

210 RUE MASSON – ST. BONIFACE NORMAL SCHOOL
H.S. Griffith and J.A. Senecal, 1902



One of Manitoba's first normal schools, this two-storey brick building remained until the 1970s as a symbol of the francophone community's determination to sustain its language and culture through education.

The St. Boniface Normal School on the southwest corner of rue Masson and rue Aulneau was built to house a bilingual training program for French teachers. The program began in rented premises following the 1896-97 Laurier-Greenway Compromise authorizing bilingual instruction in the public education system as a means to still the Manitoba schools controversy.

By 1915, there were 234 teachers working with nearly 7,400 students in 126 French bilingual schools. The next year, however, the provincial government repealed this part of the Public Schools Act. Teacher training continued at the Normal School until 1923 but in English only.

The building was designed by Henry Sandham Griffith and constructed by Joseph Azarie Senecal. Estimated costs were \$11,500 to \$15,000.

After studies in his native England, Griffith emigrated to Winnipeg in 1887 where he was employed by the Northern Pacific Railroad and Land Titles Office. He opened an architectural firm in 1893, designing several structures in Winnipeg and other Manitoba centres before relocating to Saskatoon in 1906 and Victoria in 1907. His British Columbia practice prospered until a collapse in 1918. Griffith subsequently operated solely out of Vancouver where he died in 1944. Among his Winnipeg buildings were the Ryan, Mitchell and Baker blocks and the Criterion and Oxford hotels. The Quebec-born Senecal was a builder, architect and municipal politician. After farming in rural Manitoba for several years, he moved to St. Boniface in 1891 to work as a designer and contractor. His projects included St. Boniface Hospital, the St. Boniface CNR station, the Church of the Holy Ghost, and Misericordia Hospital.

The Normal School sits on a raised, rough-cut stone foundation with yellow-buff brick walls rising to a stone-capped parapet. The building originally had a truncated hip roof with side gables and a cupola that crowned the entrance porch and frontispiece.

Griffith's functional design employed various neoclassical details. Predominant among these are sets of wooden columns with Ionic capitals supporting the entrance portico. This element has a complete entablature including brackets and dentils. Above are a small window with a stone lintel and a wooden pediment embellished with ornamental shingle-work.

The symmetrical front (north) facade projects out in two stages; the east wall also has a projecting mid-section. Shallow pilasters separate bays of single and paired rectangular windows. The main-floor openings feature rough-cut stone sills and lintels; heavier lintels also appear above the transoms. Second-storey windows have smooth stone sills and brick heads. There are patterned brick belts and corbelled details above and below the second floor.

The main wooden door is flanked by side lights and miniature metal pilasters with Ionic capitals. This entire unit is topped by a large stone lintel.

In 1928, a sympathetically designed, two-storey addition was attached to the west side. The roof of the original school was flattened and a straight-line parapet was used to integrate the two structures. This line is interrupted by segmental arches over the entrance and mid-section of the addition. The latter arch supports a stone cross. On the wall below is a 1955 bronze plaque in memory of Archbishop Langevin.

The interior of the 1902 school included a library, classroom, laboratory, parlour, kitchen, dining hall and dormitory space. Alterations over the years have left little of the original materials.

The building was purchased in 1923 by Les Missionnaires Oblates (Oblate Sisters) and converted to a boys' residential school (le Jardin de l'Enfance). The expanded complex was consecrated in 1929 as du Jardin de l'Enfance Langevin. A decade later, the facility became a domestic training centre for girls known as Ecole Menagere Notre Dame. This school ceased operations by 1972.

The building was converted to housing for elderly persons and renamed Foyer Notre Dame, later Residence Langevin. It was sold by the Oblate Sisters in 1980 and subsequently connected by a one-storey addition to the 147-suite Accueil Colombien at 200 rue Masson. The 1902 structure now contains a childcare centre, offices and residential units for disabled elderly persons.