407 PROVENCHER BOULEVARD

BELGIAN CLUB (LE CLUB BELGE)

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
Researcher: M. Peterson
April 2020
This building embodies the following heritage values as described in the Historical Resources By-law, 55/2014 (consolidated update July 13, 2016):

(a) This building was completed by 1908 during the early years of St. Boniface’s dramatic growth phase that lasted until 1915 and the period of growth of the local Belgian community through increased immigration;

(b) It is associated with the Belgian community, influential in St. Boniface and throughout the Province of Manitoba;

(c) It features well-designed classically-based architectural detailing;

(d) Its brick and stone exterior walls are common system and materials for an early 20th century public building;

(e) The building stands near the east end of Provencher Boulevard in what was once referred to as “Belgian Town” and “The Belgian Quarter” of St. Boniface; and

(f) The building’s exterior has suffered limited alteration.
The first Immigration Act of the Dominion of Canada (1869) created a preferred countries list from which to choose immigrants to populate the new country. The country of Belgium was on this list and immigration and government agents were soon actively promoting Quebec and Manitoba (St. Boniface) because of their Francophone and Roman Catholic base. Flemish farmers and Walloon miners and labourers were among the very first to arrive in Canada. An attraction for Belgians to Manitoba was the offer of 65 hectares of free land for homesteading. However, unlike many other European countries, Belgium did not actively encourage its nationals to emigrate to relieve economic, demographic and social crises during the second half of the 19th century.

In 1879, Charles, Peter and Constant Bossuyt were among the first Belgians to arrive in St. Boniface and over the next two decades, other families arrived. Available employment included grain processing, meat packing, railway yards and production of building materials. This availability of work prompted many to stay in St. Boniface, settling in the eastern part of the community, which would later be referred to as “Belgian Town” or the “Belgian Quarter”. Other families took up farms in the southern area of the province, notably around St. Alphonse, Bruxelles and Deloraine and to the north and east at Ste. Rose-du-Lac, Ste. Amélie, Pine Falls, and Ile des Chènes. Both the urban and rural groups’ numbers were augmented through chain migration.

The second wave of Belgian immigrants began arriving after 1896, when the Canadian government’s policy of immigration began to yield positive results. After 1903, Belgian

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4 Ibid., p. 63.
immigrants could by-pass British ports and sail directly from their homeland to Canada.\textsuperscript{5} Approximately 14,000 Belgians immigrated to Canada between 1896 and 1914.\textsuperscript{6}

The population in St. Boniface rose rapidly, newly arriving immigrants took up jobs throughout the local economy: in manufacturing and labour, construction and contracting, service industries such as hotels and restaurants and professional roles in insurance, legal and banking sectors.

Market gardening was another important activity that Belgian immigrants excelled at, partially because it was a type of agriculture they were accustomed to: “self-sufficient holdings consisting of small acreages, organic fertilization, sizeable vegetable and small fruit gardens, and coarse grain plots to feed their draught horses and a few cows.”\textsuperscript{7} Belgians, according to one account, dominated market gardening in Manitoba until after World War II.\textsuperscript{8} Dairy farms, creameries and cheese factories were also successful ventures of the new Belgian population.

Another 14,000 Belgians immigrated to Canada in the decade after World War I. The final major immigration period, 1945-1975, was the largest, over 25,000 Belgians coming to Canada. Tables One and Two give some of the immigration/population figures for Belgians in Canada.

In 1903, with more and more Belgians immigrating to Canada, a Union Belge was organized in Montréal to bring together Flemings and Walloons socially. Similar associations were formed in Toronto, Edmonton and Vancouver.\textsuperscript{9}

\textsuperscript{5} “The Belgian Presence in Canada,” n.p.
\textsuperscript{7} Promoters, Planters and Pioneers, pp. 88-89.
\textsuperscript{8} “The Belgian Presence in Canada,” n.p.
\textsuperscript{9} “Belgian Canadians,” in \textit{Canadian Encyclopedia}, op. cit.
In Winnipeg, the Belgian Club, Le Club Belge, was formed in 1905 with 45 members, meeting in various locations before opening their own clubhouse at the east end of Provencher Boulevard near the Seine River in 1908 (Plate 1), “so that Belgians, who were arriving in larger numbers every month, could gather, discuss their problems and find enjoyment among themselves.”

