

Ontario Regulation 9/06 Assessment

Building Name and Address: École St-Jean-Baptiste, 755 Somerset Street West

Construction Date: 1887

Original Owner: The Ottawa Roman Catholic Separate School Board

Prepared by: Taylor Quibell, March 2023



Executive Summary

The former École St-Jean-Baptiste at 755 Somerset Street West is a three-storey 19th century stone school with Neo-Classical elements. It is situated within a cluster of stone religious buildings, south of a monastery complex at 90 Primrose Avenue East / 96 Empress Avenue, and the former Notre Dame du Rosaire Convent at 85 Primrose Avenue East. It was purpose built in 1887 to serve as an all-boys school for the Ottawa Roman Catholic Separate School Board. Today the building operates as a Nursery School and Youth Centre.

The property has cultural heritage value for its design, associative and contextual values. It meets five of the nine criteria for designation under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act.

Criterion 1	
The property has design value or physical value because it is a rare, unique, representative or early example of a style, type, expression, material or construction method.	Yes
<p>École St-Jean-Baptiste at 755 Somerset Street West is a representative example of a purpose-built 19th century stone Roman Catholic school with Neo-Classical elements. Typical of this style, the building features a balanced façade with projecting bays, pedimented entrance with doric columns, stone sills and lintels, and stone banding above the third storey.</p>	

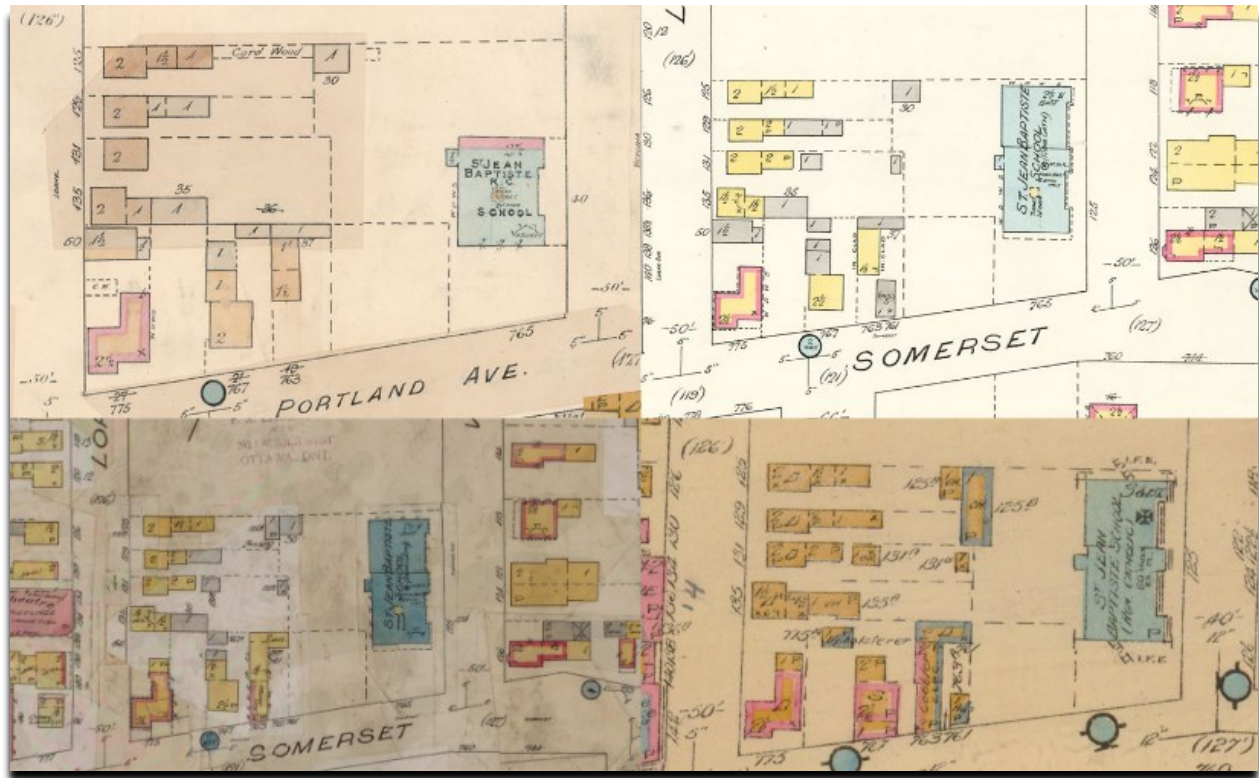
École St-Jean-Baptiste at 755 Somerset Street West is a three-storey stone building, purpose built for the Ottawa Roman Catholic Separate School Board as an all-boys-stone school with Neo-Classical elements. Typical of this style, the building features a balanced façade with projecting bays, a pedimented entrance with doric columns, stone sills and lintels, and stone banding above the third storey. A name stone in the central bay between the second and third storeys reads out the name of the school, “École St-Jean-Baptiste”, and a stone cross is situated at the top of the façade, symbolizing its original use as a school.

