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**Saint-Boniface: The Roman Catholic Values that Shape its
Landscape**

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Table of Contents

Abstract	4
Introduction	5
La Cathédrale	6
Le Collège	6
L'Hôpital	8
Conclusion	9
Works Cited	11
Figures	12

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Abstract

This paper begins by analyzing different divisions in the Saint-Boniface district. It explains the reasons for focusing on Central Saint-Boniface and more specifically on the Roman Catholic Church as leader in its landscape transformation. Three integral institutions, the cathedral, the college and the hospital, are used as case studies, exemplifying the church's role in shaping Saint-Boniface's townscape throughout history. The essay closes by discussing the effects of these institutions not only on the landscape, but also on the community and culture. Current characteristics of the townscape of Saint-Boniface are then briefly examined.

Introduction

Saint-Boniface is an urban landscape in Winnipeg, Manitoba (Figure 1) founded by early French settlers and shaped throughout history by their values. The Métis were the first settlers to establish farms along the Red River. Their French background influenced the way they divided the land; something still visible in present day Saint-Boniface. The land was divided into long narrow lots back from the river, based on the French seigneurial system (“The River Lot Farms”; “Module 3”) (Figure 2). Saint-Boniface includes a large area of land divided into east and west St. Boniface (Figure 3). East Saint Boniface is characterized largely by its Union Stock Yards. Although this industrial section has had a large impact on the landscape since its 1912 beginnings, it will not be an area of focus in the essay. The companies were mostly managed by English Canadians whereas the French were mostly “employed in religious and educational professions” (Driedger, “Maintenance of Urban” 93) as well as small businesses in older Saint-Boniface (King, MacKay 32). This essay will focus rather on the effects the French community has had on the urban landscape of Saint-Boniface. West Saint-Boniface can be divided into North Saint-Boniface, Central Saint-Boniface, and Norwood (Figure 4). Norwood has always been an English community. For this reason, the effects it has had on Saint-Boniface’s townscape will not be included in this study. North Saint-Boniface is the first land French settlers landscaped in Western Canada. As the 1880 map shows (Figure 5), the land north of Provencher Avenue was the home to many residential buildings. This site has been the subject of numerous community development and neighbourhood renewal projects in the past fifty years. Three specific examples are *The Urban Renewal Study North Saint-Boniface 1965*, *Neighbourhood Improvement Program Progress Report 1975-1978*, and the *Planning and Policy Implementation of the North Saint-Boniface Community 1971-1985*.

The “centre ville” is concentrated with symbols of significance to the French community’s rich history and its thriving future. It is in Central Saint-Boniface where the typical grand boulevard runs through the French community: boulevard Provencher. (Figure 6, 7) Along this main street stands prominent buildings; architecture famous to Saint-Boniface. The City Hall and Post Office stand proud, built successively in 1905 and 1906 during the city boom (“St. Boniface City Hall”) (Figure 8, 9). The old fire hall, built in 1907, stands directly north of the City Hall, also a landmark in Saint-Boniface’s townscape (Therrien 2, 24). As the 1880 map indicates (Figure 5), the major religious and educational institutions were built in this quarter. King and MacKay point out: “Most of the development of St. Boniface since 1818 has been closely bound up with the activities of the Catholic Church” (2, 3). For example the Archbishop’s house, built in 1864, still is famous to Saint-Boniface’s townscape (Therrien, 16) (Figure 10). Furthermore, the townscape is scattered with schools that were founded by the Catholic Church and their nuns. Many of these buildings are still in use today (Therrien, 22). The street names also reflect the French Catholic values: Avenue Taché, and Avenue de la Cathédrale (Figure 6). Moreover, the place name Saint-Boniface illustrates the French Catholic influence. Unfortunately, the size of this essay does not allow a detailed study on all of the significant buildings and townscape transformations in Saint-Boniface. Driedger, Artibise, Fauchon, and Lyon all agree that the religious values of the French-speaking settlers of Saint-Boniface play a leading role in landscaping their community and

conserving their unique heritage. “The important buildings of the Roman Catholic Church -its cathedral, hospital, and college” have been major players in shaping Saint-Boniface’s townscape (Artibise, 170). These institutions were the first to landscape Saint-Boniface and continue to be important landmarks in the townscape. The rest of this essay will focus on these three case studies. La Cathédrale, Le Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface, and L’Hôpital général Saint-Boniface each have a vibrant history of obstacles and development which have changed and will continue to change Saint-Boniface’s landscape.

La Cathédrale

“Yes, you shall have priests, the greatest need of my colony is religion” (Murphy 3). And so it began: a settlement highly influenced by the Roman Catholic Church. With Lord Selkirk’s blessing, Father Provencher started the first institution in Saint-Boniface. The mission of Saint-Boniface began in a small log cabin in 1818 and served as a church, residence, and school (“St. Boniface Museum”; Fauchon, Harvey 75). These humble beginnings of a church would grow into the defining feature of Saint-Boniface’s townscape. “St. Boniface, Manitoba, La ville cathédrale: la Cathédrale est le point central de notre ville” (King, MacKay 19). In 1825 the second church, built of oak, was completed and became Saint-Boniface’s first cathedral. A main factor in shaping the history of buildings in Saint-Boniface was destructive fires. The second cathedral, built by Father Provencher in 1832 out of stone, was the first to suffer from this disaster in 1860 (Fauchon, Harvey 75; “St. Boniface Cathedral”). Taché started the construction of the third cathedral in 1862 (Figure 11). This building had to be replaced because of population increase; another main factor in shaping Saint-Boniface’s townscape (Fauchon, Harvey 75). The fourth cathedral of Langevin, designed by Montreal architectural firm Marchand and Haskell, was constructed of Manitoba Tyndall stone and is said to be the “best example of French Romanesque architecture in Manitoba” (Therrien 10) (Figure 12). This majestic cathedral was erected the same year Saint-Boniface gained its city status. The French community from near and far united together for the cathedral’s dedication where “Archbishop Langevin blessed the cornerstone of what became one of the most imposing churches in Western Canada” (“St. Boniface Cathedral”). In 1968, this architectural landmark faced its fate in a grievous fire (Figure 13). “This disastrous fire seemed certain to end the Church’s position as the cultural centre of the old francophone district” (“St. Boniface Cathedral”). However, local architect Étienne Gaboury combined the preserved limestone ruins with a new, sixth cathedral (Figure 14). See Figure 15 and 16 to compare the former and present cathedral. And so, the church of 1818 still continues to play an active role in the heart of Saint Boniface and its people.

