

758 MCMILLAN AVENUE – ANVERS APARTMENTS
C.S. Bridgman, 1912



Few North American cities surpassed Winnipeg in the popularity of apartment living prior to World War I.

Many factors contributed to the trend. Multiple-family units were needed to cope with the city's rapid population growth and constant housing shortages. They also appealed to newcomers who could not afford to buy detached dwellings and to people who preferred the convenience of apartments for various personal reasons.

On the supply side of the market, the booming pre-1914 economy created a pool of surplus capital for property development. Many local businessmen heeded the advice of period journals which promoted residential blocks as relatively safe investments offering competitive rates of return.

City Council also played a role, passing a by-law which discouraged the kinds of poorly designed, overcrowded and unsafe tenements that had given apartment buildings a bad reputation elsewhere. Those standards, coupled with acceptance of apartment living among the middle and upper classes,

fostered construction of many good quality and several luxury blocks in Winnipeg.

In 1912 alone, 56 such units appeared on the streetscape, eight of which cost \$100,000 or more. Among the latter were the Anvers Apartments, built for the Belgo-Canadian Real Estate Co. on two lots at the southeast corner of McMillan Avenue and Arbuthnot (originally Aynsley) Street.

The Anvers is a three-storey, solid brick structure on a concrete and stone foundation. It is clothed primarily in elements of the Tudor Revival style. However, domes and classical entrances add a degree of eclecticism to the design.

The block has a distinctive O-shape plan and enclosed interior courtyard. On the north, south and west elevations, it extends from a slightly raised basement to a red brick superstructure with smooth-cut limestone trim. Walls are broken by balconies, stairwells, angled entrances, and single rectangular windows with stone sills. The roof-line also is irregular, dominated on each of the block's finished sides by four large gable ends embellished with half-timbering. In contrast, the east facade and courtyard walls are plainly finished in cream-coloured brick.

The McMillan and Arbuthnot facings have smooth stone up to the basement window sills, a stone band above those openings, and a narrow belt course which doubles as a continuous sill under the third-floor windows. Pairs of glazed, wooden balconies are relatively flush to the wall on the first floor, but overhand on the upper two storeys. They are followed at the roof-line by semi-circular dormers.

The building's north- and southwest corners are angled to accommodate two recessed, tower-like entrances topped by domes which are nestled between cross-gables. Each entrance has broad stone steps leading to a pedimented stone surround, a deep platform, and double wooden and glass doors. A decorative brick and stone panel appears above between the second- and third-storey windows, while the dome features alternating bands of brick and stone, a circular opening surrounded by stone, a galvanized iron roof, and a finial.

Interior finishes include oak woodwork and leaded glass. In addition to individual balconies, each

suite has direct access to an outside set of wooden stairs leading to the inner court, McMillan Avenue or a lane on the building's south side. This is another unusual aspect of the Anvers Apartments since blocks more commonly were designed to provide tenants with exterior access off central hallways.

The basement originally was divided into a boiler room, two laundry rooms, storage space, and janitor's suite. Each of the upper floors held eight apartments) all with dining-rooms, two with one bedroom each, and six with two bedrooms and maid's quarters.

The structure was designed by Charles S. Bridgman and built for \$110,000 by the Claydon Brothers, one of Winnipeg's larger and longer-standing contracting firms. These principals also were involved in a second, almost identical 1912 project for the Belgo-Canadian Real Estate Co., the Brussels Apartments at 150-56 Lilac Street.

Bridgman (1875-1965) was an Ontarian who graduated in 1891 from Atelier Masguray in New York, then practised architecture in that city until he relocated to Winnipeg in 1903. Over the next 35 years, he undertook many local projects, including St. Luke's Anglican Church, St. Edward's Convent, a Nairn Avenue hotel, the Dawson-Richardson Publishing Co. warehouse, Canadian Ukrainian Institute Prosvita, numerous apartment buildings, and the Mills, Metcalfe and Chambers business blocks.

In 1938, he retired to London, Ontario where he had spent most of his youth. He subsequently was called into service during World War II to help design air training stations in central Ontario. Bridgman later continued in private practice with his brother Gordon until a second retirement at age 80.

Consistent with the quality and distinctiveness of the Anvers Apartments, early tenants included bankers, barristers and business executives. Over time, the premises, like the adjacent neighbourhood, took on a less exclusive character. The Belgo-Canadian Real Estate Co., which was established locally in 1911, continued to own the property until 1970. The block subsequently changed hands on two occasions before being converted to condominiums.