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WINNIPEG GENERAL STRIKE

Driving & Walking Tour 100TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Nolan Reilly & Sharon Reilly







- a. Street railway workers strike,1906 Western Canada Pictorial Index Collection
- b. Jewish strikers from the Scotland Woollen Mills,
 Winnipeg, at St. John's Park, 1906
 Archives of Manitoba, Jewish Historical Society Collection 401
- c. Staff of early Winnipeg's early labour newspaper, dedicated to the causes of "labour and social reform," c. 1897 Archives of Manitoba

An Introduction to the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike

In the spring of 1919, Canada's attention was riveted on Winnipeg. The city's militant Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council (WTLC) was leading a massive sympathetic general strike of over 12,000 unionized workers. But it was a community strike and even greater numbers of unorganized women and men also joined the struggle. An estimated 35,000 workers supported the WTLC. With their families, they represented over half of the city's 175,000 residents. Support came from across Winnipeg's ethnically mixed working-class neighbourhoods. It came from Canadian, English, Scottish, Irish, Ukrainian, German, Jewish, Polish, Icelandic, and Russian workers. Some of these women and men were Canadian-born. Many others had only recently come to Canada.

This unprecedented show of solidarity inspired the hopes of workers across the country for a better life. On the other hand, employers and governments feared the strike. Their determination to crush the workers' dreams became evident in the strike's first days.

Early Years: Roots of the Winnipeg General Strike

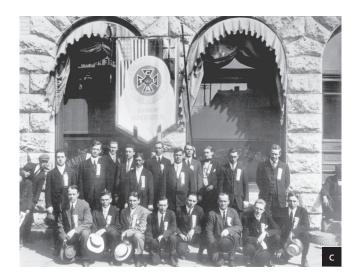
The events of 1919 were the product of decades of struggle. The origins of Winnipeg's labour movement date to the 1870s, when craft and skilled workers – mostly men at that time – created the first unions. Soon the Knights of Labor, an early experiment of North American working men and women with industrial unionism, began to organize in Winnipeg. In the 1890s, the labour movement launched its newspaper – *The Voice* – demonstrating its growing strength.

Craft unions grew despite difficult social conditions in the decade before the First World War. Employers, often hand-in-hand with government, fought against unions, securing legal rulings and injunctions against labour organizers. Police and private security agencies enforced these rulings. The most contentious of these actions involved the use of non-union workers – called "scabs" by unionized





- a. Railway shop workers on strike, Winnipeg, 1914 Archives of Manitoba, LB Foote Collection
- b. Amalgamated Sheet Metal Workers Labor Day float, c. 1915 Archives of Manitoba, LB Foote Collection



c. Telegraphers Union Convention, 1915
Archives of Manitoba, LB Foote Collection

workers – to break strikes. In the pre-war years, workers in the metal, construction, clothing, transportation, and retail trades led strikes against employers over union recognition, wages, hours of work, and health and safety concerns. Labour activists launched political parties to complement their campaigns for change in the workplace. Progressive workers supported the campaigns for women's right to vote. Winnipeg emerged as a centre of labour political action in Canada. Intense debates took place, in many languages, among independent labour advocates, social democrats, socialists, anarchists and social gospel advocates across Winnipeg concerning the best path to social change.

The First World War: Labour's Turning Point

The declaration of war in 1914 initially dampened labour activism as society shifted its focus to Europe. By late 1916, however, concerns about the horrific death toll of the war,

war-time profiteering, deteriorating living and working conditions for many of those at home, and the possibility of conscription stirred working people to action. The federal government War Measures Act (WMA) of 1914 angered many who believed in greater social equality. The WMA made many of Winnipeg's English and non-English speaking political and labour organizations, and mutual benefit societies, illegal. Some groups were shut down simply because their members came from countries fighting against the western allies. Others faced police action because of their progressive politics. The government wanted to suppress rising working-class and ethnic militancy and to undermine solidarity in Winnipeg and across Canada. Ottawa's decision to retain the WMA after the war ended convinced labour and social activists that they were the primary target of this legislation.





- a. Three thousand enlisted men leaving for war from Canadian Pacific Railway Station, Winnipeg, c.1915 Archives of Manitoba
- b. Railway workers, c.1913 Western Canada Pictorial Index



c. Garment factory workers, Winnipeg, 1920
Archives of Manitoba, Jewish Historical Society Collection

1918: The Civic Workers General Strike – A Victory for Labour

In 1918, a rising tide of labour activism was evident across Canada. Unionization and strike activity approached historic highs. Conditions at home and abroad during the First World War had radicalized many working-class leaders. Unionization was no longer enough for them. At meetings in Winnipeg's labour halls, at the Walker Theatre, and within the progressive ethnic halls, demands were made for broad political and economic reforms. Some found inspiration in the ideals of the Russian Revolution.

In May 1918, in a dress rehearsal for the 1919 confrontation, Winnipeg civic workers went out on strike. They demanded union recognition and wage increases that would help make up for what they had lost during the war. City council rejected these demands. The WTLC declared its support for the civic workers and 35 unions joined city employees in their strike. The unions formed a strike committee and

business owners created the Citizens' Committee of One Hundred. An agreement negotiated by these two groups, combined with pressure from the federal government to curtail the escalating dispute, eventually ended the strike. City council met labour's demands, agreeing to increase wages and to rehire workers dismissed for going on strike. The agreement also confirmed the right to strike for most civic employees.

Winnipeg workers had now witnessed the power of mass union action. They believed it had brought them victory. But workers were not the only ones assessing the strike's significance. Governments and employers turned their attention to reversing labour's rising tide of activism. The next and even more dramatic confrontation was only months away.

Chronology of the Winnipeg General Strike

1917

- Helen Armstrong, Gertrude Puttee, Katherine Queen, Winona Dixon, Laura Watts, and others revive the Winnipeg branch of the Women's Labor League.
- They organize women in retail shops and press for minimum wage and mothers' allowance legislation.

1918

- Civic workers general strike wins concessions on unionization and wages in May. In late June, William Ivens, democratic socialist-Christian minister and pacifist, organizes the Labor Church. He is elected editor of the Western Labor News – the new, militant voice of the local labour movement.
- First World War ends in November.
- Influenza epidemic rages through Winnipeg in fall-winter.
 Hundreds die.

December 22: Socialist Party of Canada holds famous mass rally at Walker Theatre.

May 16: City's business elites create the anti-strike Citizens' Committee.

General Ketchen, allied with Citizens' Committee, orders 5,000 soldiers in the city back to their barracks.

May 22: Federal cabinet ministers, accompanied by members of the Citizens' Committee, arrive in Winnipeg. They ignore the Strike Committee.

May 23: Large group of veterans vote to support strike. Others support Citizens' Committee.

May 25: Federal and provincial governments order strikers back to work and to sign anti-union pledge. They threaten to fire those who refuse to do so. Mass meeting at Victoria Park

May 30: Helen Armstrong arrested in confrontation for supporting bakery workers. She is arrested more times than anyone else during the strike and put in jail.

rejects both ultimatums.

June 1: Thousands of returned veterans supporting the strike march to Manitoba Legislature.

(Specials) to replace them.

June 10: Specials on horseback chased from corner of Portage and Main by a large crowd of strikers and supporters.

June 12: "Ladies Day" mass rally held in Victoria Park.

June 14: Thousands attend soldiers' parliament meeting in Victoria Park.

June 16-17: In the night, police raid homes of strike leaders and arrest them. Others are arrested over the following days. Ukrainian Labor Temple and (Jewish) Liberty Temple are raided. Hundreds of police surround and raid James Street Labor Temple.

June 18: Arrests of strike leaders protested across the country.

June 21: Bloody Saturday: Six strike leaders released on bail, but the European "aliens" held for deportation hearings remain imprisoned. Crowds gather in front of city hall in support of veterans' silent parade to protest arrests. Crowds and police clash. Two dead, many injured. Armed military units patrol downtown streets with machine guns.

1919

February 14: Ukrainian Labor Temple celebrates its grand opening.

March: Twenty-four Winnipeg unions represented at an organizing convention for One Big Union in Calgary. Intense internal political conflict within Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council (WTLC) over radicals' push for industrial unionism and greater militancy.

May 1-2: Building Trades and Metal Trades councils strike over union recognition, wages, working conditions.

May 6: WTLC announces vote of all union members will be held on whether to launch a sympathetic general strike to support striking building and metal trades councils.

May 13: WTLC announces at James Street Labor Temple that members voted overwhelming in favour of a sympathetic general strike.

Strike Committee of 300 members selected.

May 15: Union members and unorganized workers – women and men, Canadians and immigrants – join in massive strike action. City closed down.

June 2 and June 6: Women of Weston and Brooklands neighbourhoods lead crowds and prevent delivery wagons without "By Permission of the Strike Committee" signs driven by non-strikers – from entering their neighbourhoods. June 3: Winnipeg newspapers print Citizens' Committee advertisements demanding the deportation of "alien" workers. Winnipeg strikers gathering support from labour organizations across Canada.

June 6: Federal government introduces amendments to Immigration Act to deport any person not born in Canada accused of sedition. British citizens may also now be deported. **June 5:** Thousands of pro-strike veterans march across Winnipeg and along Wellington Crescent. This taking of the strike to Crescentwood, the home of the elites, alarms Citizens' Committee supporters. Mayor bans further marches. June 7: JS Woodsworth, Methodist minister and committed social reformer, returns to Winnipeg from Vancouver. Speaks at a Labor Church meeting of 10,000 at Victoria Park.

