662 MAIN STREET

BELL HOTEL

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
Researcher: M. Peterson
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The routing of the mainline of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) through Winnipeg’s Point Douglas area during 1879-1881 would have a profound influence on Western Canada in general and Winnipeg in particular.¹ During the CPR boom of 1881, the city had become the focal point for railway construction and rampant speculation in real estate.² A resident population of some 6,200 in 1880 grew to twice the size in 1881 and then more than doubled again the following year.³ Up to 500 newcomers were arriving in the city daily as of mid-February 1882.⁴ By the fall of 1882, however, this frenetic economic boom had passed, although its effects on Winnipeg were far more long term.

One of the most obvious changes was land use – modern buildings replaced the existing structures as the first stages of urbanization occurred. In the Point Douglas area, many of the early residential and light commercial structures were replaced by industrial and wholesaling interests locating along the rail line to take advantage of the new modern transportation system.

The early development of the west side of Main Street between present-day Henry and Higgins avenues was characterized by low-density residential and commercial uses.⁵ That began to change in 1881-1882 once the CPR became established in Point Douglas. Numerous hotels, bars, restaurants and retail shops appeared along North Main to cater to the CPR’s passengers and employees.⁶ Hotels especially began to concentrate in the vicinity of the CPR Station,

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⁵ Henderson’s Directory, 1880.
⁶ Ibid., 1882-1886.
which was then located on East Main between Higgins and Point Douglas avenues. By the turn of the century, theatres and vaudeville houses were also locating along Main Street, providing newcomers with a cheap source of entertainment that ran most of the day and into the evening (Plates 1 and 2).

Considered for a time as one of Winnipeg’s finest small hotels, the Bell Hotel was built in 1906 as the city moved into nearly a decade of unbridled growth and prosperity.

STYLE
Stylistically, the Bell Hotel is a subdued example of a Classical Revival commercial building, a popular architectural form used extensively throughout North America from approximately 1900-1930. Based on the classical forms of Greece and Rome, the style was in part a reaction to the picturesque forms – Queen Anne and Romanesque – of the late 19th century. The style ranged from simple temple-like structures with minimal ornamentation to grandiose public structures like the Manitoba Legislative Building, with a wealth of classically inspired elements: columns, entablature, pediments, porticos, rich mouldings, statues and carved wreaths, garlands and even baskets of fruit as decoration. Most often the buildings are symmetrical and exterior surfaces are smooth.

CONSTRUCTION
The four-storey solid brick building rests on a stone foundation, measures approximately 13.1 x 40.3 metres and cost $50,000 to complete in 1906. Ceilings of the building range from 2.4 metres in the basement, third and fourth floors to 3.7 metres on the ground floor, to 2.6 metres on the second floor. Stone foundation walls measure 66.0 centimetres, the superstructure’s solid brick walls taper off from 43.2 centimetres on the ground floor, to 33.0 centimetres on the second and 22.9 centimetres on the top two levels. According to contemporary accounts, the

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8 City of Winnipeg Building Permit (below as BP), #1437/1906.
9 City of Winnipeg Assessment Department Records, Roll No. 919760-12-2.
building shell was completed late in the construction season of 1906 and the interior finishing work continued during the winter months of 1907.\textsuperscript{10}

**DESIGN**

The original front (east) façade of the building, according to photographs, began with a shallow rusticated base interrupted by small basement window openings and leading to the ground floor, believed to be clad in limestone (Plate 3). Two large windows with lug sills framed the centrally-placed entrance topped by attached signage and a lit neon overhead sign. A modest metal entablature visually separated the ground floor from the upper storeys. The upper floors, clad in dark brick, featured regularly spaced rectilinear window openings with stone lug sills, radiating brick heads with keystones and pilasters at the corners with stone bases and heads. These pilasters end on the top floor in a complete entablature with heavy overhanging metal cornice. The front façade also boasted metal and wood balconies on the third and fourth floors.

The south façade was a continuation of the design and materials of the front elevation and has not seen extensive alteration beyond window unit replacement and small patio (Plate 4).

Today, the front façade is a mixture of original and altered spaces. The main floor has been reworked: the stone was stuccoed (date unknown); the south window has been converted into a door/window combination; the central door and north window feature new units; and the neon sign has been moved from its original central location to the north end of the building (Plates 5 and 6). The entire building has been painted.

The north elevation was for many decades partially covered by a small brick commercial structure, which was replaced in 2014 with a three-storey office building (670 Main Street). The rear of this elevation is visible with three multi-storey light wells (Plate 7). The rear (west) façade features a raised entrance and rectilinear window openings on all floors (Plate 8).

