



Democratizing Heritage Conservation

The Archi10 App

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1.0 Introduction

Public awareness of heritage buildings is an important factor in the conservation of heritage resources. In the City of Winnipeg, officially adding a building to the city's list of heritage resources is a complex process that requires the support of numerous actors. Grassroots movements have long driven heritage conservation in Winnipeg. In fact, some of city's buildings were successfully added to the list of heritage resources thanks to the effort of concerned residents and neighbourhood organizations. This document demonstrates how Archi10, a free mobile app, allows users to go on a self-guided tour along Winnipeg Transit's No. 10 route which passes by some of the city's most architecturally significant buildings and neighbourhoods. This app has the potential to inspire more Winnipeggers to join in the heritage conservation conversation.

"Frequently passed over, Winnipeg might be one of the most architecturally interesting cities in North America. Once known as the 'Chicago of the North,' the capital of Manitoba, Canada, has the largest collection of heritage buildings in North America: an unexpected benefit to slow growth."

- Gardiner, 2020

2.0 Background and Context

2.1 Awareness of Heritage Sites

Awareness about heritage sites and buildings is in an interesting ‘chicken-and-egg’ situation. Heritage awareness is a critical factor in the preservation of tangible heritage such as buildings and sites. People who are more aware of heritage buildings and sites are more likely to have positive attitudes toward conservation. However, people who have visited historic sites and buildings are the ones who are more likely to be aware of heritage preservation and not the ones who do not visit sites (Nyaupane & Timothy, 2010).

Research suggests that knowledge about history is declining, and poor wayfinding and interpretative signage contribute to “mindless visitors” (Nyaupane & Timothy, 2010, p. 236) who are detached from the experience of engagement with a historic place. Improvements in ways to deliver knowledge and engagement can be enhanced by subsequent reinforcement. Nyaupane & Timothy (2010) argue, multiple visits to historic sites and buildings can help people become more aware of the sites than just a single visit.

2.2 Urban Conservation

Urban conservation was formalized as a response to urban renewal projects in the United States, which resulted in the demolition of historic sites across the country in the name of rationality in urban planning. This movement was born from community engagement and community organizing as a response to the policies that were “destroying the urban fabric and character of historic districts.” (Garcia, 2018, p. 520) Thus, urban conservation is rooted in the critical response of preservationists to the Rational Planning movement which grew in popularity across North America in the 1950s. Under a rationalistic approach to planning, planners demolished historic structures to eliminate blight and separated land uses with the intention of creating healthier, safer, and more efficient cities. However, rational planning has also led to the demolition of thousands of historic sites (Garcia, 2018).

Several successful examples of community participation at the grassroots level such as community-led lobbying efforts have been documented and studied. For example, in 2013, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) released their plan to shut down 54 failing and underutilized schools to help address the city’s budget deficit. One of these schools is the Alexander Von Humboldt School, a historic building in a gentrifying neighbourhood. In response, the Community As A Campus (CAAC), a grassroots organization, stepped in and proposed to redevelop the school into a teacher’s village. A mixed-use development provides affordable housing for school teachers, offices spaces for educational organizations, and spaces for community-related uses (Garcia, 2018).



Figure 1. A render of the Teacher’s Village

The CAAC understood that they needed to make a winning proposal to the CPS by finding a compatible use, drawing political support and providing an acceptable monetary offer. The CAAC worked closely with the local alderman to ensure that their plan for the school was in line with the community’s needs. They also brought in a non-profit developer and lender who was able to bring in \$3.1 million for the project. Because of this, the CAAC won the bid, despite being outbid by two other parties. The Chicago Board of Education chose the proposal because their plan provided the highest value and it aligned with the community’s wants and needs (Garcia, 2018).

Similarly, the DC Preservation Network in Washington, DC, a collaborative group comprised of local conservation advocates, community organizers, planners, and other stakeholders was formed in part to address how planners lack multisector data that can provide a complete picture of housing issues. The DC Preservation Network is an important example of the ways in which sharing data and information between actors has created a more inclusive process in solving complex urban issues such as affordable housing. However, more importantly, the Network has helped address some of the distrust between actors such as community groups and government agencies (Howell, 2018).

2.3 Winnipeg's Built Heritage

In the mid-1960s, the city commissioned a study called "City of Winnipeg-Cultural Centre-Renewal Scheme." Had the plan been completed, about 78% of the buildings in the Exchange District would have been demolished because they were in "poor or very bad condition." (Turner, 2014, p. 70). The project sought to redevelop 180 acres of land in the East Exchange, see "Renewal Area 3" in figure 2. (Warkentin & Vachon, 2010).

