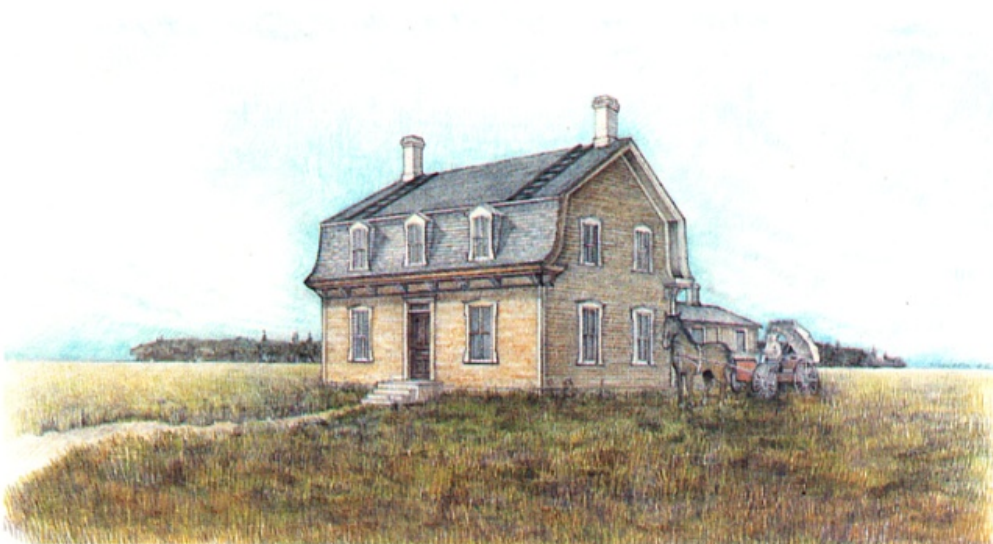


FRANCO-MANITOBAN FARM BUILDINGS

An Architectural History Theme Study



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On the Cover:

Illustration of the Benjamin Bohemier House, ca. 1880,
now at the St. Norbert Heritage Park.

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PREFACE

This overview of Franco-Manitoban farm buildings has been derived from a review of various reports and research projects developed by the Historic Resources Branch of Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Tourism, or by research consultants working on behalf of the branch.

The areas from which information has been derived include the Rural Municipality of De Salaberry and Town of St. Pierre, the Rural Municipality of Tache, the Rural Municipality of Ste. Anne, the Rural Municipality of Ritchot, the Rural Municipality of La Broquerie, the Rural Municipality of St. Francois-Xavier, the Rural Municipality of Alexander (where the community of St. Georges contains some rare examples of early Franco Manitoba farm buildings), and the Rural Municipality of Morris, where there are also still some extant examples of Franco-Manitoban farm architecture.

Many historic Franco-Manitoban communities are located near Winnipeg, and thus have suffered losses to their heritage stock because of modern suburban and recently exurban development, and growth of farm sizes that have rendered older buildings obsolete more quickly than in other areas of the province. At the same time, there are still rural areas in the communities and districts noted above that have sustained some older farm buildings, and it is certainly possible to explore those places in order to piece together the various themes and trends that define the architectural history of Franco-Manitoba farm buildings.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Franco-Manitoban farm buildings (Figure 1), including houses, barns and outbuildings, have their roots in the French region of Normandy, and of course in Quebec. It was in Quebec, where most of the French-speaking immigrants to Manitoba originated, that basic vernacular farm building types and forms were developed over the course of nearly 200 years, from the late 17th century and into the 1800s. These traditions are presented in the next section, Historical Context, as a background to developments in Manitoba. Additional information about another vital physical quality that defined pioneer Franco-Manitoban farm life—the actual layout of many farms—is also examined in this section.

Settlement

The following information has been adapted from an entry on the Manitoba Historical Society website: *The French Presence in the West, 1734-1874*, by Cornelius J. Jaenen.