\textsuperscript{10} Manitoba Morning Free Press, December 6, 1906, p. 56.
INTERIOR
The original Bell Hotel was a traditionally designed hotel of the early 20th century. Tin ceiling and carved wood finishes in the basement (Plate 9) and basement windows suggest a public use for this space. The ground floor, by the late 1920s, included a beer parlour along the south wall (Plate 10).

Many changes were made to the interior layout and by 2000; the main floor held a large beverage room in the rear section, a diner in the southeast corner and an office and front desk to the north (Plates 11-13). The upper three floors were organized into 75 one-room suites, most with sinks, some with bathrooms on either side of a wide central hallway that also held tenant washrooms (Plates 14 and 15). Stairs were located at either end of the hallway.

In 2009, the vacant structure was purchased and converted into a supportive housing development with a café, offices, common rooms and counselling space on the ground floor (Plates 16 and 17) and 42 modern suites on the three upper floors (Plate 18).

INTEGRITY
The building stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition for its age. Alterations and its recent redevelopment have significantly altered the building’s original design, interior layout and original materials and finishes.

STREETSCAPE
This section of North Main Street has always seen a variety of building types, styles, ages and sizes (Plate 19). The pedestrian traffic that was once a hallmark of this area has steadily decreased since World War II. In recent times, building vacancies, graffiti, vandalism and demolitions have further diminished the continuity of many of its blocks. A number of newer buildings have also been constructed in the area. The Bell Hotel has been an important part of its streetscape for over 100 years (Plate 20).
ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS
Quebec-born and Ontario-trained Daniel Smith (1840-1913) was the designer of this hotel. Smith came west to Winnipeg in 1882 as the Superintendent of the Western Canadian section of the Department of Public Works. In his public and private practice, alone or in partnership, he was responsible for the design of many fine buildings across the region. He has been given 5 points by the Historical Buildings Committee.

Contractors for this building were Derochers and Company, a small-scale firm that worked in Winnipeg from 1904 to 1910. Among the company’s larger contracts were St. Joseph’s Orphanage, Portage Avenue (1906 – demolished) and the Western Paint Company Warehouse, Charlotte Street (1910).

PERSON/INSTITUTION
Joseph Bernhart (1853-1923), also spelt Bernhardt, was the original owner of this facility (Plate 21), along with brother Antoine. Born in France, Joseph Bernhart was educated in Strasbourg, Germany and trained as a chef before coming to Canada in 1873. He worked in Québec City at the Hotel St. Louis before coming to Winnipeg in 1881. He operated the European Hotel, Fort Street (which he renamed the St. Louis), for 18 months prior to returning to Québec for a brief time. In 1883, he was the leaseholder of the Cosmopolitan Hotel, Main Street near Sutherland Avenue, switching in 1901 to invest in lumber and other businesses. In 1906, he returned to the

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11 BP #1437/1906.
12 City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books, 1899-1913.
13 City of Winnipeg Assessment Rolls, Roll No. 919760-12-2 (Old Roll. No. 14620), below as ARo, 1900-1910.
15 This appears to have been a very common practice in Winnipeg’s hotel sector. An investor, who may or may not have had any hotel experience, owned the business and leased it to an experienced manager, who was often referred to as the “proprietor” in local directories and biographies in the early 20th century but not listed as an “owner” in City tax information.
hotel trade with the construction of the Bell Hotel, on land that had held a small retail block with residential suites previous to 1906 (owned by the Bernhart brothers).\textsuperscript{16}

Ownership of the block did not rest long with the brothers, it was sold in April 1907 to the Bell Brothers, Harry and Thomas, who, according to one account, purchased the land in 1906 and agreed to buy the hotel once it was completed.\textsuperscript{17} Neither brother had any experience in the hotel business but ran the facility until its sale by 1908 to Patrick “Pat” Shea, brewer (Plate 22). Shea was born in County Kerry, Ireland on March 7, 1854 and arrived in New York City at the age of 16, taking a job with a railway construction crew. In 1882, he moved to Winnipeg and joined on with the CPR. He and fellow-Irishman John McDonagh (1856-1894) purchased the Waverley Hotel in 1884. Located on Main Street (northeast corner Higgins Avenue, demolished to make way for the Royal Alexandra Hotel), it was perfectly located to serve the detraining passengers from the CPR station next door.\textsuperscript{18}

