

# OLD ST. BONIFACE



*“ we live ...  
with our different ways  
how we genuflect or not  
how we speak or dance  
where our ships came from  
we live like that  
meeting on the bridge  
some moonlit nights  
the river glittering  
beneath us ... ”*

*“provencher bridge”  
Patrick Friesen (1998)*



St. Boniface is a Winnipeg neighbourhood located east of the Red River. The area, however, is more than just a neighbourhood. It is, rather, the heart of Franco-Manitoban culture, a place indelibly tied to the foundation of the province, a hub of francophone culture in Western Canada, and an important site in the history of the Métis people. Many historic and poetic descriptions of St. Boniface have stressed its distinctness from the rest of Winnipeg. This difference is an important one. For much of its history the area was an independent municipality; its culture and roots have their own significant story. At the same time, St. Boniface has played a key role in the development and growth of Winnipeg. The architecture of St. Boniface reflects these overlapping definitions, embodying a wide span of cultural, religious and economic history.



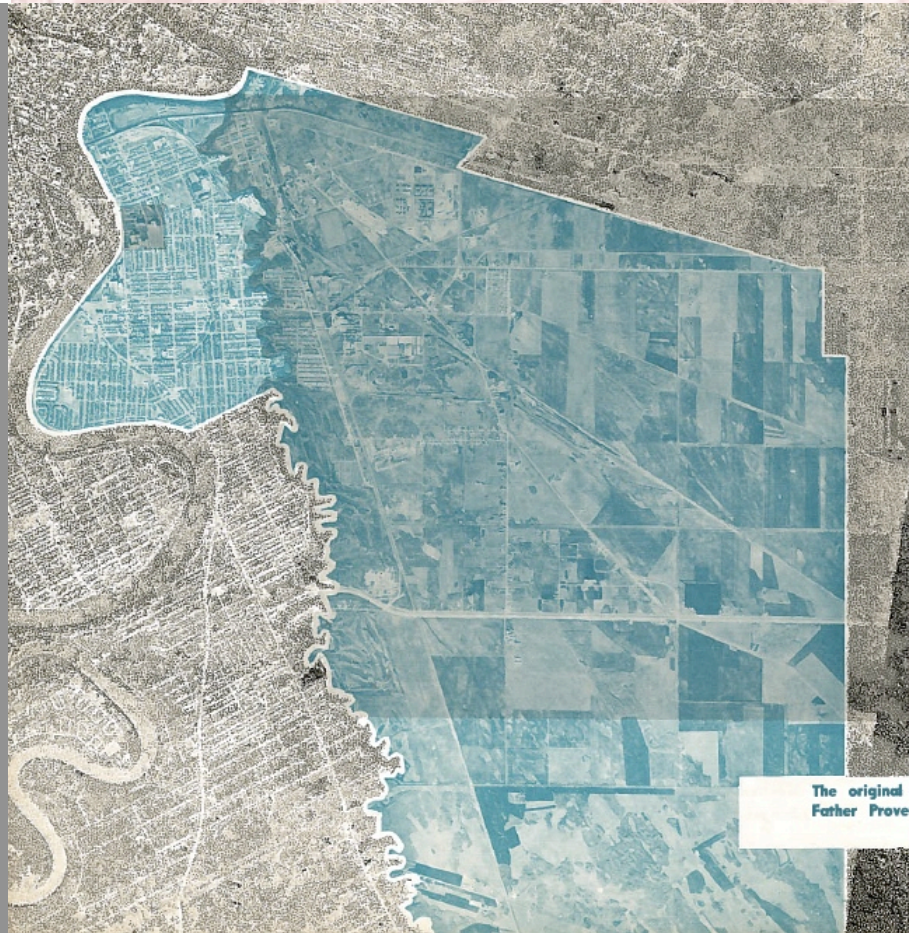
**ABOVE LEFT:**

Esplanade Riel. Étienne  
Gaboury and Wardrop  
Engineering. 2003.

