

LANDMARKS



Significant Heritage Buildings of the Swan Valley Region



This project has been developed by Heritage Manitoba on behalf of the municipalities that comprise the Swan Valley Region: R.M. of Minitonas-Bowsman, R.M. of Mountain, R.M. of Swan Valley West and the Town of Swan River.

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2026

On the cover, left to right: Historic views of commercial thoroughfares of Benito, Minitonas and Swan River.

Landmarks

Significant Heritage Buildings of the Swan Valley Region

In 2008, the Historic Resources Branch of Manitoba Sport, Culture, Heritage and Tourism developed an initiative called *Special Places: Identifying A Community's Best Heritage Sites*. The introductory guidebook for the initiative describes the intent of these kinds of projects: "A community's historical evolution is presented in concrete form by its surviving buildings, structures and sites. These places, which together define the range of community life, from the modest houses and utilitarian commercial operations, to the inspiring and dramatic churches, schools and public buildings, are the final and resolute expression of a community's past and of its character.

"The scores of buildings that together define any community, are too numerous and even complex to put into a meaningful and cogent story. For heritage purposes this kind of challenge is usually met by identifying a few key buildings, structures and sites that can be shown to sum up significant aspects of local history. These places are the ones that can most effectively stand in for the others, and define important qualities and themes of the whole community.

"Developing this list of notable buildings and sites starts with an inventory, which is then reduced to increasingly smaller numbers through analysis and assessment, until those with major historic significance have been identified."

The Special Places initiative is being undertaken in 44 communities and rural municipalities across Manitoba, with all steps and activities developed according to the best-practices approaches of Historic Resources Branch (HRB).

The Swan Valley Region Special Places project was undertaken in 2009-10, with the first stage being the creation of a comprehensive and detailed inventory of sites of potential heritage interest (at the time the Town of Swan River, Town of Minitonas and the rural municipalities of Bowsman, Minitonas, Benito, Mountain and Swan River*). That inventory, which ultimately featured 108 buildings and sites, was carried out by a consultant secured by HRB. Follow-up assessments and final evaluations were carried out in 2026.

* Note that in 2015 the Province required municipalities with populations below 1,000 to amalgamate. For the Swan Valley Region this resulted in the following new names: Minitonas-Bowsman (formerly Town of Bowsman and rural municipalities of Bowsman and Minitonas), and Swan Valley West (rural municipalities of Benito and Swan River). The Town of Swan River and the R.M. of Mountain retained their status and names.

The final “short list” of 20 sites ultimately determined to effectively sum up the main historical and architectural themes that defined the Swan Valley Region include these selected places:

Town and Country

Fisher’s Siding School

Renwer, R.M. of Minitonas-Bowsman

St. Margaret’s Anglican Church

112 Willow Avenue, Mafeking, R.M. of Mountain

Ukrainian Orthodox Church

Pine River, R.M. of Mountain

Merchants Bank

Main Street, Minitonas, R.M. of Minitonas-Bowsman

Benito Foods

106 Spencer Street, R.M. of Swan Valley West

Swan Valley Credit Union Building

103 Main Street, Benito, R.M. of Swan Valley West

Log House

Mountain Road, Bellsite, R.M. of Mountain

Trofimchuk House

2nd Avenue W, Minitonas, R.M. of Minitonas-Bowsman

Town of Swan River

Post Office

5th Ave. N & First St. N.

Benito Telephone Office

Swan Valley Historical Museum

Bowsman C.N. Station

Swan Valley Historical Museum

Lady Hubble School

Swan Valley Historical Museum

War Memorial

2nd St. N. & 7th Ave. N. Swan River

St. Andrew’s United Church

5th Ave. N & 1st St. N. Swan River

Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Holy Ascension

205 Kelsey Trail Swan River

Harley House

512 2nd St. N Swan River

Beattie House

312 6th Ave. N. Swan River

McFadden House
500 Duncan Crescent Swan River

Zinger House
Street Swan River

Sovereign House
Swan Valley Historical Museum

Each building and site on the short list is presented on the following pages with an accompanying Heritage Value Statement that elucidates that building or site's key heritage attributes. This kind of text is one of the ultimate goals of a Special Places project. The Heritage Value Statements that have been developed here are based on an initiative inaugurated in the early 2000s by Parks Canada in association with all provinces and territories, including Manitoba. The project was called the Historic Places Initiative (HPI), and its goal was to develop a pan-Canadian approach to heritage conservation and communication.