The French were the first Europeans to penetrate the western region of Canada and to extend their sovereignty and their institutions onto the Prairies. As early as 1717, Zacharie Robutel de La Noue was assigned the mission of establishing posts west of Lake Superior in the interests of the fur trade and scientific speculation about a water route through the continent to the Western Sea. He got no farther than Thunder Bay, where he established the post of Kaministiquia, of which Pierre Gaultier de La Vérendrye became commandant in 1728. Six years later two members of La Vérendrye's party reached the forks of the Red and Assiniboine, the first recorded Europeans to visit this site, well-known and utilized by the original Aboriginal peoples. La Vérendrye himself arrived here on 24 September 1738 and pressed on up the Assiniboine River hoping to discover the route to the Western Sea in the upper reaches of the Mississippi-Missouri system. Meanwhile, one of his lieutenants built Fort Rouge at the Forks, but it seems to have been little more than a storage depot and



Figure 1.
A Franco-Manitoban Métis Farmsite (get photo credit). – this from St. Norbert pamphlet

was reported abandoned by 1749. Forts La Reine, Bourbon, Dauphin and Paskoyac, on the other hand, assured a flow of Western peltries to New France.

Following the cession of New France to the British Crown, the fur trade resumed in 1764, still dominated by the Montreal merchants and Canadian voyageurs. The American Revolution and loss of the territory south of the Great Lakes stimulated new activity in the Far West, especially the Athabasca country. The North-West Company, for example, had at least 900 employees at the beginning of the 19th century, most of them French-Canadians.

Métis from the upper Great Lakes region, often portrayed as francophone and Catholic, began to settle in the vicinity of the Forks. They quickly became associated with the North-West Company trade, notably as suppliers of the indispensable pemmican, and so opposed to the Hudson's Bay Company and the Selkirk settlement.

The francophones consisted of Métis and voyageurs connected with the Montreal-based fur trade. The Selkirk settlers found a heroic friend in one of these Canadian voyageurs – Jean-Baptiste Lagimodiere. Around 1805 he had married an adventurous young woman of good family and education, Marie Anne Gaboury, in her native Quebec village of Maskinonge. She followed him to the Forks, then often accompanied him on his journeys on the plains from the Missouri to the North Saskatchewan and as far west as the foothills of the Rockies. She is believed to have been the first non-Aboriginal woman to have lived here.

When Lord Selkirk arrived at Red River in July 1817, he was greeted by many of his settlers, some of the two hundred or so French and Métis settled on the east bank of the Red River who came out of neighbourly feeling, retired servants of the fur companies, some curious Aborigines, and about one hundred de Meurons and de Watteville soldiers who settled mostly among the French along the Seine river. Catholic missionaries began arriving in 1818. By 1823 the francophones numbered about 350 in the vicinity of St. Boniface, and another 450 (mostly Métis) in the

neighbourhood of Pembina who moved north that same year. As a result the population around St. Boniface nearly doubled.

The troubles of 1869-70 [the Red River Resistance, led by Louis Riel] seem to have created some sense of cohesion, of belonging to a French Catholic community, where before French Canadians and Métis were generally perceived as different “races.” The “founders” were made up of 445 families, thirty-three of them from Quebec living in St. Boniface being its social and cultural elite. Most lived in the woods of St. Vital, both banks of the river Sale westwards from St. Norbert, at Ste. Anne on the Seine, at Ste. Agathe on the Pembina trail, on the Saskatchewan trail on the north bank of the

Assiniboine around St. Charles, St. Francois-Xavier and Baie St. Paul, and at the fishing stations of St. Laurent on Lake Manitoba and Grand Marais on Lake Winnipeg.

The demographic weight of the community and its institutional development seemed to assure its role in the new province. An ethnic balance was adhered to in both the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly, in the delineation of electoral districts, in the composition of a non-partisan cabinet, and in the parish system of local government. In 1871, the provincial legislature created a dual confessional system of Protestant and Catholic public schools. St. Boniface College was incorporated to provide advanced education in French. Captain Villiers of the Quebec Regiment was given the task of organizing a provincial police force.