Le Collège

The importance of education, knit deeply in the Saint-Boniface culture, owes its beginnings to Lord Selkirk’s insistence for priests, and the arrival of Father Nibert Provencher in 1818. The first classes were taught at his mission, the beginning of what we know today as Le Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface. The college faced many

hardships including hazards like flood, famine, and fire (Régnier i). In 1833, because of the lack of space, a separate school-house was finally built for the seven Latin students (Régnier 24). Taché had this building constructed 60' x 34' on the corner of present day rues Taché and Masson (Fauchon, Harvey 111). With lots of determination to keep the program alive, a second boarding school was opened in 1855 north of the cathedral (Régnier ii, 51). Régnier expresses the unbelief that the college of 1855 could hold all this personnel and manage to educate on such a grand scale. However, Archbishop Taché never had sufficient funds to build a suitable college. But the matter became too pressing and Taché found himself going to Québec in search of financial support (Régnier 50). The 120' x 60' elaborate four story college was erected by Taché in 1880. It was situated on twenty-two acres east of the cathedral on Provencher boulevard, where the Provencher park is located today (Régnier 51; Fauchon, Harvey 112). The land boom in the 1880s made it possible for Taché's debt, \$51 000, to be entirely relieved; lifting a heavy financial burden off of the Catholic Church (Régnier iii, 52-54). "Le Collège de Saint-Boniface was the principal Catholic school of Manitoba and of all the Canadian West" (Régnier 57).

The college was expanded in 1902 because of the "ever increasing enrolment" (Régnier 62). Again in 1905, there was a need for more space to support the student-body. With the two added wings, the grand college measured 300' x 62' (Fauchon, Harvey 112) (Figure 17). This era of prosperity reflects the effect population increase has on the development of a townscape and its architecture.

By 1909, the college no longer focused only on its seminary for priests, so it was decided that a separate building was needed for the seminary alone. A great stone building was thus constructed in 1911 (Régnier 80, 81). This structure found itself as the home to Saint Boniface College because of the all too familiar calamity: fire. The 1922 fire destroyed the entire elaborate structure of 1880 (Figure 18, 19). The \$800,000.00 loss could never be replaced (Régnier 85). Although a committee was formed in quest of rebuilding the Saint-Boniface College, funds would not allow reconstruction. "Rebuilding was out of the question" (Régnier 87). As a result, in 1924, the Petit Séminaire was transferred to the College Corporation (Régnier 87). The prestigious college is still situated at this Avenue de la Cathédrale location.

The present college, le Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface has expanded over the years as well. The increasing student enrolment and the demands made by modern education prompted the College authorities to seek financial aid in order to "alleviate the problem of overcrowded classrooms and the altogether inadequate recreational space" (Régnier 114). 1955 saw the work of a new gymnasium (Régnier 115). When sufficient funds were available, a new wing with classrooms was added in 1960 (Régnier 116). This was realized with the help of several different financial contributors. Amongst them were the the federal and provincial governments. "It was the first time in the history of the Province that a grant had been given to the Roman Catholic College" (Régnier 117). Trudeau's government implemented "La loi sur les langues officielles" and thereupon the CUSB benefited from government support and grants. The college has been able to expand according to its needs ever since. Physical expansion along with the increase of new programs and services continue to occur at the college. This college, which was one of the three founding colleges to the University of Manitoba, as well as the school of the ever famous Louis Riel, is a symbol of pride in the Franco-Manitoban community. "The

oldest post-secondary education institution in Western Canada,” le Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface, has left a legacy in Saint-Boniface’s landscape (Therrien 20).

L’Hôpital

Father J.N. Provencher saw a need for nuns in his Red River Settlement. After some time, it was decided that nuns were needed to teach the children and train young women. With thought and prayer, four Grey Nuns from Montreal decided to leave their life behind and commit themselves to the new settlement in present day Saint-Boniface, Manitoba. The nuns immediately began healthcare when they arrived in June 1844 and it continued to be an important part of their work (“St. Boniface General Hospital”; Fauchon, Harvey 87, 88). Although the Sisters played a large role in landscaping Saint-Boniface with educational facilities, the buildings relating to the General Hospital will be the ones discussed in most detail.

A convent was built between 1845 and 1851 for the Sisters of Charity (Grey Nuns) and was used as their hospital. This two-storey hipped roof structure, situated on rue Taché, was built out of white oak, taking nearly six years to build (“St. Boniface Museum”) (Figure 20). Today it is a designated heritage site and home to the Saint Boniface Museum. It is the oldest building in Winnipeg and the “largest oak log frame structure in North America” (Therrien 18). The Grey Sisters needed a separate building where they could exclusively provide care for the sick; the vast number of patients was no longer supportable in their home (Murphy 13). In 1871, the first hospital building in Western Canada was erected. The hospital, called maison des hommes, had a modest beginning, with only four beds (Fauchon, Harvey 88). It was expanded six years later with a new structure holding ten beds. This is the current location of l’Hôpital général Saint-Boniface. The first railroad came in 1878, bringing with it many settlers, immigrants, and homesteaders (Murphy 14). As a result, the hospital needed to expand. In 1887, with the help of a generous public, the new structure was realized, holding sixty patients. Again in 1894, they constructed a three-storey structure with very modern architecture for the time (Figure 21). This doubled the hospital’s capacity (Fauchon, Harvey 24). Winnipeg and Saint-Boniface experienced rapid growth during this period. This resulted in providing a street car service between Winnipeg and Saint-Boniface in 1905 (Murphy 14). The expansion of the city required the same for the hospital. With the added south wing, the hospital now welcomed four hundred beds (Fauchon, Harvey 26) (Figure 22).

During World War One, the Hospital was treating up to three hundred soldiers with influenza (Fauchon, Harvey 89). During this economically difficult period, the Grey Nuns continued to develop the healthcare and the landscape. By 1918, the first licensed nurses graduated from the new nursing school. Moreover, they opened an old folks’ home, L’Hospice Taché, and a novitiate in the 1930s (Fauchon, Harvey 39).

