CHAPTER TWO
The Roaring Twenties 1920 - 1929

The Residence was the hub of the small campus shared by Agriculture and Home Economics students in the early years. It provided living quarters, dining facilities, plunge baths, gymnasium, and an auditorium, all under one roof.

Residence Life in the 1920s

What was life like on “the farm”? The Residence became home for most of the students attending the Manitoba Agricultural College for the months or the years of their stay. Here they slept (when undisturbed); studied, as 7:00 – 9:00 pm study hours were mandatory, with the halls patrolled by seniors; and entertained.

Rooms were furnished with two cots, two clothes cupboards, two desks, two chairs, and two goose-necked lamps. Long white curtains hung over the windows, and khaki army blankets hung over the beds. (In the dark, one might watch sparks from static electricity fly to one’s fingers if one reached for the heavy wool covers). Students provided their own sheets and towels, but these were picked up each week and returned from the campus laundry, clean and fresh.

Personal laundry was done in the basement, in the deep, steam-heated tubs (a great place for the wavy-haired girl to steam and set her hair).

Though the East and West Dormitories were officially separate, unofficial “raids” were undertaken to both sides. Students might find themselves suddenly tipped from their beds and aroused from sleep, only to see a figure departing into the shadows. Those were innocent days of unlocked doors!

Or one might shake off sleep to stare into the eye of an odorous goat (said livestock had then to be coaxed, by the outraged Residence Dean and amused Residents, to make its way down the long hall, down the stairs, and to the outer doors—after which time, housecoats could be observed “airing” from the windows of the girls’ quarters).

Boxes from home were cause for a room party, or a progressive dinner might be arranged using different rooms for various stages of food preparation. Each course was served in a separate room and was unlikely to include cocktails.

The swimming pools (or plunge baths, as they were called) in the basement, one for each wing, were available either for swimming or for chastising a student whose behaviour was deemed...
unsuitable. A “party” would be arranged, and the unsuspecting offender would be dumped into one of the pools.

The Residence Gymnasia were the centre of sports activity: classes, basketball practice and games, folk dancing, and the annual spring gym display. West Gym was off-limits to girls, except during classes, games, etc. Female pianists for the folk dancing classes were met on the east side and escorted, by the gym instructors, to the boys’ gymnasium on the west side.

However, it was in the Dining Room that first contact was made with “the other side” (the opposite sex). Large oak tables, covered with sparkling white linen, seated eight—four women and four men. Lists were posted each week assigning table numbers and personnel. These were checked with interest as they would indicate one’s tablemates for the coming week. On weekends, the students chose their own tables and table companions.

There was great competition to secure one of the four tables for which a “good” waitress was responsible (a good waitress being one who could obtain a second bowl of the delicious campus-made ice cream). Another of the Kitchen’s specialties was the hot rolls served on Sunday mornings. These rolls, dressed in honey, enticed the otherwise reluctant Residents to Sunday breakfast.

Many special events were celebrated in the Dining Room: sports trophies were presented here, with appropriate table decorations. And graduation dinners were also held in the Dining Room, with menus and decorations suitable to the occasion.

Some tables were reserved for those in training for competition (perhaps a way to avoid co-ed tables). However, though publicly scorned, the mixed tables provided contact with those from “the other side.”

The staff was served in a small separate dining room across from the Kitchen on the second floor, but some members of the faculty sat in the Dining Room at a table near the Don in an attempt, perhaps, to lend some decorum to the dinners. If visitors were expected, one might be told “to keep the soft pedal down.”

The Lounge on 2nd East was in great demand on Sundays for the girls to entertain their current boyfriends. Near the east door to the Residence was the office of the Dean of Residence, where permission to leave campus had to be negotiated and where one signed “out” and “in” again at the end of the evening.

The Auditorium was the other Residence meeting place. Here, assembly was held each weekday morning; and concerts, plays, debates, stunt nights, church services, dances, and finally, graduation ceremonies were held. How simple it was then, after the last waltz of the evening had been played, to walk down the stairs and down the hall to one’s home.

By 1920, the University of Manitoba was the largest university in the Canadian prairies and the fifth largest in Canada. It had eight faculties: Arts, Science, Law, Medicine, Engineering,
Architecture, Pharmacy, and Agriculture/Home Economics (Manitoba Agricultural College).

The University of Manitoba was originally located on Broadway in the centre of Winnipeg, but in 1929, following the addition of more programs, schools, and faculties, the University officially moved to its permanent site on the Fort Garry campus.

Another factor in that decision was the 1929 world shattering stock market “Crash” that forced the U of M’s Board of Governors to abandon the plans for the new Tuxedo location. Plenty of land was available at the Fort Garry site and within three years the Arts (Tier) and Science (Buller) Buildings were completed.
Below - The Residence in 1920.  
Above - A view of the campus in 1923.  
Right - A MAC poster from 1926-27.