The building has undergone substantial changes since its initial construction in 1887. The original structure was designed in the Second Empire style with Classical ornamentation and included a mansard roof, attic, and side porch. The Second Empire style was most popular in the 1870s and was most easily recognized by its mansard roof. ¹ Between, 1906 and 1928, the building expanded to accommodate the growing student intake.² In 1906, a substantial addition was designed by Felix Maral Hamel extending the building north, and in 1928 major alterations designed by Maurice Champagne were executed which appears to have included the removal of the mansard

¹ Canada's Historic Places (2019)

² Les Frères Des Écoles Chrésiennes (1937).

roof and the side porch.³ The removal of the mansard roof was common in the 1920s and 1930s as many Second Empire buildings were at risk of fire in their mansard roof.⁴



Fire Insurance Plans, L to R 1901, 1912, 1922, 1948

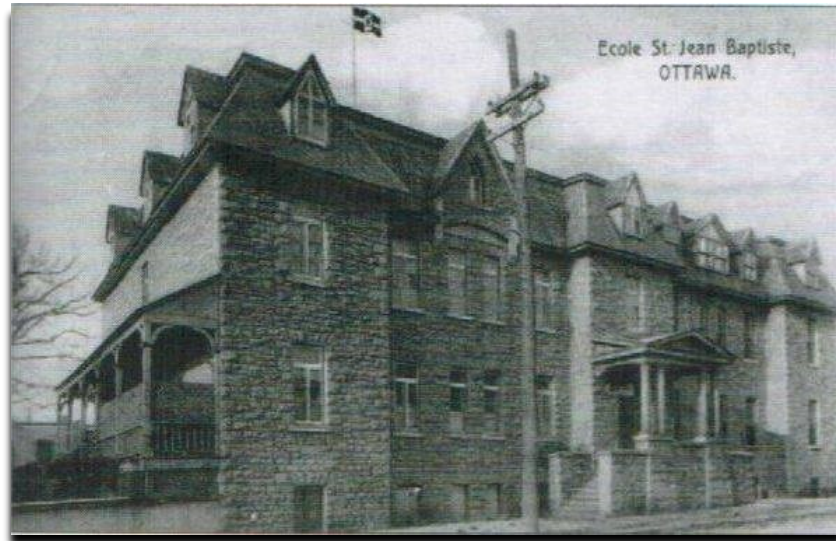
Due to the alterations circa 1928, the building no longer displays characteristics of the Second Empire style but continues to display classical elements. Attributes of the Neo-Classical style include the balanced façade and massing, portico entrance with doric columns, stone sills and voussoirs, and stone banding above the third storey.

Neo-Classical architectural influences were common in late-19th and early 20th century French Roman Catholic schools and institutional buildings in Ottawa including École Guigues at 159 Murray Street (c. 1864), St. Charles School at 24 Springfield Road (1910), École St-Pierre at 353 Friel Street (1906), however these buildings are red brick.

³ "Champagne, Maurice | Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada," n.d. / "Hamel, Felix Maral | Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada" (n.d.)

