

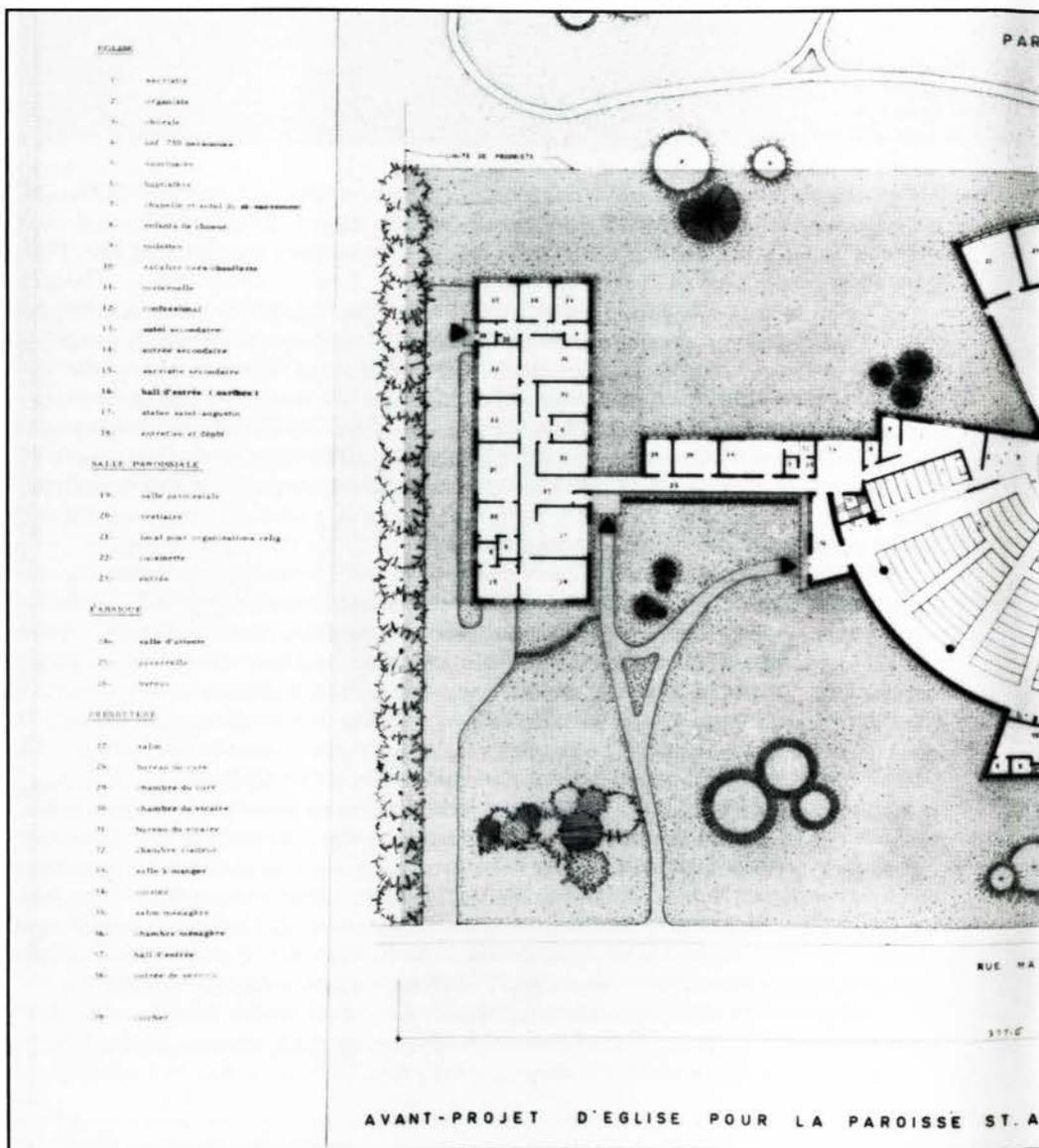
# Pierre Dionne, Architect:

Pierre-G. Dionne was born in Valleyfield, Quebec, on 4 August 1925 to Alice Gauthier and Joseph Romulus Dionne. His father was a dentist by profession; he was also an invalid, with a family of six children to provide for.<sup>2</sup> As a boy the young Dionne visited construction sites with his uncle, Raphael Bélanger, co-partner in the Montreal-based firm of engineers Deschamps & Bélanger, and so was exposed to architecture from an early age. From 1933 to 1935, Deschamps and Bélanger, under the direction of architect Henri-S. Labelle (1896- ?), were involved in the rebuilding of the Valleyfield Cathedral, which had been destroyed by fire.<sup>3</sup> Dionne was ten years old upon the completion of the project.

Dionne entered the Séminaire de Valleyfield in 1938, completed his études classiques, and received a B. A. in affiliation with the University of Montreal in 1946. While at the Séminaire he began to associate with artists and intellectuals. He became close friends with fellow student Jean-René Ostiguy (1925- ) and with the professor of painting and print-making, Albert Dumouchel (1916-1971). Ostiguy, now a nationally-prominent critic and art historian, and Dumouchel, who would soon become an important second-generation Auto-

*The development of modern architecture in Canada, from the post-war variations of the early international style to the late modern buildings of the 1970s, greatly altered not only large urban centres, but many smaller towns and cities as well.*

*Recently, the Archives Department of the Canadian Centre for Architecture completed an inventory of documents related to the work of Pierre Dionne, a Quebec architect whose career spans exactly this thirty-year period of modernism. Dionne began to study architecture at the École des Beaux-Arts de Montréal in the mid-1940s, and closed his professional practice in 1976. Except for a certain number of projects executed in Montreal and Ottawa, most of Dionne's work — roughly 80% — was produced for the city of Salaberry-de-Valleyfield and the communities of the surrounding area, located sixty kilometres south-west of Montreal.<sup>1</sup> This article is an introduction to Dionne, his work, and the Archive.*

