



## **STREET PILLAR**

### **COUNTRY CLUB BOULEVARD AT PORTAGE AVENUE**

City of Winnipeg  
Historical Buildings Committee  
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The early history of St. James, prior to the arrival of Europeans in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, saw the area's seasonal use, especially along the banks of the Assiniboine River, by local First Nations bands for transportation, hunting and gathering activities and seasonal habitation.

Portage Avenue, the area's main thoroughfare, originated as the main east-west overland trail connecting The Forks, an important hunting and meeting ground, and the western plains rich with herds of bison and other large game. As the fur trade in the region developed and expanded, the trail was an important freighting route for thousands of ox-carts transporting food and other goods. Modern development transformed Portage Avenue into the hub of commerce and transportation for Winnipeg and its western suburbs.

Permanent settlement of the St. James area began as fur traders retired from their years of service and sought to take up land in the vicinity of the Upper Fort Garry (Plate 1). The prevailing system of land organization was River Lots, thin parcels of land stretching back a distance of 2 miles from the river, giving the land owner important access to the water. An additional 2-mile strip beyond the lot could also be obtained. As settlement increased, additional River Lots were established, extending development further west along the Assiniboine.

In 1850, the Parish of St. James was created by a grant of land from the Hudson's Bay Company and comprised property from Omand's Creek (originally known as Catfish Creek and first bridged in 1860) to present-day St. James Street south of the Portage Trail. Here a group of Anglicans built St. James Church in 1852 (today its address is 540 Tylehurst Street and it is referred to as Old St. James Anglican).<sup>1</sup> Around this structure the community grew. A school was built ca.1853.<sup>2</sup> Early parishioners included Charles and Cornelius Fidler, James Spence, James Foulds, the Bourke family and Gavin Garrioch. The Parish population grew mainly because of the resettling of Selkirk Settler families from the Kildonan area after the disastrous

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<sup>1</sup> Mary McCarthy Ferguson, A History of St. James (Winnipeg, MB: Author, 1967), pp. 6-11.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 11. Honourable John Norquay, future Premier of Manitoba, taught at the school in 1857.

1852 flood. These farmers sought higher land to avoid future floods and much of the land along the Assiniboine River had remained dry.

After the creation of the Province of Manitoba in 1870, a number of municipalities were established, including the Rural Municipality of Assiniboia, incorporated in 1880, which encompassed the former parishes of Headingley, St. Charles, St. James and part of St. Boniface on both the north and south sides of the Assiniboine River (Plate 2). This large municipality was steadily decreased over the years as new government organizations were formed: the Rural Municipality of Charleswood (1912); Town of Tuxedo (1913); and the Rural Municipality of St. James (1921) – Plates 3 and 4.

The period between the Wars saw little development in St. James, however, the situation changed after World War II and St. James began to expand rapidly. New residential neighbourhoods emerged including Silver Heights, Birchwood, Westwood, Crestview, and St. Charles. Other important developments in west Winnipeg included the founding and expansion of Winnipeg's airport in 1928 (originally Stevenson Field, renamed Winnipeg International Airport in 1958 and James Armstrong Richardson International Airport in 2006) and Polo Park, originally one of Western Canada's premier horse racing facility (1925-1956) and now one of its best known shopping centres (built in 1959 and expanded several times since).

The Rural Municipality of St. James, ostensibly the urban part of the Assiniboine Municipality, became the City of St. James in 1956. In 1967 the Town of Brooklands merged with St. James as did the Rural Municipality of Assiniboia two years later to form the City of St. James-Assiniboia. It was this city that became part of the City of Winnipeg under Unicity in 1972.

St. Charles Country Club organized on August 18, 1904.<sup>3</sup> Eighty-one hectares of land on Sturgeon Creek were soon purchased and a clubhouse complex, designed by architects Darling and Pearson, was erected the following year over a kilometre south of Portage Avenue (Plate 5).<sup>4</sup> This allowed

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<sup>3</sup> B. Huck and D. Whiteway, One Hundred Years at St. Charles Country Club (Winnipeg, MB: Heartland Associates Inc., 2004), pp. 13-25. Below as One Hundred Years.