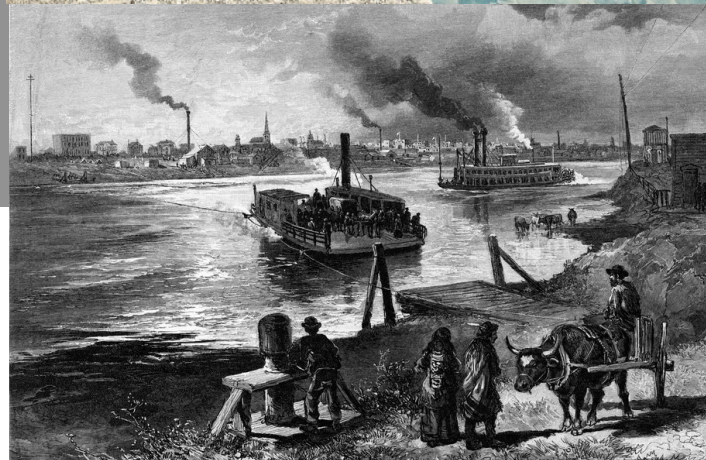
**ABOVE RIGHT:**

“Bird's Eye View of Saint  
Boniface, Manitoba, 1880.”  
J. J. Stoner, Madison,  
Wisconsin. Beck & Pauli  
Lithograph, 1880.

The area around the forks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers was, for many generations, a site for camping, trading and other activities by indigenous peoples. In the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries land to the west of the Red River hosted a variety of European settlements, including Forts Rouge, Gibraltar and Douglas and the Red River Colony. The roots of the present built form of St. Boniface can be found in these years. In the early-nineteenth century the area came to be settled by groups of fur traders and mercenaries hired to protect the Red River Colony, including the German-Swiss De Meurons regiment. (Many of this group would later move to the United States in the wake the flood of 1826.) Soon after arrived the Québécois Father Joseph-Norbert Provencher, who had been sent to Manitoba by Québec bishop Joseph-Octave Plessis at the behest of local citizens, Hudson's Bay Company governor Miles Macdonell and Scottish Lord Selkirk. Provencher was to found the first permanent Roman Catholic post west of the Great Lakes in present-day Canada. He and the church were given the title to a large tract of land to the east and south of the forks to aide their efforts, endeavours which led, in 1818, to the construction of the first church in Western Canada, not far from the site of St. Boniface Cathedral.



The original land area granted to Father Provencher by Lord Selkirk in 1818.



#### ABOVE:

Map of St. Boniface.  
From St. Boniface 1958  
50th Anniversary  
Jubilee Pamphlet.

#### LEFT:

George Monro Grant.  
Winnipeg From St.  
Boniface Ferry Landing.  
From Picturesque Canada,  
1882. University of  
Manitoba Archives &  
Special Collections.



# VILLE CATHÉDRALE DE SAINT BONIFACE THE CATHEDRAL CITY

Old St. Boniface is a subsection of the land tilted to the church defined by the Red River, rue Marion and rue Archibald. The early development of this district included a school near the 1818 church. These two facets encouraged Catholic colonists to settle east of the Red River. They also set the tone for what would be two major themes in the architecture of the district: religion and academia. Today major monuments in this tradition remain area landmarks, including, most notably, St. Boniface Cathedral. The present building (partially destroyed by fire in 1968) features a façade and walls that date to 1905-08. The structure is the third cathedral and fifth church on its site, beginning with Provencher's humble wood building and progressing to more elaborate designs after the diocese was granted cathedral status in 1847. Replacing a building of 1863, the 1905-08 cathedral was designed by Montréal architects Marchand and Haskell. Before the fire of the 1960s its towers soared to 150 feet, seating a congregation of 2,050. Neoclassical in inspiration, the façade features details from a number of styles, including the Romanesque and the Byzantine, anchored by an enormous arch, round window opening and a triple-arched entryway.



