (1818-1882 – Plate 1) arrived from the east in 1851 to serve the growing number of adherents in and around the Red River Settlement. In response to Reverend Black's appointment, the people of Kildonan quickly set out to have a manse ready for his use as a residence and church. That log manse housed the first Presbyterian service west of the Great Lakes, which was held on September 28, 1851, nine days after Reverend Black's arrival. Approximately 300 of the original settlers and their descendants attended the event.[2] Because the church site designated by Lord Selkirk in 1817 was already occupied by the Anglican denomination, it was decided to take land in an area known as *La Grenouillère* or Frog Plain. The site originally consisted of 121.5 ha.

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1 M.E. McBeth, The Story of Kildonan Presbyterian Church, 1851-1951 (Winnipeg, MB: Willingford Press, 1951), pp. 3-4.

2 N.R. Bingham, Old Kildonan Presbyterian Church, (Winnipeg, MB: Historic Resources Branch, Manitoba Department of Culture, Heritage and Tourism,, 1980), p. 2.

of land and a 11.0 m. right-of-way from the main road (Main Street) to the Red River (which is now John Black Avenue).[3]

Church construction began in the winter of 1851, but the flood of 1852, one of the worst in recorded history in the Red River Valley, halted work and carried away construction material. Work began again after the water subsided and the church was opened free of debt on January 5, 1854 (Plate 2).[4]

The church was also used as a schoolhouse, filling this role until the early 1860s when the congregation decided to build a separate building for the students. Reverend James S. Nisbet who had arrived at the Settlement in 1862 to assist Reverend Black, was sent east in 1863 to raise funds for the project. He returned with school materials, maps, tablet lessons, books and other supplies.[5] Nisbet also took charge of the actual construction, utilizing his carpentry and mason training and expertise to complete the structure, known locally at the West Kildonan School, and officially opened on July 12, 1865 (Plate 3).[6]

The Kildonan Presbyterian Church Management Committee is quoted as saying in 1921, the new school would "go down for years to come as a historic landmark."[7]

STYLE

West Kildonan School/Nisbet Hall is one of the City of Winnipeg's oldest structures and is a good example of early architecture in Western Canada. Simplicity was the norm for the design of early religious structures, the limited resources of the congregations, and the basic materials and technology available precluded the use of any architecturally-based style. Rather, the designs

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3 Ibid., p. 4; and M.E. McBeth, op. cit., p. 7.

4 M.E. McBeth, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

5 Presbyterian Record, Vol. III, 1863-1864, p. 109 quoted in John Walker, The Early History of the Presbyterian Church in Western Canada From the Earliest Times to the Year 1881, Ph.D. Thesis, Edinburgh, 1928, p. 69.

6 Nor-Wester, August 1, 1865, p. 2.

7 Old Kildonan Presbyterian Church Records, "Minute Book of the Annual Meetings of the Congregation, 1918-1960", p. 19 (January 18, 1921).

recalled familiar edifices from home parishes in England and Scotland. The basic rectangular plan, whether of stone or wood, was embellished with an entrance tower or spire, a simple gable roof and often pointed Gothic windows.

> So basic and uncomplicated is this plan - derived from the humbler parish churches of Britain - that it formed the most common arrangement for rural churches in Manitoba until about 1945.[8]

CONSTRUCTION

According to a contemporary account published in the summer of 1865, the stone was quarried in Stony Mountain and hauled over 30 kilometres by ox-team to the site. The walls were 0.6 metres wide, the building itself measures 7.3 metres wide, 14.6 metres long and walls 3.1 metres to the eaves of the simple gable roof.[9] The building's entrances, according to images, have changed several times and the building was stuccoed over (Plates 3-6).

It was originally located a short distance to the north and east of the church (Plates 7 and 8).

Cost of construction, including furnishing, was reported as £243 8s 9d,[10] which converts to approximately $450 in 2016 currency – a large sum for such a small congregation.

A frame kitchen, referred to as the "service wing", was added to the east end of the building in 1919 (Plate 5).[11] In 1969, this addition burned to the ground, causing smoke damage in the interior but no structural damage to the building.[12] At this point the building was abandoned by the congregation.

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8 N. Bingham, A Study of the Church Buildings in Manitoba of the Congregational, Methodist, Presbyterian and United Churches of Canada (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Recreation, Historic Resources Branch, 1987), p. 14.

9 Nor-Wester, August 1, 1865, p. 2.

10 Ibid.

11 S. Grover, "2679 Scotia Street N., Nisbet Hall," report for the Manitoba Historic Resources Branch, Department of Tourism, Recreation and Cultural Affairs," February 1977, p. 8; and Manitoba Free Press, September 29, 1919, p. 12.

12 Government of Manitoba, Historical Resources Branch (HRB), Memo, dated September 16, 1982, courtesy of HRB; J.A. Chivers and George R. Walker, "Report on Nisbet Hall," report to HRB, 1971, courtesy of

In 1987, the congregation chose to move Nisbet Hall north, to be used as auxiliary space for its new church structure (Plate 9). With the assistance of staff from the Province's Historic Resources Branch and architectural firm Gaboury Associates Architects Inc., the building was carefully documented, dismantled and rebuilt on the new site (see APPENDIX II for complete description of this project).

DESIGN

This one-storey structure was built from local stone, its south façade, which in its original location faced east towards the Red River, is windowless with a carved date stone found above the redesigned central entrance. Plain, square-headed windows were featured on both of the side elevations and the gable roof was originally finished with a simple wooden spire topped by a weather vane at the east end (which was removed and now rebuilt – Plate 11) and a brick chimney at the west end (a new ornamental chimney was built in 1987).

Entrances to the building, as mentioned previously have changed over time. The 1918 renovations included moving the main entrance from the river end to the road end (west).[13]

The building was moved and alterations completed in the late 1980s. Today, the south façade features a newer door with modest pedimented hood, date stone and returned eaves (Plate 12). The east and west side façades include large rectilinear window openings with wooden frames (Plates 13 and 14). The north façade is partially hidden by the connecting building to the new church (Plate 15).

INTERIOR

An original description of the new schoolhouse stated it could "comfortably accommodate from 68 to 78 pupils" with the ability to use sliding doors to separate the front portion of the space, 3.1 x 6.6

HRB; and "West Kildonan School No. 8 (2373 Main Street, Winnipeg)," in Historic Sites of Manitoba, Manitoba Historical Society website, www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/sites/kildonanschool, 2015.