June 9: Police ordered to sign anti-strike pledge. They refuse and are fired. Citizens' Committee recruits "Special Police."

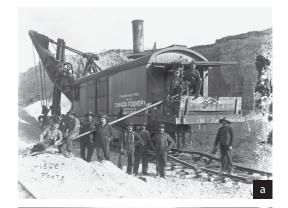
June 23: Determined strikers rally in Victoria Park. Police close the park and military troops are ordered back onto streets. June 25: With two supporters dead, many others assaulted, leaders arrested and workers "reduced to a state of terror," the WLTC calls off strike (Masters, p. 110).

1919 - After the Strike

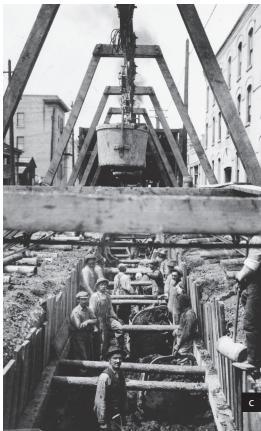
After the strike and in the coming years, working people focus on politics. They elect a large group of labour men and women to all levels of government. Strike leaders' trials and deportation hearings conclude.

1919 - Summer and Autumn

- Workers' Defense Committee and Jewish Relief Fund created to raise funds for arrested strikers and their families.
- Helen Armstrong and other labour leaders travel across Canada to raise support for charged strike leaders.
- Eight thousand march in Winnipeg under banners: Prison Bars Cannot Confine Ideas: Their Sentence is Our Sentence: and You Can't Deport Conviction.









- a. Workers loading gravel, c. 1915 Archives of Manitoba, LB Foote Collection
- b. Workers at the TW Taylor Bookbinding Company, c. 1915

 Archives of Manitoba
- c. Construction of the Winnipeg aqueduct, c. 1917

 Archives of Manitoba
- d. Workers moving electric turbine, May 1920
 Archives of Manitoba, LB Foote Collection

Winnipeg grew rapidly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The city's population rose from 26,000 in 1891 to 176,000 by 1921. Many new residents arrived from Britain, Ukraine, Poland, and other eastern European territories. Others came from western Europe and the United States. Many of the European working-class families settled in neighbourhoods in the North End – the area north of the CPR railway yards that stretched across the city from east to west.

Driving through these streets, one still gets a sense of what life was like here 100 years ago. The sites identified in the pages that follow offer a guide to that exploration. Driving north from the railway tracks provides the most dramatic approach to the North End. The poorest families lived nearest the tracks. The transition is apparent as one moves further away to the streets of better, but still modest, working-class

housing. Overcrowding was a problem throughout much of the North End at the end of the First World War. The daily hardships of life here contributed to the discontent that led to the General Strike. But despite these difficulties, the immigrants created a vibrant life that was reflected in the many community, labour, and mutual benefit societies centred on Selkirk Avenue.

The cluster of sites in the North End makes it a major focus of the tour. However, there were other large, working-class neighbourhoods located elsewhere in Winnipeg. Workers living in Brooklands, Weston, and West End neighbourhoods on the south side of the CPR provided crucial leadership and support to the strike. Many Europeans settled in these areas too, but these neighbourhoods were largely British. Other working-class areas included the neighbourhoods immediately west and east of the CNR yards and rail shops stretching through Fort Garry. The east side of Osborne Street to Jubilee Avenue became known locally as Rail Town.

Elmwood and some areas of Saint Boniface were home to many working-class families. Transcona, to the east of Winnipeg, was an important working-class town with some of the strongest labour supporters living there. All these areas are interesting to explore.

Indigenous Peoples

Little has been learned to date about the participation of Indigenous peoples in the General Strike. By 1919, the restrictive and racist government policies that characterized the colonialist, capitalist ethos of the period had forced Anishinaabe from their traditional territories in the Winnipeg area and elsewhere in the region onto isolated reserves. Also, most Métis had been forced off their land by government directives and unscrupulous real estate interests. Métis remaining in Winnipeg were segregated in small districts at the edge of town. See Further Reading: Perry, Aqueduct.







- a. Winnipeg Fire Hall No. 3
 (Maple Street), 1923

 Fire Fighters Historical Museum of Winnipeg, Inc.
- b. Winnipeg Fire Hall No. 3
 (Maple Street), 1918

 Fire Fighters Historical Museum of Winnipeg, Inc.
- c. Canadian Pacific Railway Station and Royal Alexandra Hotel (left), 1909 Western Canada Pictorial Index

Union Station

(Winnipeg Railway Station/Via Rail Canada)

123 Main Street 🎩

Union Railway Station was another major point of arrival for newcomers. Operated by the CNR, it was associated with the luxurious Fort Gary Hotel at 222 Broadway.

1 Winnipeg Fire Hall No. 3 (Fire Fighters Museum of Winnipeg) 56 Maple Street 4

Winnipeg fire fighters were no strangers to labour activism in 1919. They had been lobbying for improved wages and hours of work for years. These concerns and the fear that new recruits would lose their jobs to returning soldiers led to the formation of the Winnipeg Firemen's Union in 1916. When civic workers struck in 1918, fire fighters joined in. Most city workers won modest wage increases, union recognition and the right to strike. Fire fighters were refused this right. Strike action could mean dismissal.

Despite this threat, fire fighters voted overwhelmingly to support the General Strike. At the same time, they pledged to provide full service where human life was in danger. Civic authorities rejected this offer. On May 26, Winnipeg City Council dismissed fire fighters and all other civic employees who refused to return to work. It passed resolutions prohibiting fire fighters from joining international unions and participating in sympathy strikes.

The Citizens' Committee advertised for replacements and hired 350 anti-strike volunteers. On Bloody Saturday, these "volunteers" used fire hoses to douse protesters. Equipment from the Maple Street fire hall was sent to extinguish the street car fire.

In the days to come, 54 of the 204 firefighters who joined the strike were refused employment. One man was denied his pension. Despite these setbacks, the United Fire Fighters of Winnipeg re-grouped to provide effective representation for its members. In 2002, it became the first fire fighters union worldwide to win Presumptive Workers Compensation coverage for its members in recognition of the inherent dangers faced on the job.

Canadian Pacific Railway Station (Aboriginal Centre of Winnipeg, Inc.) 181 Higgins Avenue

Thousands of newcomers arrived at this site beginning in the late 1800s. The poorest among them were sent to immigration halls across Higgins Avenue. These buildings provided offices for immigration agents and temporary accommodation to immigrants with no other options. Disease flourished in these crowded halls. Other newcomers stayed at nearby hotels and boarding houses, or were met by family members and taken to their homes.

By contrast, the railway's Royal Alexandra Hotel (Higgins and Main) provided wealthy travelers with splendid accommodation. Federal government authorities stayed here during the strike and held meetings here with Citizens' and Strike Committee leaders.





- a. Immigrant couple, early 20th c.
 The Manitoba Museum
- b. Immigrant family, Flora Avenue, c. 1910 Western Canada Pictorial Index
- c. Olga (Hrekul) Tsurkalenko-Hunka, c. 1918 Association of United Ukrainian Canadians Archives



European Immigrants and the General Strike

It is difficult to draw bold generalizations about the participation in the General Strike of the central and eastern European families who lived mainly in the North End. However, reports indicate that workers discussed the confrontation in the Ukrainian Labor Temple (ULT), Jewish Liberty Temple and other associational halls. The Labor Church held meetings at the ULT. One Ukrainian worker commented that the 300 mostly Galicians and Bukovinians who repaired the street car lines "all belonged to the One Big Union." There are reports of other immigrants supporting the strike. But it wasn't just men. Olga (Hrekul) Tsurkalenko-Hunka, member of the ULT, was in her early twenties in 1919. The strike "opened the doors to understanding what the class struggle really means," she reminisced on the 50th anniversary of the General Strike. She volunteered in the Labor Café where she became friends with Helen Armstrong and Edith Hancox. "My husband and I never missed a

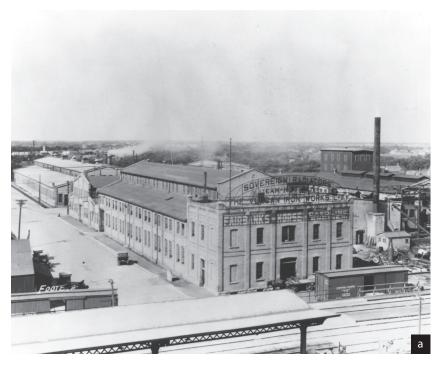
meeting in Victoria Park, never missed a demonstration. We went to Victoria Park to the Workers' Church to listen to the talk by Bill Ivens ... I would give anything to be twenty years younger and be in the struggle again."*

The participation of these immigrants, for whom English was not their first language, was crucial to sustaining the General Strike. These women and men were an integral part of the working-class solidarity that swept Winnipeg at the end of the First World War.

Prejudice still confronted many immigrants. Ethnic slurs were hurled at them, especially when venturing outside their own districts. Jewish families sometimes faced antisemitism from other immigrants as well as from the people they encountered downtown. Some veterans returning from the First World War accused immigrants of stealing their jobs. But most returned soldiers resisted such scapegoating and demanded jobs for all. The Citizens'

Committee accused immigrants of being at the root cause of the strike even though it knew such accusations were unfounded. Consequently, immigrants had much to fear in Winnipeg if they were too visible in their support of the strike. The ultimate threat they faced was deportation. Immigrants could be, and were, deported from Canada because of their political activities. Sometimes this happened just because they were poor.