The Exchange District, now a national historic site, was saved because the redevelopment scheme could not be sold to any developers at the time. Indeed, one of Winnipeg's most popular neighbourhoods today may not exist had it not been for slow economic growth in the city. "...luckily we moved in Winnipeg so slowly all we got was city hall and the concert hall, that precinct." (Bellamy, quoted in Turner, 2014, p. 70). A deep and long-lasting economic recession in the early 1970s forced national and international real estate firms to retract their planned investments (Warkentin & Vachon, 2010). One of the economic downturn's effects was a marked change in the way urban renewal should be undertaken. The focus shifted from the "big projects and the bulldozer approach" (ibid, p. 65) to small projects, rehabilitation, and restoration.

Of the planned buildings, only the Centennial Concert Hall, Planetarium, and the Manitoba Museum were built in the Exchange (Bernhardt, 2018). Like other cities, the foundations of the heritage preservation movement in Winnipeg is grounded in the tug-of-war between preservationists and modernists. While the Rationalism that underlined the Modernist movement provided the impetus for the demolition of some of Winnipeg's heritage structures in the middle of the 20th century, Modernist architecture has become an important part of the character that makes Winnipeg's architectural character unique.

The story of Winnipeg's architectural heritage cannot pit opulent Beaux Art buildings of the gilded age against the rational structures of the modernist era. Some of Winnipeg's important landmarks today came from the Modernist movement.



Figure 2. Winnipeg's proposed renewal areas

These examples demonstrate that effective urban conservation necessitates community leadership and engagement. However, both examples underscore the importance of gaining the support of local politicians, funders, and other decision-makers. As the CAAC demonstrated, it involves several important actors to make an impact; however, heritage conservation starts from the grassroots.

3.0 Case Summary

3.1 Grassroots Heritage Conservation in Winnipeg

Concerned grassroots advocates have long driven architectural heritage conservation in Winnipeg. In the 1980s, Elizabeth Fleming and Patricia Gove, two neighbourhood residents, led the campaign to save the Uptown Theater on Academy Road. The pair went door-to-door in “bitterly cold weather” (Fleming & Gove, 1988, p.10) to secure 270 signatures on their petition. In the end, the movement that the pair spearheaded successfully saved the theatre from being turned into a strip mall. They share how networking was one of their keys to success. “Prepare to be on the telephone for hours! The more people you talk to, the more ideas you get; the more word gets around, the more feedback you receive... it’s a networking process because once you consult people, they become interested and will discuss the issue with friends and colleagues.” (ibid, p. 13)

The movement to preserve architectural heritage by concerned individuals and grassroots movements continues to be a strong tradition to this day. In January 2022, the city elevated two modernist buildings by Étienne Gaboury to heritage status. Community members came out to support the designation of 227 and 233 Provencher Boulevard (figure 3) as City of Winnipeg historical resources. Community members including architects, professors, archivist, representatives of civic organizations, and teachers spoke at the public meeting and provided written submissions in support of this designation.

3.2 The Archi10 App

Grassroots support for heritage conservation can take not only reactive (such as speaking at a public meeting), but proactive approaches as well. Launched in November 2021, Archi10 is a free bilingual app that takes riders on Transit Route No. 10 on a self-guided tour of three historic Winnipeg neighbourhoods—Wolseley, Downtown, and St. Boniface. The app provides information about some of the city’s most important historical and modern architecturally

significant buildings. The GPS-activated app allows users to track where they are on the route (figure 4). When they are near selected points of interest, users may choose to read or listen to prerecorded information about the featured buildings.