[13] S. Grover, op. cit., p. 8. Renovations in 1918 also included new wood floors and wood window frames.

metres for "superior classes".[14] Coat rooms were located on either side of the main entrance vestibule (later removed) and students' desks were laid out in two rows.

By the 1970s, the building was vacant and the interior, which had been damaged by the 1969 fire, was in poor condition (Plates 16 and 17).

Today, the building is used as a meeting hall, the completely renovated interior includes washroom and kitchen facilities in the north end of the building (Plates 18 and 19).

INTEGRITY

The building does not stand on its original site but appears to be in good structural condition and its original design. The rebuild was completed using the original materials in the original location wherever possible.

STREETSCAPE

Originally located just north of Old Kildonan Church (present-day John Black Avenue), the stone school was moved, although it is still a visible structure from Main Street (Plate 20), now one of Winnipeg's busiest streets and originally the Red River Settlement's most important thoroughfare connecting the fur trading posts Upper Fort Garry and Lower Fort Garry.

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS

Rev. James Nisbet, who trained as a carpenter and stonemason in his native Scotland, supervised the design and helped build this school.

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[14] Nor-Wester, August 1, 1865, p. 2.

PERSON/INSTITUTION

James Nisbet (Plate 21) was born near Glasgow, Scotland in 1823, immigrating to Toronto in 1844 and studying at the newly established Knox College.[15] He graduated in 1848 and two years later was ordained as a Presbyterian Church of Canada (Free Church) minister in Oakville, Canada West (present-day Ontario).[16] In 1862, he was appointed by the new Canada Presbyterian Church Synod, as a "foreign missionary" to assist his Knox College classmate John Black in the Red River Colony. From Kildonan Church in the Settlement, Black and Nisbet worked to develop congregations throughout the area including Little Britain, Headingley and Winnipeg. Nisbet lasted only four years in the Settlement before he was moved further west to continue his missionary work, ending up near present-day Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. Nisbet returned to Kildonan because of ill health in 1874 where he died in September.[17]

Kildonan School opened its doors in 1865 and took its place as an important community structure. The school was administered by a local board of trustees which controlled the hiring of teachers, inspection of the school and examinations. While the provincial board did give an annual grant, donations by local families helped cover operating costs.[18]

In 1871, the first classes of the Manitoba College (which would become the University of Manitoba) met in the school while its new building was being completed.

By the late 1870s, attendance was down and inspection reports suggested the building needed major repairs. Over the next two decades, the little stone school was utilized less and less as more modern structures were built nearby.

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15 Jean E. Murray, "Nisbet, James" in Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online, Vol. X (1871-1880), University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2000; Pioneers and Early Citizens of Manitoba (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Library Association, 1971); and Rev. W.S. MacTavish, Missionary Pathfinders - Presbyterian Laborers at Home and Abroad (Toronto, ON: The Musson Book Co. Ltd., 1907), Chapter VII, "James Nisbet – A Missionary to the Red Men," pp. 83-93.

16 "Nisbet, James S.," Memorable Manitobans, Manitoba Historical Society website, 2010.

17 J.E. Murray, op. cit.

18 S. Grover, op. cit., pp. 5-6.

In 1905, the congregation agreed to "sell to the Kildonan West School District the Building"[19] (the school) and the land on which it stood for $1,000. The building remained vacant until 1919 when it was reopened as a parish and community hall and named Nisbet Hall. It continued to serve in this capacity until 1969.[20] The Presbyterian congregation decided to build a modern church in the early 1980s and in 1987 Nisbet Hall was moved north to its present location, refurbished and dedicated as part of the new Kildonan Community Church in 1988.[21]

The building was recognized as a Provincial Heritage Site, No. 50, in 1990.

EVENT

A public structure of this age would necessarily have been an important part of the daily life of the Western Canada's earliest European settlers. During the Riel Rebellion of 1869, the school was known to host at least two meetings of local residents, in October and December. The fall meeting passed a series of resolutions condemning the Métis, their expelling of Lieutenant-Governor McDougall, barricading roads and seizing Fort Garry.[22]

CONTEXT

This school was built prior to the creation of the City of Winnipeg, when the area was still very much an agrarian settlement, with large Indigenous and Métis populations co-existing with newly arriving European, Canadian and American settlers. It was built to supply the growing number of settler's children with a modern education and is one of the oldest extant educational structures on the prairies.

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19 "Kildonan Church- Minutes, 1875-1918," January 17, 1905, p. 180, courtesy of Kildonan Church.

20 Government of Manitoba, Manitoba Provincial Heritage Site No. 50, dedicated March 30, 1990.

21 Presbyterian Record, May 1, 2001.

22 Notebook of James Ross (son of Alexander), December 7, 1869, cited in S. Grover, op. cit.

LANDMARK

This modest building is not conspicuous and would not be familiar to the general public, although it has been part of the community for over 150 years.

Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
THE CITY OF WINNIPEG

APPENDIX I

CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report

Building Address: 2373 Main Street

Building Name: Nisbet Hall (West Kildonan School)

Original Use: school

Current Use: hall

Roll No. (Old): 05009421900 (---)

RSN: 56241

Municipality: ---

Ward: ---

Property or Occupancy Code: ---

Legal Description: Part of River Lot 27 Kildonan

Location: east side, north of John Black Avenue

Date of Construction: 1864-1865

Storeys: 1

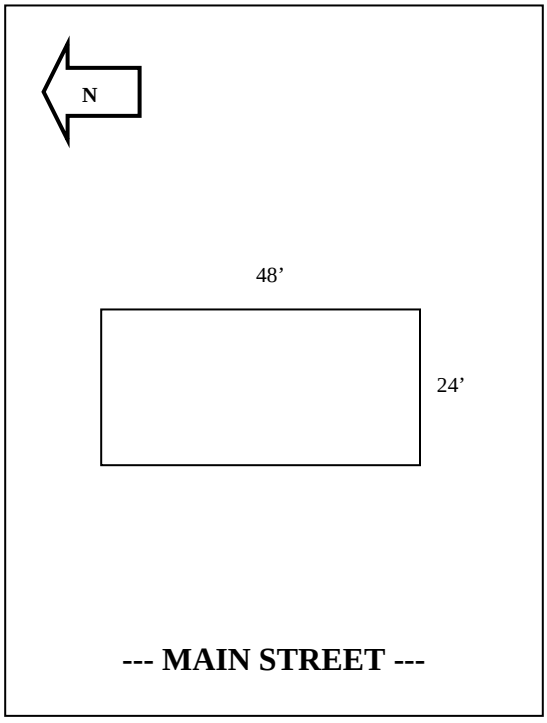
Heritage Status: NOMINATED LIST

Construction Type: Stone

Building Permits (Plans available: **[CS]** City Storage; **[M]** Microfilm):