*"We'd see the tower of the cathedral, then the dome of the Jesuit college, then spires and other church towers. The familiar outline of our little city against the intense Manitoba sky revealed much more attachment to prayer and education than to business, and it always gave us comfort ... We may not have been numerous in our pious and studious little city but this helped us feel one of heart."*

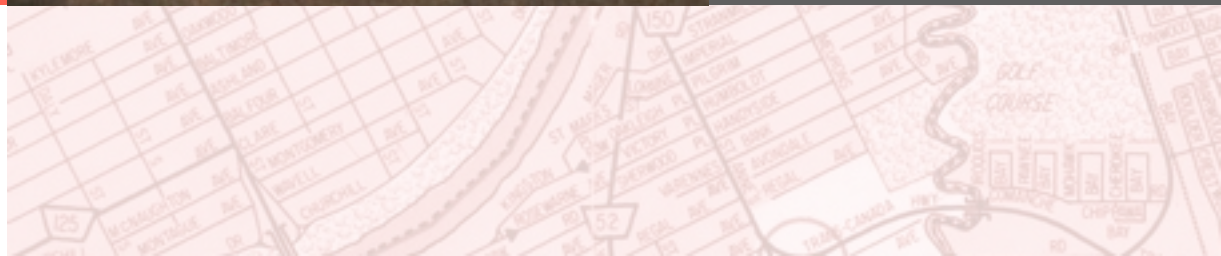
– Gabrielle Roy,  
Winnipeg Free Press  
28 November 1987

#### ABOVE LEFT:

Welcome to St. Boniface sign at rue Marion at St. Mary's Road. From St. Boniface 1958 50th Anniversary Jubilee Pamphlet.

#### LEFT:

St. Boniface Cathedral. Marchand & Haskell. 1905-08. From St. Boniface 1958 50th Anniversary Jubilee Pamphlet.



**RIGHT:**

Le Musée de Saint-Boniface. 1846. In foreground: Louis Riel Réal Bérard. 1985.

**BELOW:**

Archbishop's Residence 1864.



The area adjacent to St. Boniface Cathedral is home to a number of Manitoba's most significant historical structures. These include, to the south, Le Musée de Saint-Boniface. Dating to 1846, this former convent was built for the Grey Nuns using the Red River frame construction technique, a locally-popular method short squared logs are mortised and set into upright log posts. Today it survives as the largest traditional oak log structure standing in North America. Beginning in 1871 the Nuns also were responsible for operating St. Boniface Hospital as an independent institution south of the convent; in 1914 the hospital was given a prominent Beaux-Arts addition.

To the north of the cathedral stands the Archbishop's residence. This structure is the fourth building on this site erected for the same purpose. Constructed in 1864 under the direction of Bishop Taché, the western, riverfront, portion of the residence is one of the oldest stone buildings in Western Canada. The home first featured walls of rougher field-stone. Over time an east wing was added (in 1899) and the stone veneer and roofline were altered, taking the present shape of a mansardic gambrel. Remaining true to the original form are the gable and other windows and the graceful white-painted verandah.



**BELOW LEFT:**

Archbishop's Residence, 1885. From the Province of Manitoba Archives.

**BELOW CENTRE:**

St. Boniface, 1857-58. From the Province of Manitoba Archives.

**BELOW RIGHT:**

St. Boniface, 1883. From the Province of Manitoba Archives.

**RIGHT:**

St. Boniface Hospital. From St. Boniface 1958 50th Anniversary Jubilee Pamphlet.



East of St. Boniface cathedral stand the descendants of the early nineteenth-century school facilities established by the Catholic church. Foremost in this capacity is the Université de Saint-Boniface, the oldest post-secondary educational institution in Western Canada. This school first grew with the establishment of Collège de Saint-Boniface near the intersection of rues Taché and Masson, in 1855. 25 years later, in 1880, a new college home was built at the present site of Provencher Park, a structure destroyed by fire in 1922. At that time the university was offered a new location at their present address, the Petit Séminaire. Dating to 1911, this neoclassical structure was designed by architect J. O. Turgeon of Montréal. To this day its sparkling silver dome serves as a local landmark. Not far down avenue de la Cathédrale stands the 1906 École Provencher and the Académie Saint-Joseph. The latter, originally a convent and school, was erected in 1912. Its massing and design parallels that of the Séminaire.



