

233 BOULEVARD PROVENCHER – ST. BONIFACE HEALTH UNIT BUILDING
Étienne Gaboury, principal, Gaboury and Associates (1962-1963)



By the late 1950s, the City of St. Boniface was booming. Its economy was growing quickly, as was its population. This resulted in an increased demand for civic services and City officials began assessing their facilities. The need for expanded and modern space was particularly acute for the police and health departments. Commissioning local architect Étienne Gaboury, the City planned to construct two buildings – a health care unit and a combination police station/jail/county courthouse. It would form part of a new civic complex that would include the 1905-built City Hall, the 1907-built Fire Station and a large open greenspace on Provencher Boulevard. The Health Unit Building, 233 Provencher Boulevard, as opened in 1963 and the Police Station/Jail/Courthouse, 227 Provencher Boulevard, in November 1964.

The St. Boniface Health Unit Building and the neighbouring Police Station/Jail/County Courthouse, are excellent examples of the Brutalist Style. Developed in the post-World War II period, the style is often seen as a conscious move away from the lightness of the International Style in its use of

glass and steel in favour of a heavier, masonry-base architecture, its complex and irregular massing, rough concrete finishes, deeply inset fenestration and linear patterning. Architect Gaboury was inspired by European examples of the style but his focus on light and shadow gave the building its own unique, Prairie Regionalism. The building stands as one of a handful of Brutalist buildings, the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre, 174 Market Avenue (1970, Waisman Ross Blankstein Coop Gillmor Hanna, architects) is one of only two buildings in Canada federally designated as examples of the Style.

The one-storey rectangular building sits on reinforced concrete piles, the steel superstructure is clad in pre-cast concrete panels with exposed limestone aggregate with deep reveals, matching the cladding of the neighbouring Police Station/Jail/County Courthouse Building. The east and west façades feature projecting raised entrances and rectilinear, punched windows with defined pre-cast concrete surrounds. The north elevation features high, recessed window openings and the south façade includes storefront windows interrupted by pre-cast projecting fins.

The building's interior still boasts original layouts, built-ins and wood finishes in hallways, offices and the main ceiling (with clerestory windows).

This structure, along with the neighbouring Police Station/Jail/County Courthouse, were designed by internationally renowned and award-winning Manitoba-born architect Étienne Gaboury (1930-).

The list of his major local works would include:

St. Louis le Roi, 610 Rue Laflèche (1961)

St. Boniface Health Unit Building, 233 Boulevard Provencher (1962)

Church of the Canadian Holy Martyrs, 289 Avenue Dussault (1963)

St. Boniface Police Station and Law Courts, 227 Boulevard Provencher (1964) – Manitoba Association of Architects award winning design

Blessed Sacrament Roman Catholic Church, 710 Roanoke Street (1966)

Precious Blood Roman Catholic Church, 200 Kenny Street (1967)

Messiah Lutheran Church, 400 Rouge Road (1968)

Gaboury House, 90 River Road (1968)

Metro Plaza, Corydon Avenue at Osborne Street, 1969 (demolished)

Fire Station Number 3, 337 Des Meurons (1969)

Fire Station Number 15, Autumnwood Drive (1969)

Fire Station Number 2, 55 Watt Street (1970)

Gaboury designs continued:

Riel Statue, Legislative Grounds, 1970 (moved to St. Boniface College, 1995)
St. Boniface Cathedral, 190 Avenue de la Cathédrale (1971-1972) – List of Historical Resources
Chez Nous, 187 Avenue de la Cathédrale (1973)
Centre Culturel Franco-Manitobain, 340 Provencher Boulevard (1974)
Royal Canadian Mint, 520 Lagimodière Boulevard (1978)
Louis Riel Library, 1168 Dakota Street, 1990
Provincial Remand Centre, 141 Kennedy Street (1992)
PhysHealth Centre, Health Sciences Complex (1992)
Provincial Remand Centre, 141 Kennedy Street (1994)
St. Boniface University College Student Centre, 200 Avenue de la Cathédrale (2002)
Esplanade Riel Pedestrian Bridge & Provencher Bridge, Provencher Boulevard (2003)
Nuns' Residence, 210 Rue Masson (date unknown)

Contractors for the building were Crosier Kilgour & Partners Ltd., structural engineers and T.B.J. Kruse and Associates, mechanical and electrical engineers.

This building functioned for many years as the St. Boniface Health Unit, even as the City of St. Boniface amalgamated into the City of Winnipeg via Unicity in 1972. By the mid-1980s, Manitoba Health had taken over the facility, which became known as the St. Boniface/St. Vital District Health Office.

It has, for over a decade, been used as the administrative headquarters for the Festival du Voyageur, Western Canada's largest winter festival.

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

- A. Site:
 - i. The yard setbacks along the north, east, west and south
- B. Exterior:
 - i. The one-storey, rectangular building with a concrete and steel structural system on inset foundation walls, with a predominately flat roof and metal parapet flashing, accented by two raised and shed-sloped metal roofs above the east and west entrances that house clerestory windows, its east façade facing Rue Langevin, its south façade facing Boulevard Provencher, its west façade facing a courtyard, and the north façade facing the former jail portion of the neighbouring building
 - ii. All exterior walls clad in pre-cast concrete panels with exposed limestone aggregate

and deep reveals

- iii. The east and west façades with their lower, projecting entrances, and rectilinear, punched windows with defined pre-cast concrete surrounds
- iv. The south façade with a recessed section of storefront windows interrupted with regularly-spaced robust, pre-cast concrete projecting fins
- v. The north façade with raised and recessed ribbon window openings

C. Interior:

- i. Original wood ceiling finishes in the main portion of the building
- ii. Pre-cast concrete window fins that extend into the interior along the front (south) wall office space
- iii. The wood and glass wall finishes along the south end of the corridor and the south end staircase with wood and metal railings.