⁴ "HistoricPlaces.ca - Second Empire Architecture" (2019)

As a neo-classical stone building, this building is more comparable to the Deschâtelets Building at 60 Oblats Avenue (1885).



Photograph from Saint-Jean Baptiste d'Ottawa, 1872-1997 125eme Anniversaire. Additional renovations and restoration work has been completed since 2013 included foundation repointing, restoration of the façade and window opening changes.⁵



Criterion 2	
The property has design value or physical value because it displays a high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit.	Yes

⁵ Porter (2020)

As a stone building constructed using the standard construction methods of the time, École St-Jean-Baptiste displays a standard degree of craftsmanship in its architectural design and elements.

Criterion 3

The property has design value or physical value because it demonstrates a high degree of technical or scientific achievement.

No

As a stone building constructed using the standard construction methods of the time, this building does not display a high degree of technical or scientific merit.

Criterion 4

The property has historical value or associative value because it has direct associations with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization or institution that is significant to a community.

Yes

École St-Jean-Baptiste has historical and associative value due to its direct associations with the development of French language education in Ontario through the fight against Regulation 17. This building represents the notorious struggle for the right to teach francophone children in their first language. The school was part of the Institute of Christian Schools and run by the Ontario Christian Brothers, also referred to as De La Salle Brothers. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the Christian Brothers were a significant organization in the community that played a crucial role in the development and expansion of Ontario's publicly funded Catholic separate school system. However, it must also be acknowledged that, since the 1980s, a difficult legacy of harsh discipline, physical and sexual abuse by many members of the order across North America has emerged.

École St-Jean-Baptiste was owned and constructed in 1887 by the Ottawa Roman Catholic Separate School Board to serve as an all-boys Catholic school. The educators

at the institution were the Ontario Christian Brothers, also referred to as De La Salle Brothers. The Christian Brothers originated as an Irish order of Brothers and quickly expanded worldwide with thousands of members and institutions. According to the mission statements available, the Christian Brothers were dedicated to providing Christian education to boys and played a crucial role in the development and expansion of Ontario's publicly funded Catholic separate school system.

The Christian Brothers arrived in Ontario circa 1851 and Ottawa in circa 1864, teaching at this location until the 1960s. Their growth in the first hundred years of operation in Canada was substantial, there were 920 Brothers in Canada teaching nearly 35,000 pupils in 79 schools. By the early 1960s, there

were about 1,300 Brothers in Quebec and Ontario⁶.



1914 City of Ottawa Directory

In Ottawa, the Christian Brothers were divided along linguistic lines, with the French language institutions being estranged locally and provincially, making them the first male congregation to split along linguistic divisions. The majority of Brothers in Ontario advocated for English-language institutions, believing that the Catholic education in French-language schools was inadequate with concerns about textbooks, methods, and the Brother's qualifications, believing that Quebec trained Brothers did not have the right to teach in Ottawa's Separate schools⁷. Many of the French-Catholic boys schools taught by Christian Brothers were involved in advocating for a separate school and rallied together to protest against English Brothers and Regulation 17.

École St-Jean-Baptiste was one of the schools affected by Regulation 17. In 1912, the Ontario government enacted Regulation 17, which made English-language instruction mandatory beyond the first two years of elementary school, even if the school was French or Catholic⁸. The regulation discriminated against French-Catholic communities which were perceived to be a threat to Ontario's English-Protestant institutions. This regulation limited the growth of Franco-Ontarien school communities, until major

⁶ The Canadian Encyclopedia (2009)

⁷ Wilcox (2015)

⁸ University of Ottawa (2023)

resistance from the public (most notably by families enrolled at École Guigues in Lowertown), forced the province to repeal restrictions on French-language instruction.⁹

École St-Jean-Baptiste was also involved in the fight against Regulation 17. When it was not possible to have classes in the school itself, Reverend Peres Curé temporarily housed students in the presbytery, in the basement of the church (most likely 90 Primrose Avenue East) and in the old fire station on Somerset Street.¹⁰ École Saint-Jean-Baptiste closed its doors in 1914 for seven months in accordance with the directives of the ACFÉO.¹¹

