

# Multi-Faceted Past Makes St. Boniface Colorful



By BARRY MULLIN

The history of St. Boniface is as old as that of Manitoba.

It is as colorful because the pasts of both Manitoba and St. Boniface are interwoven into an historical tapestry that is one of the most interesting in Western Canada.

The history of St. Boniface is one of happiness and sorrow, growth and change, multi-lingualism and multi-culturalism. It is a history of families, religion, strong and brave men, devout men and weak men, uprisings, Indians and Metis and celebrations.

To know St. Boniface is to know and love Manitoba.

When La Verendrye paddled and portaged into Manitoba in 1738, he arrived at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers.

What he saw made his pulse quicken. Ahead lay the grassy plains, cut by rivers and creeks, criss-crossed by buffalo trails. Beyond the Prairies, the Rockies (La Verendrye didn't know that though). And beyond even those — the Pacific.

La Verendrye camped in what is now St. Boniface and established a series of forts in the area to be used as trade posts. He named the forts for the King of France and pushed on, caught up in the excitement of discovering a new land.

In the 80 years that followed La Verendrye's visit and fort establishing ven-

ture in the new Canadian west, hundreds of people came and went through the area. The forts were quickly abandoned when richer trading areas were established further west.

It wasn't until 1818 that the first stable community was established.

The first settlement was established by Bishop Joseph Norbert Provencher along the banks of the Red River on a 25-acre site allotted to him and his followers by Lord Selkirk.

One of the first things Father Provencher did was build a small wooden chapel for the cure of bois, the Indians and Metis and the German missionaries to worship in.

He selected the name St. Boniface, that of an English monk who became a German apostle, for his tiny church partly to please the German Catholics who had already established on the banks of the Seine River. The Germans were mostly mercenary veterans of the Des Meurons regiment, brought to Manitoba by Lord Selkirk to defend the Red River Settlement.

When the regiment disbanded, many of the soldiers and their families cast their lot with the Metis and farmers living in the area and began to create a more prosperous community.

It was from the humble wooden chapel that the St. Boniface Basilica, destroyed by fire in 1968, received its name. And it was from that same tiny church that the

City of St. Boniface was named.

Although St. Boniface has grown probably greater than any of its founders could have ever dreamed, it has not become so big that it doesn't remember the past.

La Verendrye Park across from St. Boniface Hospital (the first hospital in Manitoba) was named after the famous French explorer. A monument there depicts the explorer, a Jesuit priest and an Indian, the first inhabitants of the St. Boniface area.

Provencher Boulevard was named after the famous clergyman and on the St. Boniface Basilica grounds is a statue of Bishop Provencher.

In the cemetery at the front of the church a statue of Louis Riel recalls the Riel uprisings of 1869 and 1885, considered by many as significant steps for the area. Others consider it infamous. No matter how it is viewed, it was a day when the Metis of St. Boniface rose against the government in an effort to protect their rights.

Another monument in St. Boniface is to Jean-Louis Lagimodiere, a coureur de bois, and his wife, Marie-Anne Gaboury, who was the first white woman to come to the northwest.

The couple settled in what is now St. Boniface in 1806 and raised a family of 10. One of their daughters, Julie, married young Louis Riel.

From its beginning, St. Boniface has been a centre of education in the province. One of Father Provencher's duties was to establish schools for children and adults in the area.

The first school, which taught weaving, was started in 1838. The weaving industry was halted a year later when the school was destroyed by fire.

In 1844 Grey Nuns came from the east and founded the first permanent schools in the settlement. The influence of the Grey Nuns has been retained by the community because the St. Boniface Hospital was founded by them. The sisters have actively operated the hospital since it was founded in 1846.

The settlement slowly grew into a thriving community as the west opened to settlers. Early residents braved brief skirmishes with the Indians, but they weren't nearly as difficult to cope with as nature.

There were disheartening cycles of droughts, grasshoppers and floods. There were the harsh winters and the flies and mosquitoes during the hot, calm summer days.

While some of the tradesmen and storekeepers gave up on the area, it was the Sisters of Charity (now the Grey Nuns) who persevered. In 1829 the sisters established a girls' school and 10 years later started an industrial school with the help of the Hudson's Bay Company.

And the settlement grew. St. Boniface was incorporated as a municipality in 1880 and only three years later it became a town.

When it officially became a town, St. Boniface had a population of 2,015.

The city of St. Boniface was born in 1908. At that time the new city's most beautiful building was the St. Boniface Basilica. There were less than 6,000 residents, most of whom attended the church occasionally and came to love the basilica.