The second half of the 20th Century witnessed many scientific transformations and medical progress. In 1971, l’Hôpital général Saint-Boniface added its center of research. The Hospital saw numerous additions and added organisations because of the pressure for more beds and modern equipment (Murphy 14) (Figure 23). Today it is administered by “la Corporation Catholique de la Santé du Manitoba” (Fauchon, Harvey 90). The

Hospital and its Research centres welcome about 1.4 million people a year and employ “over 4,000 health professionals and support staff” (Therrien 30). It has a worldwide reputation. A new 7,000 square meter atrium has been added with a natural lit entrance that “symbolizes the confluence of Winnipeg’s three rivers” (“St. Boniface General Hospital”). Now the size of 120,774 square metres, it is evident the impact the Grey Nun’s hospital has had on Saint-Boniface’s townscape throughout history (“St. Boniface General Hospital”).

Conclusion

Roman Catholicism plays a large role in defining French communities across Canada. In Saint-Boniface, Manitoba, they were the leading figure to establish vital foundations in the landscape and the community. Breton states that “religious, educational, and welfare institutions are crucial” (qtd. in Driedger, “Ethnic Boundaries” 204). These three aspects provide an essential base in caring for the wellbeing of mankind. La Cathédrale, Le Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface, and L’Hôpital général Saint-Boniface have shaped this urban landscape from their humble beginnings in 1818 until today, where they stand as prestigious world-wide recognized institutions.

Barnabe argues that these religious institutions have greatly contributed to the preservation of the French heritage in Saint-Boniface (65). Gabrielle Roy (1909-1983), for one, doubted that Saint-Boniface “was going to survive as a French-speaking community” (Ford). Carol Harvey points out that Roy was mistaken, “the French language and culture has survived in St. Boniface” (Ford). Saint-Boniface has remained a French speaking community for almost two hundred years. This can be partially attributed to the physical boundaries enclosing Central Saint-Boniface’s space: the Red River to the west and the Seine River to the east. Furthermore, the River Lots which first divided the land encouraged access to neighbours and thereby creating a tight-knit community. The largest cluster of Franco-Manitoban institutions is around the Catholic-based institutions previously discussed. Amongst these are the CBC French radio and TV station and the offices of La Liberté newspaper. It is also in this area where prominent historical graves and monuments are displayed, that of Louis Riel and Jean-Baptiste Lagimodière, just to name a few (Driedger “Ethnic Boundaries” 204). Moreover, all the sites are within walking distance and studies show that “thirty percent of the population say walking is their main mode of transport;” compared to six percent in all of Winnipeg (“St. Boniface”). These factors help create a sense of place in Saint-Boniface.

The community needed to be strong in order to fight through different obstacles. In 1890, the French faced their first challenge when legislation made English the official government language. In 1896, a compromise was made, where French or English could be taught in schools. But in 1916, English became once again the only official language for education. Saint-Boniface managed to keep the language alive despite these setbacks (“Maintenance of Urban” 92). After Trudeau’s law in 1969, establishing a bilingual country, Saint-Boniface has augmented in strength. With federal support and financial grants to promote the French language and culture, many heritage institutions have been established and succeed in preserving and promoting Franco-Manitoban values (Driedger, “Ethnic Boundaries” 209). Amongst these are La Société historique de Saint-

Boniface and Le Centre culturel franco- manitobain, of which play prominent roles in landscaping Saint-Boniface's townscape.

Finally, there are numerous proposed development plans for Central Saint-Boniface. For example, "Building Communities Initiative" launched a neighbourhood renewal project in 2002 focusing on a number of community projects. "Boulevard Provencher Planned Development Overlay" is another example of different regulations put in place to best protect "Provencher Boulevard with its cultural and historic significance to the French community as the neighbourhood main street for St. Boniface" ("Boulevard Provencher"). The "Plan Winnipeg 2020 Vision" has Central Saint-Boniface placed as a Rehabilitation Neighbourhood. One recent project that quickly became an architectural symbol of Saint-Boniface and Winnipeg alike is the Esplanade Riel (Figure 24). This bridge was designed by Gaboury and completed in 2003. It connects Provencher Boulevard and Broadway; symbolically connecting the French and English communities of greater Winnipeg. The most recent project being constructed on the main boulevard in the urban landscape is the new theatre for Le Cercle Molière. It was also just recently announced that a \$40.3-million Cardiac Centre is to be added to the townscape (Ford). Thus, Saint-Boniface shows no sign of decline in townscape impact and Francophone importance in Manitoba.

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Figure 1: Winnipeg Ward Map (winnipeg.ca)