Unfortunately, the course of provincial history did not follow along the route sketched out at its inception. Archbishop Taché used his persuasive powers to attract a number of Quebecois to St. Boniface – men such as Joseph Royal who founded the paper *Le Metis*, Joseph Dubuc who was an effective legislator, and Marc-Amable Girard who sat on the Executive Council and was Provincial Treasurer. Among Colonel Wolseley’s soldiers who came in 1870 were volunteers such as Taillefer, Taschereau, Gagnier, Martineau, Magot, Tetu, d’Eschambault and Simard who

decided to settle in the province. Taché prevailed on the Quebec bishops to send a circular letter to all parish clergy urging settlers to come West to reinforce the French presence. Only fifteen persons came in 1871. The federal government, concerned about emigration from Quebec to the United States, gave its support to a plan to repatriate Franco-Americans in Manitoba. The Société de Colonisation du Manitoba enjoyed a modest success, attracting 441 families from New England and 991 families from Quebec.

By the late 1800s and early 1900s there were thriving French-speaking communities south and east of Winnipeg (Ste. Agathe, St. Adolphe, St. Jean-Baptiste, Ste. Anne, St. Pierre, St. Malo, La Broquerie), west of Winnipeg (Baie St. Paul, St. Eustache, Elie and St. Francois-Xavier), southeast of Portage la Prairie (Notre Dame-de-Lourdes, Mariapolis, Somerset, St. Alphonse) and along the Winnipeg River at places like St. Georges. And all of these small urban centres had surrounding farming communities with their own distinct characteristics.

Québec Agricultural Traditions

The following information has been adapted from *The Canadian Encyclopedia* on-line.

In 1617 Louis Hébert began to raise cattle and to clear a small plot for cultivation. Small-scale clearing ensued as settlers planted cereal grains, peas and Native corn, but only 6 hectares were under cultivation by 1625. Beginning in 1612 the French Crown granted fur monopolies to a succession of companies in exchange for commitments to establish settlers. The charter companies brought some settlers, who used oxen, asses and later horses to clear land, but agricultural self-sufficiency was realized only in the 1640s and marketing agricultural produce was always difficult during the French regime. In 1663 Louis XIV reasserted royal control and with his minister Colbert promoted settlement by families. Intendant Jean Talon reserved lots for agricultural experimentation and demonstration, introduced crops such as hops and hemp, raised

several types of livestock and advised settlers on agricultural methods. By 1721 farmers in New France were producing 99,600 hL of wheat and smaller amounts of other crops annually, and owned about 30,000 cattle, swine, sheep and horses.

After 1763 and the arrival of British traders, new markets opened for Canadian farm produce within Britain's mercantile system. Francophone Habitants predominated in the raising of crops, but they were joined by anglophone settlers. British subjects purchased some seigneuries, which they settled with Scottish, Irish and American immigrants. New Englanders also settled the Eastern Townships and other areas. Anglo-Canadians promoted some new techniques of wheat and potato culture through the press and in 1792 formed an agricultural society at Québec City.

While the focus of the government's promotional activity was in Upper Canada (Ontario) and the Maritimes, Lower Canada (Québec) enjoyed a modest growth of wheat exports before 1800. Nevertheless, Lower Canadian wheat production lagged far behind that of Upper Canada in the first half of the 19th century. The failure of Lower Canadian agriculture has been blamed by some on the relative unsuitability of the region's climate and soils for growing wheat, the only crop with significant export potential; soil exhaustion; and the growth of the province's population at a faster rate than its agricultural production in this period. Because there was little surplus for reinvestment in capital stock, Lower Canada was slow to develop an inland road system, and transport costs remained relatively high.

Later 19th-century Québec agriculture was marked by increases in cultivated area and productivity, and by a shift from wheat production to dairying and stock raising. From the 1860s government agents worked to educate farmers to the commercial possibilities of dairying, and agronomists such as Édouard Barnard organized an agricultural press and instituted government inspection of dairy products. Commercial dairies, cheese factories and butteries developed around the towns and railways, most notably in the Montréal plain and the Eastern Townships. By 1900 dairying was the leading agricultural sector in Québec. It was becoming mechanized

in field and factory and increasingly male-oriented as processing shifted from the farm to factories. By the end of the century 3.6 million kg of Québec cheese were being produced, an eight-fold increase since 1851.