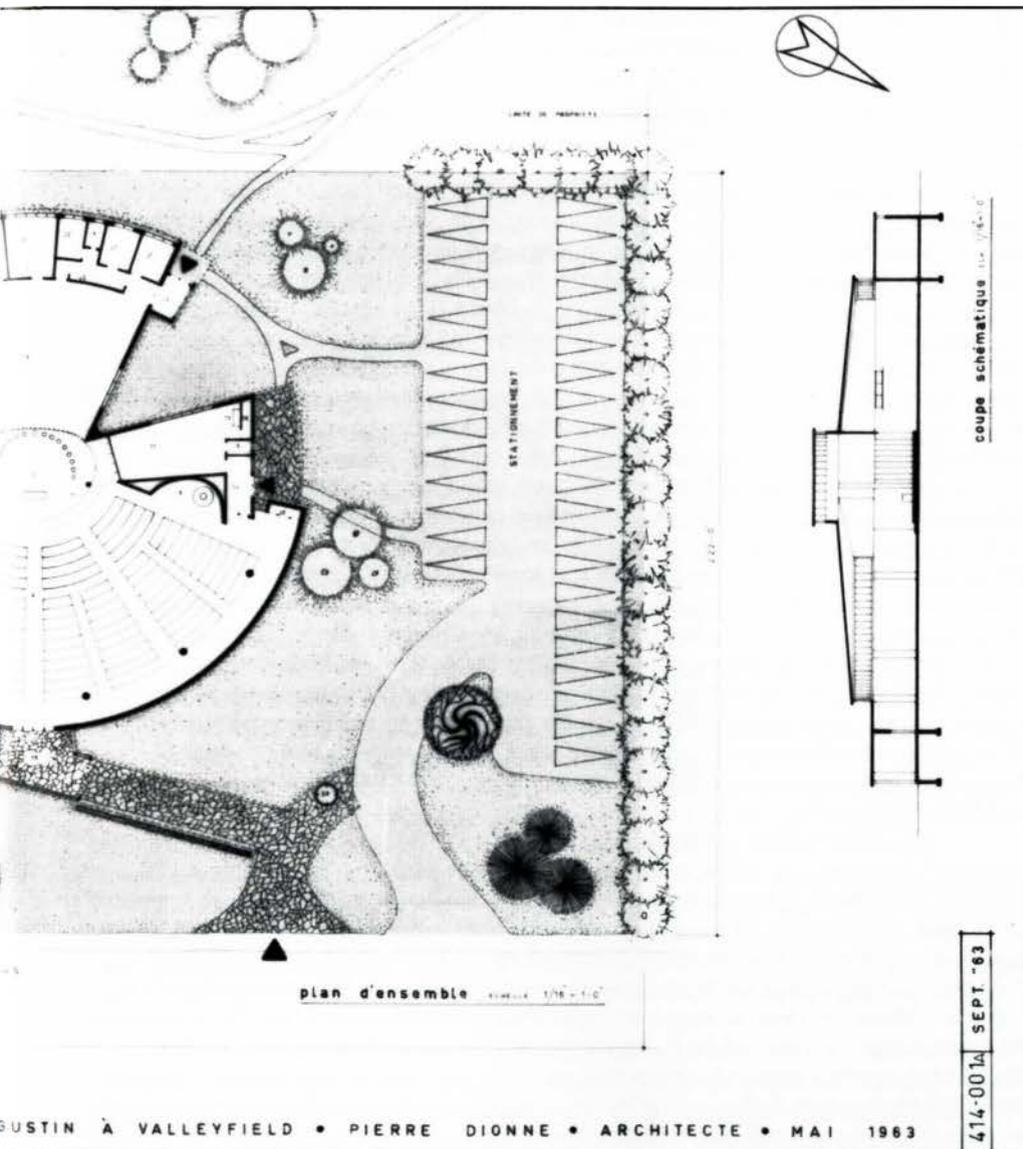


# Valleyfield's First Modern

matist painter and printmaker, exposed Dionne to the ideas of the artistic avant-garde. Dumouchel was Dionne's teacher for six years (1940-1946), and had a decisive influence on his student's decision to study architecture.<sup>4</sup> Since Dionne was the educated son of French-Canadian parents, his choice of occupation was a disappointment to his family, who would have preferred that he embark on a more traditional profession, such as priest or doctor.<sup>5</sup>

Dionne began classes in architecture at the École des Beaux-Arts de Montréal in 1947. Through the intervention and insistence of his relatives he reluctantly accepted a standard government bursary of \$150 a year, which was available only to those with the right connections within the Duplessis bureaucracy.<sup>6</sup> Otherwise, he supported himself with minimum-wage summer jobs: in 1950 he worked in the office of architects Duplessis & Labelle, in Montreal; and in 1949 and 1951 with architect Jean-Marie Lafleur, in Valleyfield.<sup>7</sup>

The turmoil brewing in the school since the end of the war reached its peak during Dionne's five years of study. The students' avid interest in current developments in architecture, which they followed in French and American periodicals, and their awareness of the



By David Rose

Figure 1. Site plan and section of the proposed church for the Parish of Saint-Augustin, Valleyfield, Quebec, 1963. (06 ARC 026N. This and all illustrations are from the Collection Centre Canadien d'Architecture/ Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal)

- 1 Salaberry-de-Valleyfield is the official name given to the city when it was incorporated in 1874. Today it is more commonly known as simply Valleyfield.
- 2 L'Association des architectes de la province de Québec, registration form, and interview with Pierre Dionne, 11 February 1990, Ste-Barbe, Quebec. The interview was conducted by David Rose and Rosalie Hodson. Audio cassette, CCA Archives.
- 3 Interview with Pierre Dionne, 11 February 1990.
- 4 Dumouchel, who was also a Valleyfield native, went on to become very influential as the director of graphic arts at the École des Beaux-Arts de Montréal. Among his students were artists Roland Giguère, Gérard Tremblay, Gilles Robert, Pierre Ouard, Yves Gaucher, and Dionne when he was at the school from 1947 to 1952.
- 5 Interview with Dionne.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 L'Association des architectes de la province de Québec, registration form, Pierre Dionne.



Figure 2. View of the principal facade of the Brassard Medical Centre, Valleyfield, Quebec. David Rose, photographer. (06 ARC 042N)

Bauhaus-oriented curriculum at McGill's School of Architecture fueled a revolt against the outdated methods of the Beaux-Arts system. The protagonists of the unrest were in the class a year ahead of Dionne's. These students forced a decisive confrontation with director Émile Venne which resulted in Venne's resignation and the resignation of two of the original teachers of the Beaux-Arts, Jules Poivert and Aristide Beaugrand-Champagne.<sup>8</sup>

Dionne was among the eager recipients of foreign periodicals such as *Architecte Aujourd'hui*, *Art Aujourd'hui*, *Domus*, and the publications of CIAM (Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne).<sup>9</sup> After 1950, the designs of his student projects show a marked swing toward contemporary concerns. Although his presentation drawings and the plans of his projects remain decidedly Beaux-Arts in conception, there is a determined effort to explore certain modernist elements such as glass curtain walls, the structural principles of Eero Saarinen, Le Corbusier's Modulor and villas, and Joan Miró's biomorphic shapes for interior design.

For its thesis diploma project the graduating class of 1952, which included Dionne, was required to produce designs for a suburban Catholic church. The subject was topical, for during that year the Church in Rome officially sanctioned the use of modern art and architecture in Catholic buildings, and in Quebec the effects of the Liturgical Reform Movement were already being assimilated into religious architecture.<sup>10</sup> The thesis project of Jean Ouellet (1925- ), an exact contemporary of Dionne, was singled out for special attention, along with the work of Michel-Pierre Beauvais, and their designs were published in *Architecte bâtiment construction*. Both these students used similar L-shaped plans for connecting the church and presbytery, with steeply pitched roofs on the main building.<sup>11</sup>

Dionne's solution for "une église de banlieue pour Valleyfield" was to design the main body of the church as a low structure, on a semi-circular plan. In a note on the title presentation panel he wrote:

C'est avant tout par une connaissance de la véritable liturgie et du sens liturgique que nous avons été guidés dans l'étude de ce problème.

Dionne explained that the reason he adapted the radical form of a classical amphitheatre was to put the congregation into a closer relationship with the altar, so that it would have a more intimate involvement with the church's most important ritual. Dionne's statement and his emphasis on community within the plan of his church reflect the major concern of the Liturgical Movement as it was then being expressed in the influential French journals *Art d'église* and *Art sacré*.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Dionne designed his project with a specific site in mind. He learned through a relative in the clergy that a new parish would be founded in Valleyfield in about a decade, which meant that a new church and presbytery would be required. The tip paid off, for Dionne was chosen to build the Église Saint-Augustin in 1963, as a modified and scaled-down version of his thesis diploma project (figure 1).<sup>13</sup>

After he graduated with distinction, Dionne, who had been a member of the Association canadienne d'urbanisme since 1949, planned to continue urban studies in Belgium. But when a hoped-for bursary failed to materialize he prepared to settle down and practice architecture in Valleyfield. In June 1952, Dionne married Marie Clairmont (1927- ), who was to have a substantial career creating tapestries for religious and public buildings in Valleyfield (including several of Dionne's buildings), Vaudreuil, Montreal, and Alma.<sup>14</sup> About this time Dionne and Jean-François Bélanger, a fellow 1952 graduate from the École des Beaux-Arts, founded "le Groupe Forès" (Forme, Rythme, ESpace), a loosely-knit association formed to promote the arts in architecture. Since he required a one-year apprenticeship with an established architect in order to join the Association des architectes de la province de Québec, Dionne once again entered the office of his former employer J-M. Lafleur, and worked there until June 1953.<sup>15</sup>

