



## 321 DE LA CATHEDRALE AVENUE

### ST. JOSEPH'S ACADEMY

PREPARED BY PETERSON PROJECTS – FEBRUARY 2009



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## 321 DE LA CATHEDRALE AVENUE ST. JOSEPH'S ACADEMY

**Date of Construction:** 1912

**Building Permit:** 820/1912 (St. Boniface Building Permit)

**Architect:** Sénécal, Joseph-Azarie

**Contractor:** Unknown

### ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

Another one of the domes institutional facilities in St. Boniface is St. Joseph's Academy, classically detailed and exceptionally well designed.

The front (south) façade features a central entrance with flanking wings. The centre portion projects slightly and features a wealth of stone accents to contrast the light coloured brick superstructure. This area includes squared attached columns on the ground floor and unfluted columns on the second floor connected by a stone balustrade. Topped by a pediment, the building's dome rises above this section. A metal entablature runs the width of the building between the second and third floors. The hip roof, emphasized by a complete entablature, is interrupted on the front (south) slope by large gable dormers on either side of the dome. The east side is now hidden by a newer attached building. The



Rear (north) and west façades, 2009

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rear (north) west sides feature a continuation of the classical detailing of the front, especially around windows and doors and at the roofline.

The building stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition. Exterior alterations have been confined to the east side addition, the original building does not appear to have been severely altered.

The building was designed by St. Boniface contractor and architect Joseph-Azarie Sénécal (1841-1917). Sénécal was born in Quebec and after early education went into the carpentry trade but was soon designing as well. He came west to Manitoba in 1877 on the invitation of Father Albert Lacombe and took up farming. In 1887, he travelled to Fort Macleod, AL to build a house and enlarge a store for a Hudson's Bay Company chief factor. In 1891, Sénécal moved to St. Boniface to work fulltime as a contractor and architect. His first major contract, enlarging St. Mary's Academy, established him as Western Canada's leading francophone architect, especially with the growing religious groups of the region.

He worked extensively in Edmonton and Calgary, designing convents and churches throughout the region. Local works by Sénécal include St. Boniface General Hospital, Taché Avenue (1893, 1905, 1914 – only one wing remains), Misericordia Hospital, Sherbrook Street (1900, 1907 – one the central section remains), St. Boniface Cathedral, 190 Avenue de la Cathedrale (1906-1908, supervising architect and contractor), St. Joseph's Academy, 321 Avenue de la Cathedrale (1912) and Asile Ritchot, St. Norbert (1912).<sup>1</sup>

This building stands as an excellent example of the Classical Revival style that rose to popularity in the early 1900s as a reaction to the picturesqueness of the designs of the late





Rear (north) façade, 2009

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19<sup>th</sup> century. Common elements include columns, pediments, capitals and other Greek and Roman-based detailing. Designs were usually symmetrical, surfaces were smooth and rooflines were often flat. Door and window openings were square headed rather than arched.<sup>2</sup>

#### HISTORICAL INTEREST:

This facility began as St. Joseph's Academy, a convent and girl's school founded in 1898 by the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. This order began in Quebec in 1844 and came west in 1874 to organize St. Mary's Academy on the request of Archbishop A.A. Taché. In 1898, the Sisters took over the work of the Grey Nuns in educating young girls at a convent/school located at the corner of Des Meurons and Provencher (present-day St. Boniface Cultural Centre). By 1911, there were 17 sisters looking after the needs of nearly 500 students (120 in residence).

To ease the overcrowding, a new facility was planned and construction began. Part of it burnt to the ground but work was quickly started and the new St. Joseph's Academy was opened on September 5, 1912 and included a school wing east of the main building (demolished and replaced by the present residential structure).

Enrollment peaked at over 2,000 but by the 1960s, the numbers had dwindled and the school finally closed. The education wing was demolished in 1974 and the building became a personal care facility for members of the order.<sup>3</sup>



Front (south) façade detail, 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- an important and early educational and religious facility in St. Boniface;
- its associations- its long-term connections to francophone and Roman Catholic education in St. Boniface;
- its design- an excellent example of the Classical Revival style;
- its architect- J.-A. Sénécal was a respected and important practitioner;
- its location- contributes greatly to its historic streetscape and is a landmark building in St. Boniface; and
- its integrity- its main façades continue to display many of their original elements and design.



Front (south) façade, 1978

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ENDNOTES:

- 1 Gilles Cadrin, "Sénécal, Joseph-Azarie," located in Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online, 1911-1920, Vol. XIV, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2000.
- 2 Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg: Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, 1991), p. 18.
- 3 M. Peterson, Winnipeg Landmarks, Vol. II (Winnipeg, MB: Watson and Dwyer Publishing, 1998), p. 21.