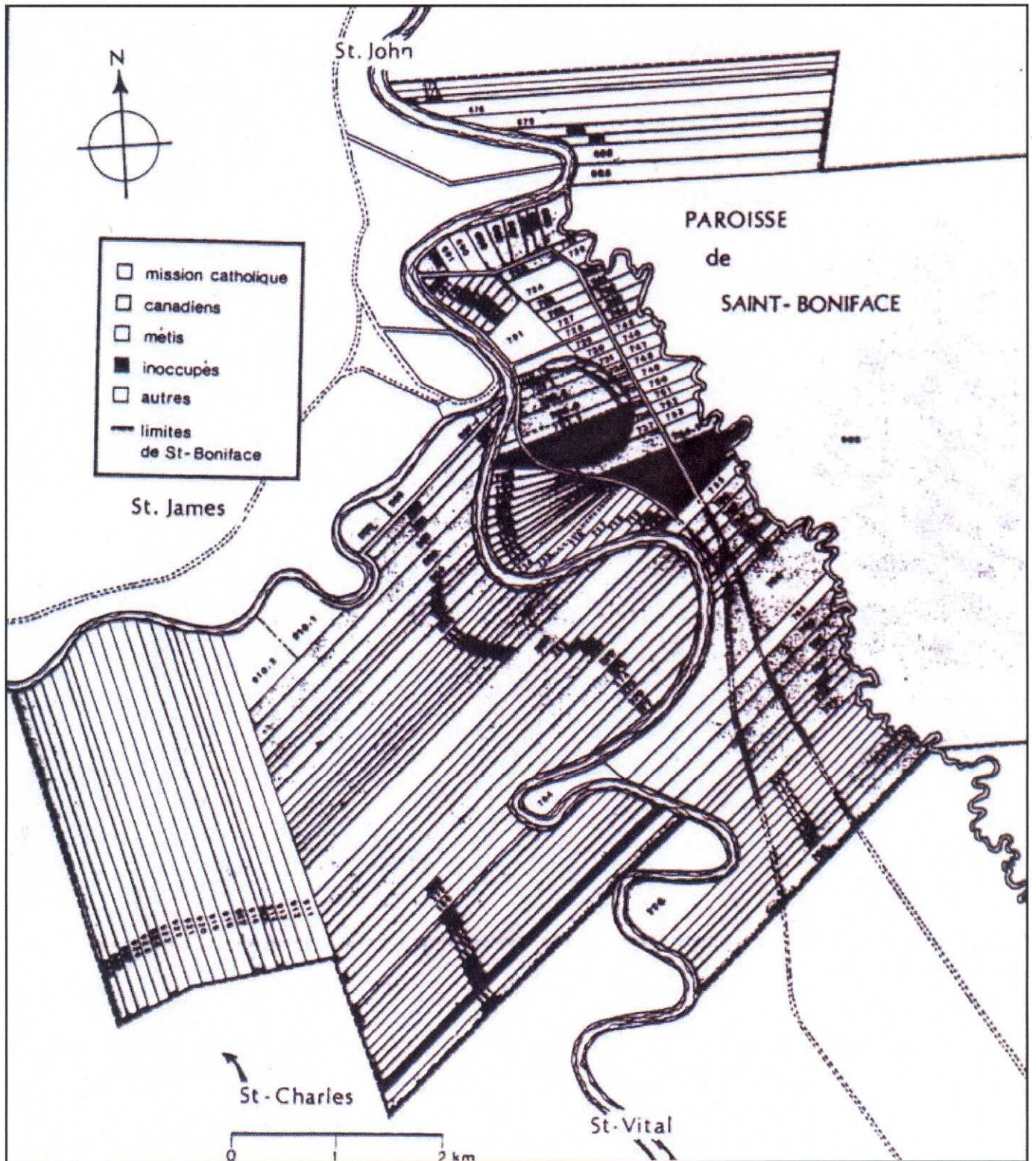


Figure 2: The River Lot Farms (Archives de la Société historique de Saint-Boniface)

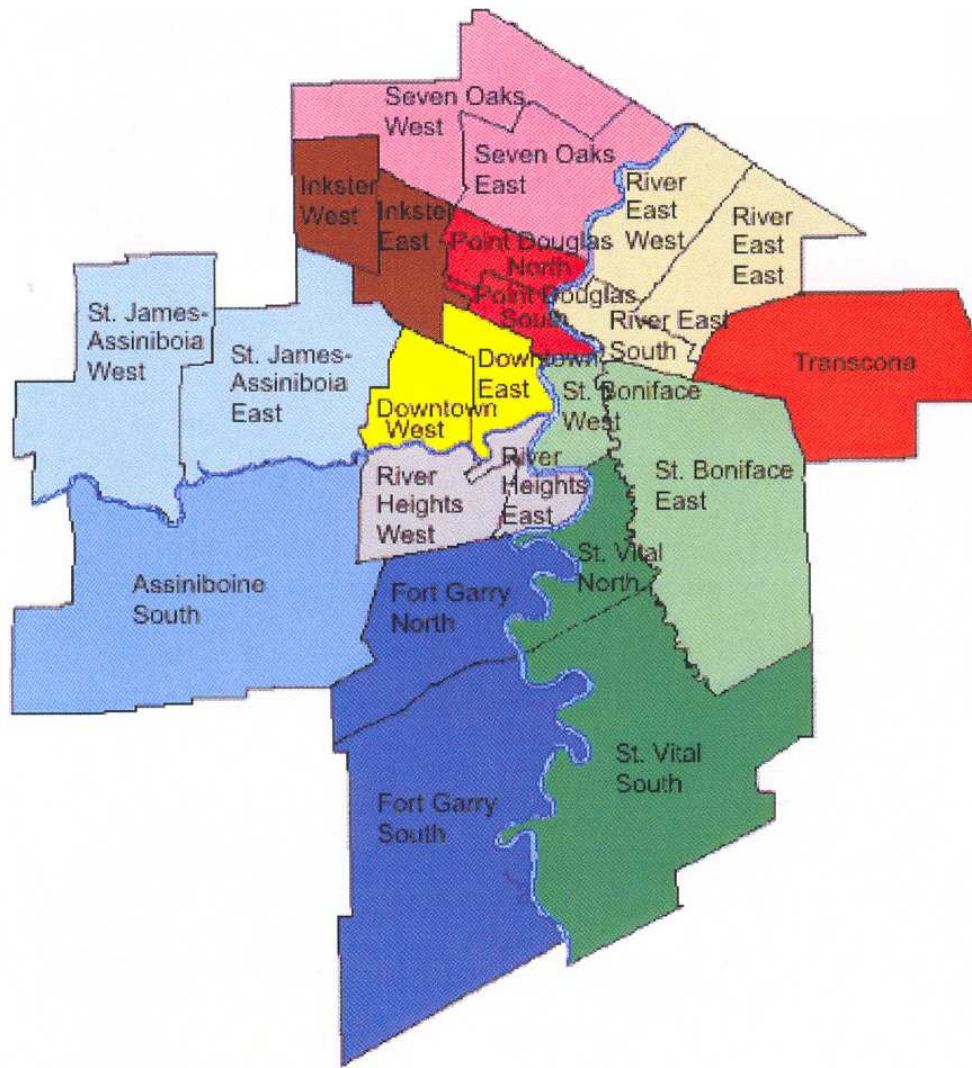


Figure 3: East and West St. Boniface (winnipeg.ca)