Jean-Marie Lafleur (1902-1985), who completed his degree in 1929, was among the first architecture graduates of the École des Beaux-Arts de Montréal.<sup>16</sup> In 1931 he began to practice in Valleyfield, and two years later worked as a draughtsman with J-Eugène Perron (1900-1969) under Labelle for the Valleyfield Cathedral.<sup>17</sup> While Lafleur would eventually expand his working territory to include projects in Montreal, Rigaud, and as far west as Cornwall, Ontario, his principal buildings were in Valleyfield. These included the École normale Jésus-Marie, the Hospice Saint-Vincent-de-Paul, the churches of Notre-Dame de Belle-rive, Saint-Joseph-Artisan, and Pie X, the monastère des sœurs Clarisses, and the Hôtel de ville de Salaberry-de-Valleyfield (constructed 1959-62). Although he kept abreast of modern construction techniques, Lafleur was primarily an architect of Beaux-Arts eclecticism, and by the early 1950s he was firmly entrenched as the only major architect in Valleyfield.

A company town throughout its history, Valleyfield's first substantial growth took

8 Following these events, which took place between 1950-53, there was a period of disorganization within the school and changes in the curriculum only came about slowly. See François Giraldeau, "L'École des Beaux-Arts de Montréal, 1923-1959," *ARQ Architecture/Québec* 25 (juin 1985).

9 Interview with Dionne.

10 For an excellent account of this situation see Claude Bergeron, *L'Architecture des Églises du Québec 1940-1985* (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1987).

11 Pierre Morency, "Être ou ne pas être," *Architecte bâtiment construction* 7 (juillet 1952): 12-22. This article includes extracts from the theses diplomas of Ouellet and Beauvais. For a complete list of the architecture graduates from l'École des Beaux-Arts de Montréal in 1952, see Eugène Charbonneau, "Onze nouveaux architectes diplômés à l'École des Beaux-Arts," *Architecte bâtiment construction* 7 (juin 1952): 15.

12 Bergeron, 12-53.

13 Interview with Dionne. For a detailed account by Dionne of his influences and intentions concerning the Église Saint-Augustin, see the supplement to *Le Progrès* [de Valleyfield], 2 novembre 1966, pp. 21-23. Also, it should be noted that at least one other architect submitted a proposal for the church: the CCA's Ludger and Paul-M. Lemieux Archive contains 20 sketches and preliminary drawings by Paul Lemieux for this same project.

14 *Les Oeuvres d'art du ministère des Travaux publics et de l'Approvisionnement ou la politique du un pour cent* (Québec: Government du Québec, Ministère des Communications, 1981), p. 186. In 1980 the Vatican Museums accepted a wall-hanging by Marie Dionne, *Manteau d'ermite*, as a commemorative gift celebrating Pope John-Paul II's visit to Valleyfield. Marie Dionne's woven art-works were based on original cartoons by her husband, Pierre. Letter from Pierre Dionne to David Rose, April 1990, CCA Archives.

15 Confirmation letter by Lafleur, l'Ordre des architectes du Québec, Pierre Dionne file.

16 Curriculum vitae of Lafleur drawn up by his son Guy, after his father's death. L'Ordre des architectes du Québec, Jean-Marie Lafleur file.

17 This relationship did not end well, as both Lafleur and Perron forced Labelle to acknowledge them as associate architects. L'Ordre des architectes du Québec, Henri-S. Labelle file.



place in the 1850s with the opening of the Beauharnois canal and several paper mills. The Montreal Cotton Company built its mill there in 1875 and dominated the economic life of the city until the Second World War. After 1945 Valleyfield, with a population of about 17,000, experienced the same boom that was taking place in the rest of the country. Manufacturing and chemical factories sprang up, creating a surge in population and wealth. This prosperity was sustained by the major improvements made to the St. Lawrence Seaway between 1954 and 1959 to accommodate larger ocean-going vessels, which led to the development of Valleyfield's port facilities. Through the 1960s, Valleyfield's location and its abundant source of hydroelectric power from the Beauharnois dam attracted large industrial companies such as Canadian Electrolytic Zinc, in 1963, and the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co., in 1965. Whereas before the war the city had been able to support just one professional architect, mainly through the patronage of religious organizations, after 1950, with the influx of new clients and capital, there was the possibility of the establishment of a second architectural firm.<sup>18</sup>

In 1953, upon completion of his term with Lafleur, Dionne was accepted into the Association des architectes de la province de Québec and was now fully licensed to practice his profession. The situation could not have looked promising, though, for Lafleur had all the institutional contacts and a lock on all the important regional government and religious commissions.<sup>19</sup> Rather than set up on his own, Dionne joined forces with Jean-F. Bélanger, and the firm of Dionne & Bélanger became the first architects in Valleyfield totally committed to the ideals of international-style modernism.

One of the firm's first projects was a new entrance facade for the Brassard Medical Centre on Boulevard du Havre, Valleyfield, constructed in the summer of 1953 (figure 2). Very modern in conception, the facade's glazed brick, corrugated metal, and large areas of glass (subdivided by thin strips of glazing bars) are geometrically organized into a planar composition reminiscent of the neo-plastic paintings of Mondrian.<sup>20</sup> The strictly functional interior consists of an open two-storey vestibule containing only an industrial metal staircase with treads and landing of natural wood. The honest expression of unadorned materials in this project did not, however, negate the possibility of an artistic contribution.

Most important for Dionne in the Brassard Medical Centre was the collaboration with his former teacher Dumouchel, who produced a colourful ceramic mural of surrealist content for the facade. Dumouchel's influence, the involvement with Groupe Forès, and reports such as that of the 1951 CIAM conference, which promoted the integration of modern art and sculpture into architecture, instilled in Dionne a career-long concern to involve artists in his work.<sup>21</sup> His belief that architecture encompasses all the other arts, and that art enhances architectural space and so creates a visually stimulating environment, motivated Dionne to use his own training in art to design murals when no client funds were available to hire artists.<sup>22</sup>

Although Lafleur laid claim to the larger, more profitable contracts in the region, Valleyfield's leading professionals turned to Dionne & Bélanger to design their private homes. Accepting these smaller commissions in the hope of acquiring referrals for larger contracts, Dionne & Bélanger survived because their modern style of building was relatively inexpensive and also appealed to the "keeping up with the Joneses" mentality of their nouveau-riche clients.

Two houses in Valleyfield, the Théoret residence, built in 1955, and the de Grandpré residence, built in 1956, are good examples of Dionne & Bélanger's ability to realize modernist principles in domestic architecture. On a small lot behind Le Club Touriste, of which he was co-proprietor, Romuald Théoret's flat-roofed, compact bungalow contains an economically-spaced, functionally-planned interior (figure 5). The house is logically organized

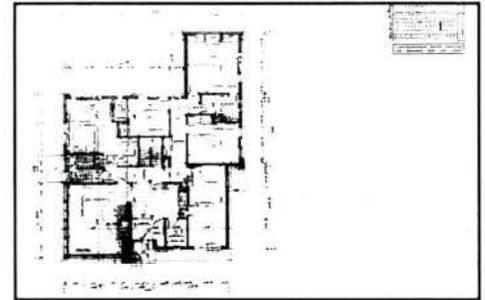


Figure 3 (top left). Exterior view of the Romuald Théoret residence, Valleyfield, Quebec, circa 1955. Studio of A. Dubuc, Engr., photographer. (06 ARC 033N)

Figure 4 (top right). Exterior view of the Dr. Lorenzo de Grandpré residence, Valleyfield, Quebec, 1955. Marcel Corbeau, photographer. (06 ARC 036N)

Figure 5 (above). Working drawing of the ground floor plan, Romuald Théoret residence, Valleyfield, Quebec, August 1954. (06 ARC 020N)

18 Since the 1970s the growth of Valleyfield has slowed considerably. As of 1987, the population of the city was 29,200 citizens, with three architectural firms.