Table One – Belgian Immigration to Canada

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEARS</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901-1910</td>
<td>7,020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911-1920</td>
<td>11,687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921-1930</td>
<td>13,404</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931-1940</td>
<td>1,136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941-1950</td>
<td>3,496</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951-1960</td>
<td>16,278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961-1970</td>
<td>6,941</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971-1980</td>
<td>3,534</td>
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Table Two – Canadian Census Data, Belgians in Canada

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>QUEBEC (% OF CDN. TOTAL)</th>
<th>MANITOBA (% OF CDN. TOTAL)</th>
<th>ONTARIO (% OF CDN. TOTAL)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>969          (32.9)</td>
<td>940 (31.9)</td>
<td>216 (7.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>2,105 (21.9)</td>
<td>2,453 (25.6)</td>
<td>633 (6.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>3,284 (16.2)</td>
<td>5,320 (26.3)</td>
<td>3,175 (15.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>4,324 (15.7)</td>
<td>6,323 (22.9)</td>
<td>7,310 (26.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>4,182 (14.1)</td>
<td>6,715 (22.6)</td>
<td>8,575 (28.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>4,697 (13.4)</td>
<td>7,733 (22.0)</td>
<td>11,582 (32.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>12,092 (19.7)</td>
<td>9,698 (15.8)</td>
<td>22,142 (36.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>8,220 (16.1)</td>
<td>9,055 (17.7)</td>
<td>19,955 (29.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>6,465 (15.6)</td>
<td>6,455 (15.3)</td>
<td>17,910 (42.4)</td>
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</tbody>
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13 Ibid., p. 18.
STYLE
As originally built, the small, modest one-storey building had little ornamentation or decorative elements. The later extension of the ground floor and additional storey continued the basic design of the original and the use of classically-inspired elements such as cornices, parapets, belt courses and keystones.

CONSTRUCTION
The original one-storey brick building rested on a raised stone foundation, the superstructure built of dark brick (see Appendix I for construction information). In 1911, a second storey was added to the building and in 1914, a two-storey addition was completed to the east side of the building. The rear portion of the building is one-storey in height.

DESIGN
The front (south) façade begins at grade with a raised, rough-cut stone foundation which also acts as sills for the rectilinear window openings of the ground floor (Plate 2). Entrances are located at the east and west ends of the ground floor, although the western opening is boarded over. All window openings on this façade are now filled with glass blocks and feature radiating brick heads and stone keystones (Plate 3).

The original roof line of the 1908 building is now a stone belt course leading to the second storey, with its large rectilinear window openings, stone lug sills, radiating brick heads and stone keystones (Plate 4). Above the second storey keystones is another stone belt course, topped by a brick section holding limestone tablets with the words: “LE CLUB BELGE” and “FONDE AD 1905”. Above is a complete entablature with medal cornice finished with a brick parapet and modest central pediment. A vertical neon sign also graces the front façade (Plate 5).

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14 City of Winnipeg Assessment Record, Roll No. 609100-06-02.
The brick wall of the west façade is windowless (Plate 6); the east façade features rectilinear window openings with lug sills on both floors, the openings filled with glass block (Plate 7). A small addition and an open metal fire escape are also found on this elevation.

The one-storey rear addition features windows in rectilinear openings (Plate 8) and includes a walkway on its roof to give a means of exit from the second floor of the front portion of the building.

**INTERIOR**
The interior space has always accommodated gatherings, with meeting rooms, a bar and banquet hall. Alterations have been numerous on the interior, but some of the original pressed tin ceiling is still extant.

**INTEGRITY**
The building stands on its original site, appears to be in good structural condition and its original design and many of its exterior elements are unchanged.

**STREETSCAPE**
This building is located at the east end of the Provencher Boulevard on the west bank of the Seine River. One of its most important related streetscape elements is the Belgian War Memorial, located in the median in front of the Club (Plates 9 and 10).

The Memorial was unveiled on October 1, 1938, in a ceremony that included dignitaries, soldiers and citizens (Plates 11 and 12). The Memorial was the work of well-known local sculptor Hubert A. Garnier (Plate 13), a French-born artist who became world renowned. The Memorial was designated by the City of Winnipeg in 1995 and restored and rededicated that same year.
ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS

Tenders were called for the construction of the original club in the summer of 1908 although no architect was mentioned in the advertisement. Sources list the contractors as Belgians Wynant and DeLeeuw. Marcien De Leeuw arrived in St. Boniface in 1906, an apprentice wheelwright by training. He was soon working as a carpenter and contractor and he built the towers of St. Boniface City Hall and the Fire Station, the gymnasium of Provencher School and the first section of the Belgian Club. The project, which cost about $4,877, was assisted by a loan from the local brewery McDonagh and Shea.

