

190 AVENUE DE LA CATHÉDRALE – ST. BONIFACE CATHEDRAL & CEMETERY
Marchand and Haskell (Montreal), 1908 & Étienne-Joseph Gaboury, 1972



One of the City of Winnipeg's most famous and recognizable structures, the St. Boniface Cathedral and cemetery site has been the centre of Francophone society since the earliest European settlement in the West.

The Roman Catholic Mission was founded near this site in 1818 and worked diligently to attract French-speaking Catholic intellectuals and businessmen from Eastern Canada to support the new settlement and firmly establish the Francophone culture. St. Boniface was incorporated as a Town 1883 and a City in 1908 and has, because of this early history, developed separately and uniquely from its larger neighbour.

The present cathedral, officially opened in 1972, is built at the eastern end of the ruins of the stone cathedral that was opened in 1908 and destroyed by fire in 1968. The stone church, the fifth church building on site and the fourth to be designated a cathedral, was an imposing structure designed in the Roman Byzantine Style. Measuring approximately 95.2 metres long and 26.8 metres wide, its limestone walls rose 12.2 metres above grade while the two towers reached a height of over 45 metres and framed a beautiful stained glass rose window 7.6 metres in diameter. Exceptional stone detailing includes a stone statue and cross, arched windows and

columned buttresses, carved floral panels, unfluted Corinthian Order columns, patterned stonework and carved bracketing.

Its interior was equally opulent, with seating for over 2,000. The structure received the title Minor Basilica from Rome in 1949 and was an important part of the landscape until its gutting by fire. The Parish decided, after much public debate, not to rebuild the 1908 structure but to create a new, smaller modern cathedral nestled in the stabilized stone ruins of the old building. The new church was traditional in layout but Modern in style with its heavy use of glass and metal, straight, angular lines and the lack of historically-based ornamentation. It was designed by the St. Boniface firm of Gaboury, Lussier and Sigurdson. Its principle, Étienne-Joseph Gaboury is a well-known Manitoba-born and trained architect.

Also historically significant is the Cathedral's site on the banks of the Red River. Its cemetery which is the final home to many of the City's most influential leaders and family members including: Father Jean-Pierre Aulneau, J.B. La Vérendryé and 19 others who were killed on an island in the Lake of the Woods on June 6, 1736; Ambroise-Dydime Lépine- Riel's lieutenant in 1869-70; Louis Riel, buried at the north edge of the cemetery; and Jean-Baptiste Lagimodière, trapper and his wife, Marie-Anne (nee. Gaboury), first French-Canadian woman to live in west.

Elements of the building that would require approval if alterations were planned are:

Exterior:

- the location on the east bank of the Red River, at the junction of avenues Taché and de la Cathédrale in St. Boniface
- the structure's east/west orientation on well-groomed grounds fronted by a cemetery that holds important pioneer families and historical figures
- the multi-storey 1908 Romanesque Revival limestone structure, now stone ruins, creating an enclosed rectangular courtyard through the ashlar facade and the rusticated segments of the north/south walls
- the symmetrical two-part front elevation with a large central empty rose window recessed behind the main (west) façade
- the monumental features of the main façade, with a large floriated compound arch resting on pilasters with heads featuring volutes, square corner towers abutted by Corinthian columns with massive plinths and chevroned off-sets, and a large gable parapet depicting a seated bishop inset in a niche surrounded by diaper patterned nailhead mouldings, crow-stepped trim and projecting bands of billet moulds, all topped by a low-relief Greek cross

- the arcaded entrance composed of inner and outer round-arched openings with intrados inscribed with Greek crosses
- the numerous elongated rectangular and round-arched windows, many with radiating stone voussoirs and downward-sloping smooth-cut sills, and the towers' tall narrow openings
- details including the crypts, the stone staircases, modillioned cornice, limestone coping, dentilled and geometric banding, label moulding, lion's head, diamond and floral motifs
- the blended sacristy at the east end of the building with 1908 limestone, narrow, rectangular square-headed window openings, projecting lug stone sills; and 1972 angular upper storey with metal roofing, cornice and the projecting, east-facing entrance featuring an arched doorway and smooth-cut broken pediment with cross
- the 1972 Cathedral, square in plan, set within the ruins of the 1908 Cathedral, with a prominent metal clad pyramidal roof and low set bands of fenestration

Interior:

- the 1972 cathedral with the following aspects: the spruce-clad narthex, nave with hipped cedar ceilings featuring exposed beams and trusses, stained glass panels, simple oak pews, and raised sanctuary