



3514 PEMBINA HIGHWAY
FORMER 931 AVENUE DE L'EGLISE (ST. NORBERT)
HOUSE

HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE

5 December 1983

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Turning east from Pembina Highway onto Avenue De L'Eglise, one immediately senses that this street has had a past different from its present residential role. Features begin to give clues. First, there is the LaSalle River, about to empty its silt into the Red. A few houses along both sides of the street are clearly old, but mixed with new houses. Halfway down, one can read Banque d'Hochelaga in a stone bank across a small brick apartment. Finally, the street deposits one face to face with the church of the Catholic Parish of St. Norbert, with the nineteenth century prayer chapel and the former convent of the Sisters of Charity. This surely was the nucleus of something that is all but vanished.

The former Banque d'Hochelaga, now a private residence, at the corner of Rue Campeau marks the once-vibrant commercial centre of the village of St. Norbert. This was a village apart from the sprawling city to the north, not a suburb of Winnipeg in any sense, until recent times. St. Norbert was the religious and commercial centre of a parish with a sphere of influence well into the Red River Valley district to the south. Although the bank is all that can be initially identified, other significant buildings remain from this historical period. Across from the Bank, at 931 Avenue De L'Eglise is a small mansard-roofed house that was for decades a butcher shop and post office in this commercial cluster.

The origins of St. Norbert go back to the early Red River settlement years when our connections with the American territories to the south were stronger than any pull towards eastern Canada.¹ By 1812, the Pembina trail on the west bank of the Red was fully established down to Pembina. Métis families, engaged in the seasonal pursuits of freighting, farming and the buffalo hunt, settled along the bank of the Red and the LaSalle. Jean-Baptiste Charette made his home a stopping house for travellers in c.1811, the first commercial venture in what was to become St. Norbert.² The Métis, French and Catholic in tradition, had spiritual ties with St. Boniface until the Parish of St. Norbert was formed in 1857. The small wooden church of 1855 was replaced in 1883 by Father Ritchot's handsome brick church.

In part because of the political developments from 1870 to 1885, many of the Métis families left their settlements to relocate in the North West Territories. As the very region began to open to permanent settlement, these early inhabitants departed, to be replaced by settlers who took up farming in earnest. Those who settled in the fertile lands along the Pembina trail were generally of French origin from Québec, coaxed westward by Archbishop Taché with the lure of free land. Taché could readily see the erosion of the French fact in Manitoba as the balance tipped toward the English-speaking settlers from Ontario. St. Norbert, St. Adolphe, Ste. Agathe, and St. Jean Baptiste, among other districts, were targets for his settlement schemes to redress this imbalance.

St. Norbert evolved from a Métis settlement to a small farming and religious centre while these southern towns began to develop. As a measure of the growth of these southern districts, one can look at the parish boundaries. From 1857 to 1874, the Parish of St. Norbert extended from St. Boniface south to the American border. The formation of such parishes as Ste. Agathe, St. Adolphe and St. Jean Baptiste in the 1870s to 1890s signified churches built in these towns³ and some local retailing. However, during this period and well into this century, St. Norbert retained its religious influence (through Ritchot's various institutions) and its commercial dominance.

The historic Pembina trail, long since paved, fed traffic north from these southern villages up to the heart of St. Norbert. The actual crossing of the LaSalle River on Pembina Highway was different from its present location. Until 1922, a wooden bridge crossed the river at the foot of what is now Rue Campeau, formerly Rue LaSalle. One block in from the bridge was Avenue De L'Eglise and the commercial district. All north-south traffic fed into this intersection.

Out of deference to the Church at the end of the street, a buffer zone of housing separated this commercial square.⁴ On the south bank of the bridge, in full site of the highway, was a big white cross in wood to commemorate the Métis' role with Riel in erecting a barrier against government surveyors in 1869. From the bridge and Rue Campeau, traffic swung west onto Avenue De L'Eglise and then north again to the Pembina road. On the other side of the highway was the St. Norbert railway station, where local merchants would receive their supplies, a block from their

establishments on Avenue De L'Eglise or along the Pembina road.⁵

Besides this excellent bridge arrangement from the point of view of merchants, there was also a ferry at the foot of Avenue De L'Eglise, north of the Church itself, that brought people from the eastern section of the parish across the Red River.⁶ Thus the hinterland for these merchants was the agricultural districts to the south, east and west. There was little incentive for farmers seeking supplies to go the extra distance into Winnipeg. Fifteen miles in a horse-drawn wagon round trip could be saved by dealing in St. Norbert.