#### BELOW LEFT:

Université de Saint-Boniface (Le Petit Séminaire). J. O. Turgeon. 1911. Photo by Jeffrey Thorsteinson.

#### RIGHT:

Statue of Louis Riel at Université de Saint-Boniface. Riel was first educated in St. Boniface. Marcien Lemay and Étienne Gaboury, 1973. Moved to present site in 2005. Photo by Jeffrey Thorsteinson.



#### LEFT:

Avenue de la Cathédrale, 1916. From St. Boniface Historical Society.



#### BOTTOM:

Académie Saint-Joseph. J. A. Sénécal. 1912. Image circa 1913. From St. Boniface Historical Society.



Beyond its religious and educational activity, by the early twentieth century St. Boniface would also develop into an important transportation and industrial centre for Western Canada. Since 1878 facilities for the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) were located in the area. Over time St. Boniface would entice all three of the country's major railways to build locally, with Canadian Northern's main line and the Grand Trunk Pacific-Transcontinental Railway joining the CPR. Early neighbourhood stations for these lines that have been demolished include a 19th century CPR stop near the intersection of Provencher Boulevard and Taché and a 1901 Canadian Northern depot designed by architect J. A. Sénécal located on rue Aubert. Remaining vestiges of this era include the 1908 CPR Engine House located on rue Archibald; the 1913 Canadian Northern station at 630 Des Meurons (since creatively repurposed as a restaurant); and the 1927 Greater Winnipeg Water District Railway Station at 598 rue Plinguet.

St. Boniface would capitalize on the presence of the railways to become a major industrial hub housing iron, steel, lumber, brick and flour mills as well as grain elevators and factories. Many of these structures – such as Western Canada Flour Mills – would assume the dramatic, large modern forms of the sort that would influence European modern architects like Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier. This growth, lured by lax legislation (accounting for the scattershot mix of residences and industry still found in the area today) was mirrored in a population boom, with St. Boniface expanding from 1,500 citizens in 1900 to 7,000 by 1909. Early in the following decade the district would score two further massive new industrial complexes: the Union Stock Yards and the Canadian National Railway's Symington Yards project. The establishment of the first led to the construction of offices, a powerhouse, weigh house, pens, stables and a water tower, with St. Boniface becoming the terminal point for much of the Prairies cattle lands. The latter continues to function to the south-east of Old St. Boniface as one of the world's largest rail yards.



TOP LEFT:  
Canadian Northern  
Station in St. Boniface.  
Now demolished.

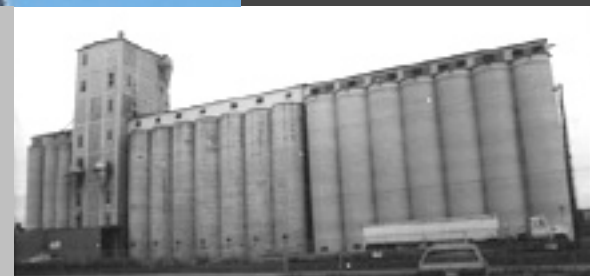


TOP RIGHT:  
Advertisement for St. Boniface  
industry featuring Western  
Canada Flour Mills.



LEFT:  
Union Stock Yards  
water tower.

ABOVE:  
Advertisement for St.  
Boniface from The  
Winnipeg Tribune. 31  
May 1926.



LEFT:  
CPR Engine House.  
198 rue Archibald.  
1908.

ABOVE:  
Western Canada Flour Mills  
Company. 1908. Reinforced  
concrete and brick.