^{*} Association of United Ukrainian Canadian Archives, Winnipeg







- a. Vulcan Iron Works, early 20th c.
 Archives of Manitoba, LB Foote Collection
- b. All People's Mission, 119 Sutherland Avenue
 (Manitoba Indigenous Cultural Education Centre),
 c. 1910

Western Canada Pictorial Index

c. Point Douglas Ukrainian Labor Temple, 197 Euclid Avenue (constructed 1938), c. 1970 Association of United Ukrainian Canadians

Vulcan Iron Works and the Point DouglasNeighbourhood105 Maple Street North

Point Douglas changed rapidly after the railway cut through the community in the 1880s. The wealthy families living there, having pushed Indigenous peoples out of the area years before, moved to the newer, quieter neighbourhoods of south end Winnipeg. Industries crowded into Point Douglas to take advantage of the railway for shipping and receiving. Factories produced farm implements, paints, liquor, beds, wagons and carriages. Hundreds of workers were employed.

Few of those living in Point Douglas – or in other workingclass neighbourhoods – owned their homes. Families usually rented accommodation, and single men and women lived in boarding houses. Some of the "poorest of the poor" – mostly newcomers from central and eastern Europe – lived and worked in Point Douglas. Overcrowding and the dirt and noise of industry made for appalling living conditions.

The Vulcan Iron Works, which manufactured parts for the railways, was one of Winnipeg's largest metalworking shops. Its buildings stretched along the railway tracks for several city blocks. Vulcan employees worked longer hours, earned lower wages, and faced poorer working conditions than the unionized metal trades workers who were employed directly by the railways. Before the First World War, metal trades workers at Vulcan Iron works, Manitoba Bridge and Dominion Bridge lost several bitter fights with these companies over the right to have a union.

Workers' discontent escalated during the war. Employers demanded ever greater production, while inflation eroded the workers' incomes. Skilled workers at Vulcan, Manitoba Bridge, and Dominion Bridge struck again in 1917 and 1918, demanding union recognition and improved wages and working conditions. But the employers prevailed in these disputes. They hired strike

breakers and brought in a detective agency to intimidate the workers. They backed up these tactics with court injunctions against picketing of their premises.

Determined to win union recognition, workers struck once again on May 1, 1919. This time, the strikers had the full support of Winnipeg's powerful Metal Trades Council. The Council represented and bargained for 19 craft unions in the city's main railway shops. Its members were determined to secure a victory for their non-unionized brothers. But once again, the employers fought hard against unionization. Neither side was willing to compromise. The Metal Trades Council responded with dramatic action to support the strikers. It launched a sympathy strike of all its members to win union recognition for the Vulcan and other metal shop workers. This confrontation escalated guickly. It became a key factor in the declaration of a general sympathetic strike on May 15, 1919.









- a. Corner of King Street and Dufferin Avenue, 1904
 Archives of Manitoba
- b. Tenement housing in North End Winnipeg, early 20th c. Western Canada Pictorial Index
- c. Working class neighbourhood, c.1904 Archives of Manitoba
- d. Children in poor housing, c.1916 Archives of Manitoba

4 Working-Class Housing

Drive along North End streets like Dufferin Avenue and Stella Avenue to see the many examples of houses occupied by working families in 1919. These streets, with their often tiny houses pressed together on 25 foot lots, are typical of the homes that flanked the north and south sides of the CPR railyards stretching from Point Douglas to Keewatin Street. Workers lived in these neighbourhoods because they were located near their place of work and, often, this was the only accommodation they could afford.

The rail yards and factories nearby made life here difficult. Smoke filled the air and soot blackened furnishings and windows. The constant back and forth shunting of the trains shook the flimsy houses. Overcrowding was a serious problem. Property owners, who often lived far outside the area, subdivided houses or squeezed two or more buildings onto a single lot. Official reports stated that as many as five

families lived in one house. JS Woodsworth, a social reformer, complained that people froze to death when fierce winter winds blew through cracks in the walls and broken windows. Outbreaks of typhoid, tuberculosis, pneumonia, and other diseases haunted the lives of residents. Social conditions were among the worst reported in Canada.

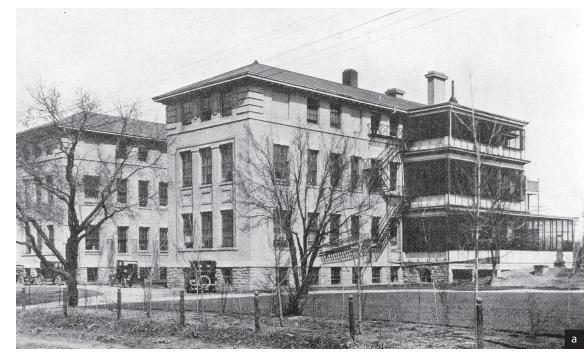
5 Selkirk Avenue

Newcomers from central and eastern Europe lived in the least desirable housing, just north of the busy and noisy CPR railyards. Over 80 percent of Winnipeg's Jewish and Slavic families lived here in 1919.

Selkirk Avenue was the retail and cultural focus of the new neighbourhood. Confectioneries, butcher shops, grocery stores, banks, real estate agencies, loan offices, theatres, and meeting halls lined the street. German, Jewish, Polish, Ukrainian, and English-language community newspapers kept residents up to date on local news and events in their homelands. Mutual benefit societies like the North End Relief Association, the Hungarian Kossuth Sick Benefit Association, and the United Hebrew Charities offered companionship and financial assistance to those in need.

The North End, with its diversity of languages, religions, dress, and culture, stood in sharp contrast to other Winnipeg neighbourhoods. Immigrants felt at home walking and shopping here. These families contributed to the remarkable solidarity of workers across Winnipeg's working-class neighbourhoods in 1919.

Not everyone in Winnipeg found the diversity of Selkirk Avenue to their liking, however. Many newcomers experienced intense discrimination. They heard their neighbourhoods belittled by outsiders as "the foreign quarter," "CPR town," or "New Jerusalem."







- a. Children's Hospital of Winnipeg, located at Aberdeen Avenue,
 Main Street and Redwood Avenue, c.1920
 Winnipeg Health Sciences Centre Archives
- b. Nurses Residence, Children's Hospital, 165 Aberdeen Avenue, c.1920 (still standing in 2019)
 Winnipeg Health Sciences Centre Archives
- c. Ethel Johns, Director of Nursing at Children's Hospital, c. 1915 Winnipeg Health Sciences Centre Archives

6 The 1918 Influenza Epidemic: Children's Hospital and the Nurses School Residence

165 Aberdeen Avenue

Winnipeg did not escape the ravages of the flu epidemic that swept much of the world in 1918. City officials reported 1.200 residents died from influenza that fall. Thousands of others became ill. The flu affected families throughout the city. Working-class neighbourhoods faced the greatest devastation, and immigrants suffered the most. Having wealth meant better living conditions and sanitation, which limited the spread of disease. It also meant that those who did become ill had greater access to health care. The flu killed entire households, orphaned children, and made single parents of many adults. Working class and immigrant men and, especially, women faced a difficult future. They lacked the resources the city's wealthier residents had to improve their lives.

Influenza fueled the momentum toward the social upheaval of 1919. Mutual assistance within working-class neighbourhoods during the crisis deepened social solidarity, while the slow and inadequate response of government left people angry. The state's unwillingness to involve labour in decision making on public health issues also frustrated workers. Bans on public meetings in the last days of the epidemic led many to conclude the restrictions were meant to frustrate labour organizing.

Working-class and immigrant women played a crucial role caring for the sick. Much of this work went unnoticed. Male labour leaders responded in a traditional way, assuming women would serve as mothers and caregivers while men acted as breadwinners. Even the many politically empowered, middle-class women who volunteered during the crisis were unable to shake the patriarchal norms of the era.

Ethel Johns

Children's Hospital cared for youngsters who became sick, or whose parents were ill or had died during the epidemic. The hospital's Director of Nursing, Ethel Johns, was praised by her bosses for her "efficient, innovative and aggressive" running of the facility. They credited her with fostering "the splendid spirit of the nurses, students and domestic staff during this trying time."* But Johns ran into trouble in 1919 when she welcomed strikers who delivered milk and showed up to repair serious damage caused by a storm. The hospital's Board of Directors and Women's Guild, who sided with the Citizens' Committee, demanded her resignation. Ethel Johns was forced to leave Winnipeg to find work. She became one of the best known and most highly respected nurses in the western world.