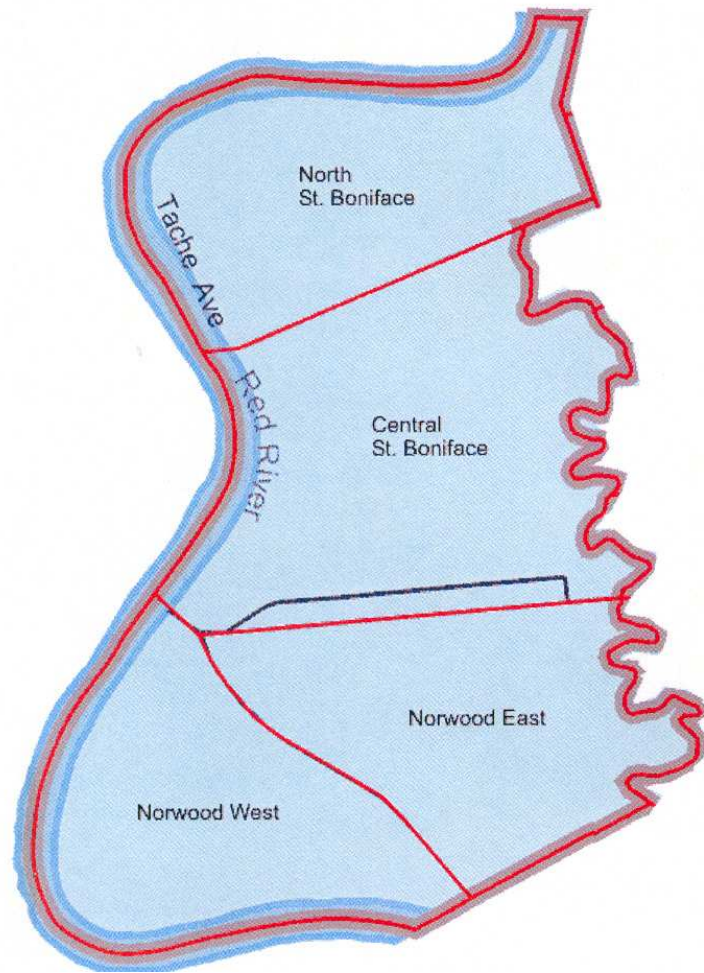


Figure 4: West St. Boniface (winnipeg.ca)



Figure 5: Saint Boniface 1880 (Gordon Goldsborough)

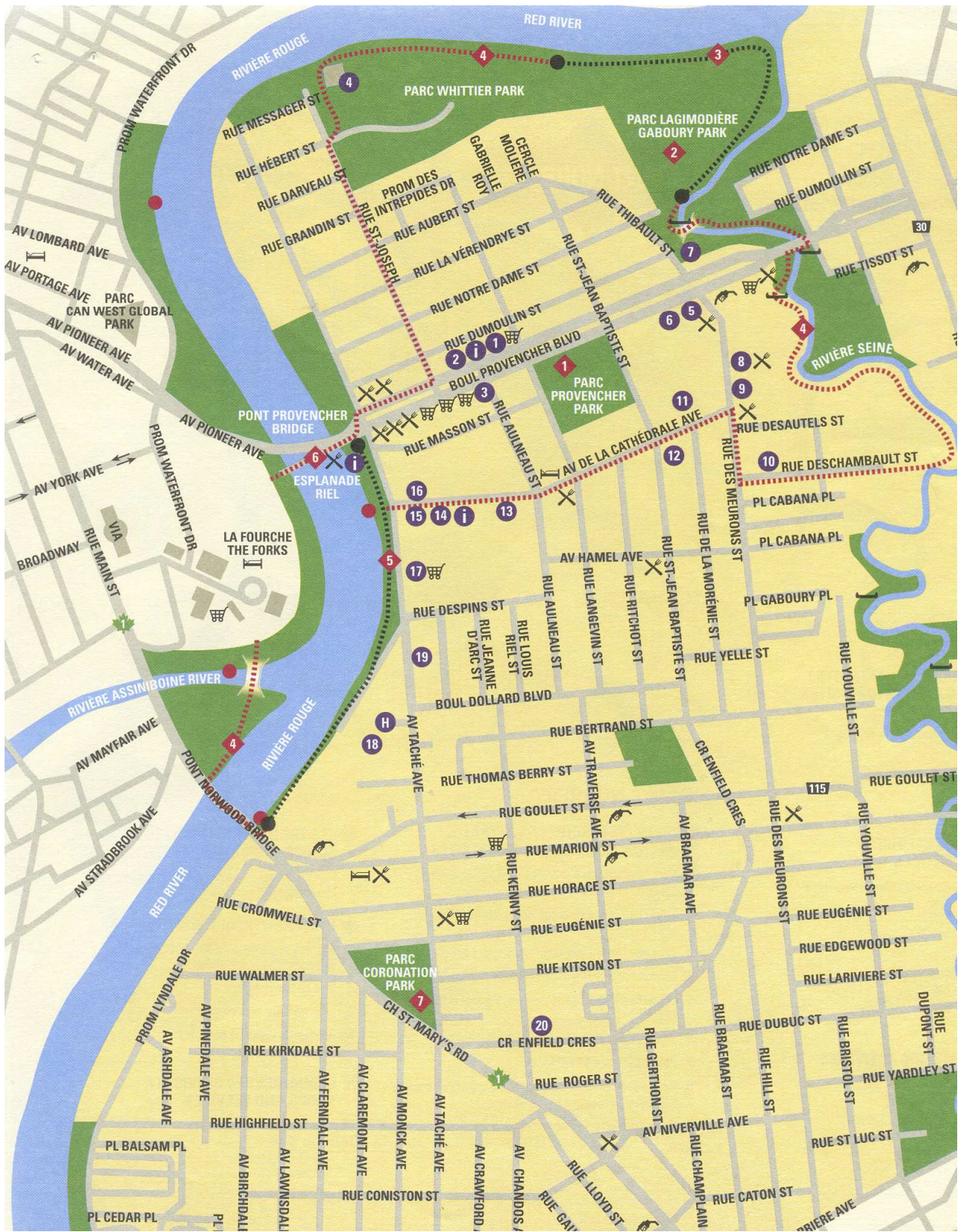


Figure 6: Saint-Boniface Quartier Français (Tourisme Riel)



Le boulevard Provencher (coin rue Taché) vers 1908
(Archives de la Société historique de Saint-Boniface, MSB 28)



Le boulevard Provencher (coin rue Taché) en 2008
(Photo: Claude de Moissac)