An important aspect of HPI was to develop consistent and reliable approaches that would clarify what makes certain buildings and sites historically significant. The Heritage Value Statement was a key part of that process. HPI documents note that such a statement "seeks to identify what matters and why. It explains why a historic place is important to the community. Naming the heritage values of a place makes it possible to identify the physical qualities that express its values, and also helps determine what aspects of the place need to be conserved."

It goes on: "Heritage value is what makes a historic place significant to a community of people. It is comprised of the many meanings and values that people attach to a place. Traditionally, historic places have been valued mainly for their historical associations and/or architectural importance." It is this approach that has been used for the Swan Valley Region Special Places project.

As a collection, these buildings and sites define many aspects and themes from each municipality's past, and do so through places that are at once significant, but also interesting and attractive. They are places that the people of the municipalities can look to with pride. These places remind us of past glories, but also suggest an enduring sense of community.

Fisher's Siding School



Renwer

Fisher's Siding School at Renwer is a very important little building, a rare surviving example of the nearly 700 one-room facilities that rural communities erected between 1870 and 1940 to provide educational opportunity for their children. This site is especially important, being on its original site – most other surviving examples have been moved to museums or repurposed as homes. The first Fisher's Siding School was built in 1914 but was destroyed by fire in 1944. The present school building, from 1946, is a fine example of its type – one of the most popular standardized provincial school designs available between 1912 and the early 1940s, with architectural features such as an informal hipped roof, obligatory bank of windows on one side and a tin ceiling inside.

St. Margaret's Anglican Church



112 Willow Avenue, Mafeking

St. Margaret's Anglican Church, built in 1940, represents the fulfillment of aspirations common to small isolated congregations everywhere. Built by local volunteer labour, this charming little house of worship was originally served by itinerant lay missionaries known as Bishop's Messengers of St. Faith's. The church closed in 2002 and its interior, still fitted with handmade pews, now houses a museum, which includes tributes to Agnes Edwards, the first St. Margaret's 'Messenger,' as well as articles relating to church and community history. The church is a Municipal Heritage Site.

Holy Transfiguration Ukrainian Orthodox Church



Pine River

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Holy Transfiguration (from 1929) is an exceptional building, combining the ancient traditions of the Ukrainian Orthodox faith with stunning architecture recalling the Baroque ecclesiastical traditions of 17th-century Ukrainian churches. With its copper-coloured banyas and domes, and complex plan, the building is a marvel in a fairly remote situation near Pine River. The interior of the church is equally impressive, a celebration of deep-rooted tradition and style.

Benito Foods



106 Spencer Street, Benito

Now called Benito Foods, this simple little building (built about 1900) recalls the kinds of modest but serviceable commercial operations that lined many main streets in smaller Manitoba communities. The Benito example is typical of its type, with a broad main façade, here carried out in red brick, and expansive windows allowing views to the wares within. A modest Classical Revival cornice tops off the symmetrically composed façade. Like others of its type, the architectural flare was reserved for the main façade, with side walls of less expensive brown brick.

Swan Valley Credit Union Building



103 Main Street, Benito

The former Bank of Commerce Building in Benito (built around 1910, and now a credit union) is an excellent example of the kind of elegant bank buildings that served many small Manitoba communities in the early decades of the twentieth century. The main façade is the drawing card, with its fine Classical Revival features and details. This architectural vocabulary was de rigueur for bank buildings, suggestive of sophistication, and to convey to customers and townsfolk the permanence, trust, and security that the bank represented. At the Benito building the style is expressed in the deep white-coloured cornice and symmetrical arrangement of windows and doors, with the main walls sheathed in dark brown brick.