^{*} Harry Medovy, A Vision Fulfilled: The Story of the Children's Hospital of Winnipeg (1979), p. 136-137









- a. Telephone Operators and Supervisors, 1919
 Telephone Pioneers of America, Winnipeg
- b. St. John's Telephone Exchange Building, 405 Burrows Avenue, 2013
 Photo: Sharon Reilly
- c. Kindergarten class, All People's Mission, Maple Street Church, c. 1904 United Church Archives
- d. All People's Mission, 470 Stella Avenue, c. 1920 Western Canada Pictorial Index

7 All Peoples' Mission (CEDA - Community Education Development Association Winnipeg, Inc.)
470 Stella Avenue

This building housed one of several All Peoples' Missions in the poorest immigrant neighbourhoods of Winnipeg's North End. Most were run by the Methodist Church but Anglican and Presbyterian missions also operated nearby. Committed to improving social conditions for immigrants, these churches accompanied their relief efforts with a strong cultural message. Mission programs emphasized Anglo-Saxon values and Protestant Christian beliefs. Activities ranged from providing charitable donations, like food hampers, to offering Sunday school lessons, advice on sanitation, and "Fresh Air" summer camps for the children of the poor. Health care for immigrant women and children was, perhaps, the most important contribution of the missions. JS Woodsworth, who in 1933 was elected the first leader of the Cooperative Commonwealth

Federation, directed the work of the Stella Avenue Mission from an adjoining house between 1907 and 1913. At the beginning of the First World War, he left Winnipeg and did not return until the General Strike was in progress.

8 St. John's Telephone Exchange Building (Winnipeg Housing Rehabilitation Corporation)

405 Burrows Avenue at Salter Street 🕮

The rapid expansion of telephone networks in the early 20th century provided women with a new opportunity for employment. The industry appealed to young women. It advertised clean working conditions, an all-female workplace, and better wages than factory and retail jobs. However, conditions were not as advertised. Long hours with few breaks, low wages, and constant supervision – to force the women to work harder and not use time to speak with one

another – soon frustrated many operators. By 1918, most telephone operators were employed by the Manitoba Government Telephone System. That year they joined other government employees in a general strike that set the stage for the confrontation of 1919.

In May 1919 most operators, in Winnipeg and in the many rural telephone exchanges, left their switchboards and joined the General Strike. This meant there was no telephone service in Manitoba for most of the first week of the strike. The Citizens' Committee arranged for replacement workers to re-open the telephone exchanges and paid them much more than the striking operators. Some services were provided but the system remained disrupted until the strike was over. Operators who struck for the duration of the General Strike were fired and blacklisted.







WORKERS
OF THE WORLD
UNITE





- a. Editorial office, Ukrainian Labor Temple, post 1918
 Association of United Ukrainian Canadians Archive
- b. Ukrainian Labor Temple, 2006
 Association of United Ukrainian Canadians Archive
- c. Ukrainian Labor Temple, 1983 Photo: Gerry Berkowski
- d. Liberty Temple activists, c. 1926
 Archives of Manitoba, Jewish Historical Society Collection
- e. Jewish radicals; Rose Alein (*centre*), elected in 1919 as school trustee from Independent Labour Party, 1906 Jewish Historical Society of Western Canada

9 The Ukrainian Labor Temple (1918) 4 591 Pritchard Avenue at McGregor Street

A building of great historical significance, the Ukrainian Labor Temple (ULT) was constructed largely by volunteer labour and with financial donations from members of the city's progressive Ukrainian community. A wonderfully preserved community hall, rich in history, it is a must see on the strike tour.

Many mutual benefit societies flourished in Winnipeg in the early 1900s. They began as voluntary organizations founded on the efforts of individuals who sought companionship, economic security and social improvement through collective association. The ULT stands as one of the few surviving buildings owned and operated by such organizations. For members in need, the ULT provided financial assistance, food, and clothing. Its members organized social, cultural, political and educational activities. Reading classes, political debating clubs, and choral, theatrical, musical and dance productions

were an integral part in the life of the ULT. Labour unions held their meetings here.

Other ethnic associations offered similar companionship and assistance to immigrant communities. Liberty Temple, for example, was established by Jewish radicals. Both the Ukrainian Labor Temple and Liberty Temple were raided by the police on the night of June 16 –17. The ULT printing presses were smashed and books and files were seized and used to claim evidence of a conspiracy during the trials of the strike leaders.

10 Liberty Temple 410 Pritchard Avenue at Salter Street

Liberty Temple was home to the Winnipeg branch of the Arbeiter Ring (Workmen's Circle), a progressive Jewish society that was dedicated to social change and mutual aid. It also promoted the Yiddish language and culture. Committed to working-class solidarity that stretched beyond ethnic boundaries, the society hosted many intense debates among left-wing Jewish political groups.

The 1919 strike was strongly supported by Jewish radicals. Three of these individuals served on the Strike Committee - AA Heaps, a labour politician; and Max Tessler and M Temenson of the Metal Workers Union. The Israelite Press carried scathing indictments of the Citizens' Committee. Liberty Temple served as an information centre on the strike. Anti-strike campaigns targeted Jewish strikers with a barrage of anti-immigrant and antisemitic attacks. On June 17, Liberty Temple was raided by the police. Jewish homes were ransacked, and three men were arrested and faced with the possibility of immediate deportation - Samuel Blumenberg, Michael Charitinoff, and Moses Almazov, A Jewish Workers' Committee was formed to organize a Strike Relief Fund in their support.

FEDERAL ELECTION

REGISTER!

SEPTEMBER 24th TO SEPTEMBER 30th



VOTE LABOR HEAPS, A. A. X

Polling Day, October 29th

REMEMBER-Mark Your Ballot With a X

andersage

Reproduction of a Federal Election leaflet of the Thirties.









- a. AA Heaps Election poster, c. 1930 Leo Heaps, *Rebel in the House*
- b. John Queen, Member of Manitoba Legislative Assembly, 1921 Archives of Manitoba
- c. AA Heaps Residence, 1985 Photo: Gerry Berkowski
- d. John Queen Residence, 1985 Photo: Gerry Berkowski
- e. Arrested strike leaders at Vaughn Street jail, fall 1919 Library and Archives Canada

11 Arrest of the Strike Leaders, June 17

The arrest of the strike leaders on June 17 was dramatic. At 2:00 am eight police cars swept down on the homes of the men who were to be arrested. Each car carried three armed police officers. They roused the suspects from their sleep and took them into custody. The police raided the James Street Labor Temple, surrounding it with 500 soldiers and members of the Royal North West Mounted Police (RNWMP). Police also raided the Ukrainian Labor Temple and offices of the Western Labor News, RB Russell, John Queen. George Armstrong, Roger Bray, AA Heaps, William Ivens, Bill Pritchard, and Dick Johns were charged with conspiracy to overthrow the government by force. These men were of British origin and were prominent leaders in the local and regional labour and socialist movements. They had gained the respect of Winnipeg's working class citizens through many years of hard work, and their supporters would come to their aid after the arrests.

Four more men were apprehended by the police on June 17 – Matthew Charitonoff; Mike Verenczuk (mistaken for Boris Devyatkin); Oscar Schoppelrei; and Solomon (Moses) Almazoff. These men were radicals who were active in their communities but not prominent in the day to day leadership of the General Strike. The Citizens' Committee and the government brought them before immigration officials. It was their intention to deport them. They were targeted because they had eastern European names. Authorities were desperate to blame the strike on "enemy aliens."

Residences of the Arrested Strike Leaders

Abram Albert (AA) Heaps, furrier:

562 Burrows Avenue (now demolished)

William Ivens, Labor Church minister and journalist:

309 Inkster Avenue

John Queen, cooper:

317 Alfred Avenue

Robert Boyd (RB) Russell, machinist:

1415 Ross Avenue

Richard J. (Dick) Johns, machinist:

256 Isabel Street (now demolished)

George Armstrong, carpenter: **Edmonton Street**

Roger E Bray, butcher, returned soldier and Methodist preacher: **East Kildonan**

William Pritchard, carpenter; a Vancouver labour organizer living in Winnipeg at the time of the strike







- a. Railway workers, c. 1920 Archives of Manitoba
- b. CPR Weston Shops Archives of Manitoba
- c. Grand Trunk Pacific Railway workers, c. 1915 Western Canada Pictorial Index
- d. Google Earth view Map data © 2019 Google





12 The Weston Shops (CPR) and Labour Militancy

For location, see map A

In 1919, Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) and Canadian National Railway employed some 10,000 workers across Winnipeg and in nearby Transcona. The railways' operations were complex. All kinds of skilled workers and many more unskilled labourers were needed to maintain the rail system, run the trains, and handle the huge volume of freight and passengers that passed through Winnipeg. The Weston Shops, one of several worksites operated by the railways in the city, hired hundreds of machinists, moulders, plumbers, pipefitters, and other skilled workers. Large numbers of semi-skilled workers and labourers also found work here. The men working in these shops repaired the companies' steam engines, and freight and passenger cars. They forged steel for the rails, and did the many other jobs essential to the successful operation of the railway. Only a few original buildings remain from this era.



Take Logan Avenue to Electa Street. Turn north onto Electa. Turn right onto Gallagher Avenue. Follow Gallagher until it turns into Bawlf Street, turn left. You will find a parking lot at the end of Bawlf. From the parking lot walk north through the park (towards the tracks). The Weston Shops are to your left.

Long hours of labour, dirty and noisy working conditions, and low wages in these industries prompted the skilled workers to organize into 19 different craft unions before the First World War. During the war, these unions organized a Metal Trades Council to improve their bargaining power with the CPR. The craft exclusiveness of these unions, however, meant semiskilled and unskilled workers in the shops were not unionized. RB Russell, Dick Johns, and their supporters argued against this rigid structure. They proposed replacing the craft unions with one big industrial union that would represent all the workers in the railway shops. In 1919, they were busy transforming the Metal Trades Council into just such an industrial union.