<sup>4</sup> "The Country Club," in Manitoba Free Press, July 8, 1905, p. 8.

for the creation of a long entry road that ran through the golfing greens. Members were transported on a private tram to the clubhouse from Portage Avenue, where a small chalet had been built to shelter waiting members.<sup>5</sup> At this time, the Club boasted polo grounds, a shooting range, stables, a trotting park, tennis and croquet lawns (near the Portage Avenue entrance) and the golf course.<sup>6</sup> During the first year of operation, the men's membership limits were raised twice, finally to 350, to accommodate all the applicants. In 1906, the 200-metre Portage Avenue frontage was rented to the Wanderers Cricket Club.<sup>7</sup>

The Club's membership was on the rise, its facilities expanded and new activities were being added when the Clubhouse burned to the ground on March 24, 1910. It was rebuilt according to plans by George W. Northwood and opened by the Governor-General, the Duke of Connaught, on July 14, 1912 (Plate 6).<sup>8</sup> Only three months later, the new building was also destroyed by fire. Undaunted, the Club management sent G.W. Northwood on a fact finding trip through eastern Canada and the northeastern U.S. to study clubhouse design. The new Clubhouse was completed in 1914 (Plate 7).

At Portage Avenue, the Club built a pair of lighted brick pillars with chains to close off the road access to the club.<sup>9</sup> It is unknown at this time when the pillars were built.

## STYLE

The pillars were designed with minimal ornamentation or style.

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<sup>5</sup> One Hundred Years, p. 24. The cost of the spur line for the tram was shared between the Club and the Suburban Rapid Transit Company.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 24-26.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> Manitoba Free Press, July 15, 1912, p. 15; and One Hundred Years, pp. 33-34. The cost of the new Clubhouse was \$100,000 and was partially offset by the selling of 20 hectares of Portage Avenue frontage.

<sup>9</sup> The metal hook to hold the chain is still present on the remaining pillar's west side.

## **CONSTRUCTION**

The original pair of pillars, standing on the east and west sides of Country Club Boulevard at Portage Avenue, were built of red/brown tapestry brick, rising approximately 2.4 metres above their limestone bases. The caps were concrete. Originally, the two pillars were topped by wrought-iron electric lights, which were removed in the 1970s.<sup>10</sup>

## **DESIGN**

As originally designed, the square pillars sat on limestone bases, the shaft of the pillars embellished with varying brick courses and a widened mortar line creating rectangular shapes (Plates 8 and 9). Attached to the top caps with screws were metal letters – “St. C. C. C.” – for St. Charles Country Club (Plate 10).

## **INTERIOR**

N/A

## **INTEGRITY**

Only one of the original pair of pillars remains (the second pillar was demolished at an unknown date sometime after a 1971 newspaper article described the pair). The single pillar stands at its original location but has suffered alteration (the removal of the light) and is suffering from neglect and age (Plate 11).

## **STREETSCAPE**

The single pillar is located on a busy commercial intersection with a 1960s-era residential subdivision located between it and the Country Club (Plates 12 and 13). It is not a conspicuous part of the present-day streetscape.

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<sup>10</sup> R.R. Rostecki, “Pillars of the Community: Roadside Markers in Winnipeg, 1911-63,” report for the Historical Buildings Committee, 1993 (revised 1995), p. 8.

## **ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS**

It is unknown at this time who designed and built the pillars.

## **PERSON/INSTITUTION**

In 1971, the Club sold approximately 22 hectares to land developer Ladco Company which subdivided the land into a sprawling residential subdivision on both sides of Country Club Boulevard.<sup>11</sup> It meant that the Portage Avenue entrance was no longer relevant to the Club with its new entrance south of Meadowside Drive. The Club built a new entranceway (Plate 14), using the original iron lights from the Portage Avenue pillars (Plate 15).

## **EVENT**

There is no known event connected with this pillar.

## **CONTEXT**

This pillar, originally part of a pair, was built as the gateway to the St. Charles Country Club, one of the city's fine private member golf and recreational clubs. With the subdividing of the some of the Club's property and the development of a residential neighbourhood between Portage Avenue and the Country Club, the pillar's context has been severely and negatively altered.

## **LANDMARK**

This small, unadorned lone pillar is set back from busy Portage Avenue and is virtually invisible where it stands.