The partners sold their interest in the Waverley in 1887 to purchase a bankrupt brewery just south of the corner of Broadway and Osborne Street. Opened by Celestin Thomas (ca.1838-1927) in 1873 as the Winnipeg Brewery (Plate 23), it had undergone a number of expansions and modernizations over its short history, as well as a number of ownership and name changes, including Thomas and Ward (ca.1880), Poulin and Roy Brewery (ca.1882) and Cosgrove and Company (1886).\textsuperscript{19} McDonagh & Shea Brewery opened with a staff of five and steadily grew. Despite the death of McDonagh on January 3, 1894, the brewery continued to grow. Shea’s Brewery became one of the city’s best-known companies and is credited in 1921 with the creation of a show wagon pulled by a team of Clydesdale horses. Known across Canada, they were sold in 1933 to become the world famous Anheuser-Busch (Budweiser) Clydesdales.\textsuperscript{20} Pat Shea died in 1933 and control of the company transferred to his only surviving son, Frank D.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} ARo, 1900-1906.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Manitoba Free Press, April 2, 1907, p. 43.
\item \textsuperscript{18} William Douglas, The House of Shea (Winnipeg, MB: Bulman Brothers Limited, 1947), pp. 36-59.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid., pp. 7-36.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 71.
\end{itemize}
Shea (Plate 24), who had been ill for several years and died within months of his father. Shea’s continued to operate until its sale to the John Labbatt’s Brewing Company in the 1950s. The Osborne Street brewery was demolished in 1979 (Plate 25). Patrick Shea and his representatives owned the Bell Hotel until 1938.

Although owned by Shea’s, the hotel was run in 1913 by Sam Bronfman (Plate 26). This Jewish immigrant family from Russia began what would become an international commercial empire with a small homestead in Saskatchewan in 1889, soon relocating to Brandon, Manitoba. In 1902-1903, the Bronfmans (father Ekiel and sons Abe [1882-1968], Harry [1886-1963] and Sam [1889-1971]) purchased the Anglo-American Hotel at Emerson, Manitoba. This was the beginning of a string of pre-World War I purchases that saw family members owning business blocks, hotels, stores and other structures throughout Saskatchewan and Manitoba including a number of properties in the City of Winnipeg.

Although it enjoyed a good reputation, the Bell Hotel saw hard times in the 1910s due to World War I and prohibition in 1916. But the Bronfmans used prohibition to move into the distilling sector, ultimately merging with Joseph E. Seagram and Sons of Ontario to create the world’s largest distillery business.

Prohibition was lifted in Manitoba on March 14, 1928 and like many other local hotels, the Bell refurbished and reopened its beer parlour (Plate 10). A description in a national trade magazine of 1928 told of 77 rooms (20 with baths), a lounge, writing room, billiard room, barber shop and the well-appointed beer parlour. The article referenced many of the guests of the hotel who had made it a “more or less permanent home.”

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21 Ibid., pp. 36-65.
23 Henderson’s Directory, 1908-1914.
George Swan became the owner of the Bell Hotel in 1939, owning it until his death in 1943. His estate sold the property a year later to Bell Hotel Limited. Alex Guthrie is listed as the facility’s manager in the 1950s.\textsuperscript{26}

In 2007, the building became vacant (Plate 27) and two years later was purchased by CentreVenture Corporation, which converted the building into a supportive housing project, officially opening in June 2011 (Plate 28).

\textbf{EVENT}

There is no known significant historical event connected with this building.

\textbf{CONTEXT}

The Bell Hotel speaks to a number of important themes in Winnipeg’s history. It stands as an excellent example of the type of medium-sized hotels that lined the streets of downtown Winnipeg, built shortly before or during the first decade of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century to serve the travelling population that came to Winnipeg for business and pleasure. Strategically located just south of the massive CPR railway station/yards, this hotel was, for many years, a popular temporary home for many visitors. More recently, it joined the growing trend of downtown Winnipeg hotels serving longer-term occupants, many retired or on fixed incomes that live in the downtown.

The structure is also a reflection of the heady economic times enjoyed by Winnipeg in the early part of the 1900s, when all its amenities attempted to keep pace with the rapidly growing citizenry and increasing numbers of visitors. The Winnipeg hotel sector was especially active during this period; hotels were extremely numerous throughout the downtown.

\textsuperscript{26} ARo, 1930-1990; and Henderson’s Directory, 1930-1990.
Finally, it represents an important early investment of the Shea Brewery, an early and successful Manitoba company and was connected to the Bronfman family, one of the country’s leading business families.