Information:

24 x 48 x 14½’ (according to Nor’Wester, August 1, 1865, p. 2)



ARCHITECT – SUPERVISED BY REV. JAMES NESBIT

CONTRACTOR – SUPERVISED BY REV. JAMES NESBIT

APPENDIX II

2373 MAIN STREET – NISBET HALL

1987 RECONSTRUCTION

(INFORMATION COURTESY OF PROVINCE OF MANITOBA, HISTORIC RESOURCES BRANCH)

1971 Report-

J.A. Chivers & George R. Walker



West end (facing Scotia Street) features a small, non-original wood entry vestibule, building covered in non-original stucco and roof covered in non-original asphalt shingles. Note: brick chimney at west end of roof, weather vane (steeple now gone) at east end, where date stone is located.



East end of the building (facing river) showing fire damage that destroyed a non-original frame "service wing". Date stone is visible. Interior was "thoroughly blackened by smoke". Stocco being removed from southeast corner.



Eastern-most window on the south side of the building. Report states that the "original materials appear in good condition – possibly good enough to be restored."

1980 Report
George R. Walker, HRB

Both sets of doors broken and ajar.

Burned out roof at southeast corner allowing water to penetrate stone wall causing considerable damage.

Work done: making sure windows and doors and damaged roof all boarded up properly.

1986 Photographic Report
G.O. Menzies, HBR

Documentation to ensure information available for move of building.

Frame kitchen addition was added to the east end, damaged by fire and later removed completely.

Notes extensive deterioration (erosion, spalling, rot, etc.) of much of the building – windows, timber, mortar, stone, brick, roof, trim, etc.

Evidence that door design on west end is not original to building.

June 1987 Photographs
George R. Walker

“Reasonable replica of the original building” was produced that “closely resembles the original building” on the exterior.



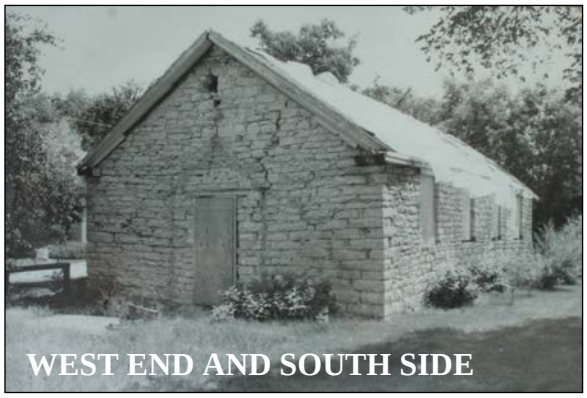
EAST END



EAST END



WEST END



WEST END AND SOUTH SIDE



SOUTH SIDE



WEST END



EAST END

November 1987



West end and north side



East end



North side



East end and north side



West End

1987 Move

Online Specification
Kildonan Presbyterian Church
Nisbet Hall Relocation
Project No. 8602.02

Submitted by Gaboury Associates Architects Inc.
09 February 1987

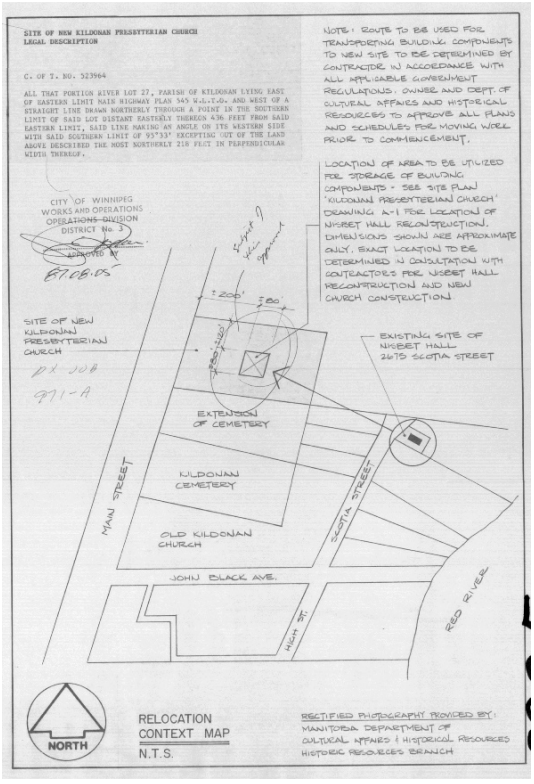
3.14 Schedule

.1 Stage I- pre-inspection demolition/dismantling
Generally, the contractor is responsible for removal of all "non-original" items & building components from Nisbet Hall. Additionally, this stage requires partial dismantling of specific original components, as indicated on the drawing as necessary for inspection of structure. Care and attention shall be given to the removal of these items. The Contractor shall confirm with the Provincial Department of Historic Resources which building components are original (1864) construction. No material will be disposed of or discarded at this stage.

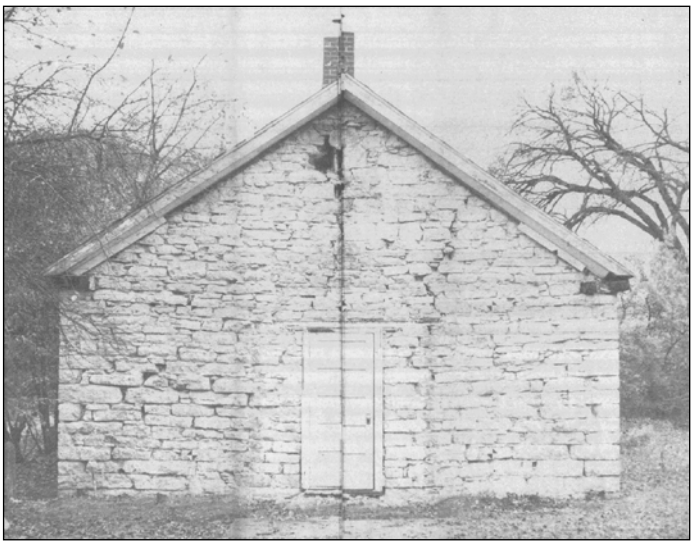
.2 Stage II- Following completion of Stage I, the contractor shall notify P.H.R.D., who will then carry out inspections research, historical recording and archeological investigations as deemed necessary.
The Contractor shall consider possible delay of work for historical recording archeological investigations and completion of architectural drawings based on these investigations. Delay will be dependent upon the significance of discoveries uncovered during Stage I. The P.H.R.D. will then submit to the contractor written approval for disposal of specified building elements. All other building elements shall be stored on site as outlined in the specifications.