19 Interview with Dionne. Also, Labelle was occasionally brought in from Montreal as the favourite architect of the Bishops of Valleyfield. Eugène Perron appears to have worked in the area as well, although he, too, was based in Montreal.

20 Interview with Dionne.

21 *Ibid.* Dionne worked with numerous artists during the course of his career. Along with his wife Marie and Albert Dumouchel, Dionne also collaborated on projects with Maurice Lemieux, Denis Poirier, Claude Vermette, Reynald Piché, Joseph Iliu, Claude Théberge, Marcel Gendreau and Gaëtan Therrien.

22 *Ibid.* Buildings in Valleyfield in which Dionne designed his own murals include the Séminaire de Valleyfield, the administrative wing for the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, Caisse Populaire de Belle-rive, Cité des arts et des sports, and the Église du Saint-Esprit. An example in Montreal is the École normale Ignace-Bourget.

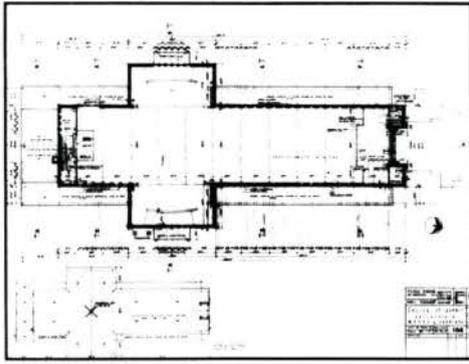


Figure 6 (above). Plan of the nave and roof of the Église du Saint-Esprit, Valleyfield, Québec, 22 February 1957. Noël Verdant, draftsman. (06 ARC 023N)

Figure 7 (right). Interior view of the nave looking toward the main altar, Église du Saint-Esprit, Valleyfield, Québec, 1959. Studio of A. Dubuc Engr., photographer. (06 ARC 040N)



into areas for private and communal domestic activities — sleeping, eating, relaxing, and preparing meals in the up-to-date kitchen. The exterior reflects the interior arrangement through an expressive use of materials, such as the expanses of glass which form one corner of the building to enclose and frame the living room (figure 3). Although larger and more block-like, Dr. Lorenzo de Grandpré's two-storey residence and office is designed with the same functional planning to utilize space. The exterior is also similar to the Théoret house in that it places the same emphasis on geometric form (figure 4). In both buildings the flat facades are articulated by the arrangements of fenestration, glazed brick, and facing stone. Both residences incorporate ceramic murals by Montreal artist Joseph Iliu.

The small profits and long hours involved in contracts like these took their toll. In the spring of 1955 Bélanger left Valleyfield for a position with an architectural firm in New York.<sup>23</sup> Now on his own, Dionne continued during the next year primarily to design residences, although he also began to pick up small municipal and industrial building contracts. Then, in 1956, the parish of Saint-Esprit in Valleyfield granted Dionne his first important commission. The parish, which was established in 1945, had only managed to lay the foundations for their church before funds ran out. Eleven years later parish officials, when reconsidering the project, were presented with a comparative study by Dionne that evaluated his proposal economically, practically, and esthetically against the only other competing submission. To cut costs, Dionne offered to build the church on the existing foundations, which his rival was unwilling to do. He also proposed to construct it using the technology of prefabrication, which he had worked out with engineer René Martineau.<sup>24</sup> The parish directors were convinced: the Église du Saint-Esprit was erected in the summer of 1957. It was Dionne's first major project, and the first church in the diocese of Valleyfield to be constructed with a poured-in-place reinforced concrete frame covered with precast concrete wall panels.

For the designs of his first churches Dionne turned for inspiration to prewar Suisse-romande religious architecture, as did many architects in Montreal during the 1950s.<sup>25</sup> In the Église du Saint-Esprit this style appeared as a classic Latin-Cross plan (dictated by the rectangular shape of the foundations), a columnless nave under a low-pitched roof with low-roofed side aisles, and an abundance of Catholic symbolism in the details, accessories, and artwork (figures 6, 7). Two years later, in March 1959, on the strength of the Église du Saint-Esprit and the recommendation of two contractors who had worked with him, the syndics of the new parish of Saint-Paul in Beauharnois chose Dionne over Perron to design their church and presbytery.<sup>26</sup> In keeping with the client's demands for a modern (but not too modern), durable, and economical building, Dionne designed the Église Saint-Paul, again using the construction techniques of prefabrication and the forms of Suisse-romande churches, but this time with a square plan (figures 8, 9).<sup>27</sup>

23 *Ibid.*

24 *Ibid.* The office of Bourgeois et Martineau, ingénieurs, was right next door to Dionne's in Valleyfield. For René Martineau's account of the project, see "Structure d'église entièrement prefabriquée sur place et érigée en trois jours," *bâtiment* 34 (avril 1959): 34-5, 81.

25 Interview with Dionne. Also see Bergeron, 3, 53, 109.

26 See Hector Besner, *Mémoires de la Communauté chrétienne Saint-Paul Apôtre de Beauharnois 1960-1985* (Montréal: Graphco Arts Graphiques Inc., 1986), pp. 59-62.

27 *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61. In reviewing Dionne's design for the Église Saint-Paul, the Bishop of Valleyfield noted "quelques formes un peu trop modern à la facade de l'église ...." Although Besner states that the form of Saint-Paul was based on a contemporary 1959 Suisse-romande church seen in *l'Art Sacré*, Bergeron writes that the square-planned Swiss church was originated by French architect Auguste Perret, and flourished more in the German speaking areas of Switzerland in the 1920s and 1930s. See Bergeron, 79.

In 1957, as Dionne's first prefabricated building was going up in Valleyfield, he became involved with a housing development project on Ile Perrot, just west of Montreal, for Pointe du Moulin/Windmill Point Inc. The scheme was unusual in that it was not sponsored by the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, which was responsible for the majority of post-war housing in Quebec, but was instead a joint investment by the president of Pointe du Moulin, Réal Rousseau, and the second wife of the Shah of Iran, Queen Soraya.<sup>28</sup> On eight hundred acres of land, bought in 1954, a "Suburban Residential Park" was planned that would include a filtration plant and twenty-seven different types of prefabricated bungalows, split-levels, and ranch-style houses, all designed by Dionne (figures 10, 11). To obtain the required prefabricated panels, Dionne and Rousseau traveled to Germany and enlisted the collaboration of the Salzgitten Industriebau, a group of highly skilled engineers who had separated from Krupp Industries. The agreement was for the panels to be made in Germany and then shipped to Quebec for assembly, but the financial backing for the project began to fall through after March 1958, when Soraya was divorced by the Shah.<sup>29</sup> By 1959 the project had been abandoned.