**LANDMARK**

Located on a busy downtown street and visually prominent because of its scale, its highly public use and the uniqueness of its front façade, the Bell Hotel is a conspicuous structure in the neighbourhood.
Building Address: 662 Main Street

Original Use: hotel

Roll No.: 13091976000

Legal Description: 35 St. John, Plan 32025, Lot 14

Location: northwest corner Henry Avenue

Date of Construction: 1906

Storeys: 4 and basement

Heritage Status: **ON NOMINATED LIST**

Construction Type: Brick and stone

- 1437/1906 $50,000 (original); 148/1913 $10,000 (alteration); 2417/1928 $200 (new fire escape);
- 1592/1930 $1,000 (alterations); 3449/1935 $5,000 (alterations); 568/1945 $500 (alterations); 759/1947 $300
  (enlarge beer cooling room); 997/1952 [CS] $200 (brick in boiler room); 4881/1963 $370 (repairs); 1540/1965
  [M515] $5,000 (alterations); 3616/1965 [M515] $N/A (alterations); 5789/1968 [M158] $8,000 (alterations);
- 1209/1973 $3,000 (alterations); 858/1982 [CS] $2,500 (alterations); 721/1991 $1,000 (alterations); 1521/1994
  $18,000 (alterations); 123344/2010 $171,000 (interior alteration – gutting); 128531/2010 $4.3 million (interior
  & exterior alterations); 152270/2011 $50,000 (south side patio); 174009/2012 $145,630 (interior alterations);
- 107099/2014 $265,000 (interior alterations – café & kitchen); 122571/2014 $28,000 (interior alterations)

Information:
- 43 x 132 x 40 = 227,040 cu. ft.
- ceilings: B- 8’; 1st- 12’; 2nd- 8.5’; 3rd–4th- 8’
- walls: B- 26” stone; 1st- 17” brick; 2nd- 13” brick; 3rd–4th- 9” brick

ARCHITECT: SMITH, DANIEL

CONTRACTOR: DEROCHERS AND COMPANY
APPENDIX II

Daniel Smith

Daniel Smith was born in Bristol, Lower Canada (Quebec) on November 1, 1840, and received his early education in Ottawa, Ontario. At the age of thirty-eight, Smith joined the Dominion Public Works Department in Ottawa, working for five years in that city. In 1882, he was transferred to Winnipeg, and that same year was promoted to Superintendent of the Western Canadian section of the Department of Public Works. As such, he had jurisdictional control of the territory west of the Great Lakes.

In 1900, he resigned his position and became a privately practicing architect in the city, designing many small to medium size buildings of various function and description. At the end of this short career, Smith took on partner William Bruce, forming Smith and Bruce that, according to City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books, operated in the city from 1907-1910.

Bruce was born in 1852 in Caithness-shire, Scotland and studied architecture in Haldene Academy, Glasgow. After practising in London, Glasgow and Edinburgh, he moved to Winnipeg in 1906. He prepared a plan for Roblin City, a proposed urban centre of half-a-million people located at present-day Churchill. Bruce travelled extensively in northern Manitoba and reportedly discovered a number of new forms of stone that were ultimately used in construction.

In 1909, Daniel Smith was appointed the provincial factory inspector, a role he filled until his death at his home on Balmoral Place on July 12, 1913, although he had continued to take on private work into 1911. Besides his other interests, Smith was one of the founders of the Winnipeg Industrial Exhibition.

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1 Manitoba Free Press, July 14, 1913, p. 16.
2 City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books, 1899-1913. Below as Ledgers.
4 Ledgers, 1899-1913.
A review of contemporary accounts and the City of Winnipeg, Building Permits (1900-1913) shows that Smith, individually and as a partner, was responsible for a number of buildings throughout the city, the most substantial of these would include the following:

**Daniel Smith:**
- Strang and Co. Warehouse, Fort Street (1902)
- W.J. Boyd Bakery, 300 Spence Street (1902) – demolished
- Canada Moline Plow Co. warehouse, Chambers Avenue (1903)
- Steele Furniture Co. warehouse/showroom, Fort Street (1904)
- Kilgour, Rimer Co. stores/warehouse, 104 Princess Street (1904) – Grade III
- Royal Crown Soap Co., 289 King Street, factory, warehouse, boiler house & alterations, (1904-1908)
- Western Bag Co. Factory, Pacific Avenue (1906)
- Codville-Georgeson Co. Warehouse, 43-51 Victoria Street (1906) – demolished
- Bell Hotel, 662 Main Street (1906)
- Canada Paint Co. Factory & boiler house, 112 Sutherland Avenue (1906) – demolished
- Northern Hotel, 826 Main Street (1906) and additional storey (with W. Bruce, 1907)
- Fire Hall No. 2, Smith Street, addition (1907) and repairs (with W. Bruce, 1908) – demolished