The school closed circa 1975, remaining abandoned for three years.¹² The school closed down around this time due to a general population shift to the suburbs. The Roman Catholic board itself has closed 27 schools between 1968 to 1978.¹³ The City of Ottawa purchased École St-Jean-Baptiste in the fall of 1977, and an extensive project commenced to convert the former school into the Dalhousie Community Centre and Nanny Goat Nursery. Today, 755 Somerset Street West is one of six former francophone schools remaining in Ottawa which were affected by Regulation 17, and the only one built out of stone.¹⁴

Although the Ottawa Christian Brothers made significant contributions to Ontario's Catholic education system and fought against Regulation 17, research reveals a history of harsh discipline, as well as instances of physical and sexual abuse associated with the Christian Brothers^{15,16,17,18}.

⁹ Einkaran (2020)

¹⁰ Les Frères Des Écoles Chrétiennes (1937)

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ottawa Journal(1978)

¹³ The Ottawa Citizen (1978)

¹⁴ Pelletier et Elizondo (2020)

¹⁵ "Brothers of the Christian Schools" (n.d.)

¹⁶ McCann (n.d.)

¹⁷ "Victims of Abuse at Ontario School Get \$1-Million Settlement" (2004)

¹⁸ Cooke (2021)

Criterion 5	
The property has historical or associative value because it yields, or has the potential to yield, information that contributes to an understanding of a community or culture.	Yes
<p>The property yields information that contributes to a greater understanding of the Catholic francophone community in the area surrounding Primrose Hill, which developed circa 1872 when a temporary church was constructed at 90 Primrose Avenue East. The church was likely constructed to address a need for a French Catholic place of worship on this side of the Ottawa River. The subsequent expansion of the church, and the demand for additional services such as the construction of École St-Jean-Baptiste at 755 Somerset Street West, reflects a growing Catholic francophone community in this area in the late 19th century.</p>	

Criterion 6	
The property has historical value or associative value because it demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer or theorist who is significant to a community.	No
<p>While it is likely that Georges Bouillon architect of the Ottawa diocese at the time was the architect for this building, there is no confirmation that this is true. Other significant architects including Felix Maral Hamel and Maurice Champagne were responsible for additions and major alterations at 755 Somerset Street. However, the building as a whole is not the sole works of these architects and thus is not precisely associated with these architects. Therefore, this criterion is not met.</p>	

Georges Bouillon, architect of the Ottawa diocese between 1878 and 1891 was best known for his Neo-Gothic chapel for the Rideau Street convent in Ottawa (now demolished but reassembled in the National Gallery of Canada) and the House of

Studies at 90 Primrose Avenue East. He was also known in Ottawa for his influence in Bytown and early Ottawa¹⁹.

The 1907 addition is representative of local architect Felix Maral Hamel, who completed works for the Roman Catholic diocese in Ottawa including several schools in Hull and Ottawa between 1870 and 1907.²⁰ He was the son of a prominent civil engineer Felix Hamel. He went to school at a seminary in Quebec City and was first employed by the Intercolonial Railway. He moved to Ottawa to work for the Department of Public Works in the 1870s and then opened his own practice in 1897 as an engineer and architect. The former École St-Pierre is one of five schools designed by Hamel in the Sandy Hill and Lowertown neighbourhoods.²¹ The 1928 alterations which included the removal of the mansard roof and porch is representative of Maurice Champagne. Champagne was responsible for a major addition at the Rideau Street Roman Catholic convent.²²

Criterion 7	
The property has contextual value because it is important in defining, maintaining or supporting the character of an area.	Yes
<p>As a prominent stone building on Somerset Street West, facing Empress Avenue, this property is important in defining the character of the area surrounding Primrose Hill.</p> <p>Primrose Hill is an area within West Centretown, bounded generally by Upper Lorne Place, Primrose Avenue East, Bronson Avenue and Somerset Street. At the highest point, stands a complex of religious buildings, surrounded by residential properties many of which were constructed in the late 19th early 20th century.</p> <p>The cluster of religious buildings including École St-Jean-Baptiste, the monastery complex (90 Primrose Avenue East and 96 Empress Avenue) and a former convent (85 Primrose Avenue East) stand as tangible evidence of this area earliest educational</p>	

¹⁹ “Bouillon, Rev. Georges | Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada,” n.d.

