

ANGLO-ONTARIO FARM BUILDINGS

An Architectural History Theme Study



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On the cover:

This image from the Provincial Archives Manitoba, entitled “Six years after settlement on the prairie,” shows an elaborate house and a large barn on a neat little farmyard dotted with neatly stoked wheat. This image reflects the dream of so many immigrants to Manitoba from southern Ontario, and suggests the type of building forms and styles that these newcomers would come to build over the first 30 years of settlement, and which still can be found in the area around Brandon, which was the destination for many of these pioneers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	1
INTRODUCTION	1
HOUSES	2
Initial Structures	12
Small Houses	12
Ontario-Gothic Houses	12
Side-hall Houses	19
Large Houses	22
The American Four-Square House	12
BARNS	11
Initial Structures	12
Early Frame Barns	19
Southern Ontario-style Barns	22
Barn Transition	22
Plank-framed Barns	22
OTHER FARM BUILDINGS	25
Granaries and Elevators	22

PREFACE

This booklet has been adapted from a larger publication developed in 1983 by the Historic Resources Branch of Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Tourism. That study, *Architectural Heritage. The Brandon and Area Planning District*, should still be available in public libraries.

That original study was intended to assist various local governments (Rural Municipalities of Cornwallis and Elton and City of Brandon), formed into the Brandon and Area Planning District, to gain a better understanding of the architectural heritage of the region, and thus to undertake better educational, tourism, designation and conservation programs. To that end, this original work also contained a substantial selected inventory of buildings in the area, and sections focusing on other aspects of the region's history.

A major part of the study focused on farm buildings, and especially on the prevailing architectural traditions of the most common pioneer settlement group in the region – from southern Ontario. It is that section of the original report that has been adapted here, to enable readers to get a better sense of the traditional architectural styles and forms, materials and construction practices, that define this important aspect of Manitoba's architectural history.

There are many other areas of the province that have similar southern-Ontario building traditions, and this booklet, while focused on the area around Brandon, certainly contains information that applies to those places as well.

INTRODUCTION

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MUCH of south-central and southwestern Manitoba, beginning in the late nineteenth century settlement, was undertaken by settlers from southern Ontario. Like other groups that would soon join them, these pioneers brought with them distinct building forms and construction techniques that were on clearest display in their farm buildings.

Within the typical farmyard of a newly-arrived southern Ontario family, it was the house and the barn that provided a focal point for the whole yard's development. Being the first two structures built (almost simultaneously), on the yard, the house and the barn share a position of equal importance in the hierarchy of farmstead buildings. The granaries, elevators, sheds, chicken coops and other storage buildings built after the house and barn were usually of secondary importance.

Initial structures built during the 1870s, like tents, lean-tos, sod huts or crude log shanties offered a rudimentary, yet quick, means of providing shelter for humans and animals (Figure 1). Throughout the first stage of settlement, the location of a water source was the dominant factor in determining the yard's layout. The barn was placed closer to the water source to provide easier handling of water for livestock. At this time, both the barn and the house were approximately the same size. Within the yard, these first crude buildings were generally arranged in a cluster for three reasons: to make access between buildings easier, to provide shelter from the prevailing northwest winds, and finally, to contain the buildings within a fireguard trench dug around the yard. The average homesteader built few additional storage structures at this time, as available money was spent on land, seed and farm equipment.

After a few months (although sometimes it took years depending on economic circumstances) the pioneer settlers were often able to replace these first structures with more comfortable ones (Figure 2). These moderately sized farms, with small houses, barns that had now become somewhat larger than the house, and more out-buildings, served most of the new southern Ontario settlers during the 1880s.

The surveying of Elton-Cornwallis in the late 1870s strongly influenced farm an established business enterprise, houses became more commodious, barns grew to a dominant size within the farmyard and associated buildings became more numerous. In addition, a fairly systematic approach to yard layout was developed. The house was located closer to the main section road to provide initial views and access. The more utilitarian barn was generally located in a position behind the house, in such a way that it was easily accessible from the house, provided a wind break, but was not upwind from the house. While these layouts are regularly seen in the Brandon area, there are enough exceptions to limit its application as a specific rule.



Figure 1

“Breaking the Prairie,” ca. 1880. This idealized illustration shows the progression of habitation. While the first crop is being prepared other members of this pioneer group construct a small frame house. The tent in which the settlers are still temporarily living will soon be vacated. (Provincial Archives Manitoba.)



Figure 2
Two years after settlement on the prairie,
ca. 1883. (Provincial Archives Manitoba.)