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<sup>11</sup> One Hundred Years, p. 111.

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Plate 1 – The Honourable James McKay (1828-1879), ca.1870, one of St. James’ early and influential citizens. McKay was a member of the Council of Assiniboia in 1868, Manitoba Legislative Council, Minister of Agriculture and a founder of the Winnipeg Board of Trade (1873). His fine home was located on the site of the present-day Deer Lodge Hospital, 2109 Portage Avenue. ([Archives of Manitoba](#))

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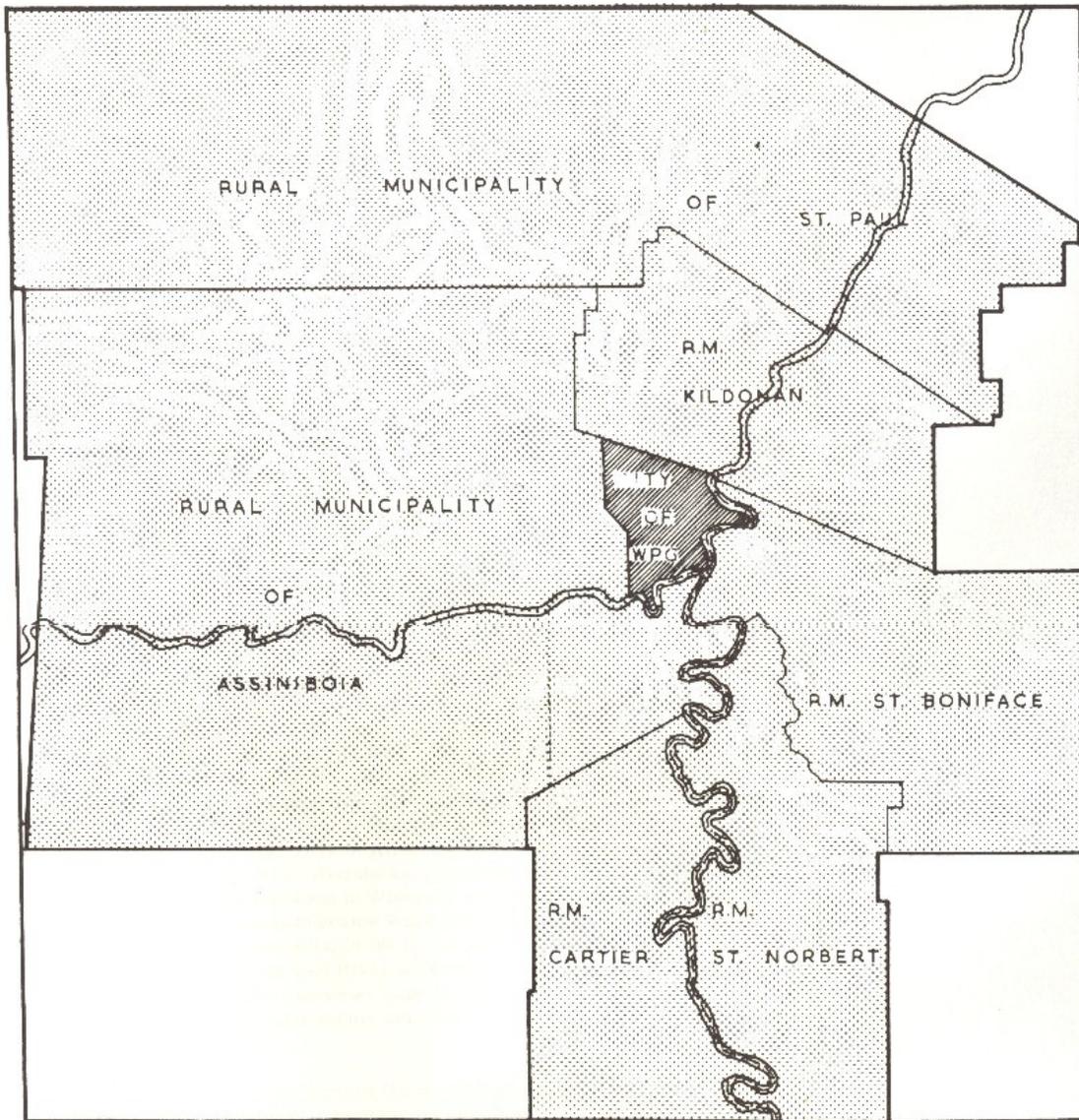


Plate 2 – The municipalities surrounding the City of Winnipeg as they appeared in 1880. (City of Winnipeg.)

