315 VICTORIA AVENUE EAST – EUSÈBE JOSEPH BLAIS HOUSE
William Henry Girling, 1914

Built mid-block near a large park, the E.J. Blais House is a fine example of the type of single-family dwelling built at the turn-of-the-century in residential districts throughout North America. In Transcona, where small workers' cottages are the norm, this is a rarer example: its age, design, materials and interior finishes making it a landmark structure in the neighbourhood.

Transcona developed as the quintessential railway town (the name was chosen by a public contest and combined "Trans" from the transcontinental railways and "cona" after Lord Strathcona who drove the last spike in the Canadian Pacific Railway line). In 1906, the area consisted of hundreds of hectares of low-lying, swampy, underutilized land with a scattering of agricultural holdings and homes, and a few businesses north of present-day Regent Avenue. In less than a decade, it was transformed into a thriving town on the strength of the opening of one of Western Canada's largest industrial complexes – the Transcona Shops – a $6-million repair

shop serving both the National Transcontinental Railway and the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, which were ultimately taken over by the federal government as part of the Canadian National Railways.

Eusèbe Joseph Blais (1876-1936) was born in Quebec and came to Transcona from another Manitoba railway town, Rivers, in 1912. Working as a foreman in the tin shop, Blais would have been an influential person both in the Shops and in the community. He chose to build his family a fine, 2½-storey wood frame home near Park Circle. The house was completed in 1914 and took its place among the other large, comfortable homes on Victoria Avenue East. Blais died in the home and his widow, Éléontine Marie Blais, remained in the house until her death in 1961, along with several of the couples grown children.

The house itself was laid out in tradition fashion, a ground floor with parlour and dining room along one side (west), a side staircase to the second floor (east) and the kitchen to the rear. The Blais House also featured a one-storey summer kitchen attached to the rear of the structure. Originally, the home was built with a fine, open veranda front entrance which was replaced in 1937 by an enclosed two-storey addition on the east end of the front façade, used as the entrance porch on the ground floor and a summer bedroom on the second floor. Interior finishes included hardwood floors on the ground and second levels, leaded glass panes, dark wood mouldings and stair accents and pocket doors that allowed the dining room and parlour to be divided or open. The second floor features three bedrooms and the attic is divided into two bedroom son either side of a steep set of wooden stairs. Much of the interior finishes throughout the house have been retained.

The home was designed by local architect William Henry Girling, born in England who came to Transcona in 1913 in the employ of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway. He died in 1941 and is also credited with designing the bandstand in Park Circle in 1911 (now demolished).

Elements of the building that would require approval if alterations were planned are:

Exterior:

- The south-facing, 2½-storey frame single-family dwelling on a raised foundation with horizontal wood siding and metal roof

Interior:

- Pocket doors between the living room and dining room
- Wood accenting on the main (east side) staircase
- Wood moulding around windows and doors on the ground and second floors
- Hardwood floors on the ground and second floors