The first of Dionne's large school projects was the expansion and upgrading of the Séminaire de Valleyfield, for which he was chosen as architect in 1958. In order to accommodate the population growth of Valleyfield and to attract students from the surrounding municipalities of Huntingdon, Beauharnois, Châteauguay, and Vaudreuil-Soulanges, renovations were recommended for the old seminary, as well as the construction of several new buildings. Dionne's approach to the problem was to design a four-part complex whose purpose was to merge the traditional concept of education, which focused on the moral training of the pupil, with new pedagogical trends, which were intended to prepare the individual for modern society.<sup>30</sup>

Tempered with an abundance of murals and decorative screens, Dionne's purely functionalist forms dictated the clean lines and rational spaces in the three new sections of the school. These additions included a building for a cafeteria, study rooms, and an infirmary; a Pavillon Universitaire, comprising a library, theatre, and student dormitories for a school of Belle-Lettres à Philosophie; and facilities for physical education, with a gymnasium and a pool (figure 12). The fourth part of the project, alterations to the original seminary, involved renovations of the classrooms, study, and recreation areas and modernization of the science and language laboratories. These projects, as well as various other modifications to the school, including its later transformation into a CÉGEP between 1968 and 1969, became an on-going commission for Dionne.

Modern architecture across Canada began to hit its stride at the end of the 1950s after more than a decade of experimentation and isolated successes. In Quebec, the Liberal Party under Jean Lesage came to power in 1960, thus ushering in the Quiet Revolution. In Montreal, Place Ville Marie seemed to symbolize this new era of social and artistic confidence. With corporations and all levels of government turning to International-style architects to design their buildings, Dionne decided to expand his field of operations to Montreal. However, in order for an architect to be considered for the larger commissions in the city, it was first necessary to have an address and pay taxes there. Dionne made the move in 1960, and operated for ten years from two consecutive Montreal offices. His first office was at 3365 Ridgewood Avenue; in 1965 he moved downtown to 640 Cathcart Street, where he worked until 1970. During this decade he also maintained his practice in Valleyfield.

The most important contracts Dionne executed in Montreal were two schools: the École normale Ignace-Bourget, now the CÉGEP Bois-de-Boulogne, built 1960-65, a large multi-building complex along the lines of the Séminaire de Valleyfield (figure 13); and the École élémentaire Saint-Zotique, a single, compact building located in Saint-Henri, constructed in 1963-64. Other commissions included an enlargement and renovation of the United Auto Parts building in 1960-61, and the Caisse Populaire de Saint-Victor in 1963, both built on the east side of the city. Perhaps Dionne's most interesting project in Montreal was one that was never built: an enormous domed stadium for the Montreal Alouette Football Club planned for Ville d'Anjou.

The Alouette stadium project, as announced to the press in April 1964, was to be built in three phases, with the first part completed by July 1965 in time to host the annual Grey Cup game (figure 14).<sup>31</sup> Dionne collaborated with the engineering firm of Blauer, Horvath, Taylor to design a building planned on a perfect circle, built mostly of prefabricated concrete panels, and ultimately capable of accommodating 65,000 spectators. In phase three, a dome 233 feet high with a diameter of 700 feet was to be constructed of transparent plastic and a network of 148 steel meridian trusses. It would have been the largest dome in world at that time (figure 15). However, the project was continually plagued by budget problems,

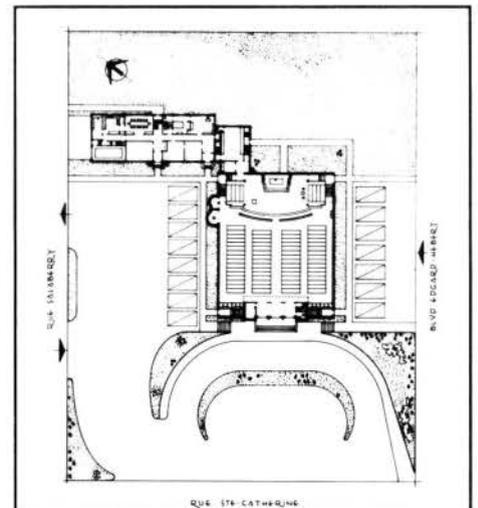
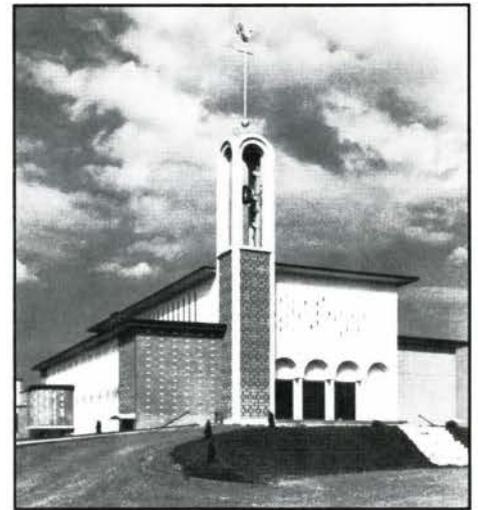


Figure 8 (top). Exterior view of the Église Saint-Paul de Beauharnois, Beauharnois, Quebec. Marcel Corbeau, photographer. (06 ARC 038N)

Figure 9 (above). Site and ground floor plan of the Église Saint-Paul de Beauharnois, Beauharnois, Quebec. (06 ARC 021N)

28 Interview with Dionne. For more information on the role of the C.M.H.C. in the development of post-war Québec housing, see Michel Lessard and Huguette Marquis, *Encyclopédie de la Maison Québécoise: trois siècles d'habitations* (Montréal: Les Éditions de l'homme, 1972), pp. 438-441.

29 Interview with Dionne. This is how he understood the situation. Unfortunately, the events cannot be confirmed as Réal Rousseau is deceased. Dionne met Rousseau through his friend and previous client, Louis Derome. Also employed on the Ile Perrot project, Derome was an engineer who lived in Valleyfield.

30 Project folder file #261, Pierre Dionne Archive.

31 Guy Pinard, "Le Stade des Alouettes à Ville d'Anjou," *La Presse*, 7 avril 1964, p. 26.

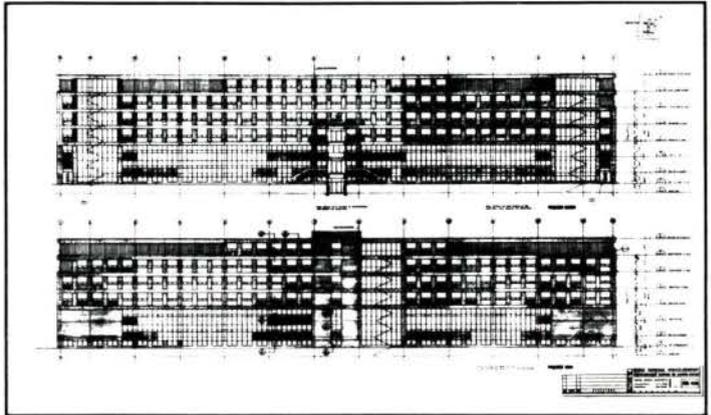
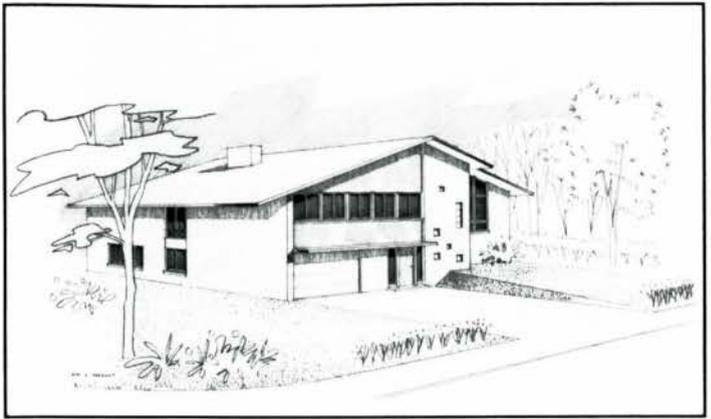
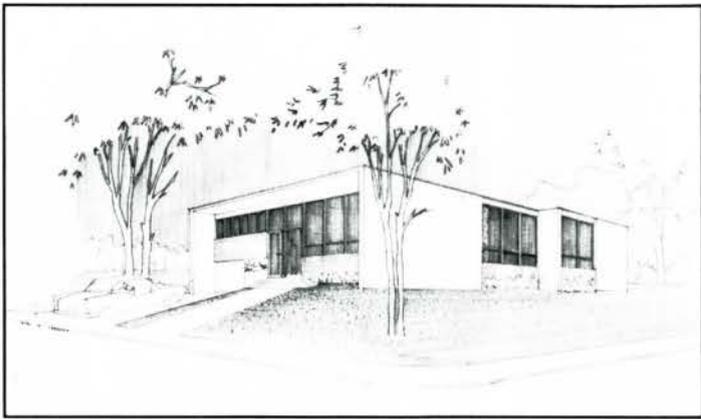


