

541 SELKIRK AVENUE – MERCHANTS HOTEL (STEIMAN BLOCK)

Max Z. Blankstein, 1913



This building operated as the Merchants Hotel for over 70 years but began as a mixed-use commercial/office structure with public meeting space built on one of Winnipeg's most famous and colourful streets – Selkirk Avenue.

The structure was completed in 1913 on the northwest corner Andrews Street. Its two main façades, south facing Selkirk Avenue and east facing Andrews Street, were similarly designed and both clad in Menominee face brick on the upper storeys. The original ground floor included a large recessed entrance on Selkirk Avenue, large plate glass display windows on both elevations and an ornate entrance for access to the upper storeys at the west end of the south façade. A second, smaller entrance to a second retail store was also located on the Selkirk Avenue front and a modest side door on Andrews Street. The second and third storeys featured

windows in rectilinear openings, most grouped in threes, separated by attached square columns with ornate stone bases and capitals. These were topped by a modest metal-clad cornice that led to the roofline, emphasized by a complete entablature with heavy overhanging metal-clad cornice topped by a stone capped stepped brick parapet. A wooden flagpole was also located on the roof.

While the upper storeys have seen little alteration since construction, the ground floor, because of the changing role of the building, has seen significant alteration to windows and entrances, especially on the south façade where doors were closed and glass block was used to fill window openings.

The rear (north) and west façades were much plainer in design and included windows in square headed openings all floors. A fire escape to the third storey was built onto the rear elevation. Neither of these façades has seen significant alteration. A one-storey addition was built on the west side of the building in 1958 and featured a curved glass block entrance.

On the interior, the original ground floor held two retail shops, the second floor was divided into 12 offices and the third was designated as open storage but became Steiman's Hall, a public meeting facility. The hotel alterations of 1933 created a completely new interior. The ground floor was rewired and the original front retail space was divided into a hotel rotunda (lobby) in the southwest corner and a large parlour in the middle. The small store in the northeast corner was left as originally built. On the second floor, the offices were converted into 20 single rooms, with men's and women's washroom/shower facilities near the rear of the floor. The third floor was similarly organized. Alterations over the years removed/replaced almost all of the original materials.

The building was designed by Russian-born and trained Max Z. Blankstein (1877-1931), one of Canada's earliest Jewish architects. Blankstein's career spanned several decades in the City and he was responsible for the design of many fine buildings, especially in the North End. The 1933 conversion to the hotel was designed by Max's son, Cecil, founding member of influential

architectural company, Green and Blankstein, which for a time also included Max's daughter Evelyn.

Lithuanian-born Steiman owned the building and operated the hotel until he retired to California in 1947, where he died six years later. The property was sold to John Konosky, a long-time hotelier who operated several rural Manitoba hotels. Early commercial tenants of the building, besides Steiman and Sons, hardware, included International Dental Parlours, Novelty Ladies Red-To-Go Wear and Palestine Kosher Delicatessen. A number of dentists, doctors and barbers occupied office space and the 3rd floor hall was used by many community groups including during the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike. The building was vacated in 2011 and has recently been purchased and is slated for major repurposing.

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

Exterior:

- The rectangular three-storey Classical Revival Style building located on a corner lot with two primary facades of Menominee brick;
- The largely original upper floors of the south and east facades featuring symmetrical bays separated by pilasters, each containing a trio of double-hung windows, all topped by a modillioned cornice, decorative entablature and stepped parapet with stone coping;
- The north (rear) and west facades much plainer in design;
- The rectangular window openings throughout, many embellished with stone lug sills; and
- Details including a modest main floor pediment and cornice, south-facing flag pole and limestone accenting throughout.

Interior:

- None