.3 Stage III- Dismantling the remainder of building and relocation of component parts to new site.
Upon written authorization from Provincial Historic Resources Department, Stage III Demolition/Dismantling for the coordination of all final dismantling and tagging and recording of individual building components. The Contractor shall be responsible for moving items and component parts being re-constructed to the new site in a systematic orderly fashion. Means of storage at new site to be as outlined in specification. Components shall be organized and labelled for easy identification with reconstruction. The original site shall then be cleaned and left in suitable condition as per specifications. Any remaining items that the P.H.R.D. identifies for disposal shall be disposed of.

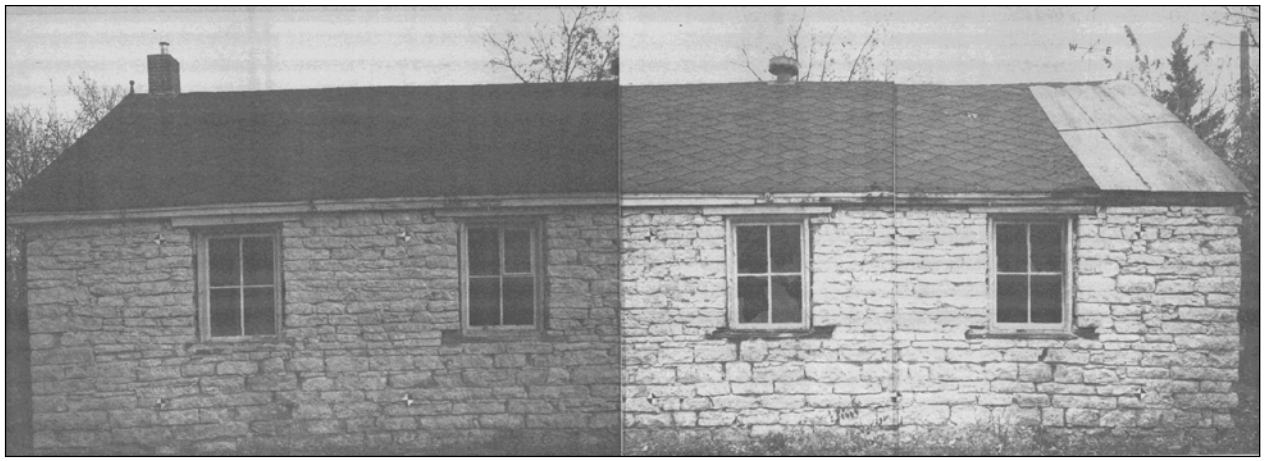
Plans 9825/1987



Site Plan for Nisbet Hall in relation to the church and its new location.



West elevation (facing Scotia Street), 1987.



South façade, 1987.

Gaboury Associates Architects Inc.

Sheet A-D1 – Dismantling Procedure

Stage I: Pre-Inspecting Demolition/Dismantling

1. All interior non-original interior plaster, lath, rough sawn studs removed
2. Dismantle non-original stage
3. Removed all mechanical
4. Remove all non-original roofing
5. Remove and dispose of brick chimney
6. Dismantle and store weather vane
7. Remove finial
8. Remove and dispose of ceiling boards, remove and store ceiling trim
9. Remove and dispose section of floor boards (to investigate underpinning)
10. Dismantle and store original roof boards

Stage II: Inspections and Approvals

Stage III: Dismantling remainder of building and relocation of component parts to new site

11. Dismantle floor, frame, lintel and trim
12. Dismantle date stone
13. Dismantle all materials used to reduce size of east wall opening (entrance)
14. Removed and dispose of non-original ramp
15. Dismantle all windows, all to be tagged
16. "Dismantle stone, catalogue and store in constructed wood frames for relocation – refer to specifications."
17. Dismantle temporary door panel, frame and trim pieces
18. Remove and number all original roof boards
19. Dismantle original wainscoting and trim and retain

General reassembly notes:

1. N/A
2. N/A
3. Stone wall infill material selected from retained dismantled stone rubble – all new placement to be reviewed by representative of HRB
4. N/A
5. New windows – original sash to be used, new window frames to match original in size and profile
6. Original roof timber bearing plates and window and door lintels to be reused (new material used to replace rotten or decayed original to match originals)
7. N/A
8. Original roof boards reused (new material used to replace rotten or decayed original to match originals)
9. Original ceiling ridge trim, wainscot, windows surrounds and all wainscot related trim reused (new material used to replace rotten or decayed original to match originals)
10. Original roof trusses re-installed
11. N/A
12. Original wainscoting re-installed (new material used to replace rotten or decayed original to match originals)