#### ABOVE:

Rendering of St. Boniface Hôtel-de-Ville. Victor Horwood, 1905. St. Boniface incorporated as a city in 1908.

#### TOP LEFT:

View of Provencher Boulevard. From St. Boniface 1958 50th Anniversary Jubilee Pamphlet.

#### CENTRE LEFT:

View of St. Boniface (along Provencher Boulevard) circa 1910. St. Boniface Historical Society.

#### BELOW LEFT:

View of St. Boniface (Avenue Taché at rue La Vérandrye) from early twentieth century. St. Boniface Historical Society.

#### RIGHT:

St. Boniface Fire Hall. Victor Horwood, 1907. Photo by Jeffrey Thorsteinson.

In addition to industrial growth, the first half of the twentieth century saw St. Boniface develop a commercial and civic heart. The nucleus of this expansion was Provencher Boulevard. Provencher had long been an important thoroughfare; since the 1880s it had housed a train station and a college. In 1882 an iron bridge for foot and horse traffic was erected over the Red connecting the street with Winnipeg's Broadway; washed away by ice that winter, the bridge was reconstructed the following year, later replaced by an opening bridge in 1918. As of 1905 Provencher's civic role was expanded upon, first off through the red brick and Tyndall limestone L'Hôtel-de-Ville (town hall) designed by architect Victor Horwood, a structure which to this day stands out as a local landmark, recently home to an art gallery. In 1907 two new civic landmarks joined the Hôtel-de-Ville on or near Provencher Boulevard: the St. Boniface post office (a two-storey brick structure) and the buff brick and limestone Fire Hall Number One, also planned by Horwood. These constructions and many commercial projects contributed to the rise of the street as a key St. Boniface axis, a route that has been called a symbol and motor of Franco-Manitobain dynamism.





In due course Provencher Boulevard came to host a number of buildings of a more modern variety. These included examples of Art Deco and Art Moderne design. Among such structures were 157 Provencher Boulevard, a two-storey store from dating to 1937 (originally a drugstore) and the Labossière Service Texaco Station at 353 Provencher Boulevard. The latter remains standing, much altered, hidden by a later strip mall addition.

These examples of modern styling appeared years after St. Boniface first welcomed a number of buildings that made innovative use of modern construction materials. These include 221 Dollard Boulevard, a two-storey 1911 structure which housed a store and residence in a space built of concrete block. The neighbouring Laurier Apartment (at 419 rue Aulneau) was erected three years later, also built of concrete block and likewise developed by the Mesnage Sisters, the owners of 221 Dollard. These buildings stood out in an area containing many examples of more traditional residential construction.



#### ABOVE:

375 rue Deschambault,  
once home of author  
Gabrielle Roy. 1905.

#### LEFT:

157 Provencher  
Boulevard. 1937.  
Daoust & Cie, builder.

#### FAR LEFT:

Couture Motors  
Limited. From St.  
Boniface 1958 50th  
Anniversary Jubilee  
Pamphlet.

#### TOP RIGHT:

221 Dollard Boulevard.  
1911. St. Boniface  
Historical Society.

#### BELOW RIGHT:

Laurier Apartments. 419  
rue Aulneau. 1914.

#### LEFT:

Labossière Service  
Texaco Station, 353  
Provencher Boulevard.  
From St. Boniface 1958  
50th Anniversary Jubilee  
Pamphlet.

#### BELOW:

Residential housing in  
St. Boniface in the mid-  
twentieth century (rue  
Aulneau). From St.  
Boniface 1958 50th  
Anniversary Jubilee  
Pamphlet.