Figure 10 (top left). Exterior perspective of a residence (model 1400-A-1) for Pointe du Moulin, Inc., Ile Perrot, Quebec, circa 1958 (detail). Noel Verdant, draftsman. (06 ARC 017N)

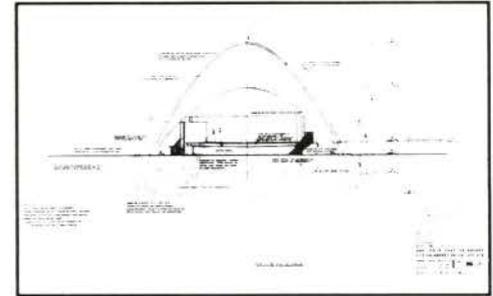
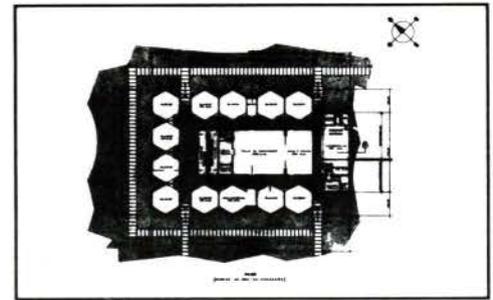
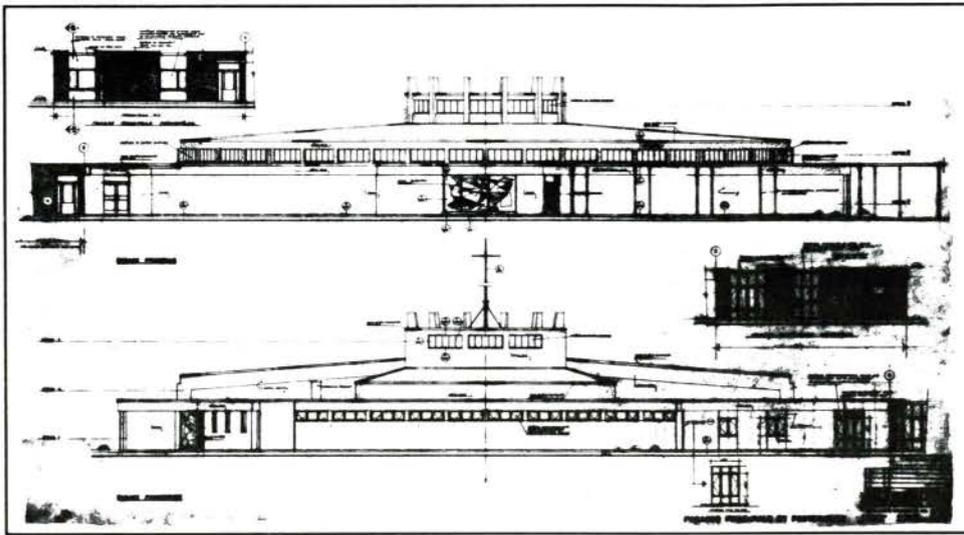
Figure 11 (top right). Exterior perspective of a residence (model 1400-D-1) for Pointe du Moulin, Inc., Ile Perrot, Quebec, circa 1958 (detail). Noel Verdant, draftsman. (06 ARC 018N)

Figure 12 (middle left). Exterior view of the principal entrance of the Pavilion Universitaire (section B), Séminaire du Valleyfield, Valleyfield, Quebec, circa 1964. Marcel Corbeau, photographer. (06 ARC 037N)

Figure 13 (middle right). Elevations of the north and south facades of section "B" (student dormitories), École normale Ignace-Bourget, Montreal, Quebec, 1961. (06 ARC 031N)

Figure 14 (bottom left). View of the model of the proposed stadium for the Montreal Alouette Football Club, Phase One, Ville d'Anjou, Quebec, 1964. Octave Levesque, model builder, Marcel Corbeau, photographer. (06 ARC 035N)

Figure 15 (bottom right). View of the model of the proposed stadium for the Montreal Alouette Football Club, Phase Three, Ville d'Anjou, Quebec, 1964. Octave Levesque, model builder, Marcel Corbeau, photographer. (06 ARC 034N)



probably caused in part by political subterfuge. The World's Fair authorities, backed by Mayor Jean Drapeau's office (which had been promising a municipal stadium for years), preferred the sports stadium to be on the site of Expo 67. By the autumn of 1964 the owner of the Alouettes, Ted Workman, announced the end of the project due to his inability to raise more capital to meet the escalating costs.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps because of his involvement with the stadium, coupled with his lack of political connections, Dionne did not participate in any way in that showcase of modern architecture, Expo 67. In fact, after 1965 Dionne undertook no major projects in Montreal, while his office in Valleyfield became very busy with a number of schools and public buildings.

During the first half of the 1960s Dionne entered two architectural competitions, one national, the other provincial. In 1962, as part of Canada's bid for the 1968 International Winter Olympic Games, the Calgary Olympic Development Association requested submissions for a design of a sports complex to be located in Banff, Alberta. One of twenty entries, Dionne's proposal for the site consisted of administrative and press buildings and an arena, all based on pyramidal geometry to relate the architecture to the mountains. The Valleyfield architect was not among the three finalists chosen in October 1963, which were firms from Winnipeg and Calgary.<sup>33</sup> The next year, however, the competition was canceled when the Games were awarded to Grenoble, France.

The second competition Dionne entered was the Concours provincial d'architecture pour écoles primaires in 1964. With the restructuring of Quebec's educational system following the Parent Report, the new Minister of Education asked for design submissions for schools of eight, ten, and twelve classrooms which would include a kindergarten, library, and a large common room. Dionne's plan for "une école de 12 classes" grouped three sets of four hexagonal rooms around a central communal space, with the fourth side enclosed by offices and the kindergarten (figure 16). With the exception of a small basement for storage and heating facilities, the school was designed to be all on one level, with no upper storeys. Although Dionne's design was not among the finalists, his project for this competition can be compared to those submitted by fourteen other Quebec architectural firms, which were published in *Architecture bâtiment construction* in April 1965.<sup>34</sup>

During his busiest period in Montreal, between 1960 and 1965, Dionne's Valleyfield practice continued to provide a steady stream of commissions. The proposed kiosk for Salaberry Park, dating from 1961, was designed as a curved reinforced concrete shell that recalled Felix Candela's paraboloid roofs of the 1950s (figure 17). During this period Dionne also oversaw the building of the Église et presbytère de Saint-Augustin in 1965, which was the realization of his thesis project from the École des Beaux-Arts (figure 18).