In spring 1919, Russell and Johns were also working, along with other socialist leaders across Canada, to create the One Big Union (OBU). An extension of the industrial union model emerging in the railway shops, the OBU was to include all Canadian workers – regardless of their skill, gender, race or ethnicity – in a single industrial union. Russell, Johns and others challenged the exclusion of Black workers by the International Association of Machinists in the pre-war years. This may explain why, as the *Western Labor News* reported on May 16, Winnipeg's newly formed, all-Black union of Sleeping Car Porters voted 67 – 2 in favour of joining the Winnipeg General Strike.



CARD OF MEMBERSHIP

ONE BIG UNION

NATIONAL INDUSTRIAL UNION OF THE DOMINION OF CANADA

"Money is the Root of All Evil," saith the Lord.

I, the undersigned, do hereby declare that, by the help of God, I will STRIKE against the use of money at any time I may be called upon.

Name	• • • • • • •	• • • • • •	• • • • • • •	
Address				
Witness				

"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," saith the Lord.

(To be Returned to Head Office)





- a. RB Russell, Independent Labor Party candidate, 1927 Mary Jordon, Survival (1975)
- b. One Big Union membership card, 1919
- c. Artist's drawing of the trial of RB Russell, *Winnipeg Free Press*, December 17, 1919 Archives of Manitoba
- d. RB Russell residence, c. 1985 Photo: Gerry Berkowski

RB (Bob) Russell

When eight police cars set out to arrest the leaders of the General Strike early on the morning of June 17, one car stopped at 1415 Ross Avenue. Three armed police officers entered the house, roused Russell from his bed, and charged him with conspiracy to overthrow the government. As Russell dressed, the police swept letters and notes from his desk into a burlap sack. They confiscated books and files as evidence to be used against him at his trial. Before dawn, Russell and the other arrested strike leaders were taken to Stony Mountain Penitentiary and jailed. Massive popular support for the men forced authorities to release them on bail three days later.

Of the leaders of the Winnipeg labour movement in 1919, Russell was the one most feared by government and by the Citizens' Committee. The broad, popular support Russell drew from Winnipeg's working people, and his national prominence as a socialist and trade union leader, commanded respect even from his opponents. Russell was only 30 years old in 1919. Many other activists involved in the strike were of a similar age.

Russell arrived in Winnipeg from Glasgow in 1911. A skilled machinist, he soon found employment in the CPR Weston Shops. Russell was a staunch trade unionist. His intelligence and his articulate voice soon brought him to prominence in the International Association of Machinists and on the Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council. Many workers were increasingly militant at this time in response to deteriorating conditions at work and in their neighbourhoods. Russell and other skilled workers were particularly angered by the employers' adoption of "scientific management" techniques and their use of new technologies designed to erode workers' traditional control over the shop floor.

Russell also was active in the Socialist Party of Canada. In

March 1919, he joined the Winnipeg delegation to the Western Labor Conference in Calgary which called for the building of the One Big Union. Russell was deeply involved in creating the OBU when the General Strike began in May.

In November 1919, Russell received a two-year sentence for his role in the General Strike. This was the longest sentence handed down to any of the strike leaders. Public pressure won Russell's early release in December 1920 and he resumed his advocacy of the OBU. He continued to be a respected labour leader in the city until his death in 1964. In 1967, the Province of Manitoba officially recognized Russell's singular contribution to the labour movement and named a vocational high school in his honour, the RB Russell Vocational High School.









- a. Wellington Crescent, c. 1914

 Archives of Manitoba
- b. Domestic servants employed at one of Winnipeg's wealthier homes, c. 1915
 Archives of Manitoba
- c. Fox hunting, Charleswood, c. 1912
 Archives of Manitoba
- d. Women curlers at the Winnipeg Board of Trade Building, c. 1906 Archives of Manitoba

Crescentwood: Home of the Elites For locations see Map A

It was a place "...where one could walk, but on tip-toe, and look and look but never touch, and never speak to break the enchanted hush." *

By 1900, the expansion of business and industry into the older residential areas of downtown Winnipeg led many wealthy homeowners to move further away from the encroaching city centre. Crescentwood – south of the Assiniboine River – was a logical choice for those searching for an alternative to the area north of the Assiniboine to Broadway. The beauty of the thickly treed river property and its promotion by developers as a quiet, spacious, and luxurious neighborhood made Crescentwood alluring to these wealthy families. Building restrictions ensured that only exclusive houses were constructed on the area's huge lots.

The river formed a natural barrier against the noise and traffic of the inner city. The insular nature of the neighbourhood was reinforced by occupational and ethnic bonds. By 1919, Crescentwood was home to lawyers, grain merchants, bankers, and industrialists – the wealthiest and most influential people in Winnipeg. They served together on the boards of directors of banks, businesses and industries. Often, they were elected as councillors at city hall. The majority of these residents were of British descent. They had their own social clubs, private schools, churches, parks, stores, and even a university nearby. Most of south Winnipeg played an active role in resisting the General Strike. Aldermen AJ Andrews participated in planning the arrest of the strike leaders, while Isaac Pitblado served as the prosecuting attorney at their trials. Others volunteered their services with the Citizens' Committee.

Few working people ventured into this area other than domestics, gardeners, and others employed here. However,

the peaceful seclusion of Crescentwood was shattered three weeks into the General Strike. On June 5, members of the Great War Veterans Association who supported the strike led a massive parade of 4,000 strikers across the Maryland Bridge and along Wellington Crescent. Singing and cheering, they marched on to the Manitoba Legislature. Crescentwood residents reportedly bolted their doors in response to the intrusion.

Many homes in this neighbourhood date to the 1919 era. Driving along Wellington Crescent and streets like Kingsway, Harvard, and Yale, after viewing the working-class districts of the North End, highlights the stark contrast between wealth and poverty in Winnipeg at the end of First World War.

*John Marlyn, Under the Ribs of Death (1957), p.64







- a. Citizen's Committee gathering, 1919 Archives of Manitoba
- B. General Ketchen (front right) with group at St. John's College, 1919
 Archives of Manitoba, LB Foote Collection
- c. Swearing in of the "Special Police," June 5, 1919
 Archives of Manitoba
- d. Women "volunteers" staffing downtown gas station, May 1919 Archives of Manitoba, LB Foote Collection



13 Citizens' Committee Members and Residences

The Citizens' Committee was organized as soon as the strike began by the residents of Winnipeg who opposed the unions' position. Chaired by AK Godfrey, Past-President of the Board of Trade, and led by people such as AL Crossin, an insurance broker, and JE Botterell, a grain broker and member of the Board of Trade, the Citizens' Committee widely publicized its intention to operate public utilities and other essential services with volunteers. This was only one of its functions during the strike. Through its newspaper, The Citizen, the committee attempted to sway public opinion towards its own conviction that sympathy strikes were unnecessary, expensive, and potentially dangerous to public and private property. The Citizen portrayed the General Strike as a Bolshevik Revolution led by foreign revolutionaries. These sentiments were also expressed by Crescentwood residents like Councillor John K Sparling and AJ Andrews, lawyer and

leading member of the Citizens' Committee. The Citizens' Committee's position that the city should not negotiate with the strikers held sway on city council.

The Citizens' Committee was secretive about its membership. No formal list of members was ever published. Most of its members were middle aged, older and well established among the city's economic, political and social elites. It enjoyed the support of WH Carter, President of the Board of Trade, and WB Moore, its secretary. The Manitoba Grocers Association, the Canadian Manufacturers Association, the Retail Merchants Association, and many other business and professional organizations made financial contributions to the Citizens' Committee during the General Strike.

Residences of Citizens' Committee

Alfred Joseph Andrews, lawyer:

749 Wellington Crescent (demolished)

John Esterbrooke Botterell, merchant:

254 Wellington Crescent

William Henry Carter, businessman:

251 Harvard Avenue

Thomas Russ Deacon, owner, Manitoba Bridge and Iron Works and Mayor of Winnipeg:

144 Yale Avenue

Alvin Keyes Godfrey, grain merchant:

144 Kingsway

General Huntley Douglas Brodie Ketchen, military officer and later, politician:

111 Nassau Avenue

WB Moore, Winnipeg Board of Trade Secretary:

785 Dorchester Avenue

Isaac Pitblado, lawyer:

523 Wellington Crescent







- a."We Stand for 35,000 against 1,000" Parade of pro-strike returned soldiers, June 4, 1919
 Library and Archives Canada
- b. Mounted "Special Police" at Portage Avenue and Main Street, June 10, 1919
 Archives of Manitoba, LB Foote Collection
- c." Special Police" on patrol, June 10, 1919 Archives of Manitoba, LB Foote Collection
- d. Anti-strike returned soldiers parade, June 4, 1919
 Archives of Manitoba



Central Winnipeg: Scene of the Conflict For locations see Map B

By mid-morning of May 15, the Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council had brought its 12,000 members from the city's shops, offices and factories out on strike. Unionized workers were joined in their sympathetic strike by thousands of nonunion working men and women. Winnipeg was virtually shut down. Telegraph, telephone, and mail service stopped, leaving the city temporarily isolated from the rest of the world. Even the police voted 114 to 11 to strike. Although the police remained on duty, at the request of the Strike Committee, their sympathy with the strikers soon brought their dismissal by Mayor Gray. "Special Police" recruited by the Citizens' Committee replaced the regular police. This decision heightened tension between strikers and the employers and government authorities.