Eastward along Provencher Boulevard, St. Boniface continued to bear the influence of the Belgian community who had first settled in the area in the nineteenth century. Among the remaining traces of this history is Le Club Belge, 407 Provencher Boulevard. Dating to 1906-14 this cultural centre is comprised of a two-storey meeting hall clad in brick and Tyndall limestone. In front stands a memoria, a portrayal of one soldier standing over a fallen comrade. Dating to 1938, this monument was paid for by the Belgian Veterans Association, executed by artist Hubert A. Garnier. South and west of this site, Des Meurons had evolved into a vital commercial street frequented by the Belgian community and others. Across the Seine River from Des Meurons stood Sacred Heart, the first Belgian church in Manitoba. Erected by Flemish-speaking settlers, this edifice opened in 1917, built by F. Wyndels for \$9,000 in 1917. Adjacent to Sacred Heart was the “Grotto of Notre Dame de Lourdes.” Situated on the banks of the Seine river, the Grotto was officially opened 25 May 1936 in front of a crowd of thousands. Built of concrete and stone assembled to recall a natural geological formation, it served as a tourist attraction and pilgrimage site until its destruction by floodwaters. Belgian-Canadians from this area would continue to play a role in St. Boniface’s growth in later years with such nearby projects as Place Cabana, a housing co-operative for French speaking Catholic families initiated by the Archdiocese of St. Boniface in 1952, built by local contractor Boel.



#### TOP:

552-554 rue Des Meurons, formerly the Gauthier Block, 1906.

#### FAR LEFT:

Le Club Belge, 407 Provencher Boulevard, 1906 & 1914.

#### LEFT:

Sculptor H.A. Garnier working on the Belgian War Monument, 1938. Province of Manitoba Archives.

#### ABOVE:

“The Grotto” at Seine River Sacred Heart Church grounds. From St. Boniface 1958 50th Anniversary Jubilee Pamphlet.



#### FAR LEFT:

St. Boniface Golf Club.  
From St. Boniface 1958  
50th Anniversary Jubilee  
Pamphlet.

#### TOP CENTRE:

Happyland Pool, 520  
rue Marion, Nikola  
Zunic, 1962.

#### LEFT:

La Tour Eiffel modern  
apartment block, 261  
rue Goulet. Photo by  
Jeffrey Thorsteinson

#### BELOW LEFT:

École Taché, 744 rue  
Langevin, Libling  
Michener and Diamond,  
1958. From St. Boniface  
1958 50th Anniversary  
Jubilee Pamphlet.

#### BELOW:

École Taché by Libling  
Michener and  
Diamond, 744 rue  
Langevin, 1958.

During the middle of the twentieth century modern architecture found a home across St. Boniface. Notable examples include a number of outdoor pools built by the City of St. Boniface. Among these are Happyland Pool, a spare one-storey concrete block building at 520 rue Marion designed by University of Manitoba graduate Nikola Zunic.

Another significant work is École Taché, an elementary school located at 744 rue Langevin. This structure – which makes use of exposed trusses and a large amount of fenestration – was planned by the firm of Libling Michener Diamond, who earned official Massey Medal recognition for their efforts.





LEFT:  
St. Boniface Clinic,  
Étienne Gaboury,  
1963. Photo by Jeffrey  
Thorsteinson.

