

Wesley United Church
130 Brodie Street North



Year Built: 1910

Architect: Stinson and Hood

Added to Heritage Register: October 26, 2009

Description:

Methodism arrived in the Americas during British colonization. It was started by a group of Oxford students led by the brothers John and Charles Wesley, from which Wesley United gets its name. The earliest record of Methodist services held in Fort William date back to 1885, when the congregation met in a rented school house, hardly big enough to fit everyone. It was not until four years later, when Reverend Joshua Dyke, later mayor of Fort William, decided the current situation was inadequate. His arrival coincided with the relocation of the C.P.R. from West Fort to Fort William, which incited the migration of several hundred workers to this new site, greatly increasing the size of Rev. Dyke's flock. Although he could only raise half the cost of the land on which Wesley United now sits, the deed was handed over with the promise that the magnificence of the church that was to be erected on that land would increase the value of all lands surrounding it.

The architectural style of Wesley United can be described loosely as Romanesque with Gothic Revival features. The Romanesque style, popularized in the 11th and 12th centuries, attempts to link medieval Europe to Roman Architecture based on similarities of forms and materials. It is known for its rounded arches its emphasis on square features, such as Wesley's large tower. Gothic Revival sought to revive medieval forms with increased complexity allowed by technological improvements. The rampart accpping to the roof, as well as the emphasis on verticality are very characteristic of Gothic styling. The interior features quarter sawn oak woodwork, numerous stained glass windows, as well as a magnificent 2,500 pipe organ in the English Romantic style.

Some of the significant architectural features include triplets of lancet windows with cut stone hood molding found on both towers. The construction material consisted of a contrast of re-brick and cut stone resulting in coursed rubble foundation walls. The church also has a large stained glass window on the central façade.

Wesley United was preceded by a much smaller structure. Grace Methodist Church, completed in 1891, and with a capacity of 100 people, it was paid for almost exclusively through donations from the parish. This was replaced in 1910 by a new 1,025 seat sanctuary, designed by architects Stinson and Hood, which has sloped coliseum seating in the Methodist style. World War I ended the economic explosion experience by Fort William, and it was not until the amalgamation of the 1920s, creating the United Church of Canada, that Wesley United was able to regain monetary stability. Wesley forged a strong connection with St. Andrew's church, preaching several joint sermons over the years. A Memorial Hall was added in 1947.