Central Winnipeg was contested terrain in the spring of

1919. The city's downtown housed the headquarters of the main protagonists – the Strike Committee and the Citizens' Committee. Milling crowds of pro- and anti-strikers paraded, demonstrated, and jostled with one another here daily. Rumors about the progress of the strike or the arrival of the "Specials" quickly brought hundreds of people out into the streets. On June 10, a strikers' demonstration at Portage Avenue and Main Street forced the city to withdraw the "Specials" and order a group of mounted policemen back to their barracks. Later, an anti-strike councillor testified that the presence of the "Specials" was a "test" to determine who had "control of the streets." Both sides in the strike seemed to know this. Ultimately, this led to the violent clashes of Bloody Saturday on June 21.

Walking the streets of the Exchange District today – east and west – is to step back in time. It was here that the most dramatic demonstrations, rallies, and confrontations of the General Strike occurred. This tour identifies some of the most significant sites of the conflict. But there is much more here to explore. A large number of buildings from the era still stand today. Many of these places have been designated as Municipal, Provincial and/or National Historic Sites. Interpretive plaques mounted on, or near, these buildings provide fascinating historical information. A list of related heritage websites is included under "Further Reading."







- a. Police on horseback at Fort Osborne Barracks, 1919
 - Archives of Manitoba
- b. Military tents, Fort Osborne Barracks, with the Manitoba Legislative Building under construction in background, 1919
 Archives of Manitoba
- c. Manitoba Club, c. 1920 Library and Archives Canada

14 Manitoba Legislative Building 450 Broadway

The present Manitoba Legislative Building was partially open in 1919, but most government business was still conducted in the old Legislature located nearby, on the east side of Kennedy Street. The mass parades of pro- and anti-strike returned soldiers made their way past this site on their way down Broadway. The provincial government did not play a major role in the General Strike. Premier Norris was reluctant to put his government between the strikers and the Citizens' Committee, or between the federal and civic governments. After Bloody Saturday, Norris finally did meet with a delegation of strikers. He agreed to establish a Royal Commission to investigate labour conditions and the General Strike. This decision helped the Strike Committee in its decision to end the strike.

Also notable: Winnipeg Law Courts, 391 Broadway

15 Fort Osborne Barracks Manitoba Legislative Building Grounds

On June 21 (Bloody Saturday) Mayor Gray met with General Ketchen at the Fort Osborne Barracks. Gray instructed Ketchen to assemble all available men – from here and from the Minto Armoury (969 St. Matthews Avenue) to enforce his proclamation against street parades. A crowd had gathered along Main Street to watch a pro-strike parade of returned soldiers. Ketchen acted immediately, sending soldiers from the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, the Winnipeg Grenadiers, the Winnipeg Light Infantry and the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders to patrol the streets.

The events of Bloody Saturday resulted from this intervention by the military and the Royal North West Mounted Police. The General Strike was one of the very few times in Canada's history when soldiers were ordered to occupy a Canadian city and to police its own citizens.

16 Broadway and the Manitoba Club 194 Broadway

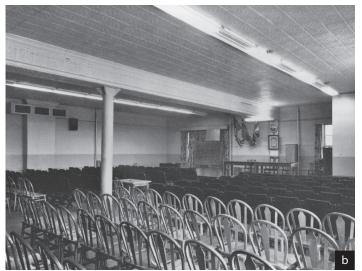
The Broadway area was in transition in 1919. Many residents had already moved to Crescentwood, but the area was popular with wealthy doctors, lawyers, bankers and businessmen who worked downtown.

The Manitoba Club was an exclusive, all-male club of the Anglo-Saxon elite. Winnipeg's most influential business and political leaders met here. The club also served as a private, informal meeting place for the Citizens' Committee in 1919.

The nearby Vaughn Street Jail held labour leaders Helen Armstrong and John Queen during the strike. The jail and law courts played an important role in the post-strike trials.

Also notable: Vaughn Street Jail, 444 York Avenue at Memorial Boulevard





- a. James Street Labor Temple, Strike Committee Headquarters
 Archives of Manitoba
- b. Meeting Room 10, James Street Labor Temple
 Local 343, United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners

17 James Street Labor Temple – Strike Headquarters

165 James Avenue at Louise Street

The James Street Labor Temple was the city hall of the labour movement. It was located on the city block where The Manitoba Museum now stands. Union locals rented rooms here and the building housed the offices of the Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council (WTLC). Helen Armstrong, as President in the Women's Labor League, also had an office here. In early May in 1919, the Building Trades Council petitioned the WTLC for help in negotiations with their employers. They were not disappointed.

On May 13, the *Western Labor News* reported, "... never before in the history of Winnipeg has there been such a Trades Council session. It was tense, electric and determined. Every inch was jammed with a seething mass of trade unionists, men and women. Amid an oppressive hush," the WTLC

announced the results of its ballot for a city-wide sympathetic general strike of all workers – "over eleven thousand had voted aye and only five hundred no. The meeting broke into cheers. It was unanimously and enthusiastically decided to call the strike at 11:00 am on Thursday, May 15."

The meeting elected 300 members to a General Strike Committee, from which a 15-member Central Strike Committee was elected. This smaller committee met daily at the Labor Temple throughout the strike. It authorized those in essential services, like the police, to continue working and issued "Permitted by the Authority of the Strike Committee" posters to the corner stores in the North End to provide strikers with essentials like milk and bread. Mayor Gray and the Citizens' Committee claimed that these posters represented the usurpation of constituted authority by the strikers. On June 17, the police raided the building, smashing windows, doors, and furniture. Union offices were trashed and documents seized.

For the strike leaders it was a demanding but exciting time. Each day began with a discussion of "...strike business in the morning, including the general view of the situation [and]...an hour in the Strike Committee..." In the afternoon, the leaders went off "...to address the waiting crowds, [to] pass along whatever news was available." The Committee reassembled until 6:00 pm and then dispersed, once again, "...to all points of the compass, within the city and outside, to talk to other waiting crowds; returning to meet with the Strike Committee until the wee small hours..." until, finally, "a weary tramp homewards."*

* Western Labor News, May 1919



LABOR CHURCH

AS USUAL—SUNDAY, 7. P.M. Victoria Park. Speakers:

J. S. Woodsworth, F. J. Dixon and Ald. Robinson. Music.

MEETINGS FOR SATURDAY, JUNE 21.

	Victoria Park	3.00 p.	n
	St. James Park	7.30 p.	n
ı	Lord Selkirk School	7.30 p.	n
ı	Salisbury School E. K	7.30 p.	n
ı	St. James Park (Home St.)	7.30 p.	n
I	Central Park	7.30 p.	n
I	Lord Roberts School	7.30 p.	n
I	Principal Sparling School	7.30	
ı	St. Mary's Road (Guay Ave.)	7.30)



- a. RE Bray, leader of the pro-strike returned veterans, June 13, 1919
 Archives of Manitoba, LB Foote Collection
- b. Labor Church Notice, Western Labor News, June 1919
 Archives of Manitoba
- c. Women and men at Victoria Park, June 1919
 Archives of Manitoba
- d. Fire Insurance Map showing Victoria Park along Red River, c.1919 Fire Fighters Historical Museum of Winnipeg, Inc.

18 Victoria Park - "Liberty Park" See map for location

"Vast Assembly in Victoria Park" *

The James Street Labor Temple was too small to hold the thousands of strikers and their supporters who gathered regularly for information on the strike. Instead, mass meetings were held at nearby Victoria Park, located south of Pacific Avenue along the Red River. Victoria Park and the James Street Labor Temple were the heartbeat of the General Strike. Labour's most crucial decisions on the strike were made at these sites. Ideals of participatory democracy permeated the city's working classes in the spring of 1919.

On May 25, at Victoria Park, 5,000 strikers rejected the federal government's ultimatum ordering telephone, post office, and fire department workers to return to their jobs. Two weeks later, Mayor Gray addressed a crowd at

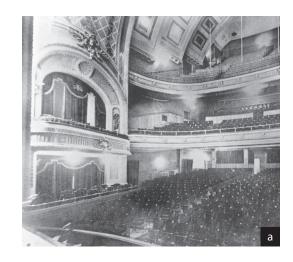
the park and "got a good hearing" when he informed the strikers that parades through the city streets had to stop. Gray's declaration was not unwelcome by the strike leaders. They implored the strikers and veterans not to hold large gatherings other than those at Victoria Park. Strike leaders feared anti-strike groups would use these demonstrations as an opportunity to provoke violence. These warnings presaged the events of Bloody Saturday.

The newly organized Labor Church was an integral part of the Victoria Park scene. Williams Ivens, a Methodist minister popular in the labour movement for his pacificism and anti-conscription campaigns during the war, championed the Labor Church. An advocate of radical Christian socialism, Ivens was so well-respected by labour that he was appointed editor of the *Western Labor News*, labour's voice during the strike. Ivens, AE Smith of Brandon and several somewhat more cautious ministers like JS Wordsworth called for a people's church.



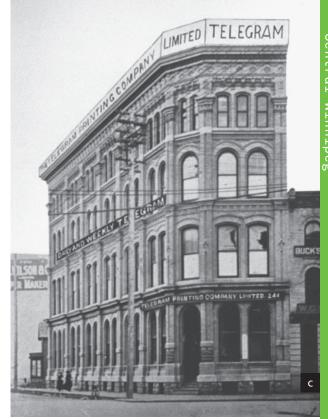
Workers renamed Victoria Park "Liberty Park" in their conviction that their goals reached beyond the immediate issues of the day to dreams of equality, social justice, and a people's democracy.