Figure 7: Le boulevard Provencher



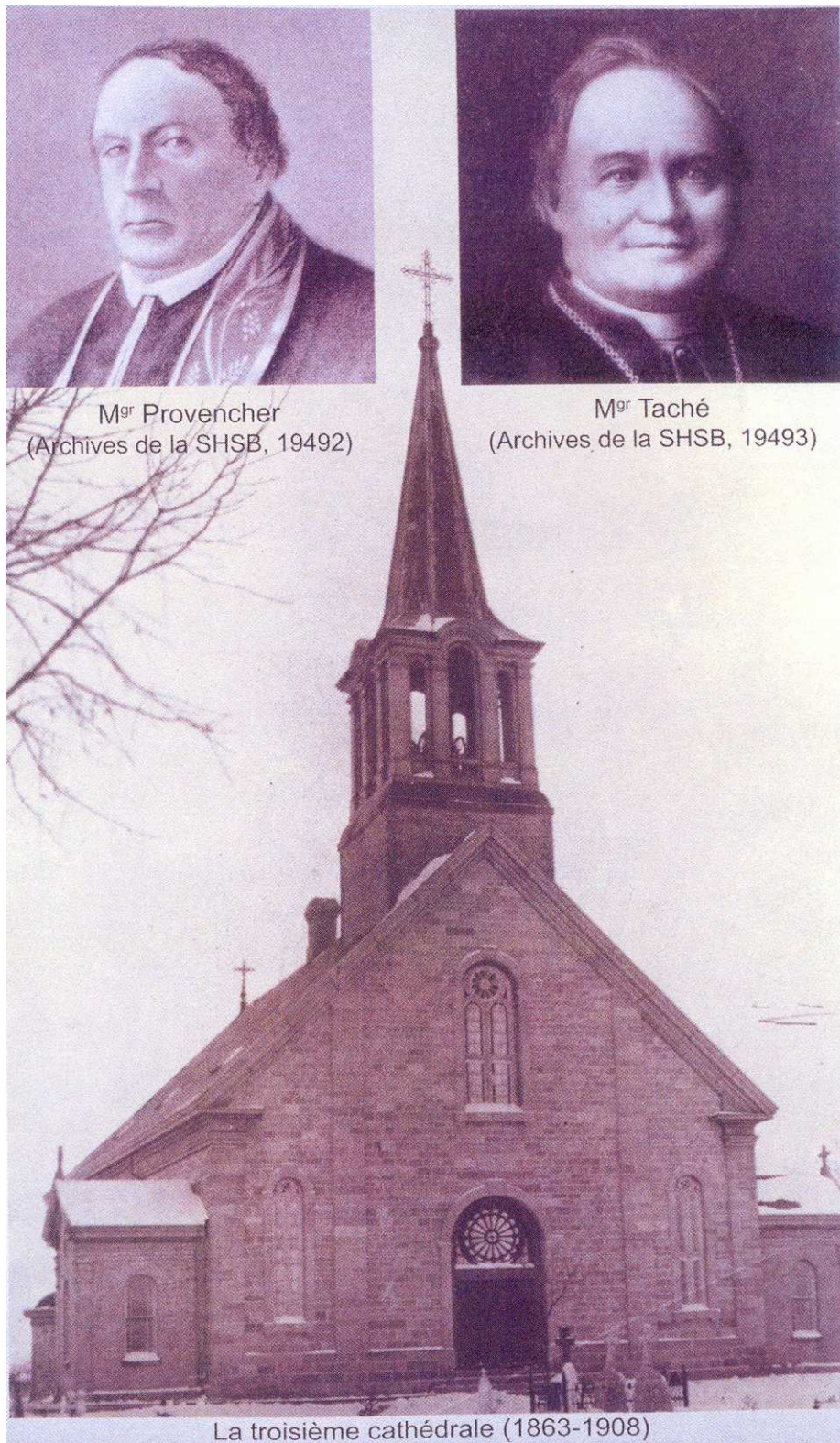
Figure 8: St. Boniface City Hall (Virtual Heritage Winnipeg)



Figure 9: St. Boniface Post Office (Archiseek)



Figure 10: Archbishop's House (Therrien)



M^{gr} Provencher
(Archives de la SHSB, 19492)

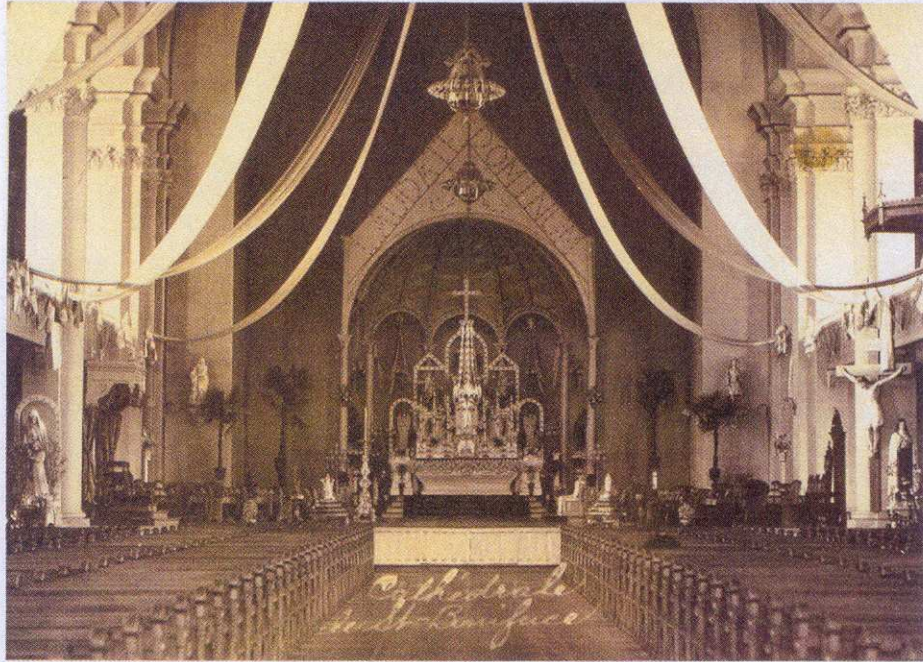
M^{gr} Taché
(Archives de la SHSB, 19493)

La troisième cathédrale (1863-1908)

Figure 11: Third Cathedral (Archives de la SHSB)



Figure 12: Fourth Cathedral (Therrien)



L'intérieur de la quatrième cathédrale
(Archives du CUSB)



L'incendie en 1968
(Archives de la SHSB, 25429)

Figure 13: St. Boniface Cathedral on Fire (Archives de la SHSB)

