



210 RUE MASSON

**ST. BONIFACE NORMAL SCHOOL
(RESIDENCE LANGEVIN)**

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee

July 1989

**210 RUE MASSON – ST. BONIFACE NORMAL SCHOOL
(RESIDENCE LANGEVIN)**

The main purpose of the Normal School is to prepare suitable persons to teach in the public schools of the province. It is not a school primarily for the benefit of the individual, but one in which individuals are especially educated for the benefit of society.¹

What would a church be without a school? Merely a passing institution. By the school the power of the church will be multiplied a hundred fold. The school will become the vestibule of the temple. Why do we wish the children to keep their language? It was the language of the great Catholic geniuses.²

The above quotes indicate the type of mainstream idealism that fuelled Winnipeg's education system in the late 1890s and into the new century. The first quote from the Provincial Normal School Syllabus was written in 1918, two years after bilingual education was abolished in the province. At this point, most administrators were more concerned with providing an English and Protestant education. Seen by the majority as a device of assimilation, it was hoped that the education system would "Canadianize" the vast numbers of immigrant children in the province. Normal schools were an important means to standardize this process.

The second quote, that of Archbishop Langevin at the dedication of a church/school in 1905, is an excellent indication of the importance given education, language and religion in Manitoba's francophone community. Immediately after the Laurier-Greenway Compromise was incorporated in Manitoba's 1897 Public Schools Act, the French community organized a teacher training course. Within three years, it was obvious that a more permanent system, including a new building devoted to the teachers, was needed. In the fall of 1902, a beautiful brick structure was raised in the very heart of St. Boniface, becoming one of the first normal schools built in the province.

¹ Provincial Normal School, Syllabus 1917-1918 (Winnipeg-1918), p.4.

² Winnipeg Tribune, September 11, 1905, p.2.

STYLE

As it originally stood, the school was a functionally designed structure with minor ornamentation and some neoclassical detailing. Neoclassicism, based primarily on the Greek architectural order, includes use of such detailing as colossal columns, parapets and massive porticos. The style first came to prominence in the design of large public structures in North America, particularly in the 1900 to 1920 period.³ It also was utilized in smaller structures, including homes.

CONSTRUCTION

This two-storey building is constructed of yellow-buff brick on a stone foundation. Ceiling heights run 2.7m (9') in the basement, 4.2m (14') on the first floor and 2.7m (9') on the second floor,⁴ while the original building measures 19.8x13.4m (66x44.5'). It is found on the southwest corner of rue Aulneau and rue Masson. Estimated construction costs were between \$11,500 and \$15,000.⁵

DESIGN

The Normal School originally was a modestly ornamented structure, complementary in design to other institutional buildings in the area.

Its rusticated stone base highlights the raised basement. Rusticated stone sills and lintels grace the first-floor windows, while the second-storey elements exhibit only stone sills. Tall main-floor openings include transoms with their own stone lintels.

The most striking feature of the symmetrical front facade is the entrance portico which boasts paired wooden columns with Ionic capitals. Above is a complete entablature with dentils and brackets.

³ J. J.-G. Blumenson, Identifying American Architecture (Nashville-1982), p.69.

⁴ Assessment Record, #606101, St. Boniface, PC 47.

⁵ The low estimate is from Manitoba Public Accounts (1903), pp.116-17, while the high figure is from Normal School, file of the St. Boniface Historical Society. Below as NS file.

The centrally placed entrance door displays two side lights under a rough stone lintel. Miniature metal pilasters with Ionic capitals surround the door and side lights, adding to the ornamentation.

Above the portico on the second floor is a projecting frontispiece with a single window and pediment. This area is also embellished with ornamental shingle-work. The original truncated hip roof was interrupted by side gables. It also contained a cupola that acted as the crown for the entrance porch and frontispiece.

The side facades (east and west) continued the ornamentation and basic design of the front area, including projected middle sections. The rear also is similar in design.

INTERIOR

The school's interior, like the purpose of the structure, has undergone numerous changes since construction. Its present interior organization includes a basement child care facility, first-floor offices, and residential units for handicapped seniors on the second floor. Severe alteration has left virtually no original materials save for a carved wooden banister and wooden doors and frames. The main meeting room on the first floor also has been relatively untouched - one interesting feature is metal door runners used in favour of hinges on the double doors.

The building's first floor originally was arranged with a kitchen, dining hall and small rooms. The second floor held a library, classroom, laboratory and parlour. The upper level was strictly for dormitory space.⁶

INTEGRITY

The building stands on its original site and is in good structural condition (although the wooden

⁶ Ibid.

columns in the entry porch are at present awaiting repair). As discussed above, alteration has been severe both in the interior and on the exterior. The most obvious change, the removal of the cupola and its replacement with a flat roof and parapet, was the result of a massive addition to the structure to create the Langevin School (due Jardin de l'Enfrance Langevin) in 1928. This 49.2x16.2m (164x54') addition⁷ is a two-storey building using a similar brick to the 1902 building. Instead of rough stone sills and lintels, the newer area uses smooth stone sills and no lintels. The roof of the new complex became a straight line with a stone-capped parapet. Two segmental arches, each centrally located in the old and new sections, act as the only ornamentation.