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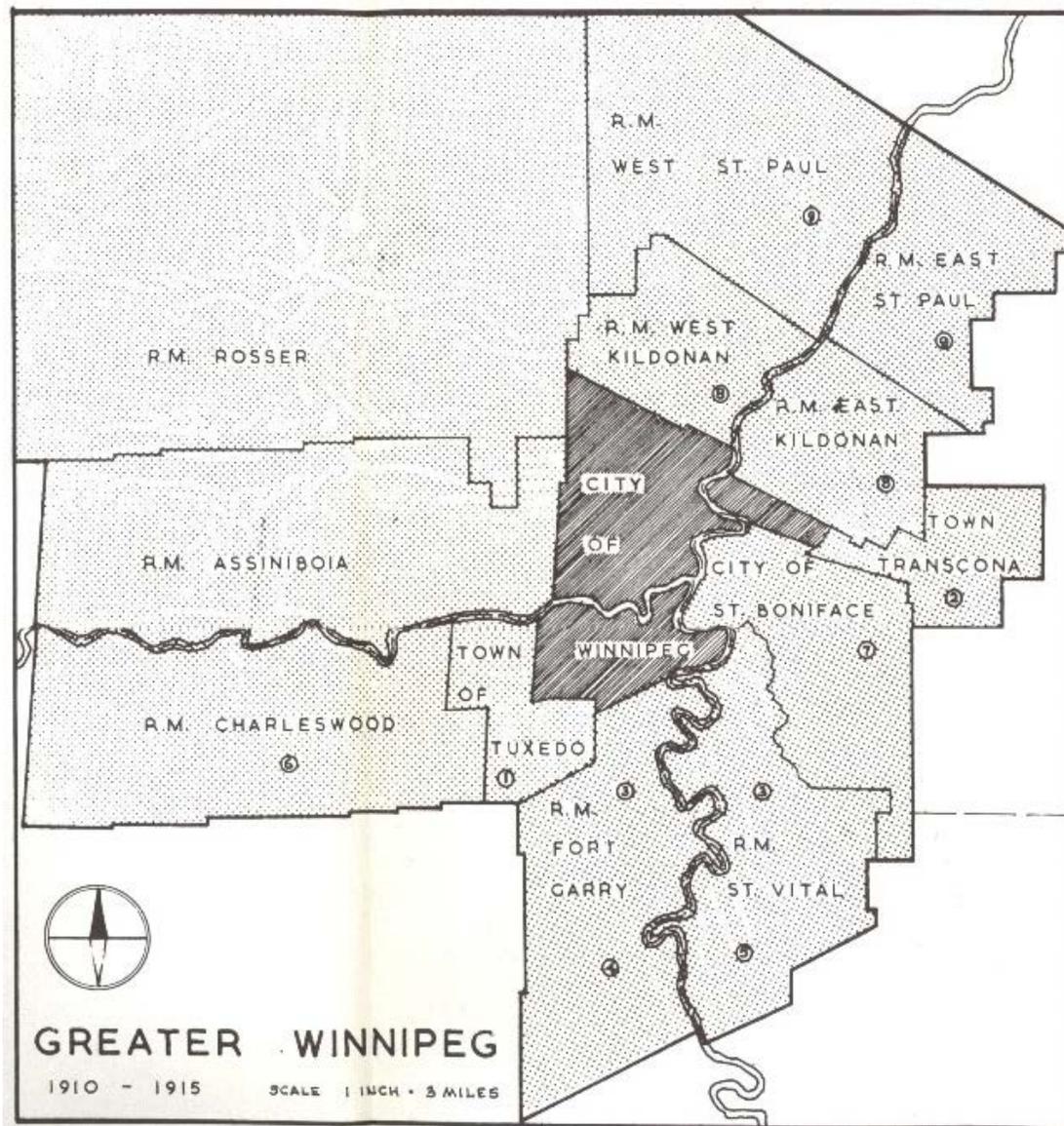


Plate 3 – The municipalities surrounding the City of Winnipeg as they changed between 1910 and 1915. (City of Winnipeg.)