Like the rest of Canada, St. Boniface sent several hundred men to fight in the First World War and when the soldiers returned and started to live a normal life, the Depression struck.

However, the First World War and the Depression failed to stymie the industrial initiative of St. Boniface and its economic impact on the Winnipeg area was felt throughout Manitoba.

There was a lull during the Second World War but once the 1930s arrived, St. Boniface was on the move again.

From just 19 industrial plants in 1908, St. Boniface celebrated its 50th anniversary as a city with more than 100 manufacturing firms. Those same companies were producing more than \$130 million worth of goods annually.

The City of St. Boniface celebrated its 50th anniversary as a city with a week-long festival in June which

featured three parades, thanksgiving services in all the churches, a jubilee queen contest and a guest appearance by hockey star Maurice (Rocket) Richard.

In 1968 the city marked its 150th anniversary since it became a community.

City council under Mayor Joseph Guay (he's now an MP for the city) celebrated the 150th anniversary of St. Boniface and the city's 60th since it became a city.

"It was our city that helped open the west," said Mr. Guay at that time.

But 1968 wasn't a year of celebration for many St. Boniface taxpayers: the mill rate jumped more than 10 mills. However, several other municipalities in the Greater Winnipeg area were hit with a similar increase that year.

On a sunny July 17, Archbishop Maurice Baudoux and Archbishop George Flahiff climbed out of a big war canoe and turned the clock back 150 years for the city. Six paddlers had brought the two clergymen over the same route that Bishop Provencher had travelled a century and a half before.

When the archbishops stepped from the canoe they were greeted by then Lieutenant-Governor Richard S. Bowles.

That same year, Francois Muller took over as police chief from retiring William Russell, who was the first English-speaking police chief in the Cathedral City (it received that name also from the St. Boniface basilica) since 1882.

Mr. Muller is pronounced the French, not the German, way.

And 1968 was a year of sadness for many St. Boniface residents. That was the summer that the St. Boniface Basilica burned down.

The magnificent Tyndalstone building caught fire in the early afternoon while workmen were repairing the roof.

The blaze injured no one but caused countless thousands of dollars damage to precious relics and religious artifacts as well as millions of dollars damage to the church building.

Since 1969 St. Boniface has carried on in the finest civic tradition. City council has performed in an orderly manner, hearing protests from citizens concerned with high rise apartments, low-cost housing projects, private grievances and sev-

eral complaints against Metro.

St. Boniface began the Festival du Voyageur last year and after a lavish promotion and a fun-filled week, the festival wound up in financial difficulties.

Plans are now under way to salvage the festival by asking creditors to accept half of the monies owing them for their services during last year's celebration.

If the 1972 festival, (provided it can get off the ground) makes money, the festival committee will reimburse the creditors.

The question of whether it will continue or not is still up in the air.

However, there is one thing of which all St. Boniface residents are certain. After Jan. 1 they will all become Winnipeggers.

To many, that is a cruel blow. St. Boniface, of all the municipalities making up Greater Winnipeg, prided itself in its uniqueness.



MAYOR TURNER

## THE FINAL COUNCIL

St. Boniface was governed by a 13-man council. Members of the final city council are:

- Mayor Edward Turner
- Ald. C. John Gee
- Ald. A. A. Peterson
- Ald. G. A. Farrell
- Ald. R. E. Sparling
- Ald. Joseph E. St. Hilaire
- Ald. Michael Ludwick
- Ald. T. A. Lonergan
- Ald. M. E. Couture
- Ald. E. J. A. (Ed) Kotowich
- Ald. William J. Rumsey
- Ald. Michael Dennehy
- Ald. Raymond V. Marius.

Here was a city, founded by a Jesuit and an explorer, given life and stability from German mercenaries, named after a German apostle and with its life blood mingled with many races, that had a sense of dignity to its heritage.

Although St. Boniface was considered a French stronghold in Manitoba, it actually isn't. Two-thirds of the population speak English while only one third are French.

However, the spirit that is St. Boniface likely will live long after it is incorporated into the City of Winnipeg.

Mayor Edward Turner expressed disappointment that St. Boniface was losing its identity as were hundreds of residents.

But many people claim that nothing will change. Service clubs will continue to operate. Most of them will adopt regional names and operate in that manner instead of being referred to as the St. Boniface Lions' or Kinsmen club.

St. Boniface will live on long after it becomes part of Winnipeg because of its history.

As long as the St. Boniface Museum remains alive, the spirit of it will live on.