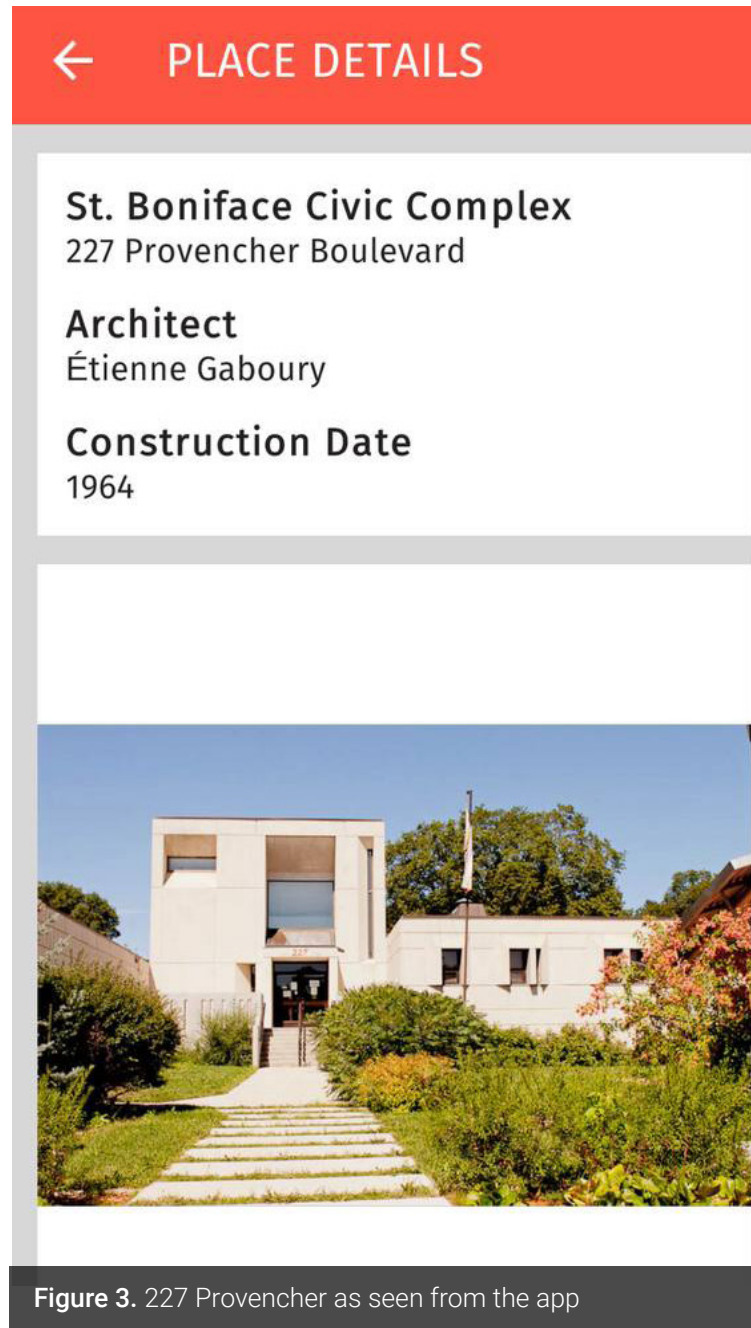


Figure 3. 227 Provencher as seen from the app

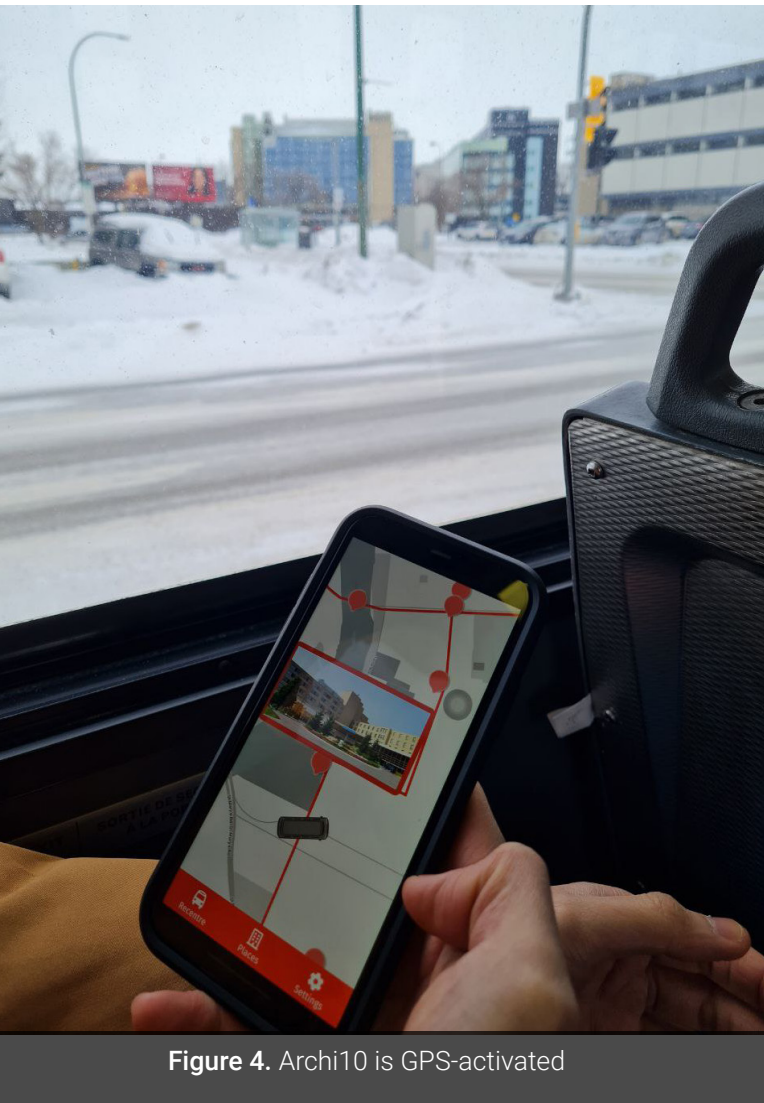


Figure 4. Archi10 is GPS-activated

The app was produced with funding support from City of Winnipeg, Province of Manitoba, Winnipeg Arts Council, the Winnipeg Foundation, the University of Manitoba and Harlyn Thompson (Winnipeg Architecture Foundation, n.d.).