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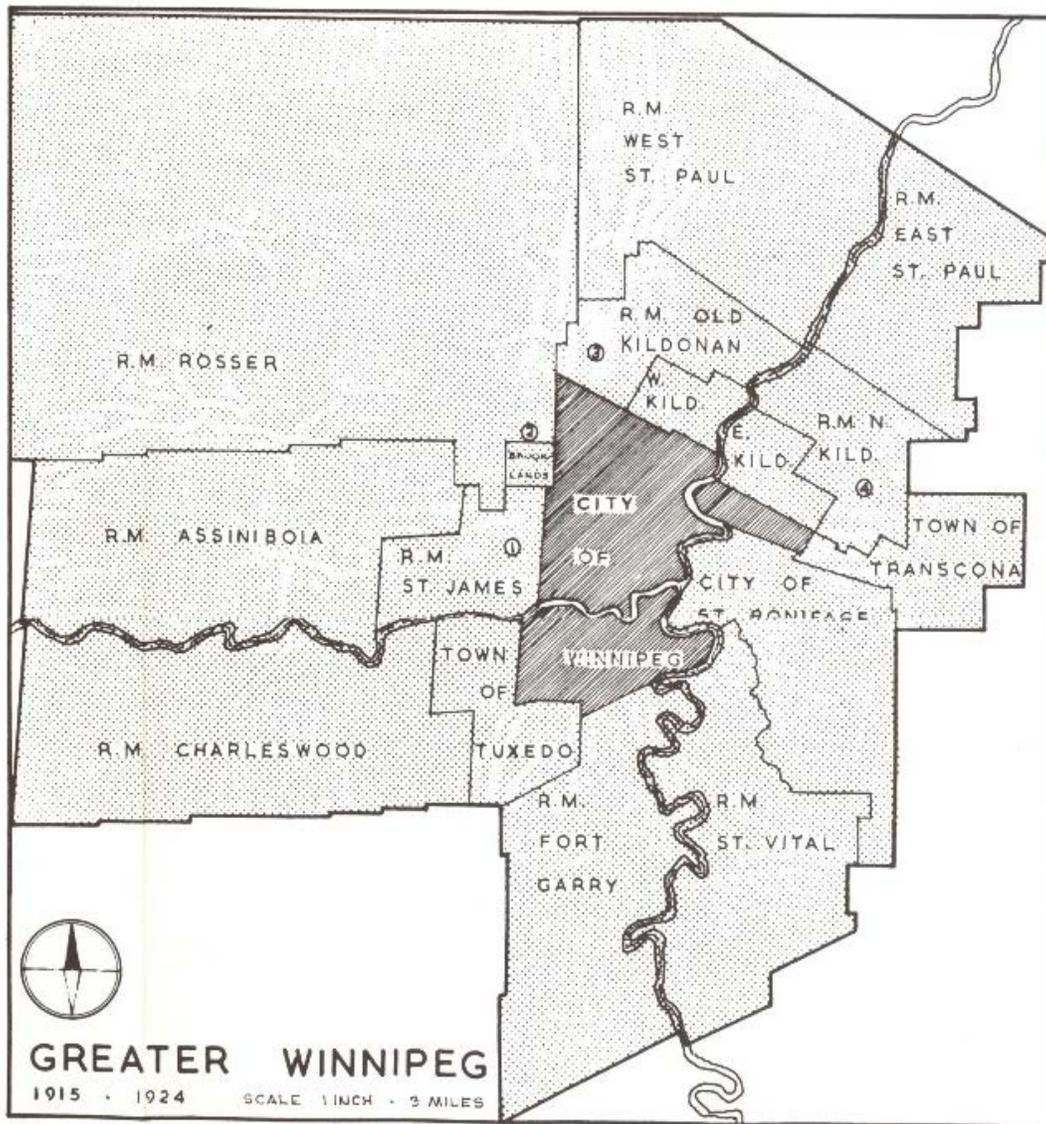


Plate 4 – The municipalities surrounding the City of Winnipeg as they changed between 1915 and 1924. (City of Winnipeg.)