STREETSCAPE

The Normal School is located in a mainly residential neighbourhood but its size does not affect its ability to blend with its neighbours. This is due to its lack of ornamentation and its proximity to St. Boniface College and other non-residential structures. While alteration has been extreme, the building still contributes to the area's overall historical make-up.

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTOR

The architect of the St. Boniface Normal School was Henry S. Griffith, who came to Winnipeg from England in 1887 and spent many years in the city designing a wide variety of beautiful structures (see Appendix I for a complete biography).

The contractor was the famous St. Boniface architect/builder Joseph Azarie Senecal. Born in St. Marc, Quebec in 1841, Senecal worked as a contractor in Montreal for several years before moving to Manitoba to farm various holdings.⁸ In 1891 he moved to St. Boniface to begin an extremely successful career as a designer and builder. Among his most prominent buildings were the Church

⁷ Assessment Record, op. cit.

⁸ Winnipeg Telegram, March 20, 1917.

of the Holy Ghost (Winnipeg), the Misericordia Hospital (Winnipeg), two-thirds of St. Boniface Hospital, General Hospital for the Grey Nuns (Edmonton), Holy Cross Hospital (Calgary), and the St. Boniface C.N.R. station.⁹ Among his non-professional successes were the positions of justice of the peace in Marquette East (1877-80) and for Manitoba, reeve of St. Francois-Xavier (1881-84), councillor for St. Boniface (1896) and mayor of St. Boniface in 1901.¹⁰ He died in St. Boniface in 1917.

INSTITUTION

The building at 210 rue Masson Street was opened as a bilingual Normal School in the fall of 1902. During the previous two years, space had been rented from a Mr. J. B. Leclerc for the purpose of teacher education.¹¹ Classes, including agriculture, occurred under the 1897 legislation known as the Laurier-Greenway Compromise which allowed for bilingual education (in French or any other language) where 10 or more pupils spoke a language other than English.¹² By the end of 1915, there were 126 French bilingual schools in the province, employing 234 teachers with 7,393 pupils. German bilingual schools numbered 61, with 73 teachers and 2,814 children, and Polish schools numbered 111, with 114 teachers and 6,513 pupils.¹³

Due to increasing pressures, the new Liberal government of Tobias C. Norris repealed the part of the Public Schools Act that allowed for bilingual instruction in March 1916.¹⁴ While public opinion differed, it was obviously a serious blow to francophones in St. Boniface and ultimately caused the

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Manitoba Public Accounts (Manitoba Estimates-1901), p.75 and 1902 Estimates, p.89.

¹² A. Gregor and K. Wilson, The Development of Education in Manitoba (Winnipeg-1984), p.69. Below as Development.

¹³ Special Report on Bilingual Schools in Manitoba. Produced by the Department of Education (Winnipeg-1916).

¹⁴ Development, p.105.

closure of its Normal School. However, because of a shortage of teachers and training facilities, the St. Boniface school remained open as a unilingual school until 1923 when Les Missionnaires Oblates (Oblate Sisters) purchased the building for \$23,000 and converted it into a boys' school and dormitory (le Jardin de l'Enfrance).¹⁵ Five years later, in response to increasing demand and use, an addition was built at the west end of the school. The new complex, renamed du Jardin de l'Enfrance Langevin, was consecrated in September 1929.¹⁶

Ten years later, the complex was changed to a young girls' training school and dormitory run by the Sisters.

Since October 1939, any St. Boniface girl desirous of training as an efficient household assistant has been accepted free of charge and has been taught cooking, sewing, cleaning, children's care, hygiene, etc. In this way, many girls were removed from the relief Rolls and placed in employment.¹⁷

In two years, 121 girls had taken the various courses offered and either utilized the employment agency on site to become maids and house servants or raised a family and tended their own homes. "Ecole Menagere Notre Dame" as it was known became a very important facility in the area. However, societal changes over the next thirty years affected the school's role and, by 1972, Ecole Menagere ceased operations. It was renamed Foyer Notre Dame later Residence Langevin, in reference to its conversion into housing for the aged. In 1980 the Oblate Sisters sold the building. The addition in 1983 of an eight-storey, 147-suite housing development for seniors at 200 rue Masson Street completed the present structure.¹⁸

¹⁵ NS file.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ "Ecole Menagere Historique." File in the Oblate Sisters Archives. Letter dated October 18, 1941.

¹⁸ Assessment Record, #606110, St. Boniface, PC 94.

