



331 ST. CHARLES STREET
ST. CHARLES ACADEMY (ROMAN CATHOLIC)

PREPARED BY PETERSON PROJECTS – DECEMBER 2009



**331 ST. CHARLES STREET
ST. CHARLES ACADEMY (ROMAN CATHOLIC)**

Date of Construction: 1906

Building Permit: N/A

Architect: Unknown

Contractor: Unknown

ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

Although set in a secluded location at the extreme west end of the city near the banks of Assiniboine River, this solid stone building is one of the finer educational structures built shortly after the turn-of-the-century.

The school is constructed of large stone blocks laid in regular courses from grade. The front (west) façade is symmetrical, with a centrally located entrance atop a set of open stairs and protected from the elements by an open stone portico. The main building includes square headed windows at grade to light and ventilate the basement and on the upper two storeys. All windows have wide heads and lug sills. The mansard roof covering the building includes pedimented dormers and an ornate cupola centrally placed on the front façade.



Front (west) and south façades, 2009

The front of the south side of the school has been altered – new cladding, a two-storey addition and new roof. The rear of this elevation is unchanged and shows the stone cladding and a pedimented dormer. The north side of the original building is now covered by an addition and the rear (east) façade is similar in design and materials to the front.

The building stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition. Additions to the north and south ends of the building have not seriously affected the original design of the main façade.

St. Charles Academy is a fine example of a Second Empire style building that became popular in Canada by 1870. This style had its beginnings in France in the early 1850s in that country's "Second Empire" (that of Napoleon III). Paris exhibitions in the 1860s popularized it in England from where it moved to the United States and Canada. It has been described as a more modernistic approach to design than Gothic or Italianate, although architects often utilized elements of the latter in Second Empire works.¹

In eastern Canada, especially southern Ontario, this style first came to prominence in public buildings (for example Government House in Toronto 1868). From government buildings the style was applied to commercial structures and finally into house designs. Here owners wanted to show their relative affluence and the style quickly became a statement of this status and power.²

This style, however, failed to become as prominent in Winnipeg and further west because of the short duration of the period's popularity. After 1880 Second Empire architecture became much rarer and only a few of this type of design were built after this date-1900 period. Therefore there are only a few western examples remaining.



Rear (east) and south façades, 2009

The most prominent detail of a Second Empire building is the mansard or double roof. While visually appealing, this roof-type also was more practical than traditional patterns because it allowed more living space on the upper level. Other features usually found on such structures are dormer windows on the steep slope, moulded cornices with decorative brackets below and a generous use of Italianate details. One- or two-storey bay windows were also often added and iron cresting was another ornamental feature. Porches were usually added to residential structures, making them asymmetrical. Rusticated stone was often used as cladding at grade.



Front (west) façade of north addition, 2009

HISTORICAL INTEREST:

St. Charles Academy was founded in 1906 as a day and residential school operated by the Oblate Sisters of St. Boniface (*Les Missionnaires Oblates de Saint Boniface*).³ It continued to offer religious education for Grades 1 to 11 until ca.1965 when it no longer offered residential services.

RECOMMENDATION TO HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE:

Under the Historical Buildings By-law, this building meets a number of important criteria:

- its historical importance- one of the oldest private educational buildings in Winnipeg;
- its associations- its long-term connections to Roman Catholic education in Winnipeg and Western Canada;
- its design- an excellent example of the Second Empire style;
- its architect- N/A;
- its location- this school, combined with the church to the west, forms a important streetscape at the south end of St. Charles Street; and
- its integrity- its main façades continue to display many of their original elements and design.



Front (west) façade, 1978

ENDNOTES:

- 1 V. and L. McAlester, A Field Guide to American Houses (New York, NY: Knopf Publishing 1984), p. 242.
- 2 C. Cameron and J. Wright, Second Empire Style in Canadian Architecture (Ottawa, ON: Parks Canada, 1980).
- 3 Historical information from the Oblate Sisters' website, <http://www.missionaryoblatesisters.ca/missionary/historical.html>, no date.