

212 RUE DUMOULIN – ST. BONIFACE FIRE HALL NO. 1
Victor W. Horwood, 1907



The distinctively-designed St. Boniface Fire Hall No. 1 emerged from an era of horsepower and steam to provide more than 60 years of protective service to its Franco-Manitoban municipality.

This 1907 structure, located immediately behind the Hotel de Ville (1906), replaced an older, outmoded fire hall during a period of significant growth in St. Boniface, including construction of major hospital, church and college facilities. Initial plans were drawn by Cecil Goddard, St. Boniface's town engineer. His structure subsequently was incorporated into a design by Victor William Horwood.

Horwood, an Englishman, arrived in Manitoba in 1904 after studies in Eastern Canada and the United States. He became provincial architect in 1911 and, as such, was involved in the design of several public buildings and in the controversy over construction of the Legislative Building in 1913-14. In private practice, he undertook projects in Ontario and Saskatchewan as well as Manitoba. The Hotel de Ville and this fire hall were among his early works.

Plans for the fire station complemented Horwood's city hall design, and, concurrently, departed from the standard Melville design then being applied to fire halls in neighbouring Winnipeg. Developed by architects-engineers William N. and Alexander R. Melville, this model was first tried in 1899 then used for more than 10 other stations between 1903 and 1914. It featured a 2½-storey, single-tower building, usually on a corner site, with a stone foundation, supporting masonry shell, and concrete basement and main floors. The ground level contained the truck room attached to a stable. Firemen's quarters were on the second floor; the third level was used for storage or remained unfinished.

Horwood, like the Melvilles, emphasized function, practicality and convenience. However, his 2½-storey structure with attached two-storey stable has distinctive exterior and interior elements. Predominant among these are his crenellated bell and larger hose-drying towers which flank a central gable on the front (north) facing. Combined with the building's stark Romanesque style, the towers are reminiscent of a medieval fortress.

The station stands on a stone foundation and has large brick supporting posts. Relatively flat buff-brick walls, broken only by rough-cut limestone at the base of the hose-drying tower and by a stone band, sills, lintels and keystones, rise to a corrugated metal roof resting on a metal cornice. The flat roof of the stable contrasts with the gabled roof of the main hall. Round and flat-headed windows provide irregular fenestration on all elevations except the façade. Doors appear at the base of each tower; three large arches around swinging doors originally provided access to the main hall but since have been altered to rectangular openings with motorized doors.

Inside are concrete floors on the basement and ground levels. The main floor has fire resistant metallic ceilings, pressed-tin wall cladding, and tongue-and-groove wainscoting. Spiral metal staircases lead to the basement and upper storeys.

The main floor held the equipment with the stable and a workshop to the rear. At the sound of an alarm, the horses would move into their traces to be quickly harnessed and driven out of the building. Municipal offices were on the second floor and an open dormitory was on the third. In emergencies, firefighters could slide down a pole to the equipment room. Up to 1919, the men

were on 24-hour duty and lived at the hall. Introduction of platoon shift systems provided shorter work weeks and the opportunity to live off-site.

The transition to motorized equipment occurred in the inter-war period. The station continued in active service until 1969 with some design modifications. Two exterior staircases and dormers were installed. Basement stone-work recently was repointed and lighting improved to provide workshop space.

The St. Boniface Museum now occupies much of the station, including a display area with fire trucks, photographs and other artifacts. Offices and a senior citizens' drop-in center also are in the building.