The earliest photograph of the Campeau and De L'Eglise intersection shows the store of Elie Brisebois. Since at least 1884,⁷ the Brisebois family lived over the general store, which also was a livery stable and feed supply. When Father Ritchot finally gave up his position as postmaster in 1883, the Brisebois' store became the post office. With his brother Hyacinth and his son Louis, Elie Brisebois was able to expand his operations further to include butchering. The sources are vague, but the photograph clearly shows two buildings across the street from the Brisebois' store. One is a barn, the other a white gable log or frame building. The white building seems to be the Brisebois' butcher shop. After the general store burned to the ground in c. 1896, the Brisebois family left St. Norbert.⁸

At this time, the village of St. Norbert included four general stores, a small hotel, two veterinary surgeons (blacksmiths?), the County Court for Iberville, a post office and the St. Norbert Milling Company operations.

Following the Brisebois fire, the post office was moved to the home of Charles H. Pacaud, immediately east of the house at 931 Avenue De L'Eglise.¹⁰

Next in the photographic record of this intersection shows a new house on the Brisebois' corner. This big white frame house was built in 1901 by Oscar Pirson and the post office moved to this home from 1901 to 1911. From 1912 to 1921, the Campeau family lived there (hence the name of

the street) and also had the post office during this time. Both Pirson and Campeau ran general stores from the big white house as well.

By 1902, the north side of Avenue De L'Eglise had changed too. The barn was a blacksmith shop for Zachée Laporte, to whom seven children were born and raised in the converted second floor. A balcony on this upper floor is visible. To the west is a large wooden store, rented at this period to the E.L. Joyal family.

The white wooden house peeks through the trees on the east side of Laporte's smithery. This is 931 Avenue De L'Eglise, the butcher shop. By the turn of the century, it was no longer in the Brisebois' family but owned by Joseph Dubois, a butcher. The Dubois name first appears in St. Norbert records in the 1860s, but Joseph and his wife seem to have farmed in the Grand Pointe area before coming to St. Norbert.¹¹ In 1902, his property was assessed at a value of \$100, but three years later, the value had risen to \$500. It seems logical that in this time, Dubois altered and enlarged his shop and home.¹²

In fact, before this time, the actual butcher shop was in a wood shed to the east of the Dubois' property. With the extension to the house, the butcher shop moved to the east portion of the house while the family lived in the west portion and the second floor. There was also a large barn to the rear of the property where animals lived and meat and equipment stored.

The extension to the house went beside and around the original building. A mansard roof tied the old with the new but the building is clearly in two sections. Most people remember the butcher shop in the east (older) section.

In 1907, Dubois sold the house and butcher shop to Louis Goguillon. Born in Déchy, France in 1876, Goguillon was a young family man in 1902. He and his wife had three children, Léon born in St. Norbert in 1906, Thérèse (born c.1902 and died 1918) and another daughter who did not survive. From 1907 until his death in 1922¹³, Goguillon kept a butcher shop at 931 Avenue De L'Eglise.

Here he would buy animals, fatten them for slaughter if necessary, dress the meat and he even used the shed on the east part of the property as a smoke house.

A remarkable photograph of the Goguillon butchering operations survives but could not be reproduced. In the photograph are four adults in everyday clothing posed before the smoke house. Before them is Léon Goguillon as a ten year old boy, gleefully hosing down an enormous placid pig. Smiling approvingly are Madame and Monsieur Goguillon and his assistant, Monsieur Parisien and his wife. The Parisiens were a Métis family, from the old order in St. Norbert, and Parisien himself was said to be the strongest man in the district. Goguillon was fairly diminutive in stature, and in poor health in the years before his death, so one can presume that Parisien was of considerable assistance in the successful operation of the butcher shop.

A butcher within a rural community served a different function than the modern city butcher. Many of the local farmers would grow their own animals, taking them live to the butcher to have the animal slaughtered and the meat hung and dressed. By the early years of this century, some farmers concentrated solely on grain crops, consequently would have to buy their meat in bulk, often smoked or preserved by winter's cold. There was also a growing number of townspeople in St. Norbert and the towns to the south who were not involved in farming of any kind. These people would purchase dressed meat.