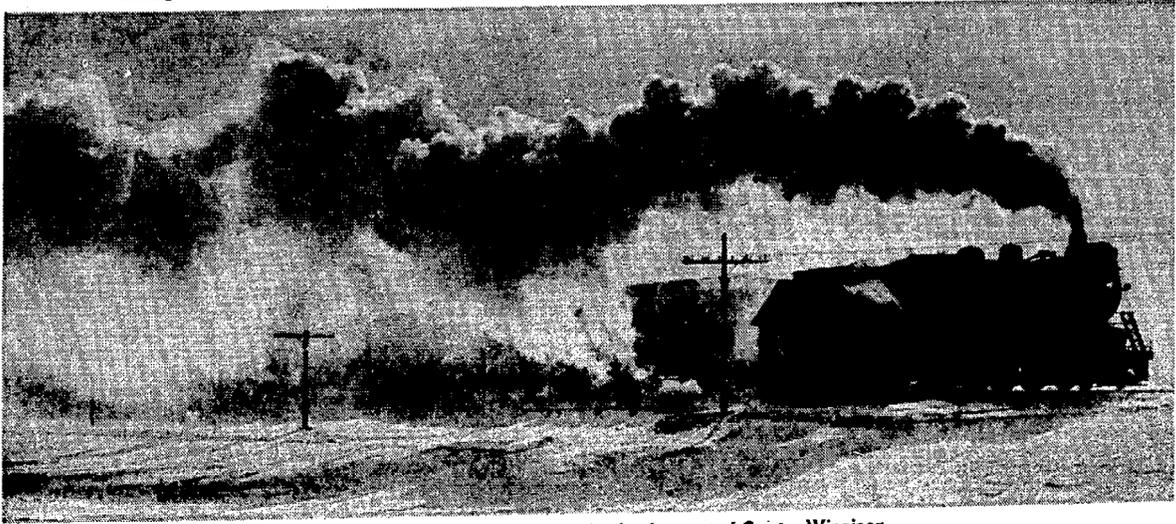
The museum, housed in one of western Canada's oldest buildings, opened in 1967. The impressive wooden structure on Tache Avenue was built for the Grey Nuns who came to the Red River settlement in 1844.

It was started in 1846 and the nuns moved into the building on New Year's Eve, 1847. It was the oldest continuously-occupied building in the West until it was vacated in 1959.

It stands as a tribute to the Metis, French-Canadian pioneers, Bishop Provencher and the settlers who helped found Manitoba.

As long as it and other links with the past remain, St. Boniface will live long after Jan. 1.

And, of course, the area will have its own community committee, which will be responsible for local services, as part of the central city government.



Railways played an important role in the development of Greater Winnipeg.



By JIM WOROBEK

The fact that Transcona was named after a railroad — the transcontinental — is fitting. It's a city that was formed by railroads and has lived by railroads.

In its infant years in the 20th century, the land to the east of Winnipeg was a monotony of level, rich agricultural land. For the most part the potential of the area was appreciated only by those who farmed it.

But in 1908, a decision that would seal the fate of Transcona was made. The Grand Trunk Pacific, operating the National Transcontinental Railway, which was later taken over by the Canadian National Railways, purchased 800 acres of land seven miles east of Winnipeg. It would house railway shops to service all Canada.

Work on the shops began in 1909. On Jan. 18, 1913, after the railway had poured \$6,000,000 into construction, the shops were officially opened for service.

Housing subdivisions and businesses sprang up on the flat prairie of the area almost overnight. The expected 5,000 railway shop employees would need shelter and services. Town boundaries far in excess of all expected requirements were established. Transcona was a budding community which, it was thought, might soon rival neighboring Winnipeg.

The Winnipeg Telegram of May 3, 1915, said, "Ris-

ing mushroom-like, almost overnight, the Town of Transcona, located seven miles to the east of the City of Winnipeg, is one of the greatest objects lessons of what western perseverance can accomplish."

The railway grew, businesses grew and the population grew, except for a slight lag during war years. Census publications show the population in Transcona was 4,185 in 1921; 5,495 in 1941; 6,752 in 1951; 14,248 in 1961, and 21,949 today.

In 1915, the assessed value of property in Transcona was \$8,654,150. Transcona also had property valued at \$4,706,720 that was totally or partially exempt from taxation. Many tax concessions had been given to attract new industry to the growing community.

Most of Transcona's social life in the early years revolved around activities associated with church. The Winnipeg Telegram reported that the first meeting of the Methodist Church was held in Peteson and Fell's cook camp in April, 1910. The congregation met for some time in a tent on Melrose Avenue before building a permanent church.

An indication of Transcona's rapid early growth came April 6, 1912 when the Town of Transcona received its charter, a scant four years after the railroad had initiated construction of the railway shops.