²⁰ “Hamel, Felix Maral | Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada” (n.d.)

²¹ City of Ottawa 2023

²² “Champagne, Maurice | Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Canada,” n.d.

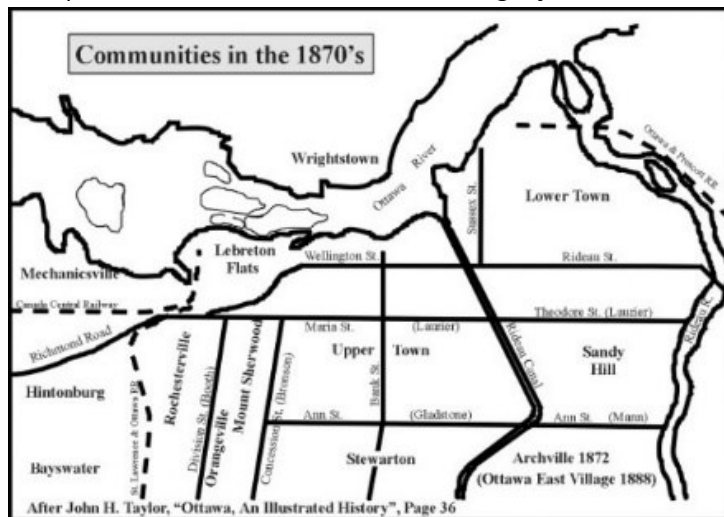
and religious landscape and is one of several stone buildings in the immediate vicinity that reflect the historic French-Canadian character of the area.

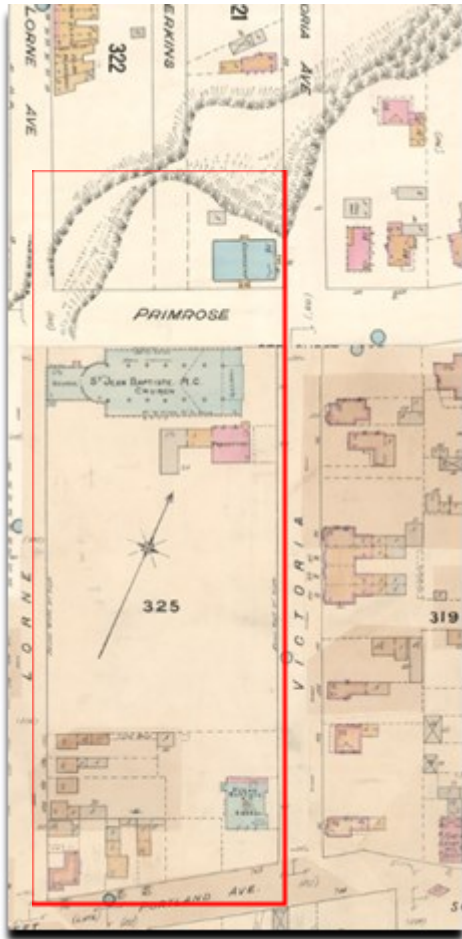
755 Somerset Street West is located in West Centretown in the Dalhousie neighbourhood. This neighbourhood is bounded by the Ottawa River to the north, Carling Avenue to the south, Bronson Avenue to the east, and the O-Train Trillium line and Bayswater Avenue to the west. West Centretown includes the neighbourhoods of LeBreton Flats, Little Italy, the Chinatown, the Glebe Annex, Dalhousie, and Chaudière and Victoria islands.

The colonial settlement of this area, now known as West Centretown is associated with the development of LeBreton Flats. West Centretown was predominantly inhabited by French and Irish prior to the Second World War, with consistent Chinese, Italian and Eastern European immigration both before and after the war.