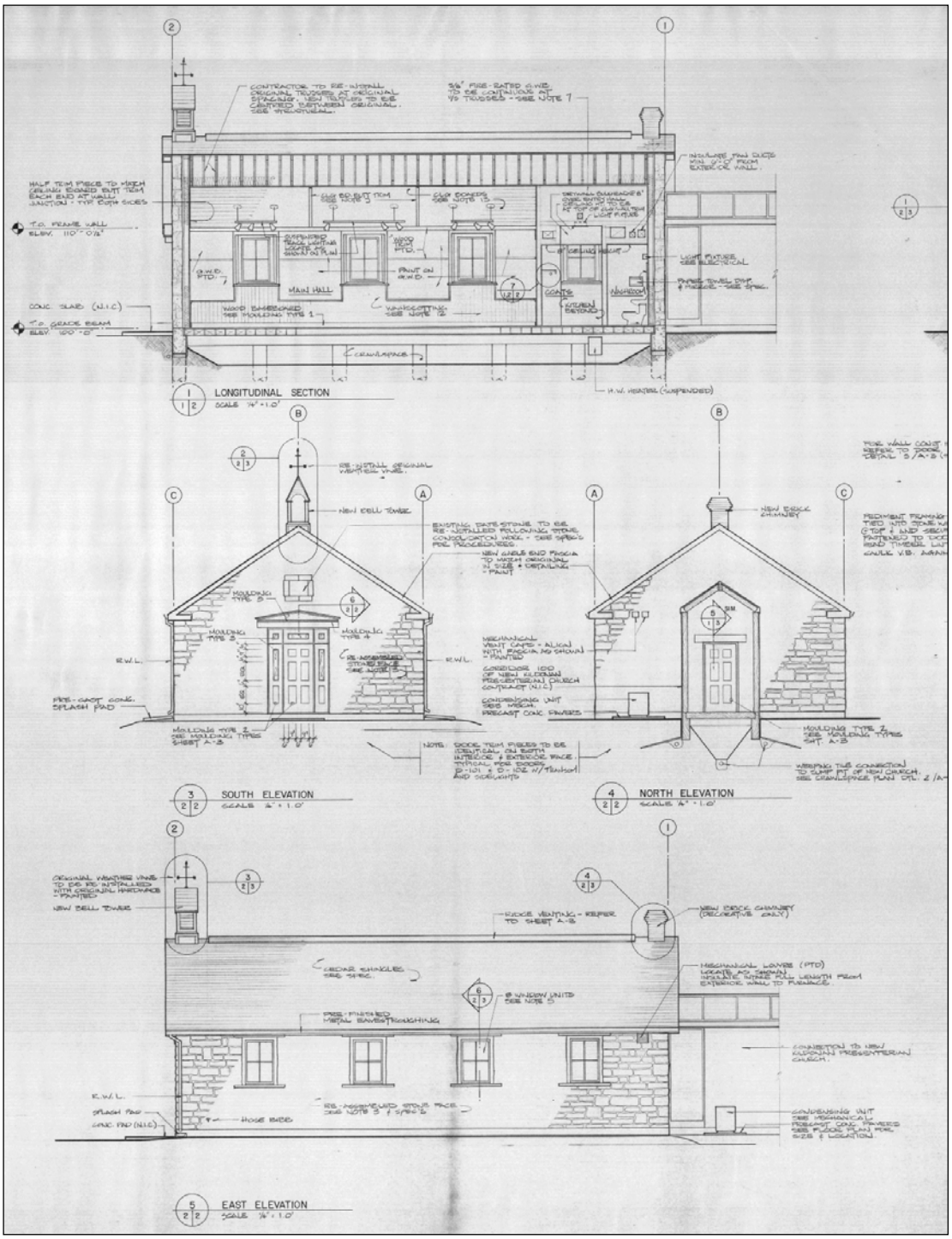
New crawlspace built under entire structure

Typical wall construction:
12” stone
1½” airspace
Building paper
½” plywood sheathing
R20 batt insulation
2x6” wood studs @ 16” O.C.
10 mil poly vapour barrier
5/8” fire-rated G.W.B. (drywall)
Wainscoting

New bell tower constructed topped with original weather vane

New brick chimney decorative only

Various plans of the rebuilt structure:



Comparison of façades:



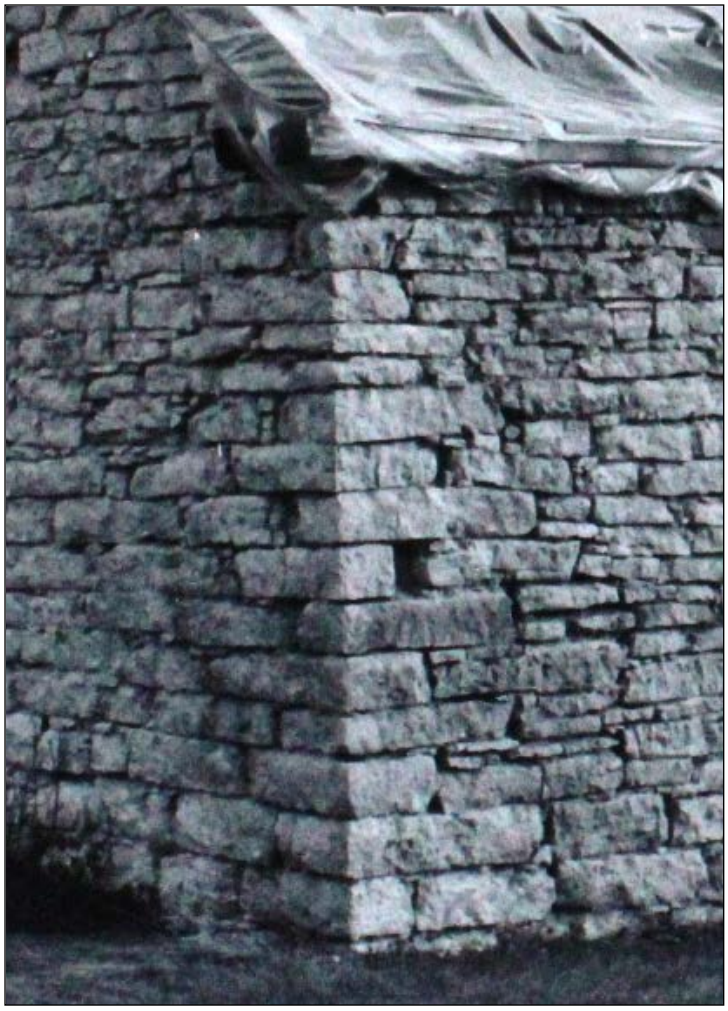














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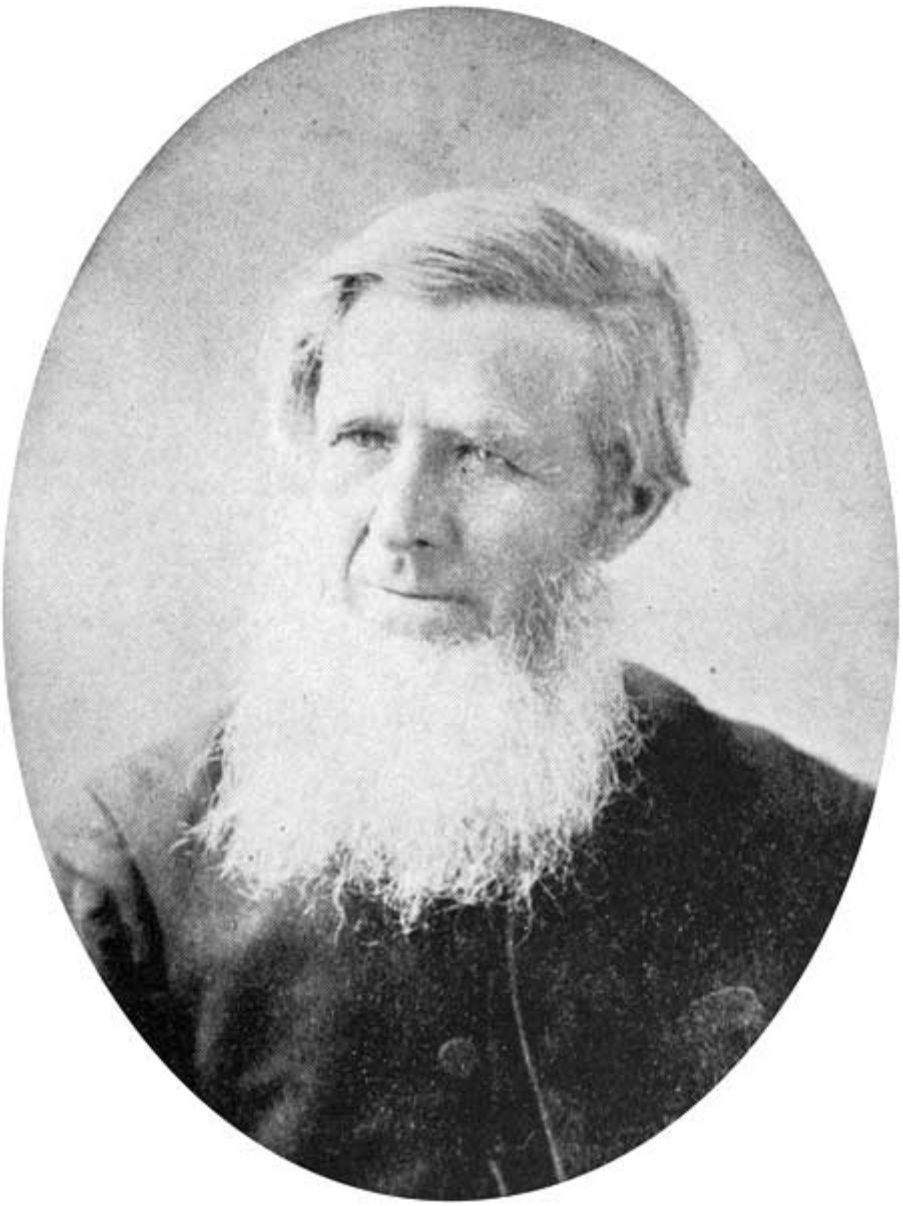

Plate 1 – Reverend John Black, no date. (Reproduced from Canadian Album: Men of Canada or Success by Example, Vol. III [Brantford, ON: Bradley, Garretson & Co., 1894].)



Plate 2 – Kildonan Presbyterian Church, 201 John Black Avenue, ca.1870; built 1852-54, stonemason Duncan McRae. (Photo courtesy of the Western Canada Pictorial Index, Negative 52-1564.)

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Plate 3 – West Kildonan School, east façade, date unknown. Note the wooden entrance vestibule, projecting pediment, date stone and modest spire. (Courtesy of Kildonan Community Church.)

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Plate 4 – Group in front of West Kildonan School, 1892, west façade. (Courtesy of Kildonan Community Church.)

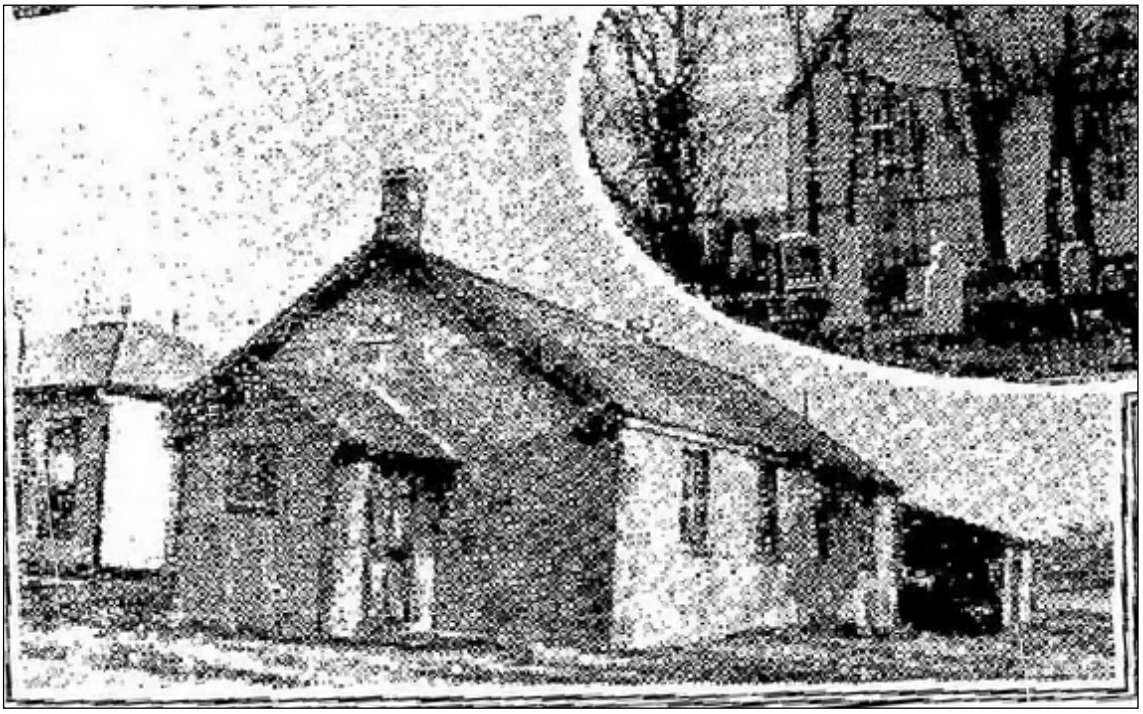

Plate 5 – Nisbet Hall, Main Street, west and south façade, ca.1930. Note the altered design of the entrance vestibule (door on side, window in gable end) and the service wing (kitchen) on the east end. (Reproduced from the Winnipeg Free Press, May 31, 1930, p. 63.)