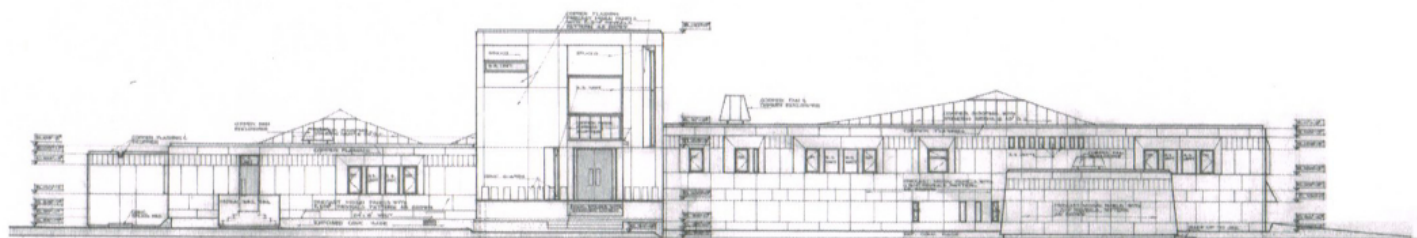


No firm or architect is as associated with modern architecture in St. Boniface as Étienne Gaboury. Indeed, few architects anywhere possess a body of work so closely associated with one community. Born in Bruxelles, Manitoba, Gaboury was educated at the College St. Boniface, the University of Manitoba and the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. In 1964, after only a short period of independent practice, Gaboury obtained a commission for one of the most prominent structures in the area: a new S. Boniface civic centre. Located next to the former Hôtel de Ville, this complex would include a police station, health office and magistrate's court. Set around a plaza, the civic centre is a striking ensemble. It bears a number of typically Brutalist details, while nevertheless expressing a highly individualized character that displays hallmarks of Gaboury's approach. These particularized elements include the deeply inset doors and windows and angular rooflines. Gaboury's play with light and the plastic possibilities of concrete bespeaks the influence of French-Swiss modern architect Le Corbusier, most especially his Chapel of Notre Dame du Haut in Ronchamp, which Gaboury visited in 1958. As with this French example, at the St. Boniface civic centre thematizes the power of illumination – to quote the author Rebecca West on Gothic architecture, the civic centre conveys "the meditative integrity of darkness considering light." A similar effect is also evident in Gaboury's earlier St. Boniface Clinic (at 343 rue Taché, from 1963).

LEFT:  
St. Boniface Civic  
Centre, Étienne  
Gaboury, 1964.

BELOW:  
St. Boniface Civic Centre  
interior, Étienne Gaboury,  
1964. Photos by Jeffrey  
Thorsteinson

BOTTOM:  
Rendering of St.  
Boniface Civic Centre,  
Étienne Gaboury.





#### ABOVE:

Église du Précieux Sang, 200 rue Kenny, Étienne Gaboury 1969.

#### BELOW:

Église du Précieux Sang interior, 200 rue Kenny, Étienne Gaboury 1969. Photo by Jeffrey Thorsteinson.



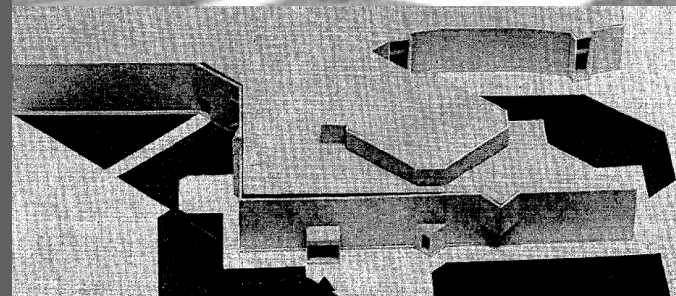
In the years after designing the civic centre, Gaboury and his firm, Gaboury Lussier Sigurdson Venables, would continue to have a hand in multiple important St. Boniface projects. Perhaps most famous is Église du Précieux Sang (1969), the architect's most identifiable work. Located at 200 rue Kenny, this church has been deemed an "outstanding example of Canadian regionalism." Dominated by the silhouette of the spiralling cedar shake roof, Précieux Sang's primarily Métis parish inspired Gaboury to conceive the tipi-inspired form as a cultural reference.

Not far away another church would be Gaboury's most significant commission of the late 1960s: the reconstruction of St. Boniface Cathedral, which had been greatly damaged by fire in 1968. Vincent Scully has said that "architecture is a conversation between generations." Seldom has that been more true than in this case, where Gaboury carefully situated a new chapel within the ruins of the previous building. Both forms share the use of Manitoba Tyndall limestone, while the addition is set apart through its angular shapes and materiality. The cathedral's interior, defined by warm wood cladding and a soaring roof continues the dramatic use of sunlight found throughout Gaboury's oeuvre. This was not the first remodelling of a church space in the architect's career, recalling, in fact, his earlier repurposing of a small chapel into his firm's office only a few blocks away.