Lumberyards and rail yards first defined the area and by 1844, a suspension bridge along Booth Street connected Ottawa and Hull. Houses, hotels, factories and workshops appeared, and the population steadily increased. Many labourers lived in LeBreton Flats, Rochesterville and in Mount Sherwood (the area south of LeBreton Flats). Both areas soon became largely middle-class. Rochesterville and Mount

Sherwood experienced a brief construction boom in the 1870s and was annexed to Ottawa in 1889³³. Concurrently, the religious properties in this area were constructed to likely address a need for French Catholic institutions for the increased population on this side of the Ottawa River.





Left 1901 Fire Insurance Plan, Right: 1912 Fire Insurance Plan



1948 Fire Insurance Plan

These religious and educational institutions including 85 Primrose Avenue were constructed for Roman Catholic religious use in the late 19th century and early 20th century in the area in West Centretown known as Primrose Hill. The religious properties include Église de Saint-Jean-Baptiste and seminary (90 Primrose Avenue East and 96 Empress Avenue), and Our Lady of the Rosary Convent (85 Primrose Avenue East). These properties are located along Empress (formerly Victoria) Avenue from Somerset Street West to north of Primrose Avenue on top of Primrose Hill.

Primrose Hill is an area within West Centretown, bounded generally by Upper Lorne Place, Primrose Avenue East, Bronson Avenue and Somerset Street. At the highest point, of the hill stands this cluster of religious buildings, surrounded by residential properties. The residential properties range in style and construction date, some predating the monastery and others constructed post religious institutions.



1928 Aerial Image

In 1900, this area faced change when a fire broke out in Hull. High winds spread the flames across the Ottawa River from the Chaudière mills south toward Dows Lake. The fire was devastating – LeBreton Flats and much of Rochesterville were completely destroyed. The escarpment known as Primrose Hill prevented the southerly spread of the fire to upper Lorne Avenue and the religious properties. The following is an excerpt from a book written by Sister Paul-Émile of the Grey Nuns Convent:

Upon finishing their meal, the nuns become aware of a fiery western wind, sweeping smoke with it. Soon afterwards, flames rise high on the Hull side. The whole city is ablaze! In less than an hour, sparks and cinders are flying over the Ottawa River. It is the beginning of the destruction of the lower part of town, the Flats, which spans to the base of Primrose Hill. It seems as if the tip of the hill might give way. With great difficulty, measures are taken to stop the roofs of the houses from catching fire. The Father, who is Rector of the University of Ottawa, sends a squad of students to rescue the convent, which is located on the edge of

*the tip of the point. The nuns post pictures of Mother d'Youville on some of the windows and on the outside doors. Windows on the first floor warp from the heat but do not break. Throughout the afternoon, firefighters and students go to extraordinary efforts to stop the flames from burning the convent's roof and walls, as well as those of the neighbouring homes. By six o'clock, the wind has died down, and the danger has subsided. We start, once again, to breathe.*³⁴

Today, West Centretown's landscape is unified by historical circumstance. This urban area contains many working-class streetscapes as well as a variety of building types constructed in several distinct periods of the late 19th century early 20th century. Today, the architectural character of West Centretown is defined by buildings built before and after the Great Fire of 1900.³⁵



Google Maps (October 2020). View of Primrose Hill, including the Notre Dame du Rosaire Convent and Saint-Jean-Baptiste Church from Empress Avenue North leading to Lebreton Flats.



Google Maps (April 2019). View of Primrose Hill, including Saint-Jean-Baptiste Church from Lorne Avenue. ²³

<i>Criterion 8</i>	
The property has contextual value because it is physically, functionally, visually or historically linked to its surroundings.	Yes
<p>The property is physically, functionally, visually, and historically linked to its surroundings. The property is part of a cluster of religious buildings including a convent (85 Primrose Avenue East) and a monastery complex (90 Primrose Avenue East and 96 Empress Avenue). Visually, these properties are all large limestone buildings that display and represent stone religious architecture. Together, historically, they are functionally and physically linked due to their proximity, construction dates, and ecclesiastical use.</p>	

****See Criteria 7**

Criterion 9	
The property has contextual value because it is a landmark	No
<p>École St-Jean-Baptiste is an early stone building located on Somerset Street but does not have contextual value as a landmark.</p>	

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