



**35 AVENUE DE LA DIGUE**

**ASILE RICHOT (BEHAVIOURAL HEALTH FOUNDATION INCORPORATED)**

PREPARED BY PETERSON PROJECTS – DECEMBER 2009



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## 35 AVENUE DE LA DIGUE ASILE RICHOT (BEHAVIOURAL HEALTH FOUNDATION INCORPORATED)

**Date of Construction:** 1903 (south wing) and 1911 (north wing)

**Building Permit:** N/A

**Architect:** Unknown (1903) and Sénécal, Joseph-Azarie (1911)

**Contractor:** Unknown (1903 and 1911)

### ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

This massive complex, made up of two buildings, has been serving the needs of the community and the surrounding area for over 100 years.

The complex is comprised of a smaller, 2½-storey brick structure and a much larger three-storey brick building immediately north connected by an enclosed brick hallway on the ground floor.

The south building was originally a house, a solid brick structure set on a raised rubblestone foundation built sometime prior to 1890. It features classically-inspired detailing and mansard roof with pedimented dormer windows. Windows on the main building are plainly adorned and the overhanging eaves are ornate.



Front (west) and north façades, 2009

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The north building, completed in 1911, is much larger in scale, although the use of similar construction materials and the connecting structure aid in visually linking the two buildings. The front (west) façade is symmetrical, with the entrance placed in a two-storey open veranda with delicate wood columns, a stone base and modest pediment on the second floor. As with the smaller structure, windows are plainly adorned and the roofline is highlighted by a complete entablature. A stone capped brick parapet and a centrally located cupola finish the larger structure.

The buildings stand on their original site and both appear to be in good structural condition. Neither appear to have suffered major exterior alteration.

The smaller structure is a fine example of a Second Empire style building that became popular in Canada by 1870. The style had its beginnings in France in the early 1850s in that country's "Second Empire" (that of Napoleon III).<sup>1</sup> In eastern Canada, especially southern Ontario, this style first came to prominence in public buildings (for example Government House in Toronto 1868). From government buildings the style was applied to commercial structures and finally into house designs. This style, however, failed to become as prominent in Winnipeg and further west because of the short duration of the period's popularity. After 1880 Second Empire architecture became much rarer and only a few of this type of design were built after this date. For most of the west this date preceded serious housing construction by several years, if not a decade or more. Therefore there are only a few western examples remaining.

The most prominent detail of a Second Empire building is the mansard or double roof. While visually appealing, this roof-type also was more practical than traditional patterns because it allowed more living space on the upper level. Other features usually found on



South façade, 2009

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such structures are dormer windows on the step slope, moulded cornices with decorative brackets below and a generous use of Italianate details. One or two storey bay windows were also often added and iron cresting was another ornamental feature. Porches were usually added, making the structures asymmetrical. Rusticated stone often completed this type of building at grade.

The larger building is designed in the Classic Revival style, popular in Canada from 1900 to approximately 1930. This type of building is distinguished by its use of Greek and/or Roman ornamental elements such as columns, capitals, pediments, entablatures, cornices and parapets and the structures are usually symmetrical with monumental proportions and smooth surfaces. Porticos, cupolas and other features are also common.<sup>2</sup>

Joseph-Azarie Sénécal was responsible for the design of the 1911 building. Born in Saint-Marc on the Richelieu, Lower Canada (present-day Quebec) in 1841, he moved to Manitoba in 1877 to farm near present-day St. Eustache, although he had trained and worked in Lower Canada as a carpenter/builder/architect. He resumed this career in 1887 and in 1891 moved to St. Boniface to work as a contractor and architect; his first major project was the enlarging of the first St. Mary's Academy in Winnipeg. He would design many structures locally and throughout Western Canada, especially convents, churches and hospitals. 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.<sup>3</sup> He died in 1917.<sup>4</sup>



Rear laundry building (south façade), 2009

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#### HISTORICAL INTEREST:

The original structure was built for Joseph LeMay and his family sometime prior to 1892. Quebec-born LeMay was an early businessman in St. Norbert and a member of the Legislative Assembly from 1870-1876. Upon his death in 1892, the LeMay home and surrounding land were acquired by Father Ritchot and given to the Sisters of Mercy (*Les Soeurs de Miséricorde*) for use as an orphanage for infants of poor families and unwed mothers, transferred from the Order's new Misericordia Maternity Hospital built at the foot of Sherbrook Street. The house was extensively renovated and contained kitchens, a chapel, a refectory, a large nursery and the sisters' living quarters on the third floor. A laundry was added to the rear of the house. It was named *Asile Ritchot* after the group's benefactor, Monseigneur Noel-Joseph Ritchot (1825-1905).

Very quickly, overcrowding became a serious problem and infectious diseases killed many babies in the absence of adequate facilities and led to the construction of the large building to the north. The complex served not only St. Norbert but the community at large until its closure in 1948 (the provincial government took over care of orphans).<sup>5</sup> The complex reopened as an Oblate Seminary in 1954 and operated until the early 1970s when it became X-Kalay Foundation, a residential treatment centre for drug addicts, alcoholics, ex-cons and others. Today it operates as the Behavioural Health Foundation.



Rear (east) façade, 2009

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RECOMMENDATION TO HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE:

Under the Historical Buildings By-law, this building meets a number of important criteria:

- its historical importance- a pre-World War I era institutional complex that has served a number of uses within the province for over 100 years;
- its associations- its long-term connections to early public health;
- its design- an excellent example of both the Second Empire and Classic Revival styles;
- its architect- J.-A. Sénécal was a respected and important practitioner;
- its location- its site in St. Norbert is open, adding to the visual conspicuousness of the building; and
- its integrity- its main façades continue to display many of their original elements and design.



Front (west) façade, 1983

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ENDNOTES:

- 1 V. and L. McAlester, A Field Guide to American Houses (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), p. 242.
- 2 Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg, MB: Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, 1991), p. 32.
- 3 Winnipeg Telegram, March 20, 1917.
- 4 Cadrin, Gilles, “Sénécal, Joseph-Azarie,” in Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online, Vol. XIV, 1911-1920 (University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2000).
- 5 Grover, S., “Cityscapes: Asile Ritchot, St. Norbert” in Manitoba History, No. 11 (Spring 1986).