

219 BOULEVARD PROVENCHER – L'HOTEL DE VILLE DE SAINT BONIFACE
ST. BONIFACE CITY HALL
V. Horwood, 1905



From the tiny settlement of French-speaking settlers huddled together on the east bank of the Red River blossomed the vibrant town of St. Boniface. Sharing in Winnipeg's boom at the turn of the century, St. Boniface grew rapidly, rewarding itself in 1905 with a new City Hall. The structure was designed by architect Victor Horwood, with the William Grace Co. as contractors. Established firms of French-speaking architects Sénécal and Smith and a Gilbert & Co. competed for the design, and the choice of an "outsider" was not particularly popular. The subcontracting of the plumbing and heating to the firm of Dallaire and Daoust went a long way to smoothing ruffled feathers.

Horwood's design, an impressionistic water-colour sketch, proved irresistible to Council. They ignored the fact that Horwood exceeded the budget several times during the construction of the

brick building, with the finished product costing \$20,000 more than the tender price of \$40,000. The new building, however, was substantially different from the softly-hued sketch.

Horwood had come well-recommended and was certainly a competent architect, having been trained in New York and Toronto. Several excellent buildings had already been erected to his credit. Following his appointment as Provincial Architect in 1911, he designed the magnificent Law Courts on Broadway as well as the Agricultural College buildings in Fort Garry. However, it was he who approved the changes in the foundations of the new Legislative Buildings in 1913 that precipitated the construction scandal which plunged the Conservative Party into a turmoil lasting two decades.

Horwood's manipulation of the St. Boniface design, and his mismanagement of the budget, did not go unnoticed. The French papers complained that the building looked different from the plans, and that the tower was ugly. While the finished building was generally acceptable, the original tower was not and Horwood redesigned it after 1907. His skills were more evident in the gracious interior: the council chambers were magnificent, the various offices functional and comfortable and the prison cells in the basement suitably stark. A double-return staircase, pressed tin ceilings and mantelled fireplaces remain to attest to the architect's talent.

While the community served by City Hall grew, so did the range of services. During the Depression, the building became hopelessly overcrowded and, by 1950, the residences on the third floor were converted to office space. The erection of a Police Station and Law Courts Building in 1966 and a City Health Unit in 1967 relieved the congestion, while the creation of Unicity eliminated the original function of the City Hall. The building now serves as facilities for the St. Boniface/St. Vital Community Committee.