^{*} The Strikers Own History, p 70





- a. Walker Theatre Interior
 Archives of Manitoba
- b. Winnipeg Board of Trade Building, Citizens' Committee Headquarters, 1919
 Archives of Manitoba, LB Foote Collection
- c. Telegram Building, 1903 Archives of Manitoba



19 Walker Theatre (Burton Cummings Theatre) 364 Smith Street

The spirit of the One Big Union and the Russian Revolution roared from the stage of the Walker Theatre on Sunday afternoon, December 22, 1918. The Socialist Party of Canada organized this mass meeting. Its members and other political radicals filled the 2,000-seat hall to capacity. The audience was politically left wing and remarkably multicultural, with workers from Anglo, Polish, Ukrainian, Hungarian, Jewish, Russian, and other cultural groups. Rousing speeches from prominent socialists including RB Russell, Dick Johns, George Armstrong, William Ivens, Fred Dixon, and Sam Blumenberg denounced inequality in Canadian society. They demanded freedom for labour activists who were detained during the war and an end to all government wartime emergency powers. Some spoke glowingly of the Russian Revolution and called upon the federal government to stop military

aid to those opposing it. Other speakers predicted the end of capitalism and the rise of a new social order. But few at this meeting, or throughout the city's working-class neighbourhoods, saw Russia's path to reform as the one for Canada. They believed that their visions of equality and social justice would one day be realized through a politically elected, democratic mass movement rooted deeply in their communities.

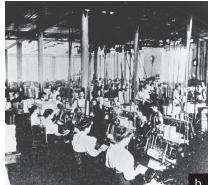
Today's Federal Building stands on the site of the former Winnipeg Industrial Bureau Exposition Building, which housed the Winnipeg Board of Trade. In 1919, it was the headquarters of the Citizens' Committee and its newspaper, *The Citizen*. The Citizens' Committee hung a large sign over the entrance

declaring the building as its headquarters. On June 3, in one of the pro-strike demonstrations held in front of the building, a large group of angry war veterans tore the sign down.

21 The Telegram Building 70 Albert Street

This building housed the Winnipeg *Telegram*, a daily newspaper which – like the *Free Press* and *Tribune* – joined the Citizens' Committee in condemning the General Strike. The *Telegram* referred to the strike as a deliberate, criminal and fantastic attempt to make a revolution. The *Telegram* combined its strike news with sensationalist reports on the Russian Revolution to help create a Red Scare in Winnipeg. The *Telegram* and other commercial newspapers declared the strike a revolution led by foreign "alien" agitators. In fact, the most prominent strike leaders were well-known trade unionists of British origin.









- a. Woman with milk delivery wagon, c. 1910 Archives of Manitoba
- b. Women at the Eaton's Book Bindery, early 20th c.
 Western Canada Pictorial Index
- c. Laundry workers at St. Mary's Academy, early 20th c. Archives of Manitoba, LB Foote Collection
- d. Crowds gather at Portage and Main, June 1919 Winnipeg Free Press Archives

Women in the Workplace, at Home, and in the Community

Women's participation proved crucial to the General Strike. For many women, it was their first union experience. Statistics tell us that many, if not most, women did not receive a living wage. But telephone operators walked away from their work exchanges four hours before the General Strike officially began. Garment workers, retail and wholesale clerks, waitresses, laundry workers, bookbinders, cleaners, and confectionery workers all voted to strike. Hundreds of women in the city's confectioneries and bakeries struck against their employers and joined in rallies and demonstrations. Five hundred women employed at Eaton's formed picket lines in front of the popular department store. Striking women harassed women hired by the commercial newspapers to replace their male paper sellers who were on strike. Women served on the General Strike Committee, and attended meetings at the James

Street Labor Temple and Victoria Park. They participated in rallies and demonstrations. Many were downtown on Bloody Saturday.

Women at home, whose daughters, sons, husbands, and other family members were on strike, faced their own challenges to keep their households running. Few strikers received any strike pay and most had little savings to draw upon while family members were out of work. They scrambled to purchase food and other necessities. Many also made time to support the strike by attending meetings and rallies.

The Women's Labor League depended on women from the community for its leadership and activities. Unfortunately, much of this work was not recorded and we know little about these women. The stories of women who did not speak English are particularly difficult to find. However, as the strikers themselves declared, the resourcefulness,

commitment and militancy of women were essential ingredients in this community struggle. It was the same care and creativity these women had demonstrated during the influenza epidemic and in their tremendous support of soldiers overseas during wartime, both in providing care packages for loved ones and in opposing conscription.







- a. Helen Armstrong, c. 1910 Sharon Barrick Personal Collection
- b. Katherine Ross Queen (1885-1934)
 Portrait by J Shelsy, 1935
 Oil on canvas, 22"w x 28"h
 Joy (Queen-Hughes) Hodgkinson and
 John Hodgkinson Personal Collection
- c. Edith Hancox, c. 1914
 Edith Danna Personal Collection,
 courtesy of David Thompson

Helen Armstrong

Helen Armstrong seemed to be everywhere during the General Strike. She organized and campaigned for labour's cause from the first days of the confrontation until its end. Afterwards, she supported the Defense Committee for the arrested leaders. Armstrong was a fierce advocate for women's rights in the workplace and at home. Before the First World War, she was already organizing women in retail stores and factories and campaigning for safer workplaces. She spearheaded a successful movement to secure mother's allowance – a crucial need, especially for widows and their children. She believed in a woman's right to vote. However, Armstrong separated herself from middle-class suffragettes, like Nellie McClung, who opposed unions, were often anti-immigrant, and supported conscription and prohibition. The police arrested Helen Armstrong more times than any other person during the General Strike. She was charged with intimidating "scabs" at factory gates, in front of retail stores, and on street corners

selling commercial newspapers. She encouraged angry and militant women to blockade their neighbourhoods against delivery wagons that did not have Strike Committee "Permission" cards. Armstrong led the Winnipeg branch of the Women's Labor League (WLL) and sat on the Central Strike Committee representing the organization. She was one of only a few women who attended the founding convention of the One Big Union.

Edith Hancox

Edith Hancox was another dynamic women's rights activist in Winnipeg. She was busy organizing women before the General Strike and long after it, into the 1930s. She campaigned as a member of the WLL for the rights of working-class women along with Armstrong and Queen. A strong advocate of the Labor Church, along with William Ivens, Hancox was perhaps the only women to address a mass meeting at Victoria Park. She sought election to

the school board in 1919, identified politically with communism in 1920s, and organized the unemployed in 1930s.

Katherine Queen

Katherine Queen stood shoulder to shoulder with these women. Together, they fought against conscription and led the WLL in the crucial months of the strike. Queen replaced Armstrong as WLL president after the General Strike. She shifted the organization more into politics. Queen advocated for birth control clinics, for equal employment opportunities, and for equal pay for women. When Queen died in 1933, a large crowd of labour supporters attended her funeral, where her casket was draped in a red flag.

WOMEN AROUSED

Mrs. Helen Armstrong,

Secretary, Labor Women's League, Labor Temple, Winnipeg, Man.

Resolution passed by Lahor Women's Council, Calgary: We send congratulations to the wives of men sent to Stoney Mountain. All Lahor is deeply grateful for their sacrifices, and we will do, all in our power to help.

Mary S. Corse, President, Calgary,

"Women Aroused", The Western Labor News, June 20, 1919. Courtesy: Provincial Archives Manitoba

NOTICE

The Working Women of Elmwood have decided at.a meeting yesterday, 19th inst., in Wellwood's Box Factory, to start a branch of the Women's Labor League.

They appointed a committee to meet the officials of the Women's Labor league to make the necessary arrangements for opening same in Elmwood. There were seventy ladies present.

A meeting is called for tomorrow afternoon (Saturday) at 2.30, for organizing purposes and other business.

VOMEN'S MEETING

Weston Park, Saturday evening, at 7,30 p.m., to form relief committee for Weston and Breoklands. Also to discuss what we women can do in this present crisis to aid and uphold our men.

"Women's Meeting", The Western Labor News, June 21, 1919. Courtesy: Provincial Archives Manitoba

WOMEN'S LABOR LEAGUE

At the Labor Temple Cafe, corner of Rupert and Main street. Some of the members of the longue are working hard to provide free membs for the girls who are on strike. They are assisted by many sympathizers. An invitation is hereby given to any girl on strike, or woman who is in need through the strike, to come where they will be welcomed and provided with free meals during the strike.

"Women's Labor League", The Western Labor News, June 3, 1919. Courtesy: Provincial Archives Manitoba

"Notice", The Western Labor News, June 21, 1919 Courtesy: Provincial Archives Manitoba



NO NEED TO HUNGER

The Women's Labor League is doing splendid work through their restaurant adjoining the Strathcona Hotel. Hundreds of free meals are suplied there daily. No one need want.

This institution is receiving fine financial support from individuals and organizations and is well able to carry on.

Strikers, get your meals at the Labor League Restaurant. If you can pay for them do so. If you can't you are welcome.

This is the biggest thing in town today.—Real Brotherhood.