EVENT

The very nature of the building's original function is significant in terms of Manitoba's francophone community. The education of French-speaking teachers was an indication of the importance placed by this community on the preservation of its language and culture. While the French-language Normal School lasted only 13 years, it was another step in a conscious process of self-definition undertaken by the francophone community in St. Boniface and the province.

CONTEXT

First as a Normal School, then later as a boys' and a girls' school, this building symbolizes the community's efforts to support and promote French language and culture within the framework of the province's larger anglophone population. Education had always been considered by the French community as one of the most important means to achieve this goal. Thus, it is not surprising that teacher training was established in St. Boniface as early as 1897¹⁹ and that this Normal School was one of the first built in Manitoba.

This building also forms part of the overall development of Old St. Boniface. Within eyeshot of the City Hall, the Post Office, and St. Boniface College, the building (according to the 1919 Fire Atlas) was within only a few blocks of St. Boniface Cathedral and Hospital, St. Joseph College, the Oblate Father's College, Academie St. Joseph, the Carmelite Convent, the Petite Seminary, St. Boniface Orphanage, the Grey Nuns Convent and Provencher School. This was, to say the least, an area of intense cultural and linguistic concentration.

LANDMARK

Although this structure sits at a quiet intersection in a residential district, it still commands a certain amount of attention. In the context of the neighbourhood, it is still conspicuous.

¹⁹ Development, p.76.

APPENDIX I

Henry Sandham Griffith

Henry S. Griffith was one of several British architects who immigrated to Canada in the last two decades of the twentieth century. Griffith was born in Oxfordshire, England in 1865, the son of Reverend G. S. Griffith. Architectural training took the form of three years of service (1882-85) to the Reading, England firm of Webb and Tubbs. In 1886 Griffith trained as a draftsman with the London District Surveyor's office.¹

He came to Winnipeg in the spring of 1887 where he found employment with the Northern Pacific Railroad and later with the Land Titles Office. Both positions dealt mainly with surveying activities but, in 1893, Griffith opened an architectural practice in the city.² Although this practice was relatively small, he designed several buildings across the province. He moved to Saskatoon in 1906 and Victoria in 1907. He stayed in British Columbia for the remainder of his life, designing many residential and commercial buildings. The 1918 collapse of his firm followed its rapid expansion during the 1900-12 land boom. Griffith's Victoria office was closed and he operated solely out of his Vancouver office. He died in that city in 1944.³

An incomplete list of his buildings includes:

Winnipeg:

- G. H. Snow house - 1894
- Ryan Block - 104 King Street - 1895
- Norwood Cricket Club Pavilion - 1895
- Mitchell Building - 1896
- Rev. Andrew Stewart house - 239 Colony Street - 1896
- Brookside Cemetery Chapel and Vault - 1897
- Central Fire Hall - 1899

¹ "A Group of Winnipeg Architects" in Canadian Architect and Builder, January 1897, pp.5-6.

² Ibid., pp.5-6.

³ Compiled from: ibid., H. S. Griffith (file of the Historic Resources Branch - thanks to R. R. Rostecki), and M. Peterson, "Ryan Block - 104 King Street.," report for the Historical Buildings Committee. Note: Norwood Cricket Club information from The Daily Nor'-Wester, Nov. 02, 1895, p.1.

H.S. Griffith, Winnipeg buildings, continued:

School on the Machray School site - 1899
Baker Building - 270 McDermot Avenue - 1901
St. Boniface Normal School - 210 Masson St. - 1902
Criterion Hotel - 214 McDermot Ave. - 1903 (Grade II)
M. Lechtzier's Turkish and Russian Bathhouse - corner Pacific and King - 1903
Oxford Hotel - 1905

Portage la Prairie:

Trinity United Church (Knox Presbyterian) - 1897
James Cowan Block - 1897
Pratt Opera House alterations - 1898
St. Mary la Prairie Church - 1898-99
T. & W. Millar Hardware Store - 1899
A. McKillop Furniture store - 1899
John Ferriss house - 1899
J. Fulton house - 1899
T. B. Mills Block - 1899
J. R. McDonald house - 1899
Bailey Block - 1900

Manitoba:

Stonewall - two businesses/warehouse blocks - 1895
Minnedosa - bank building - 1899
Morden - P. C. Heckels house - 1900
Westbourne - Episcopal church - 1900
Neepawa - Neepawa Hospital - 1904

Vancouver:

West Pender Building - 1912
Mining Building

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Plate 1 – 210 Rue Masson, front façade. (City of Winnipeg, 1988.)

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Plate 2 – Main entrance to the former Normal School. (City of Winnipeg, 1989.)

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Plate 3 – Normal School shortly after completion. (Courtesy of the Oblate Sister Archives [OSA].)

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Plate 4 – A Normal School Classroom, no date. (OSA.)

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Plate 5 – A class of agriculture students, no date. (QSA.)

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Plate 6 – École Ménagère Notre Dame, no date. (OSA.)