

662 MAIN STREET – BELL HOTEL
Daniel Smith, 1906



The development of Main Street around Higgins Avenue was fuelled by the massive Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) complex that included immigration sheds, the station and hotel and kilometres of track. Along Main Street, a variety of new structures were built in the early 1900s including banks, retail stores and theatres – both vaudeville and moving picture. Small hotels were also a popular new feature of the area, taking advantage of the increasing number of visitors to the city brought in by the CPR. Clients could get a plain but comfortable room, usually a hot meal and often a well-appointed bar.

The Bell Hotel, built in 1906, was considered one of the city's finest small hotels with ornamental tin ceilings and dark wood accenting.

The four-storey solid brick building rests on a heavy stone foundation 66.0 centimetres wide. Ceiling heights range from 2.4 to 3.7 metres and the building's exterior was completed late in the construction season of 1906 with the interior finishing work continued during the winter months of 1907.

The exterior is not ornamentally complex or stylistically significant; it was built as a sturdy structure where the interior layout and finishes were of primary importance. The front (east) façade originally featured a rusticated base and limestone cladding on the ground floor with two large windows framing a 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 were clad in dark brick and included regularly spaced rectilinear window openings. A complete entablature with heavy overhanging metal cornice highlighted the roofline and the 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.

Over the years and as part of the building's recent repurposing, several changes to the front façade have been completed: the main floor stone was stuccoed (date unknown); the south window has been converted into a door/window combination; the entire building was painted; and the neon sign was moved.

In 1928, the hotel featured 77 guest rooms (20 with baths), a lounge, writing room, billiard room, barber shop and the well-appointed beer parlour. This interior was converted in 2009 into a supportive housing development with a café, offices, common rooms and counselling space on the ground floor and 42 modern suites on the three upper floors.

The hotel was designed by Quebec-born and Ontario-trained Daniel Smith (1840-1913) who arrived in Winnipeg in 1882 as the Superintendent of the Western Canadian section of the Department of Public Works and had a modest practice both alone and in partnership. The contractors were Derochers and Company, a small-scale firm that worked in Winnipeg from 1904 to 1910.

Joseph Bernhart (1853-1923), also spelt Bernhardt, and his brother Antoine were the original owners of the Bell. Joseph was born in France and educated in Germany before arriving in Winnipeg in 1881 after working in hotels in Québec City. The brothers only owned the hotel for a short time, selling in 1907 to another pair of brothers, Harry and Thomas Bell. Neither had any hotel experience and soon sold the property to well-known and successful local brewer Patrick “Pat” Shea (1854-1933). Although owned by Shea, the hotel was actually run in the 1910s by Sam Bronfman, who would ultimately head an international commercial empire.

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

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

Exterior-

- Four-storey common clay brick building with flat roof located mid-block on the west side of Main Street between Logan and Higgins avenues, its main façades facing east onto Main Street and south onto a lane, its north façade partially hidden by a neighbouring building and its west façade facing the back lane;
- Original elements of the front (east) façade, the centrally-located main entrance, metal entablature above the ground floor openings, upper storey windows in rectilinear openings with lug sills, radiating heads and keystones, metal balconies, complete entablature with heavy overhanging metal cornice and neon sign;
- The south façade with its raised rusticated stone base, ground floor brick walls, upper storey windows in rectilinear openings with lug sills, radiating heads and keystones and complete entablature with heavy overhanging metal cornice;
- The visible portion of the north façade with angled window wells; and
- The rear (west) façade with its window and doors in rectilinear openings.

Interior-

- None