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Plate 5 – The first St. Charles Country Club Clubhouse, ca.1909. Officially opened on October 11, 1905, it was designed by Darling and Pearson. (Archives of Manitoba.)



Plate 6 – The second St. Charles Country Club Clubhouse, grand opening, July 13, 1912. (Western Canada Pictorial Index.)

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Plate 7 – The third and present-day St. Charles Country Club Clubhouse, no date. (Reproduced from B. Huck and D. Whiteway, One Hundred Years at St. Charles Country Club (Winnipeg, MB: Heartland Associates Inc., 2004), p. 151.)

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Plate 8 – St. Charles Country Club pillar, southeast corner Country Club Boulevard and Portage Avenue, north and west sides. (M. Peterson, 2013.)

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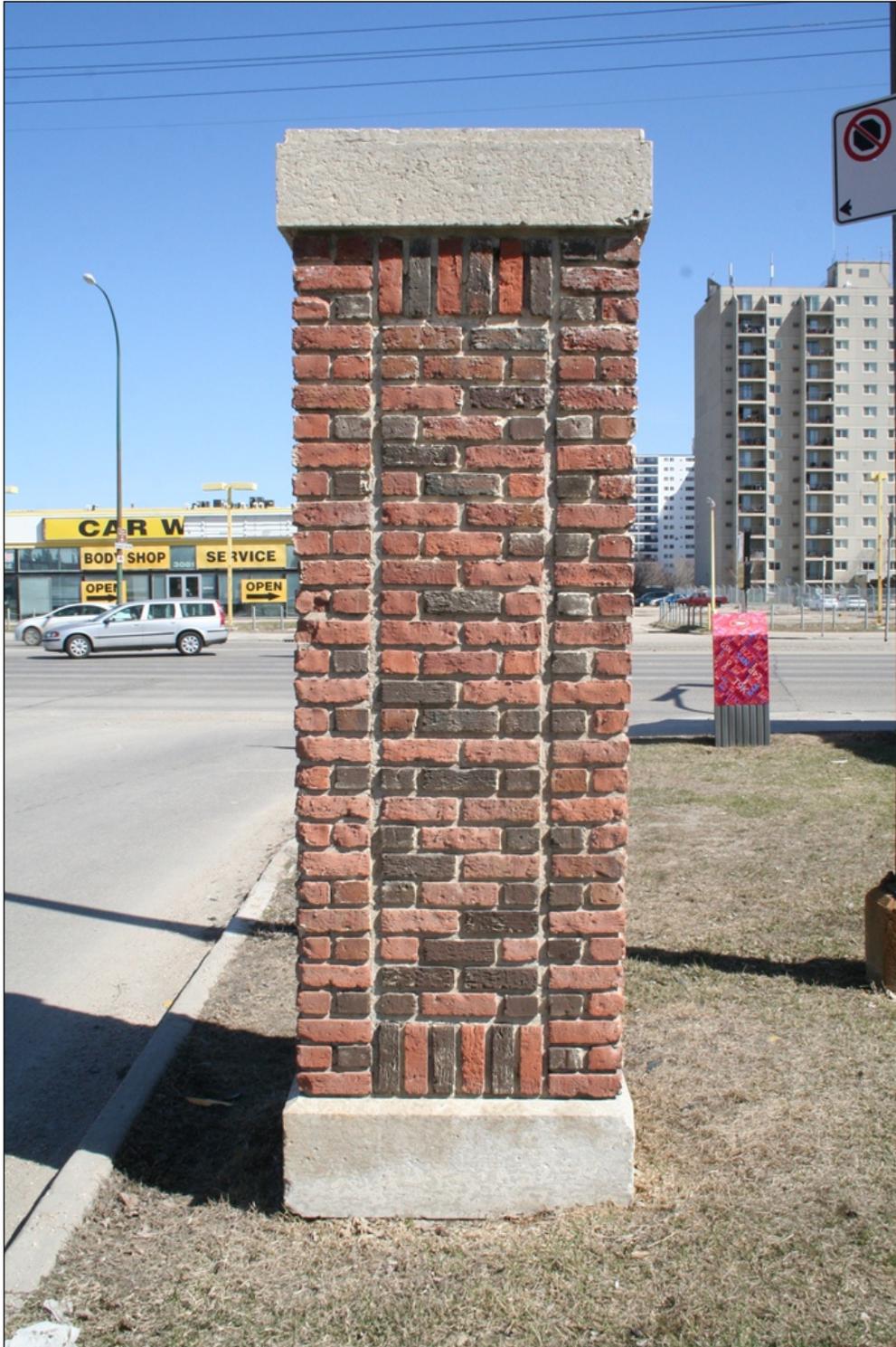