Another key work by Gaboury from these years is the Centre culturel Franco-manitobain, of 1974, a large Provencher Boulevard space featuring an art gallery, restaurant and concert halls. Clad in off-white brick this late-modern building – a hub of Francophone cultural life in Winnipeg – parallels aspects of the design of the 1974-78 National Art Gallery in Washington, by I.M. Pei. Notably, in 1974 the area north of Provencher remained 65% French-speaking, even though this group made up only 8.5% of Winnipeg's total population.

*"We're not trying to reconstruct the old church, we have these ruins, the burning is part of the church's history and from these a new cathedral arises."*

– Étienne Gaboury, 1971

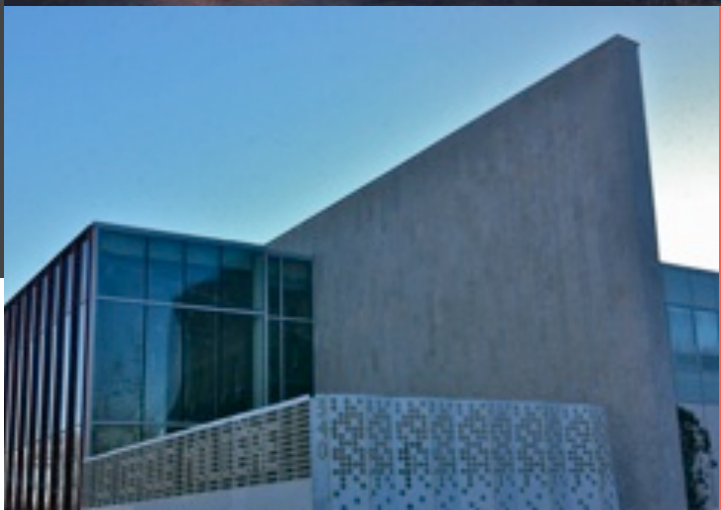




Over the following decades St. Boniface would witness the construction a number of other projects of Brutalist and late modern character, among them small commercial structures on Provencher Boulevard and rue Marion, as well as the towering concrete housing tower 101 Marion, the latter of which features a concrete-walled Brutalist garden at its base.

What was without doubt the most remarkable structure to arrive in St. Boniface in many years appeared in 2003: a dramatic cable-stayed footbridge over the Red River. In line with Provencher Boulevard, the Esplanade Riel is suspended from transversely inclined pylon which rises 57 metres above the river below. Notably, besides its striking form, the bridge is uncommon for housing at its centre an enclosed space, a cantilevered stayed structure home for many years to a restaurant. The bridge is in many ways the culmination of the earlier vision of its architect, Gaboury, who, in 1971, envisioned such a footbridge connecting St. Boniface and Winnipeg, stating at the time: "It should be more than just a bridge. It could house shops and other facilities and pay for itself. We could build an island causeway — a meeting place."

During the rest of the twenty-first century St. Boniface has experienced increasing architectural growth, particularly that manifested in the development of multi-tenant residential properties and via creative additions to St. Boniface Hospital, Université de Saint-Boniface and Centre culturel Franco-manitobain. These projects and others have remade the area through post-modern, neo-modern and hybrid approaches. Nevertheless, indeed, often through such evolution, St. Boniface continues to possess a character that is distinct in Winnipeg: a continuation of a long legacy of uniqueness that dates back centuries.



#### CENTRE:

Esplanade Riel. Étienne Gaboury and Wardrop Engineering. 2003. Photos by Jeffrey Thorsteinson.

#### ABOVE LEFT:

101 rue Marino. Moody Moore Duncan Rattray Peters Searle Christie, 1972.

#### ABOVE CENTRE:

Holy Cross Credit Union, 255 Marion, 1975.

#### ABOVE RIGHT:

387 Provencher Boulevard. Belgian Credit Union, Pratt Lindgren Snider Tomeej and Associates., 1975.

#### BOTTOM:

Centre Culturel Franco-Manitobain Cercle Moliere addition, Cibinel Architects, 2010.