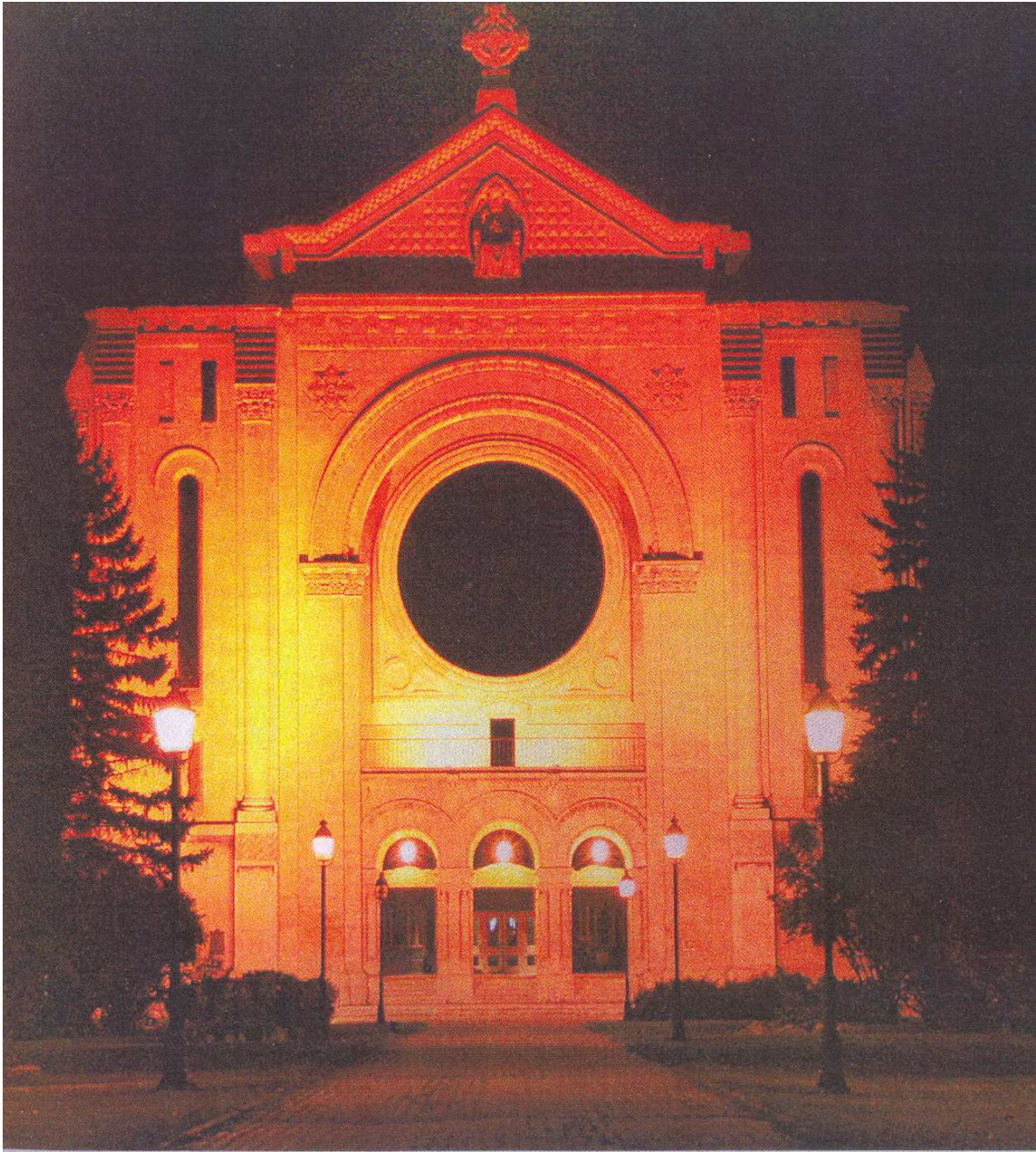


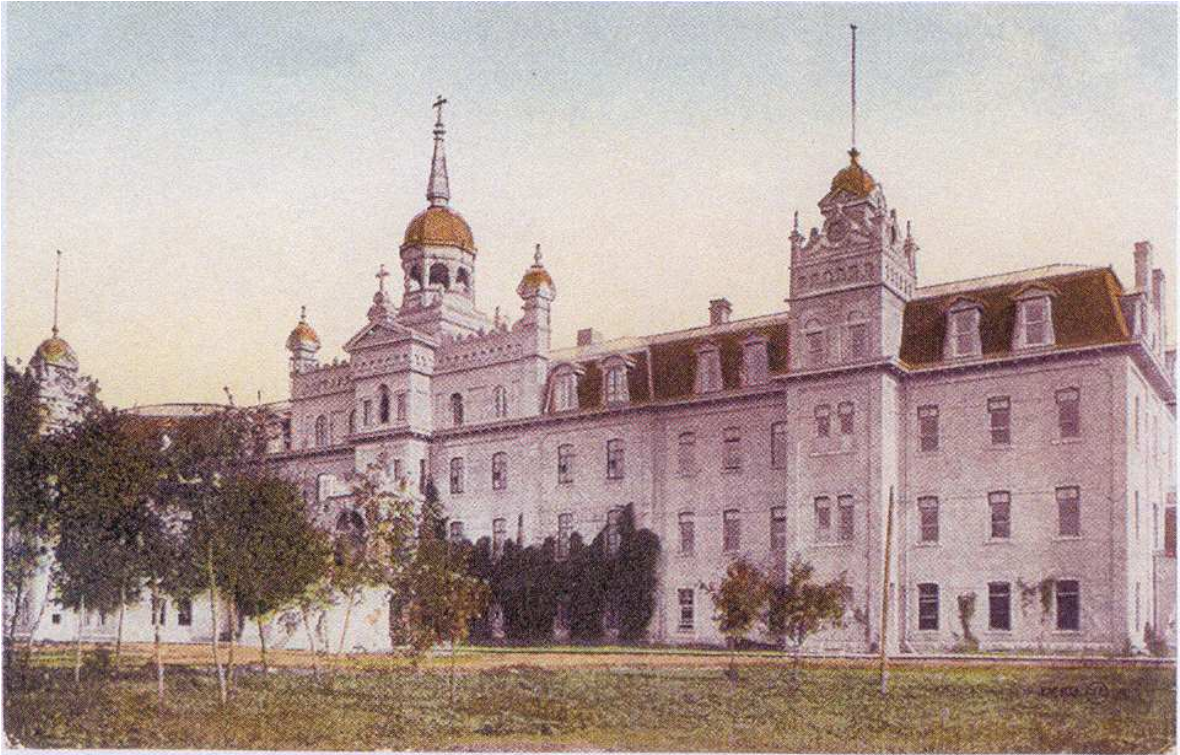
Figure 14: Sixth and Current Cathedral (Therrien)



Figure 15: St. Boniface Cathedral 1919 (Virtual Heritage Winnipeg)