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Plate 6 – Nisbet Hall on its original site (1864 Scotia Street), stuccoed and with a non-original frame entrance vestibule on its west façade, 1971. (Courtesy of Province of Manitoba, Historic Resources Branch.)

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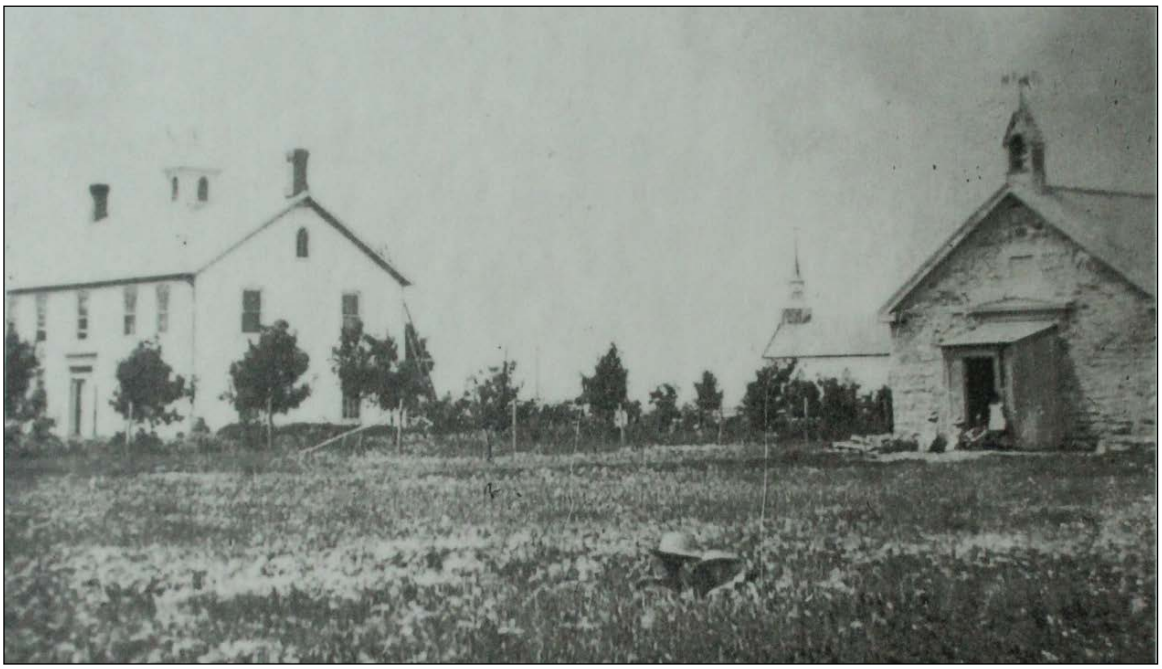

Plate 7 – Undated image taken near the banks of the Red River looking southwest and showing the West Kildonan School in the foreground (with original entrance vestibule and spire), Manitoba College to the left (south) and Old Kildonan Church (with its original spire) in the background (southwest). (Courtesy of Kildonan Community Church.)

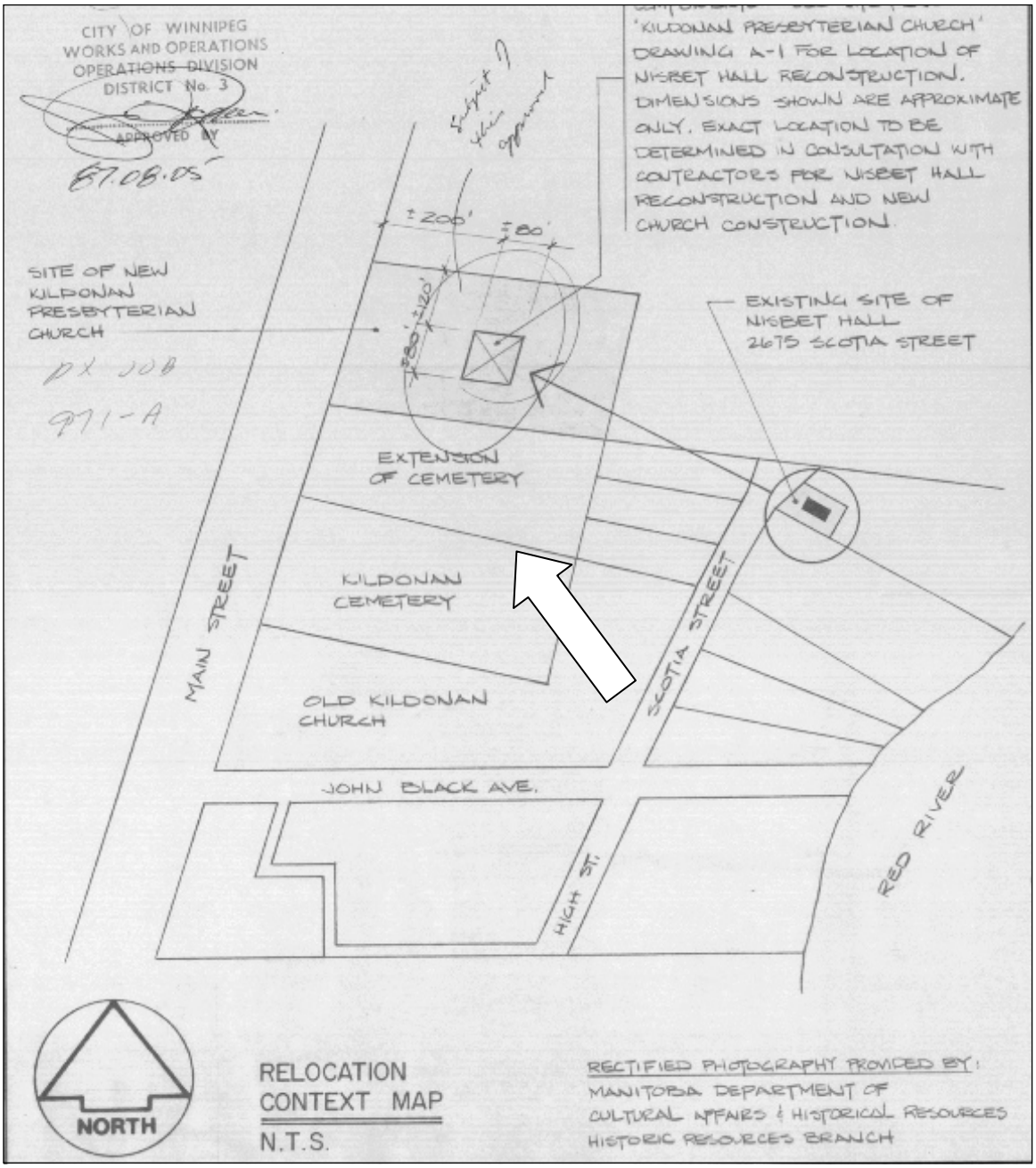

Plate 8 – Site plan of location of Nisbet Hall, 1987. Approximate location of Old Kildonan Presbyterian Church at arrow. (Architect's Plan, No. 9825/1987, City of Winnipeg.)

