

A BRIEF HISTORY

THE BUILDINGS OF THE NEWMAN CENTRE

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



NEWMAN CENTRE
CATHOLIC MISSION
at the University of Toronto's
St. George Campus

THE NEWMAN CENTRE RESIDENCE (FORMER MATTHEWS HOUSE)

The Newman Centre residence, located at the corner of Hoskin Avenue and St. George Street, across the street from the Robarts Library on the University of Toronto campus, was built in 1890/1891. The original two and one-half storey home is constructed of red clay, terra cotta bricks, plum coloured Credit Valley sandstone and pressed terra cotta decorative elements.

In the late 1800's, St. George Street was considered one of the wealthiest boulevards in the city and was home to many of the city's influential political and business leaders. The residence at 89 St. George Street was built by businessman Wilmot D. Matthews and remained his personal home until his death in 1919. The residence is still referred to in historical circles as "the Matthews House".

Wilmot D. Matthews was born in Burford, Ontario in 1850. Mr. Matthews' family fortune resulted from the grain trading business. Their business was so large that, in fact, his father was once known as the Barley King of Canada. Wilmot joined his father's business in 1866 and, following his father's death in 1890, he and a partner formed the Canada Malting Company, which continues operations today. Wilmot was a very successful businessman, serving as Director in a number of major corporations including Canadian Pacific Railway, Dominion Bank, and Toronto Street Railway.



The property, including a coach house located on the current site of St. Thomas Aquinas Church, was purchased by the Newman Club (now the Newman Foundation) in 1922 for the sum of \$100,000. This purchase could not have been made without the assistance of a major benefactor, Senator Frank O'Connor, founder of the Laura Secord Chocolate Company.

Senator O'Connor's portrait, along with that of Cardinal John Henry Newman, remains on display today above the first floor stairwell.

A number of renovations have been made to the home over the years, including the addition of a one-story ballroom in 1899, specifically for the wedding of Mr. Matthews' eldest daughter, a kitchen expansion in 1900, and later expansions of the upper floor and basement for additional usable living space.

The house remains one of Toronto's best examples of Romansque Revival architecture, similar in style to the Gooderham Residence, located at the northeast corner of Bloor and St. George Streets and currently home of the York Club. It was one of the first buildings in Toronto to receive heritage status from the Ontario Heritage Foundation in 1977 and continues to be one of the few buildings to have been granted heritage status for the interior, as well as the exterior, of the building. Most of the first floor, including the stairway, and a portion of the second floor were given heritage status in recognition of the outstanding craftsmanship in the use of woodwork, plaster, stained glass and decorative metals. The interior is one of the finest examples of late nineteenth century design in the City of Toronto.

Today, the residence is home to the Pastor and Executive Director of the Newman Centre and a small number of university students who are serving as Student Campus Ministers, living the values of their Catholic faith while at university. The building also houses the offices of the Newman Centre and the parish of St. Thomas Aquinas Church.



A portion of the Centre's basement is also the home of the Archdiocese of Toronto's Office of Catholic Youth.

Consistent with the vision of the original members of the Newman Club in 1922, the house continues to be a vibrant and active Centre, serving Catholic students on the University of Toronto campus with a variety of meetings and social events. It serves the needs of the parish community, hosting many very personal events including weddings, anniversary celebrations, baptisms, and funeral receptions. It also serves as the site of events associated with the University of Toronto or other organizations affiliated with the Church and, from time to time, a movie or television filming site.

As is the case with most historical properties, the cost associated with preserving the property is immense. If you would like to contribute toward maintaining this part of Toronto's heritage for future generations, please contact Fr. Peter Turrone, Pastor and Executive Director of the Centre (frpeterturrone@newmantoronto.com). Your support would be most welcome.

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CHURCH (ALSO KNOWN AS THE NEWMAN CHAPEL)

St. Thomas Aquinas Roman Catholic Church, located at 50 Hoskin Avenue – adjacent to the Newman Centre – on the campus of the University of Toronto, was built in 1926/27. What stood on the property prior to the church being erected was a coach house, which served the needs of the Matthews House, now known as the Newman Centre.



The Newman Club purchased the Matthews House and adjacent coach house in 1922. Mass was initially held in the Oak Room of the house, but as numbers increased, it soon became apparent that a separate chapel was needed. Plans were developed to demolish the coach house and erect a chapel in its place. With limited space, it clearly presented architectural challenges.

The solution was to build a church rectangular in plan with long elevations perpendicular to the street. The resulting one-storey limestone structure was designed in the style of 15th century Gothic architecture. The exterior walls were composed of coursed broken face Credit Valley limestone and ashlar Indiana limestone, topped by a roof composed of gray slate and copper. The church design features a nave and aisle plan with deep sanctuary and sacristy. The interior of the church is quite beautiful with arch braced trusses and an exposed roof made of dark stained British Columbia fir. The design originally featured white and yellow leaded glass Gothic windows with diamond panes to allow natural light to pour into the interior and two traditional stained glass windows near the entrance of the church honouring St. Thomas Aquinas and Blessed Cardinal Newman.

The church was blessed by Archbishop Neil McNeil and dedicated to St. Thomas Aquinas on March 27, 1927. At various points since 1927, the church has been administered by the Paulist Fathers, the Basilian Fathers, and the Archdiocese of Toronto. It is currently under the direction of the Archdiocese of Toronto. In 1995, it was officially named a parish of the Archdiocese of Toronto, and no longer simply a chapel. The interior furnishings have been rearranged from time to time to reflect liturgical changes; however, the building has not been significantly altered.



The changing sanctuary configurations in the church over the years

It was one of the first buildings listed in the Toronto Historical Board's inventory of historical buildings for architectural and contextual importance in 1973.

Between 1999-2000, the parish community undertook a special project to select and commemorate significant Christian heroes and heroines of the last century by installing twelve new stained glass windows in the west wall of the church. These windows honour the following saints and Christian heroes and heroines: St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein), St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta, St. Gianna Beretta Molla, Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, St. André of Montreal (Brother André), Blessed Franz Jagerstatter, George & Pauline Vanier, Pope St. John XXIII, St. Kateri Tekakwitha, Blessed Jerzey Popiełuszko and Archbishop Óscar Romero. Thanks to a miraculous gift, the chapel was restored and reopened on March 19, 2018 on the Solemnity of St. Joseph.

Mass is held daily at 12:15 p.m. Monday to Friday. Saturday Mass is at 9:30 am with Rosary at 9:00 am and Sunday Mass is at 11:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. Confession is available 30 minutes before all Masses. These Masses tend to attract many from the University area, students and faculty, persons living nearby, and visitors to both Toronto and the University.

This beautiful church is the site of many weddings, lectures, concerts, and other events held throughout the year. An occasional movie or documentary has also been filmed on site. During the day, the church is open for quiet prayer and many people pray and find peace in the sacred space.

NEWMAN CENTRE & ST. THOMAS AQUINAS CHURCH

ROMAN CATHOLIC STUDENT CENTRE AND PARISH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

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