Figure 16: St. Boniface Cathedral Today (Virtual Heritage Winnipeg)



Le vieux Collège de Saint-Boniface
(Archives du CUSB)

Figure 17: St. Boniface College 1905



Figure 18: St. Boniface College on Fire



Figure 19: Remains of St. Boniface College (Western Canada Pictorial Index)



Figure 20: Sisters of Charity Convent used as Hospital (Therrien)

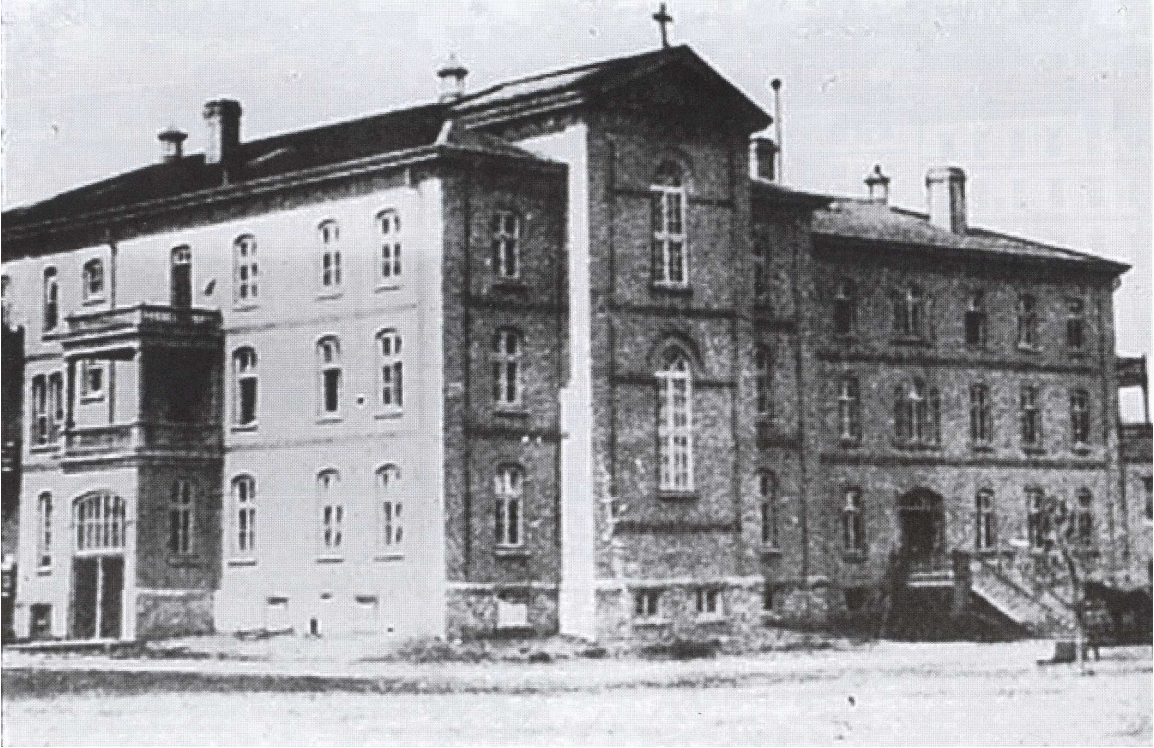


Figure 21: St. Boniface Hospital 1894 (Western Canada Pictorial Index)

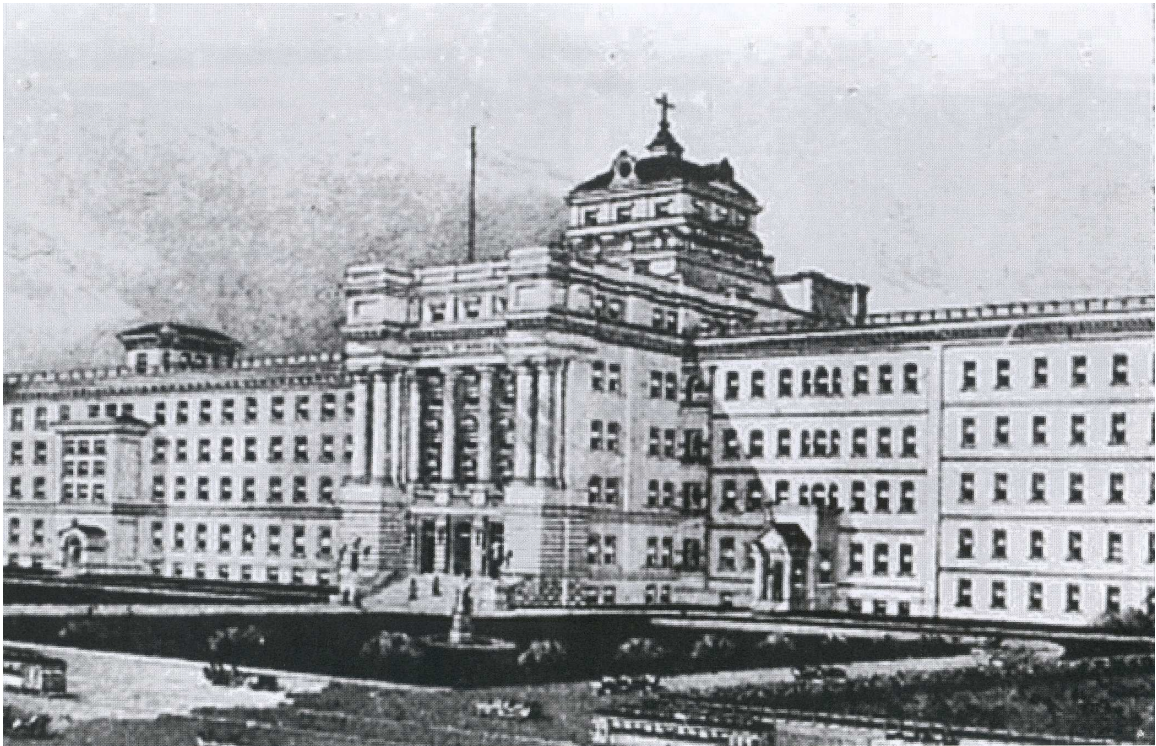


Figure 22: St. Boniface Hospital Expanded (Western Canada Pictorial Index)



Figure 23: St. Boniface Hospital Today (Therrien)



Figure 24: Esplanade Riel (Jason Brandt)