For many, many years, Transcona's economic health fluctuated with that of the railway. In the 1930s, during the Depression, more than 650 railway workers were laid off. The economic implications shook the town.

However, in Transcona as in other places, the railway's fortunes improved after the Depression and life returned to normal.

But it wasn't until about 1968 that Transcona lost its "one job town" image. New industries were moving into the area and a larger percentage of Transcona residents relied upon

the railway for employment. In 1958, only an estimated 40 to 45 per cent of railway shop workers were Transcona residents.

Apart from the community's sudden emergence on the prairies in the early 1900s, the city has experienced a steady if unspectacular growth. Over the years Transcona has managed to get out from under the railroad mantle and achieve a satisfying balance between industrial and residential development.

Mayor Harry Fuller, who moved to Transcona as a five-year-old boy in 1910, feels the community has a great future. He said Transcona, incorporated as a city in June of 1961, was attracting new industry and enlarging residential areas, and that the railway's interest in the community was growing.

"Last year we attracted a brewery, a fisheries plant, experienced a boom in housing and the CNR embarked on an expansion program at the shops." The railway shops program will cost about \$5 million or \$6 million, Mayor Fuller said.

The mayor who has held office for 10 years and been a council member for 17, attributes Transcona's success to the warmth and friendliness of its residents



MAYOR FULLER

and to local improvements designed to attract new residents.

Two of the local improvements, said the mayor, were a residential road-paving program and a newly started storm sewer system. He said Transcona always has been an attractive place to live but that the improvements made it even more attractive.

Mayor Fuller, who did not seek a seat on the new central city council which will govern all of Greater Winnipeg as of Jan. 1, thinks the new setup can do little to assist in the development of Transcona. He is definitely opposed to the central city concept and said "It's going to be very, very expensive for the taxpayer."

He said, with only three councillors representing Transcona, it will be much harder to implement policies that will be in Transcona's interest.

The present property values in Transcona have increased about 500 per cent since 1915. Today, the assessed value is \$38,387,600.

In general, the Transcona city council which completes its term at the end of 1971, was opposed to the central city concept. Only one alderman, Don Perry, was elected to the new council.

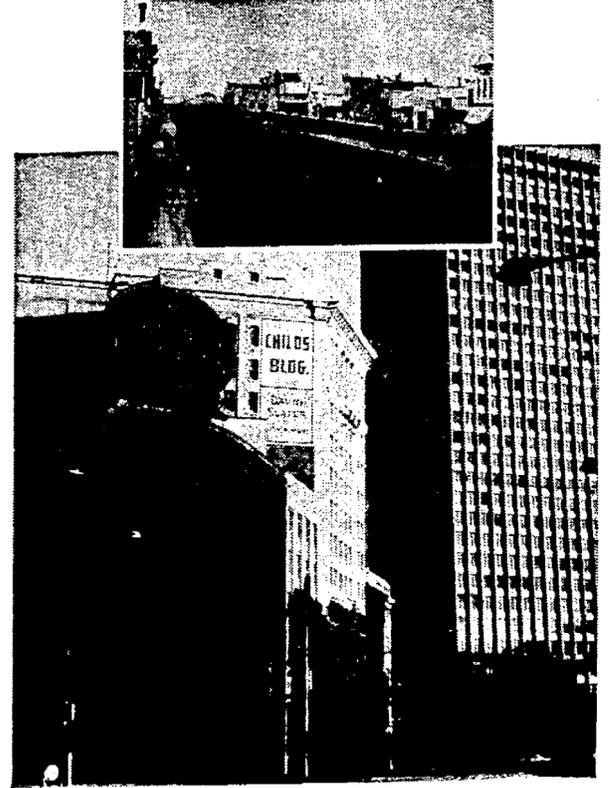
The other central city councillors for the area are Bernie Wolfe, veteran Metro councillor, and Phil Rizzuto, a semi-retired businessman.

Coun. Wolfe said in an interview it will be the responsibility of the Transcona councillors to see that Transcona receives as good treatment and services from the central city as it had before. "The present structure of government was not working. There were areas where a definite lack of co-operation was stifling the total community."

Coun. Wolfe said the primary problem confronting the central city will be to show a willingness to understand and to consider the needs and position of all the various areas under its jurisdiction.

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## THE FINAL COUNCIL

Transcona city council is made up of seven members. The final council's members are:

- Mayor Harry Fuller
- Ald. D. E. Perry
- Ald. Walter Phillip
- Ald. George E. Warshaw
- Ald. Charles J. Perry
- Ald. William Bryzinski
- Ald. Albert J. Thompson.