**William Bruce:**
- Minnewaska Court Apartments (now Chateau Apartments), 74 Spence Street (1910)
- Carmell Apartments, 39 Sherbrook Street (1911) – demolished
- Pritchard Avenue Baths, Charles Street (1911) – demolished
- Simcoe Apartments, 618 Simcoe Street (1912) – demolished
- Manitoba & Saskatchewan Bible Society Building, now Ukrainian Cultural Centre, Oseredok, 184 Alexander Avenue (1912) – Grade III

**Smith & Bruce:**
- mixed retail/apartment block for P.A. Crump, Main Street (1907)
- Mount Royal Hotel, Garry Street (1907) – demolished
- St. Stephen’s Anglican Church, 546 Portage Avenue, addition (1908)
- Assiniboine Mansion Apartments, Assiniboine Avenue (1908) – demolished
- Elite Theatre, 285 Portage Avenue (1908) – demolished
- theatre for P.A. Crump and Co., Dufferin Avenue (1909)
- St. Edwards Public School, Arlington Street (1909)
- Winnipeg Public Baths, Fort Street (1909) – demolished
- Public Press Ltd. Office Building, Sherbrook Street (1909)
- Melbourne Apartments, 133 Sherbrook Street (1910)
- McDonagh & Shea Livery Company Stables, Osborne Place (1910) – demolished
Plate 1 – Looking north from the roof of City Hall, ca.1895, from the roof of City Hall. (Courtesy of the Archives of Manitoba.)
Plate 2 – Main Street looking north from Market Avenue, ca.1905. Alexander Avenue is at arrow. (T.C. Wetton photograph, Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg- Streets- Main- c1905- 3, N9057.)
Plate 3 - Bell Hotel, 662 Main Street, front (east) façade, ca.1967. (City of Winnipeg.)
Plate 4 – Bell Hotel, 662 Main Street, south façade, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 5 – Bell Hotel, 662 Main Street, front (east) façade, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 6 – Bell Hotel, 662 Main Street, front (east) façade, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)
662 MAIN STREET – BELL HOTEL

Plate 7 – Bell Hotel, 662 Main Street, rear (west) and north façades, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)

Plate 8 – Bell Hotel, 662 Main Street, rear (west) and south façades, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 9 – Bell Hotel, 662 Main Street, ornamental tin ceiling in basement, 2007. (M. Peterson, 2007.)
Plate 10 – “Beer Parlor [sic], Bell Hotel,” 1928. (Reproduced from The Hotel News, Volume 1, No. 4 [March 1928], p. 15.)
Plate 11 – Architect’s drawings, “Existing Main Floor Plans,” 2009. (BIOS Architecture.)

Plate 12 – Bell Hotel, 662 Main Street, café, 2007. (M. Peterson, 2007.)
Plate 13 – Bell Hotel, 662 Main Street, front desk, 2007. (M. Peterson, 2007.)
Plate 14 – Bell Hotel, 662 Main Street, 3rd floor suite, 2007. (M. Peterson, 2007.)
Plate 15 – Bell Hotel, 662 Main Street, 4th floor hallway. (M. Peterson, 2007.)
Plate 16 – Bell Hotel, 662 Main Street, ground floor café, Lunch Bell Bistro, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 17 – Bell Hotel, 662 Main Street, ground floor meeting room, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 18 – Bell Hotel, 662 Main Street, fourth floor hallway, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 19 – This colourized 1925 post card shows Main Street looking north from William Avenue. Streetcars, automobiles, horse-drawn carts and hundreds of pedestrians make it a very busy place for many blocks. The large building centre background is the Royal Alexandra Hotel, Main Street at Higgins Avenue. (M. Peterson Collection.)
Plate 20 – Main Street looking south from Higgins Avenue, 2015. (M. Peterson, 2015.)
Plate 24 – Frank D. Shea (1889-1933), short-lived owner of Shea’s Brewery, no date. 
Plate 25 – Demolition of the Labatt’s Brewery (former Shea’s Brewery), Osborne Street at Broadway, October 1979. (Courtesy of the University of Manitoba, Archives and Special Collections, Winnipeg Tribune Collection, PC 18/3961/18-3217-003.)
Plate 26 – Samuel Bronfman, no date. (Reproduced from http://pixgood.com/samuel-bronfman.html.)
Plate 27 – Bell Hotel, 662 Main Street, front (east) and south façades, 2007.  (M. Peterson, 2007.)
Plate 28 – CentreVenture invitation to grand reopening of the Bell Hotel, 2011. (City of Winnipeg.)