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Plate 9 – Kildonan Community Church, with Nisbet Hall on the right (south), 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

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Plate 10 – Nisbet Hall, 2373 Main Street, date stone, front (south) façade, 2018. (M. Peterson, 2018.)



Plate 11 – Nisbet Hall, 2373 Main Street, rebuilt spire (1987) and original weather vane, 2018. (M. Peterson, 2018.)

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Plate 12 – Nisbet Hall, 2373 Main Street, front (south) façade, 2018. (M. Peterson, 2018.)



Plate 13 – Nisbet Hall, 2373 Main Street, rear (north) and west façades, 2018. (M. Peterson, 2018.)

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Plate 14 – Nisbet Hall, 2373 Main Street, front (south) and east façades with new church in the background, 2018. (M. Peterson, 2018.)



Plate 15 – Nisbet Hall, 2373 Main Street, rear (north) and east façades, 2018. (M. Peterson, 2018.)

2373 MAIN STREET –NISBET HALL



Plate 16 – Nisbet Hall, looking towards the east end (now south end), 1987. (Courtesy of Province of Manitoba, Historic Resources Branch.)

2373 MAIN STREET –NISBET HALL



Plate 17 – Nisbet Hall, looking towards the west end (now north end), 1987. (Courtesy of Province of Manitoba, Historic Resources Branch.)

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Plate 18 – Nisbet Hall, 2373 Main Street, interior looking south, 2018. (M. Peterson, 2018.)

2373 MAIN STREET –NISBET HALL



Plate 19 – Nisbet Hall, 2373 Main Street, looking north from hall into connecting building and church, 2018. (M. Peterson, 2018.)

2373 MAIN STREET –NISBET HALL



Plate 20 – Kildonan Presbyterian Church and Cemetery from the southwest corner of Nisbet Hall, 2018. (M. Peterson, 2018.)

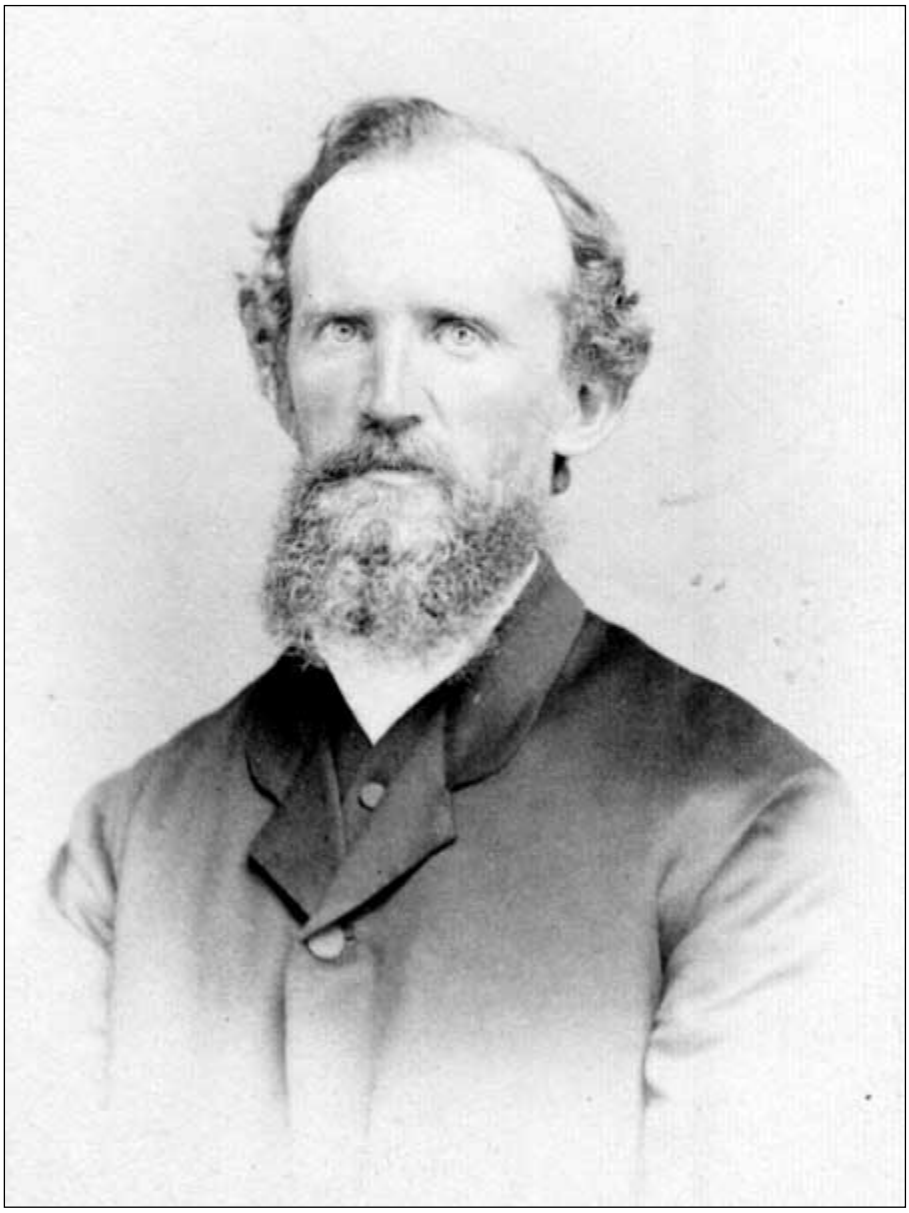

Plate 21 – Reverend James Nisbet, no date. (Archives of Manitoba, Personalities, Mrs. John Black Fonds, C44.)