The full tour takes about an hour, but people have the option to take segments of the tour as they please. Susan Algie (in Wasney, 2021 para. 15), Director of the Winnipeg Architecture Foundation shares “if we get people looking, not just at fancy buildings, but at buildings in their own neighbourhood, it helps to educate them to demand the best designs... I think it’s very important for people to think about their cities and what they look like and the things we value in them.”

She said she got the idea for the app because she enjoys architecture, as well as riding the bus. (Algie, in Rosen 2022) According to Algie, the objective is to help people learn about the city, and she hopes that people will appreciate Winnipeg’s rich collection of buildings. The app is not exclusively tied to the bus service. Users may also choose to follow along by walking or cycling through the route. While the app promotes heritage conservation and education, it also helps that it also encourages bus ridership and active transportation in the city.

4.0 Lessons Learned

Archi10 has the potential to harness one of the city’s most valuable assets—its people. Integrating heritage conservation values with user-driven technology is a new and underexplored area, yet it has the potential to be a transformative tool. As illustrated in the successful preservation of the Uptown Theatre and the buildings on Provencher, the primary catalyst was the people of Winnipeg getting together to have their voices heard. Winnipeggers have proven repeatedly that everyday folk can band together to save Winnipeg’s heritage buildings.

Nyaupane & Timothy’s (2010) research showed how awareness is one of the most important factors in heritage conservation. As they pointed out, visiting heritage sites increases awareness, but people who visit heritage sites are already aware of built heritage and care about

heritage preservation. The app has been able to bridge one of the most fundamental problems of building people’s ‘awareness’ of heritage sites. Instead of relying on people visiting heritage sites, heritage sites are brought to the No. 10 commuters. Additionally, since Archi10 is on a fixed route, people can tune in repeatedly. As Nyaupane & Timothy (2010) point out, people are more likely to be more aware and, thus care about heritage conservation if they see and learn about heritage sites in the city repeatedly.

Conclusion

Winnipeg is a city with extreme heat, and extreme cold and snow. This is where the app shines. One could still enjoy the sights and learn about the city even in equally uncomfortable cold, whiteout days or sweltering summer days which Winnipeg is both known for. Despite the challenging weather conditions, users can comfortably learn and enjoy the some of the best architectural gems Winnipeg has to offer.

An Architectural Digest article (Gardiner, 2020) describes the city as “oft overlooked... a cultured metropolis with an abundance of interesting architecture.” The article notes that Winnipeg is home to both Beaux-Arts heritage buildings and innovative contemporary architecture. The contrasting styles that sit side by side make Winnipeg’s architecture unique. “Where else in Canada, or the world, can you see modernist architecture ‘cheek-to-jowl’ with heritage buildings as can be found in Winnipeg’s city centre?” (Algie, quoted in Turner, 2014, p.59)

*“Public interest in the City of Winnipeg’s heritage legacy runs deep, and Winnipeggers have demonstrated their passionate support for the conservation...”
(City of Winnipeg, 2021, p. 156)*

The waves of immigration and the peaks and troughs of its economy shaped Winnipeg’s architectural styles. Indeed, the story of Winnipeg and its people is difficult to disentangle from its built environment. So, it is only fitting that the power to save Winnipeg’s built heritage can often be attributed to advocacy work done by the city’s greatest assets—its people. One of the most important steps in preserving the Uptown theatre was simply getting people interested. And as the research discussed earlier has suggested, it all starts with awareness. Achi10 is a platform that can create awareness, spark ideas, and inspire more Winnipeggers to join in the heritage conservation conversation.

5.0 References

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- Figures**
- Figures courtesy of the author unless otherwise indicated
- Cover Photo. *Archi10 App Map*. [image].
- Figure 1. RBH Group via Book Club Chicago (n.d.). *A rendering of the Teachers Village Project, looking south on Rockwell Street* [image]. <https://blockclubchicago.org/2020/01/15/plan-to-convert-shuttered-von-humboldt-school-into-apartment-complex-now-one-step-away-from-final-approval/>
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- Figure 3. Archi10 App. *St. Boniface Civic Complex* [screenshot]