After 1965 Dionne's main focus of activity returned to his home town. Scholastic architecture took precedence over his other commissions. He built the École élémentaire Elizabeth Monette in 1965; constructed the huge École Polyvalente "campus 1900 étudiants," which is now the École Baie Saint-François, in 1966-71; and undertook the transformation of the École Edgar Hebert in 1966. For Valleyfield's celebration of the centenary of Confederation, Dionne began planning the Cité des arts et des sports recreational centre in 1964, but the final design was realized only in 1966.

The other major contracts of the later 1960s involved two public buildings for Valley-

Figure 16 (top). Ground floor plan for a school of 12 classes for the Concours provincial d'architecture pour écoles primaires, 1964. (06 ARC 027N)

Figure 17 (above). Main facade elevation for a kiosk for Salaberry Park, Valleyfield, Québec, September 1961. (06 ARC 024N)

Figure 18 (left). Elevations of the front and rear facades of the Église et presbytère Saint-Augustin, Valleyfield, Québec, April 1964. (06 ARC 029N)

32 The rumour of the city's administration being involved in the demise of the stadium was expressed in the article "Ted Workman 'barré' par la ville de Montréal?", in *Dimanche-matin*, 1 novembre 1964, n.p. However, with a budget of \$7.7 million the enterprise may have been unrealistic from the start. By comparison, the Houston Astrodome, which was similar in structure but slightly smaller than the Alouette Stadium, was completed in 1965 at a cost of \$31.6 million.

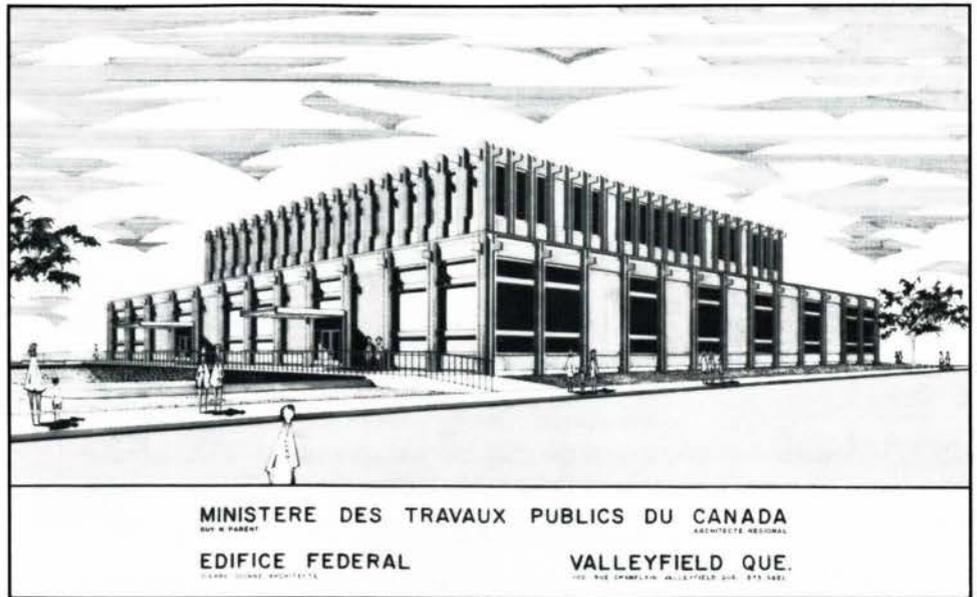
33 Letter to Dionne from John A. Russell, chairman of the Jury and Professional Adviser of the competition, project folder file #398, Pierre Dionne Archives. The three finalists of the competition were: Associated Architects, Winnipeg; Cohos-Delesalle & Associates, Calgary; and J. Stevenson & Associates, J. A. Barrett, E. Raines, H. W. Seton, Calgary.

34 "Concours provincial d'Architecture pour Écoles primaires," *Architecture bâtiment construction* 20 (avril 1965): 29-50. In connection with this competition, the Jean-Michaud Archive in the CCA contains documents for the École Bois-Joli. Michaud's project was one of the 14 winning entries and was built in Saint-Hyacinthe in 1965-66.



Figure 19 (right). Perspective of the front and side facades of the Édifice Federal, Valleyfield, Quebec, circa 1965. (06 ARC 025N)

Figure 20 (above). Exterior view of the old Palais de Justice de Valleyfield (1901) and the new addition (1972-1974), Valleyfield, Quebec, 23 March 1976. Photographer unknown. (06 ARC 041N)



field: the Édifice Federal and the Palais de Justice. Built over the old Beauharnois canal in the centre of town, the Édifice Federal of 1965-70 demonstrates the integrity of Dionne's modernist ideals. The purist geometry of the building, with its formal symmetry and second-storey setback, makes it appear more monumental than it actually is, forcefully illustrating the concept of architecture as sculpture in a landscape (figure 19). Moreover, the design clearly reveals the building's structure of concrete frame and panels on both the exterior and in the interior, which is functionally planned for public service. At a period when confidence in modern architecture was at its height, the Édifice Federal was a confirmation of Dionne's belief that only through functionalism can buildings efficiently serve people, and thus provide architecture with meaning.<sup>35</sup>

The second public building to occupy Dionne at this time was the Palais de Justice de Valleyfield. Similar to the Séminaire de Valleyfield, this project involved the renovation of an existing building — the original 1901 courthouse — and a modern addition, an annex for offices, jail cells, and an exercise yard for prisoners (figure 20). Dionne began work on the building in 1968, but the election of Robert Bourassa's Liberal Party in 1970 put the project on hold (along with seventeen other public buildings) as the newly appointed Minister of Public Works examined contracts already issued.<sup>36</sup> With modifications to Dionne's first design, the work was taken up again in 1972 and completed two years later. The delay actually allowed Dionne to take advantage of the "one per cent law," enacted in 1973, which stipulated that one per cent of the building budget be set aside for art works.<sup>37</sup>

During the last few years of his practice Dionne was faced with two major problems: maintenance of his buildings and post-modernism. One of the glaring faults of modern architecture, aggravated by dollar-conscious clients, was its over-eagerness to utilize new materials that had not yet stood the test of time. In the 1970s Dionne's availability for new contracts was hindered by the necessity in a number of his large buildings to repair roofs that had not proved watertight, notably the CÉGEP Bois-de-Boulogne, the Cité des arts et des sports, and the École Baie Saint-François. Moreover, as a strict functionalist, Dionne must have found it difficult to adapt to the growing trend towards post-modern architecture. Dionne's last two houses, both built in 1975, illustrate the change in his clients' taste. The Neverette residence, constructed in Ormstown, was designed as a ranch-style house, and the Pagé residence, built in Valleyfield, employed a pseudo-Tudor exterior and a plan drawn from a house pattern book. Precedent of style, not program of function, was becoming the generator of design.

Dionne closed his office in 1976 at the age of fifty-one and took a position with the Service technique du ministère des Travaux publics et de l'Approvisionnement du Québec, région administrative de Montréal, as chief of the architecture section — a post he held until 1987. A consultant for the Commission d'Art Sacré de Valleyfield since 1982, Dionne became president of the commission in 1984 and has since stayed on as a volunteer. The mandate of the commission is to promote sacred art in Valleyfield, to assure the conservation of religious buildings, and to oversee the preservation of the city's artistic heritage.<sup>38</sup>

35 Interview with Dionne.

36 "Le projet du palais de justice de Valleyfield est retenu pour étude." Article from an unidentified newspaper [*Le Progrès de Valleyfield?*], dated 12/8/70. Project folder file #588, Pierre Dionne Archive.