Plate 9 – St. Charles Country Club pillar, southeast corner Country Club Boulevard and Portage Avenue, south side. (M. Peterson, 2013.)

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Plate 10 – St. Charles Country Club pillar, southeast corner Country Club Boulevard and Portage Avenue, north side detail. (M. Peterson, 2013.)

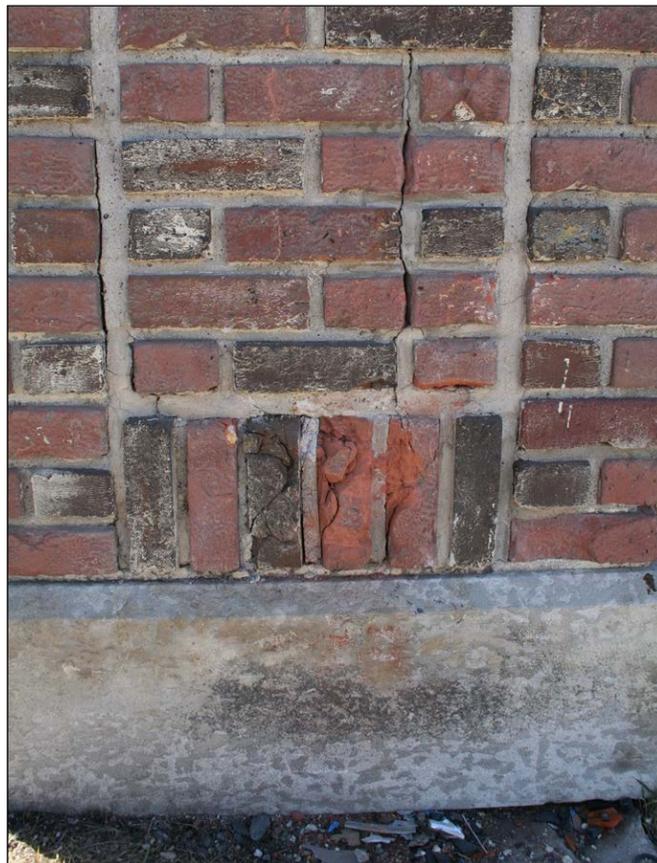


Plate 11 – St. Charles Country Club pillar, southeast corner Country Club Boulevard and Portage Avenue, cracks in west side. (M. Peterson, 2013.)

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Plate 12 – Country Club Boulevard looking south from McBey Avenue, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)