In 1911, a second storey was added to the building. Theodore Bockstael was the contractor and the Club chose St. Boniface architect builder Joseph-Azarie Sénécal (1841-1917) to complete the plans. Sénécal was a well-known practitioner who designed and built many fine structures in St. Boniface and Winnipeg (see Appendix II for biographical/professional information). Cost of the addition was estimated at $4,000.

In 1914, a $5,800, two-storey, 6.1-metre addition was completed on the east side of the building, Progress Construction Company, owned by DeLeeuw and Bockstael, was the contractor. No architect for this work was named.

PERSON/INSTITUTION

The Belgian Club was formed in 1905 with 45 members, founded by Louis Joseph de Nobele and his father-in-law Thoephile Elewaut (its honorary President was Belgian consul A.J.H.

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15 Manitoba Free Press, August 5, 1908, p. 2.
16 Promoters, Planters and Pioneers, op. cit., p. 80.
18 Manitoba Free Press, August 16, 1911, p. 22.
19 “Short Report.”
De Nobele (ca.1881-1950 – Plate 14) immigrated to Canada in 1904 and joined De Nobele Florist, where he worked for 30 years.  

Members of Le Club Belge first met in a downtown Winnipeg boarding house on Lombard Avenue.  By early 1906, they had moved to a more convenient site, the Montagne Block, in St. Boniface.  Two years later, they bought property on the north side of Provencher Boulevard and built their clubhouse.  The community used the Club to help newly arriving immigrants with housing and job information, as well as a location for business meetings and social contact.

The Club became the cultural and social focal point for Belgians in the Winnipeg area and spawned other organizations such as the Belgian Veterans’ Association No. 107 (now Royal Canadian Legion Belgian Branch, No. 107), the Belgian Ladies Sick Visiting Society, the Winnipeg Racing Pigeon Association and Robin Hood Pole Archery Club (Plate 15).

Another important organization formed with the assistance of the Belgian Club was the Belgian Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church, located on Plinguet Street.  As early as 1914, discussions were held regarding the establishment of a Belgian congregation, its members had been worshipping at St. Boniface Cathedral.  Events moved quickly and in 1916, Father Kwakman was appointed pastor and within the year the parish had been incorporated and Manitoba’s first Belgian church had been built (Plates 16 and 17).  The building was demolished in 1994.

The Belgian Club (Le Club Belge), continues to serve area Belgians and the larger Winnipeg population.

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22 Promoters, Planters and Pioneers, op. cit., p. 81.
23 Ibid., p. 80.
24 The Belgians in Manitoba, op. cit., p. 50.
EVENT
There is no known significant historic event connected with this building.

CONTEXT
The Belgian Club (Le Club Belge) was built early in the 20th century as Manitoba began a decade long growth stage. The facility’s early enlargement underlines its popularity as a cultural/social meeting place and the growth of the Belgian community in St. Boniface and Manitoba.

LANDMARK
The Belgian Club (Le Club Belge) sits in the middle of a large open space (parking). This and its public use add to its conspicuousness in the neighbourhood.
APPENDIX I

CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report

Building Address: 407 Boulevard Provencher
Building Name: Belgian Club (Le Club Belge)

Original Use: club
Current Use: club

Roll No. (Old): 609100 (---)
R.S.N.: 70783

Municipality: 06
Ward: 2
Property or Occupancy Code: 47

Legal Description: 76 St. Boniface, Plan 2766, Part Lot 1: Lots 2/3

Location: north side

Date of Construction: 1908
Storeys: 2
Construction Type: Brick – masonry

HERITAGE STATUS: GRADE III (JANUARY 5, 1999)

Building Permits (Plans available: [CS] City Storage):
- 11144/1953 $11,200 (alterations); 395/1965 $2,400 (alterations); 1971/1965 $875 (alterations);
  2686/1965 $3,000 (alterations); 738/1960 $800 (alterations); 4962/1970 $700 (alterations); 8760/1978 $300
  (storage shed added to east side); 6080/1982 $40,000 (2nd floor alterations); 3821/1983 $102,000 (beverage
  room alterations); 5827/1984 $4,000 (washrooms added); 9517/1984 $40,000 (interior alterations);
  9423/1986 $2,000 (interior alterations); 123257/1999 $18,000 (repair after fire)

Information:

- 50 x 50 x 32'+ = 126,360 cu. ft.
- ceiling heights: B- 7½’; 1st- 10-8’; 2nd- 11½’
- 1965 work: modernize ground floor committee rooms; entrance doors replaced with plate glass/aluminum units; 2nd floor
  ceiling modernized
- Permit 4962/1970- move and modernize bar
Joseph-Azarie Sénécal was born in St. Marc, Lower Canada (present-day Quebec) in 1841, training as a carpenter in his early 20s (his father’s trade). He worked as a contractor and was a self-taught architect and owned a sash and door company in Montréal before he moved to Baie-Saint-Paul (present-day St. Eustache, MB) in 1877 to take up farming. By 1880, he was operating a general store in St. François-Xavier but by 1891 he had moved to St. Boniface to take up the building profession full time. His practice expanded rapidly and he was much sought after, especially by Francophone religious institutions in Manitoba and further west. Churches, convents and religious schools all across the West were designed and/or built by Sénécal from the 1890s to World War I.

In Winnipeg, it was Sénécal who designed the 1892 addition to St. Mary’s Academy on Notre Dame Avenue East (demolished). Other local works attributed to Sénécal include:

- St. Boniface Hospital, 409 Avenue Taché (1893, 1905 and 1914)
- Holy Ghost Church, 341 Selkirk Avenue (1899-1900 – Sénécal and Smith) – demolished
- St. Roch Hospital, 351 Avenue Taché (1899 and 1904 additions) – demolished
- Couvent de Saint-Norbert, 60 Rue Saint-Pierre (1904)
- Misericordia Hospital, 99 Cornish Avenue (1900 and 1907 – Sénécal and Smith)
- St. Boniface Normal School, 210 Rue Masson (1902)
- St. Boniface Cathedral, 190 Avenue de la Cathédrale (1908)
- St. Mary’s Academy, 550 Wellington Crescent (1909 – Sénécal and J.A. Hudon)
- Asile Ritchot, 35 Avenue De La Digue (1904 and 1911)
- Belgian Club, 407 Boulevard Provencher (1911)
- St. Joseph’s Academy (convent and girls’ school), 321 Avenue de la Cathédrale (1912)
- Dr. Fortunat Lachance House, 228 Avenue Hamel (1912)

Outside the city, he is credited with building hospitals in Edmonton (Grey Nuns’ and Miséricorde) and Calgary (Holy Cross), AB; convents in St. Pierre, St. François-Xavier, St. Jean Baptiste, Letellier and Brandon, MB; and churches in Ste-Anne-des-Chênes and St. Leon, MB.

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Rivière à la Pluie, ON, Willow Bunch, Wolseley and Duck Lake, SA, Wetaskiwin and Morinville, AB and Milton, North Dakota, U.S.A.²

He was Manitoba’s Justice of the Peace from 1880-1891, a councillor for St. Boniface in 1896, its mayor in 1901 and served for nearly three decades as a school trustee. He retired from the building trade in 1915 and died in St. Boniface on March 20, 1917.³

Plate 2 – Belgian Club (Le Club Belge), 407 Provencher Boulevard, front (south) façade, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)
Plate 3 – Belgian Club (Le Club Belge), 407 Provencher Boulevard, detail of front (south) façade, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)
Plate 4 – Belgian Club (Le Club Belge), 407 Provencher Boulevard, detail of second floor of front (south) façade, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)
Plate 5 – Belgian Club (Le Club Belge), 407 Provencher Boulevard, neon sign, front (south) façade, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)
Plate 6 – Belgian Club (Le Club Belge), 407 Provencher Boulevard, west façade, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)

Plate 7 – Belgian Club (Le Club Belge), 407 Provencher Boulevard, east façade, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)
Plate 8 – Belgian Club (Le Club Belge), 407 Provencher Boulevard, rear addition, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)
Plate 9 – Belgian War Memorial, Provencher Boulevard, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)
Plate 10 – Provencher Boulevard, looking north from south side, Belgian War Memorial (median) with Belgian Club (Le Club Belge) in the background, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)
Plate 11 – Group standing beside the newly unveiled Belgian War Memorial, ca.1938. Note the openness of Boulevard Provencher in the background. (Courtesy Evelyn Baltessen, Belgian Club.)

Plate 12 – Official unveiling ceremony, Boulevard Provencher, October 1, 1938. (Courtesy of Evelyn Baltessen, Belgian Club.)
Plate 13 – H.A. Garnier sculpting the Belgian War Memorial, 1938. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N17244.)
Plate 15 – Belgian Club (Le Club Belge), 407 Provencher Boulevard, date unknown. (City of Winnipeg.)
Plate 17 – Belgian Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church, 501 Plinguet Street, from the Westeel Company yards across the Seine River, date unknown. (M. Peterson Collection.)