37 Artists who contributed to this project included Denis Porier and Marie Dionne.

38 Letter from Pierre Dionne to David Rose, April 1990, CCA Archives.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF PIERRE DIONNE IS FIRMLY ROOTED in the ideals of post-war modernism. His work is characterized by a consistent integrity in the use of functionalist design, an employment of contemporary construction methods, a keen interest in experimenting with new building technologies and materials, and a desire to emphasize pure geometric forms. The Pierre Dionne Archive provides an opportunity of examining in detail the operation of this small but, in its context, important architectural firm, as well as evaluating its impact upon a well-defined environment (Valleyfield) over a specified period. The eleven student works and 437 career projects offer a concise year-by-year documentation of the architect's work; judging from Dionne's drawing records, the Archive holds 90-100% of the graphic material produced for each commission. This depth on the project level is often complemented by a variety of additional material, such as photographs, slides, consultant's drawings, site maps, surveys, and various forms of textual documents. This material is crucial both in determining how the esthetics and actual buildings of Valleyfield's first modern architect coincided with the local patterns of patronage and the demands for certain building types, and how they thus became an integral part of the religious, political, and economic forces that shaped the city during the thirty years following World War II.

---

David Rose is currently completing a M.A. in Canadian art (architectural) history at Concordia University while working at the CCA Archives.

---

Figure 1

Office of Pierre Dionne, architect, Valleyfield, 1955 - 1976

Site plan and section of the proposed church for the Parish of Saint-Augustin, Valleyfield, Quebec  
Black ink on film, September, 1963, 59.0 x 94.5 cm  
06 ARC 026N

Figure 2

David Rose, photographer, Toronto, 1951 -  
View of the principal facade of the Brassard Medical Centre, Valleyfield, Quebec, Dionne and Bélanger, architects

Chromogenic colour print, 1990, 20.3 x 30.3 cm  
06 ARC 042N

Figure 3

Studio of A. Dubuc Engr., photographer, Montreal, 1950s

Exterior view of the front and side facades of the Romauld Théoret residence, Valleyfield, Quebec, Dionne and Bélanger, architects

Gelatin silver print, circa 1955, 13.5 x 24.3 cm  
06 ARC 033N

Figure 4

Marcel Corbeau, photographer, Montreal, active 1950s - 1960s

Exterior view of the front and side facades of the Dr. Lorenzo de Grandpré residence, Valleyfield, Quebec, Pierre Dionne, architect, Joseph Iliu, mural artist

Gelatine silver print, 1955, 19.3 x 25.0 cm  
06 ARC 036N

Figure 5

Office of Dionne and Bélanger, architects, Valleyfield, 1953 - 1955

Working drawing of the ground floor plan, Romauld Théoret Residence, Valleyfield, Quebec  
Graphite and coloured pencil on tracing paper, August 1954, 55.8 x 86.0 cm

06 ARC 020N

Figure 6

Noel Verdant, draftsman, Valleyfield, active 1950s  
Plans of the nave and roof of the Église du Saint-Esprit, Valleyfield, Quebec, Pierre Dionne, architect  
Graphite and coloured pencil on tracing paper, 22 February 1957, 87.5 x 90.3 cm

06 ARC 023N

Figure 7

Studio of A. Dubuc Engr., photographer, Montreal, 1950s

Interior view of the nave looking toward the main altar, Église du Saint-Esprit, Valleyfield, Quebec, Pierre Dionne, architect

Gelatin silver print, 1959, 19.8 x 24.2 cm

06 ARC 040N

Figure 8

Marcel Corbeau, photographer, Montreal, active 1950s - 1960s

Exterior view of the front and side facades of the Église Saint-Paul de Beauharnois, Beauharnois, Quebec, Pierre Dionne, architect

Gelatin silver print, 1960, 19.1 x 24.8 cm

06 ARC 038N

Figure 9

Office of Pierre Dionne, architect, Valleyfield, 1955 - 1976

Site and ground floor plan of the Église Saint-Paul de Beauharnois, Beauharnois, Quebec

Black ink on tracing paper, circa 1960, 44.5 x 55.0 cm  
06 ARC 021N

Figure 10

Noel Verdant, draftsman, Valleyfield, active 1950s

Exterior perspective of the front and side facades of a residence (model 1400-A-1) for Pointe du Moulin, Inc., Ile Perrot, Quebec, Pierre Dionne, architect

Graphite on tracing paper, circa 1958, 44.0 x 58.8 cm  
06 ARC 017N

Figure 11

Noel Verdant, draftsman, Valleyfield, active 1950s

Exterior perspective of the front and side facades of a residence (model 1400-D-1) for Pointe du Moulin, Inc., Ile Perrot, Quebec, Pierre Dionne, architect

Graphite on tracing paper, circa 1958, 44.3 x 58.2 cm  
06 ARC 018N

Figure 12

Marcel Corbeau, photographer, Montreal, active 1950s - 1960s

Exterior view of the principal entrance of the Pavillon Universitaire (section B), Séminaire du Valleyfield, Valleyfield, Quebec, Pierre Dionne, architect

Gelatin silver print, circa 1964, 19.2 x 25.0 cm  
06 ARC 037N

Figure 13

Office of Pierre Dionne, architect, Valleyfield, 1955 - 1976

Elevations of the north and south facades of section "B" (student dormitories), École normale Ignace-Bourget, Montreal, Quebec

Graphite on tracing paper, 1961, 76.7 x 134.6 cm  
06 ARC 031N

Figure 14

Marcel Corbeau, photographer, Montreal, active 1950s - 1960s

View of the model of the proposed stadium for the Montreal Alouette Football Club, Phase One, Ville d'Anjou, Quebec, Octave Levesque, scale model

builder, Pierre Dionne, architect

Gelatin silver print, 1964, 19.5 x 24.3 cm

06 ARC 035N

Figure 15

Marcel Corbeau, photographer, Montreal, active 1950s - 1960s

View of the model of the proposed stadium for the Montreal Alouette Football Club, Phase Three, Ville d'Anjou, Quebec, Octave Levesque, scale model  
builder, Pierre Dionne, architect

Gelatin silver print, 1964, 19.6 x 24.3 cm

06 ARC 034N

Figure 16

Office of Pierre Dionne, architect, Valleyfield, 1955 - 1976

Ground floor plan for a school of 12 classes for the Concours provincial d'architecture pour écoles primaires

Black ink and dry transfer on film, 1964, 50.8 x 76.1 cm  
06 ARC 027N

Figure 17

Office of Pierre Dionne, architect, Valleyfield, 1955 - 1976

Main facade elevation for a kiosk for Salaberry Park, Valleyfield, Quebec

Graphite on tracing paper, September 1961, 60.5 x 89.5 cm  
06 ARC 024N

Figure 18

Office of Pierre Dionne, architect, Valleyfield, 1955 - 1976

Elevations of the front and rear facades of the Église et presbytère Saint-Augustin, Valleyfield, Quebec  
Graphite and black ink on film, April 1964, 75.8 x 130.1 cm  
06 ARC 029N

Figure 19

Office of Pierre Dionne, architect, Valleyfield, 1955 - 1976

Perspective of the front and side facades of the Édifice Federal, Valleyfield, Quebec  
Black ink and dry transfer on film, circa 1965, 54.5 x 86.5 cm  
06 ARC 025N

Figure 20

Unknown photographer

Exterior view of the old Palais de Justice de Valleyfield (1901) and the new addition (1972 - 1974), Valleyfield, Quebec, Pierre Dionne, architect of the new addition  
Gelatine silver print, 23 March 1976, 20.0 x 25.2 cm  
06 ARC 041N