The Survey System

A major determinant of Franco-Manitoban farm development, especially in the areas south and east of Winnipeg, concerns the river lot survey system (Figure 2).

Land in these areas, and in Winnipeg itself, was subdivided, according to the system that prevailed in Lower Canada (Quebec), into narrow lots a few hundred feet wide and several miles deep. These river lots were designed to allow farmers to take maximum advantage of the river. Farms were laid out in such a way that each family preserved a woodlot in the river-bottom forest. The house and barn were situated at the elevation of the bank, and fields, pasture and hay-land stretched back from the river.

Although some of the owners of these plots were aboriginal or Québécois, the vast majority were Métis. Most practiced a kind of mixed farming that blended small-scale production of field crops with raising livestock. The farm provided subsistence plus some cash income, which was often supplemented with firewood cutting, hired labour and, before 1870, the Buffalo Hunt.

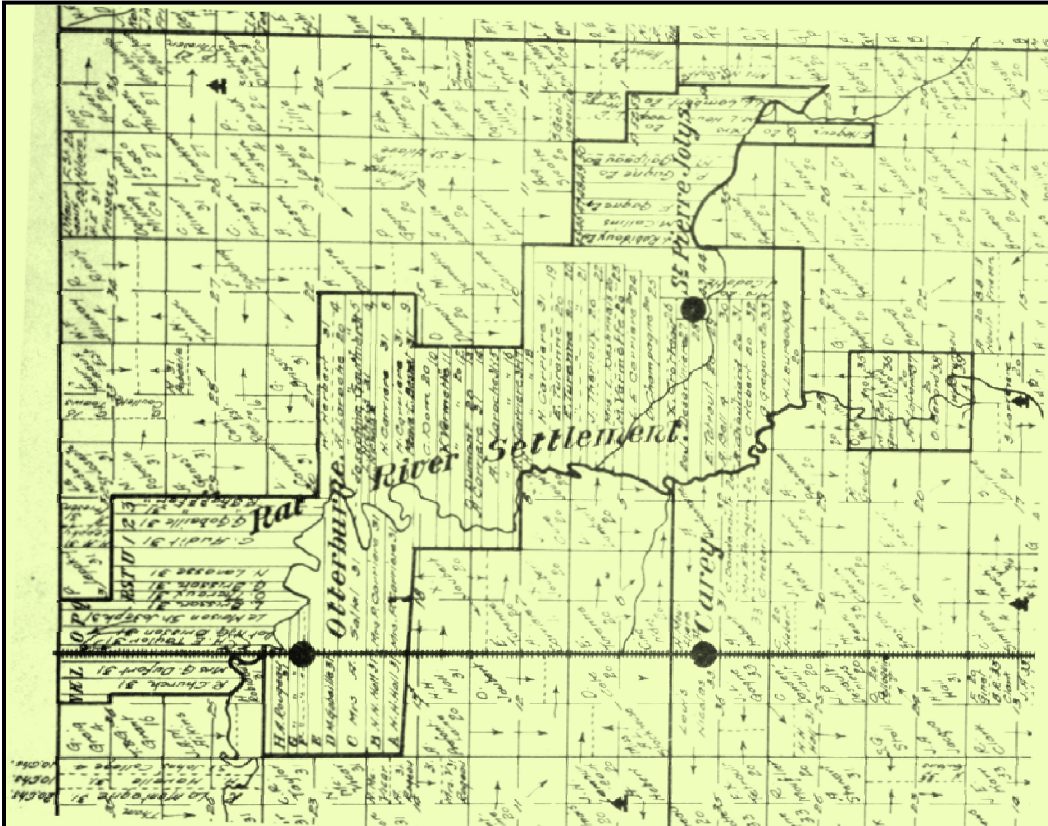


Figure 2.

The De Salaberry/St. Pierre area is one of several places in the province that possess an intersection of survey systems, including the Quebec style river-lot system and the Dominion Township survey system. Within each system, vastly different roadway and settlement patterns were formed, and the places where the two systems meet are especially notable. This map (reoriented sideways for effect, and thus with north at the left) shows how the old Quebec river lot system intersects with the more common township grid in the De Salaberry/St. Pierre area.