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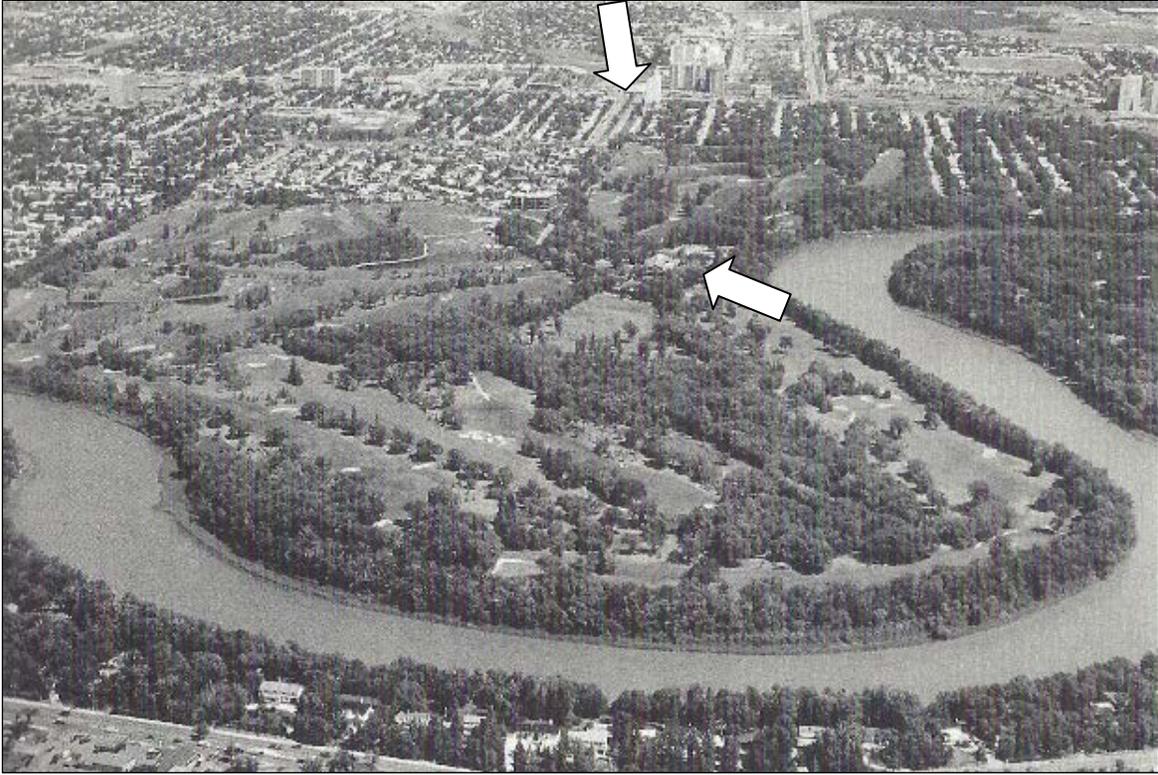


Plate 13 – This aerial photograph of the St. Charles Country Club looks north across the Assiniboine River. The pillar is located at the top arrow, the Clubhouse at the bottom arrow. (Province of Manitoba, copied from B. Huck and D. Whiteway, One Hundred Years at St. Charles Country Club [Winnipeg, MB: Heartland Associates Inc., 2004], p. 140.)

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Plate 14 – New St. Charles Country Club formal entrance, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)

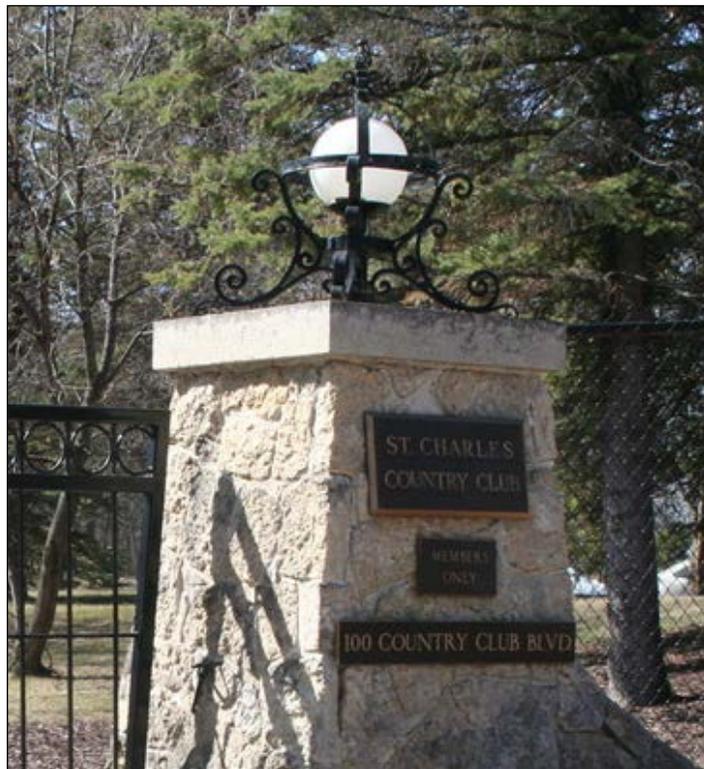


Plate 15 – New St. Charles Country Club formal entrance, detail of original pillar light, 2013. (M. Peterson, 2013.)