C

- a. Women's Labor League Announcements, *Western Labor News*, June 3 and 21, 1919 Archives of Manitoba
- b. Members of the Winnipeg Women's Labor League preparing relief packages for families of Nova Scotia Coal miners on strike, c. 1925 Archives of Manitoba
- c. No Need to Hunger, Western Labor News, 1919 Archives of Manitoba

22 The Women's Labor League and the Labor Café (Royal Albert Arms Hotel) 48 Albert Street

Women's Labor League

The Winnipeg branch of the Women's Labor League (WLL) provided essential leadership and support to women in the months leading up to, and during, the General Strike. It encouraged women to join the strike and helped those in need with rent payments and meals. During the trials of the strike leaders, the WLL campaigned for the defendants' freedom and raised funds for their defense.

Helen Armstrong, Katherine Queen, Gertrude Puttee, Lynn Flett, and a Mrs Webb held prominent roles in the WLL. Many more women, whose stories remain untold, joined them to make it a dynamic organization. The WLL supported women in unions, but dedicated great energy to organizing telephone operators, retail stores clerks and other non-

unionized women. The WLL had three members on the Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council and on the Central Strike Committee. It campaigned for minimum wage and mothers' allowance, equal opportunity and wages for women, and for birth control clinics. In the early 1920s, the Winnipeg branch sent relief parcels to WLL members in Nova Scotia to help striking coal miners. The League dissolved in the coming years as women shifted their organizational energies into political action.

The Labor Café

The Labor Café set up by the WLL during the strike reflected the impressive solidarity that united Winnipeg's working women and men in 1919. Many women – especially young strikers – had little support during this time. They were without strike pay and had meagre, if any, savings. The Labor Café provided thousands of women with free meals, offering soup and sandwiches made by volunteers in the kitchen, or donated by women throughout the working-

class community. Men picketing downtown, or without other support, could also have meals here. William Ivens' collected \$4,500 for the kitchen through his Labor Church. Other strikers – women and men – also raised funds to support the work of the café.

The Labor Café first opened at the Strathcona Hotel (567 Main Street, at Rupert Avenue); moved to the Oxford Hotel (216 Notre Dame Avenue); and, finally, re-opened in the more spacious Royal Albert Arms Hotel.









- a. Mounted Police charge into crowd at William Avenue, June 21, 1919 Archives of Manitoba, LB Foote Collection
- b."Special Police" with billy clubs on Main Street as street car burns, June 21, 1919 Archives of Manitoba, LB Foote Collection
- c."Special Police" hose down crowds gathered in front of Bank of Montreal building at Portage and Main, June 21, 1919 Archives of Manitoba, LB Foote Collection
- d. Canadian Army Service Corps trucks with fully armed soldiers and Lewis machine guns patrol the streets of Winnipeg, June 21, 1919
 Archives of Manitoba

23 Bloody Saturday

Winnipeg City Hall, Main Street and William Avenue

"June 21st, one of the blackest chapters in Canadian history..."*
On the morning of June 21, pro-strike veterans assembled in front of city hall. They planned a "silent parade" to protest the arrest of the strike leaders in defiance of the mayor's ban on demonstrations. A huge crowd gathered to watch the parade.

Mayor Gray, informed by panicked officials that the situation in front of city hall was "out of control," ordered the Royal North West Mounted Police and the military onto the streets. At 2:30 pm, 54 police on horses and 36 men in trucks lined up on Main Street facing north at Portage Avenue. Meanwhile, a streetcar drove south from north Main Street toward the crowds. Demonstrators believed the streetcar was driven by Citizens' Committee volunteers. The crowd shoved the streetcar off its tracks, broke its windows and set it on fire.

The police walked their horses north on Main Street from Portage Avenue. They wore their distinctive red uniforms, but a few riders near the end of the troop wore army uniforms. The appearance of these soldiers enraged prostrike veterans who jeered and booed them. The police turned around near city hall and headed south on Main towards their starting point. They were pelted with rocks and bricks. Mayor Gray read the Riot Act and ordered the streets cleared in half an hour.

The police then rode north and charged back south again with their clubs in hand. A third police charge followed quickly upon the second. This time the police had clubs in one hand and revolvers in the other. The crowd stood back to let the police pass. But the police unexpectedly turned into the crowd at the corner of Main Street and William Avenue. Shots were fired. Several people fell wounded. An elderly bystander, Steve Schezerbanowes, was hit by police bullets. He died later from his wounds. The police brigade

continued around behind city hall to re-emerge on Main Street at James Avenue. They headed south again on Main Street with revolvers still drawn. Mike Sokolowiski (Sokolowski), who the police claimed was throwing a brick, was shot and killed.

Two hundred "Special Police" emerged from the Rupert Street Police Station to cordon off Main Street. The fleeing crowds sought refuge in backstreets and alleys. "Specials" pursued them. In the alley between Market Avenue and James Avenue, the undisciplined "Specials" cornered several hundred men, women, and children and attacked them with batons and other weapons. The crowd defended itself with bricks, bottles, and their bare fists. In ten minutes, 27 people were injured. The police, military and "Specials" proceeded to patrol downtown streets.

^{*} Strike Bulletin, June 23, 1919







a. "Prison Bars Cannot Confine Ideas" – Winnipeg workers protest the trials of the strike leaders, Labour Day, September 1919 Library and Archives Canada

b. Manitoba provincial election campaign poster, c.1941

Archives of Manitoba

c."Their Sentence is Our Sentence" – Protesters in Labour Day, September, 1919. Sign in background reads "Those Who Are Not With Us ..." Library and Archives Canada

Aftermath of the Winnipeg General Strike

"...and so ended the general strike of 1919 when all the forces of capital, Church, and State combined to block the path of progress." * The strikers' own history, p 216

Fearing more violence, a delegation from the Strike Committee met with Premier Norris on the evening of Bloody Saturday. They agreed to call off the strike if Norris would appoint a Royal Commission to investigate local labour conditions. The Citizens' Committee wanted to crush the union movement. It urged Norris to refuse. But Norris accepted Labour's offer and, on June 26, the strike officially ended.

The Citizens' Committee continued to punish the strikers long after the strike ended. Many workers were denied jobs. RB Russell, Richard Johns, and others from the Weston Shops never worked there again. Prominent men and women leaders were blacklisted from jobs across the city. The police

were fired, and many firefighters lost their jobs. Eaton's and other retailers refused to rehire women strikers. Telephone operators and government workers were dismissed.

Despite these setbacks, many did not view the General Strike as a failure. They remained inspired by the solidarity displayed throughout the spring of 1919. Ethnic prejudices and gender divisions, while still evident, had given way within the working-class community to greater social cohesion. The General Strike was a community struggle. Without such unity, labour leaders could never have launched the strike, or maintained it for six long weeks in the face of such intense opposition.

The workers did not give up. A Workers' Defense Committee held local meetings and sent speakers across the country to raise funds for the coming trials. Eight thousand supporters marched in a mass parade in Winnipeg in September. Helen Armstrong led a large WLL delegation with two floats, one

of which portrayed the figures of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. The trials of the strike leaders began in December 1919. The court sentenced Russell to two years; five others to one year; and one to six months. Three were acquitted. If workers needed more evidence that the laws and courts of the time were against them, the trials of the leaders and immigration hearings for Jewish and other "foreign" workers confirmed it.

Working people recognized the fight for social equality, including collective bargaining, had to be taken into the political realm. This they did, with remarkable success. In the November civic elections, labour increased its representation from five to seven councillors. In the 1920 provincial election, labour sent 11 members to the Legislature. Four of those elected were strike leaders, three of whom were still in prison. JS Woodsworth, arrested for his participation in the strike, was elected to the House of Commons one year later.

Further Reading

Dennis Lewycky, *Magnificent Fight: The Winnipeg General Strike* (Winnipeg, 2019)

The Graphic History Collective and David Lester, 1919: A Graphic History of the Winnipeg General Strike (Toronto, 2019)

Norman Penner, Winnipeg 1919: The strikers' own history of the Winnipeg General Strike (Toronto, 1975, 2019)

Adele Perry, Aqueduct: Colonialism, Resources and the Histories We Remember (Winnipeg, 2016) (The focus here is on the continuing effects of colonialism and race on Indigenous labour in the Winnipeg area, circa 1919.)

R. Kramer & T. Mitchell, When the State Trembled: How A.J. Andrews and the Citizens' Committee Broke the Winnipeg General Strike (Toronto, 2010) Esyllt Jones, *Influenza 1918: Disease, Death, and Struggle in Winnipeg* (Toronto, 2007)

Craig Heron, Editor, *The Workers' Revolt in Canada*, 1917-1925 (Toronto, 1998)

Harry Gutkin and Mildred Gutkin, *Profiles in Dissent: The Shaping of Radical Thought in the Canadian West* (Edmonton, 1997)

David Bercuson, Confrontation at Winnipeg: Labour, Industrial Relations, and the Winnipeg General Strike (Montreal, 1974)

DC Masters, *The Winnipeg General Strike* (Toronto, 1973)



Bloody Saturday Streetcar MonumentBernie Miller, Noam Gonick (Winnipeg)
located at the corner of Market Avenue and
Main Street (2019)



The Winnipeg 1919 Marquee:

A Monument to the Winnipeg General Strike

Monteyne Architecture Works Inc. (Winnipeg)

located at the corner of Lily Street and Market

Avenue (2017)

Photo: Lindsay Reid

Denotes heritage status.

For further information about heritage sites listed in this brochure please see the websites of Heritage Winnipeg and the Manitoba Historic Resources Branch.