A capsule analysis of this commercial centre in 1909 reveals the following sequence: on the north side of Avenue De L'Eglise is Albert Schwartz, a watch repairman and jeweller. West of this home are the Pacauds, related by marriage to the Brisebois'. Charles Henri Pacaud had been the post-master before 1901,¹³ and was land registrar and the local notary. Beside Pacaud's was the Goguillon butcher shop and home. Next door, the LaPorte blacksmith and home and beside that, a general store. Across the street was the Pirson store, livery and post office. West and down the street was another blacksmith shop, and beside that, the saddlery shop of E.L. Joyal. Looming over all this was the boy's school, a large building on LaSalle (now Campeau) closer to the bridge.¹⁴

Not long after this, as the next sequence in the photographs show, the two general stores west of the butcher shop thriving. LaPorte became a successful general merchant in a building that replaced his barn-like blacksmith shop. In the next photograph of c.1922, the LaPorte store shows an entire side painted to advertise Five Roses Flour and a large awning across the front. The Gougillon butcher shop also shows every sign of prosperity. A large awning on the west side of the building shows the shop to have moved from the east side to the west side of the building, or possibly into a separate frame building on the west side of the property. Several outbuildings, the stable and smokehouse included, are enclosed within a picket fence. There is a driveway to the stable in the rear end, just to the east, a path that led to the orphanage of the Sisters of Mercy.

The year 1922 saw some changes to the corner. Excavation was preceding at a good rate on the Banque d'Hochelaga, giving the corner a long-needed financial service. Gougillon died that spring and the new butcher, Jean-Baptiste Monchamp, moved his family into 931 Avenue De L'Eglise. The Campeau store, formerly the Pirson house on the corner, continued selling food and merchandise but lost the post office to the Paillés in Pacaud's old house east of the butcher shop.

But the significance of the year 1922 was probably unnoticed by the merchants of this corner at first. With the new bank established, the commercial aspect of this corner looked secure but in that year, the main highway bridge was moved to its present location on Pembina Highway. No longer was traffic routed into the heart of the town. Naturally, those businesses along Pembina thrived with the new traffic pattern while the shops along Avenue De L'Eglise began to falter.

Monchamp lasted only until 1927 in the butcher shop, after which the Paillés moved into 931 Avenue De L'Eglise, re-opening their post office there. The Joyal saddlery and the blacksmith shop both outlived their usefulness as fewer animals were used in farming and transport. In fact, the general use of the automobile would also have contributed to the waning of St. Norbert's role in the community. The few extra miles to Winnipeg were not as formidable in an automobile.

From 1927 to 1930, the post office was in the former butcher shop but in 1931, the office was given

to Madame Vouriot. She rented the rear addition of the big Campeau house, raising three children and operating the post office under very close circumstances. When the LaPorte store burned sometime in the 1930s, Vouriot was able to build a new home just west of the old butcher shop. The post office stayed in this house and in this family until 1973.

The Banque d'Hochelaga did not survive long in its new site before it was absorbed by the Banque Canadien National. Hard times in the 1930s closed the doors of the bank permanently, but the building itself retained a retail function. For many years it was a hardware store, and more recently a convenience store before becoming a private dwelling.

The Paillés sold the house at 932 Avenue De L'Eglise in about 1930 to Basil Dufort. The Dufort family remained in the house right up to the present. Several children were raised there, but as older children left home, there came to be more than enough space. In c.1963, the house was made into a duplex with Madame Dufort remaining in one part with her younger children.¹⁵

Through this series of photographs, one can see the evolution of the district from bush to pioneer establishments to commercial centre. But by and large, the residential aspects of the street now dominate with only hints of its past historic role.

FOOTNOTES--

1. W.L. Morton, Manitoba: A History University of Toronto Press Toronto 1957, p. 103.
2. St. Norbert Heritage Park Manitoba Historic Resources Branch Winnipeg 1983, p. 10.
3. Dom Benoit Vie de Mgr. Taché Librairie Beauchemin Montreal 1904 p. 312, 423 and 747.
4. Lionel Dorge "Essai Historique de Saint Norbert" p. 5.
5. A great deal of this material was supplied by Corinne Tellier, an historian with the Historic Resources Branch of the Province of Manitoba. In her extensive research for the St. Norbert Heritage Park, she has used a variety of oral and written sources, along with excellent photographic material, to piece together the history of St. Norbert. I am extremely grateful for her assistance.
6. Ferry service ended in 1955.
7. Henderson's Directory for Winnipeg and the Northwest Territories 1884.
8. Ibid., 1896.
9. Loc. cit.
10. List of St. Norbert post masters from the Philatelic/Postal History Research Office, National Postal Museum, Ottawa.
11. "History of Dubois name" by Corinne Tellier, 1979.
12. Ritchot Municipality Tax Rolls, 1902 and 1905.
13. "Pacaud", Tellier, op. cit., p. 3.
14. Tax rolls, op. cit., 1909.
15. Henderson's Directory for Winnipeg 1963.

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Plate 1 – The house at 931 Avenue De L'Eglise, 1983. (Province of Manitoba, Historic Resources Branch Photograph.)



Plate 2 – Avenue De L'Eglise, ca.1896. At the foot of the street is the church. The big building on the right is the Brisebois' store, livery and home. On the left is the Brisebois' butcher shop and barn. (Province of Manitoba, Historic Resources Branch Photograph.)

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Plate 3 – The same location, ca.1905. On the right is the new Pirson store and house on the same site as the Brisebois' store. In the fore on the right is a blacksmith and the tip of the Joyal saddlery. On the left is the Dubois butcher shop, the LaPorte blacksmith and the Payment store. . (Province of Manitoba, Historic Resources Branch Photograph.)



Plate 4 – A few years later, ca.1908, the butcher shop at 931 Avenue De L'Église (arrow) is clearly identifiable in its present form. (Province of Manitoba, Historic Resources Branch Photograph.)

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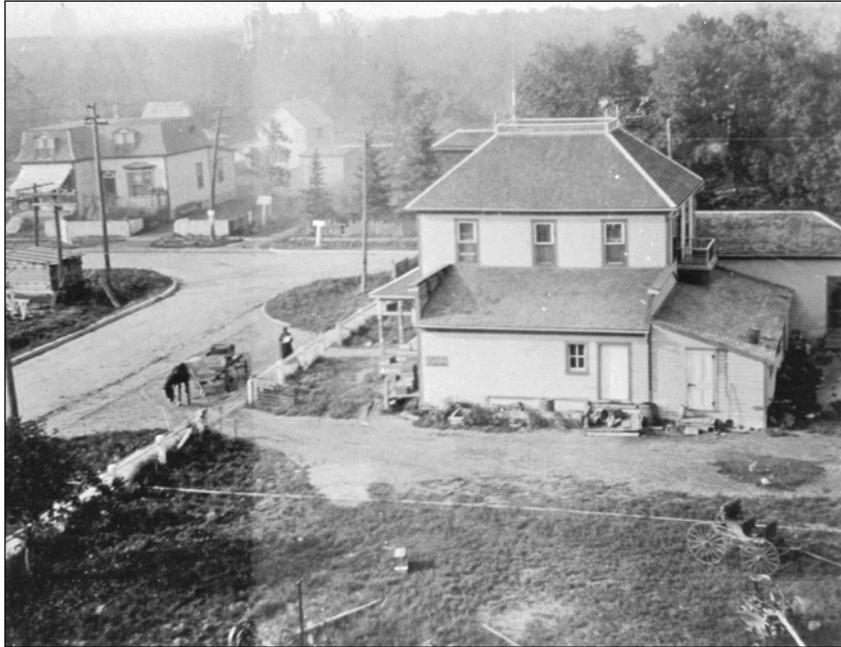


Plate 5 – The corner of LaSalle (Campeau) and De L'Eglise, 1922. In the foreground is the large Campeau house. On the left is the butcher shop and barn. The orphanage of the Sisters of Mercy can be seen on the horizon. This shot was taken from the roof of the boys' school. (Photograph property of Mrs. Suzanne Hamilton, and supplied by C. Tellier.)



Plate 6 – This photograph shows the butcher shop in relation to the LaPorte store, 1922. The excavation is for the Banque d'Hochelega. (Photograph property of Mrs. Suzanne Hamilton, and supplied by C. Tellier.)

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Plate 7 – Maison Pacaud, immediately east of 931 Avenue De L'Église. Owned by the Pacaud and later Delorme and Paillé families, this house was the land titles office, notary office, post office and even had a dark room for developing photographs in the gables. (Photograph property of Mrs. Suzanne Hamilton, and supplied by C. Tellier.)



Plate 8 – St. Norbert was badly flooded in 1950. An arrow marks the house at 931 Avenue De L'Église. On the far right is the boys' school. (Province of Manitoba, Historic Resources Branch Photograph.)

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Plate 9 – The house on Avenue De L’Eglise, 1983. (Province of Manitoba, Historic Resources Branch Photograph.)



Plate 10 – Roof detail, 931 Avenue De L’Eglise, 1983. (Province of Manitoba, Historic Resources Branch Photograph.)