Merchants Bank



Main Street, Minitonas

The Merchants Bank is a good example of the kind of simple but effective building that rose in many smaller Manitoba communities in the first decades of the twentieth century, as towns grew and prospered, and secure banking facilities became essential. The first bank in Minitonas was located in the A. McPherson Garage with J.C. Pridham as manager and Gladys Allen and Jennie Worthington as clerks. In 1919 the present bank building was built and the Merchants Bank moved into these premises. It was later used as a Bank of Montreal, then taken over by Toronto-Dominion, and was used for many years as the community library. The bank features durable red-brick walls, numerous window openings and modest Classical Revival details – cornice band at the roof line and pediment above the main doors.

Cork House



Mountain Road, Bellsite

Most early residential structures in the Swan Valley region were constructed with logs – an obvious building material, given the wealth of timber in the surrounding forests, and the absence in the early days of saw mills. Many of these pioneer buildings were quickly replaced by more sophisticated houses using milled lumber, but a few of the early log structures remain. One especially good example is near Bellsite, dating to about 1910. This fine little house still features original notched logs, painted brown, with small windows set off in yellow highlights.

Trofimchuk House



2nd Avenue W, Minitonas

Most houses outside the Swan Valley region's primary urban centre, Swan River, were modest log or wood frame buildings. But there were a few exceptions, with the most important of these at Minitonas, where an impressive residence marks the west end of that community. Built around 1910, the Italianate-style House is an ambitious two-storey brick building featuring a wealth of notable features and details. With a handsome two-storey bay window and delicate Italianate-style detailing on the verandah, and coupled brackets at the roof eave, the building has been carefully preserved over the years. It remains an enduring reminder that architectural ambitions were not restricted just to larger urban centres.

Dominion Post Office



5th Ave. N & First St. N. Swan River

Built in 1951, and thus an early example of its type, the design of the Swan River Dominion Post Office placed the community at the vanguard of a new approach to the Canadian government's post office designs. The building is an excellent example of the Mid-century Modernist aesthetic. This minimalist approach is apparent in the flat roofline and straight edges with brick wall surfaces and window bands with aluminum framing and panelling, and with one façade slightly recessed to emphasize its non-load-bearing nature. Until 1978 the Post Office building also housed the Sergeant's Residence of the local Royal Canadian Mounted Police detachment, along with the station and jail.

Benito Telephone Office



Swan Valley Historical Museum

The building is diminutive, but its affect upon the community of Benito was profound. And that is because the former Benito Telephone Office (built about 1930), recalls the pre-automatic era of telephone technology. This was one of scores of such structures erected across the province, when human operators were essential to daily communications in their communities, working switching equipment that made local and long-distance calling possible. The building also has connections to a notable pioneer citizen – Mrs. Hunt, who homesteaded south of Benito and served as a teacher at Bonny View School, later moving to town and taking over the post office and also the telephone service. Mrs. Hunt organized the local Women's Institute in 1912, one of the first to be formed in Manitoba, and also formed the first Boys and Girls Club in Manitoba.

Bowsman C.N. Station



Swan Valley Historical Museum

The former Bowsman Canadian Northern (later National) Railway Station is an important building recalling that community's importance in a rail system that opened northwestern Manitoba to immigration and provided essential grain-moving services for farmers. Built in 1900, following the specifications for a "Type A" station, the Bowsman building is a faithfully restored example. With its distinctive hip-gable roof and central gabled dormer, the building would have been a handsome landmark in the community. Sometimes called "sensible" and "welcoming," these structures also featured an extended rail-side awning, to provide protection from the elements for passengers and freight.

St. Andrew's United Church



5th Ave. N & 1st St. N. Swan River

St. Andrew's United Church (1951) recalls two of the foundational faiths of the community—St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church and Swan River Methodist Church (both from 1900)—which regrouped as a United church in 1925, as did thousands of other churches across Canada with the formal union of Methodist, Congregationalist, and roughly two-thirds of the Presbyterian churches, to reduce service duplication. The Swan River church is a fine example of the restrained Gothic Revival style, a popular choice for Protestant church buildings designed in the 1950s and 1960s, which combined a more modern building aesthetic with the still-beloved forms and features of Gothic architecture. At St. Andrew's the designer also added a more modern flourish, with an Art Deco-inspired bell tower.

Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Holy Ascension



205 Kelsey Trail Swan River

Built in 1963, the exuberant design of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Holy Ascension combines completely modern construction and finishes with the historic traditions of Ukrainian Baroque architecture. The crisp corner banyas and stout central dome are the hallmarks of this architectural heritage, enlivened with tall Orthodox crosses. The interior is likewise a striking blend of modern and historic – with soaring glue-lam ceiling trusses sheltering the elaborate ecclesiastical features required in the Orthodox service.

Lady Hubble School



Swan Valley Historical Museum

Lady Hubble School (named, it is thought, for a local luminary) is a rare surviving example of the hundreds of small one-room schools that once dotted the Prairie landscape. Such modest buildings recall the determination of pioneers to ensure that their children had the fundamentals of a good education. Lady Hubble, built in 1922, is as simple as can possibly be. But two features—eave returns and a bank of windows—give it a modest elegance. Moved to the Swan Valley Museum in 1977, the building's interior has been carefully restored, with desks, ceiling lights and typical educational accoutrements suggesting its original character.

War Memorial



2nd Street N. & 7th Avenue N. Swan River

The simple and affecting words define the significance of Swan River's War Memorial: "Erected to the Memory of Those of Swan River Who Answered the Call of Duty and Paid the Supreme Sacrifice in the Great War 1914 – 1918." The memorial was commissioned in 1930 by the Swan River Ladies Auxiliary and was officially dedicated on 11 November 1931. The stout stone cairn is flanked by two steles, one honouring the local veterans of World War II and the Korean War and the other noting in general the members of the Canadian Armed Forces and Merchant Navy.

Beattie House



312 6th Ave. N. Swan River

The Beattie House (1902) is the most important historic building in Swan River, combining architectural significance with a vital connection to a major early private banker, responsible for providing loans for local businesses and farmers. The building's architectural claims are notable, from the grand stonework of the main floor and the banded shingle-work of the upper floor, to the brackets that accent the roof eaves. The house is an ongoing reminder of the ambitions and sophistication of the community's first generation of citizens. The banker in question was Fred Beattie, and the house was designed and built under his supervision. The landmark building was later occupied by another renowned early Swan River personality – Dr. George Bruce, the local coroner and Medical Health Officer for the Town of Swan River for many years.

McFadden House



500 Duncan Crescent, Swan River

The McFadden House is an excellent local example of the type of large house erected by many well-to-do pioneering families in the early decades of the twentieth century. Known as the four-square, because of its boxy massing, these kinds of buildings were also usually distinguished by low-sloped pyramidal roofs, small dormers and large windows. The McFadden House also recalls an interesting early construction material occasionally used in such buildings – concrete block. This material, popular in the first decade of the 1900s, was an innovative way to suggest stone construction – thus creating an enduring appearance at a greatly reduced cost. The house was built by the McFadden Brothers, who operated a large milling company in town, and brother Alfred lived here with his family for many years.

Harley House



512 2nd Street N Swan River

The Harley House has a powerful connection to the earliest days of life in Swan River, being the oldest surviving residence, dating to 1900. Moreover, its construction, of logs (now concealed by stucco) recalls the earliest construction material used throughout the Swan Valley region, when the nearby forests provided the only source for building materials. The house also is notable as the home of Hugh Harley, a noted Dominion Land and Immigration Agent, and the first postmaster in town. The building is a Municipal Heritage Site, preserved by the Swan Valley Museum.

Zinger House



Swan River

The Zinger House (from 1916) is a fine example of the kind of medium-sized residential design that gained popularity in the 1910s and 1920s. Known as Craftsman bungalows, the style originated in southern California around 1905, as a reaction against ornate Victorian architecture, prioritizing natural materials, built-in furniture, and handcrafted details. The Zinger House is a near textbook example, with its low-pitched roof, wide eaves with exposed rafters, and large, covered front porch. The stonework on the main floor was undertaken by Joe Zinger, an expert stonemason, using undressed fieldstone found in the valley. Mr. Zinger was related to the Zinger Brothers who operated a well-known local saw mill for many years.

Sovereign House



Photographer A. B. Sovereign (circa 1910)

Swan Valley Historical Museum

The Sovereign House is unique in Manitoba, a large log house built on an octagonal plan. This amazing building was the brainchild of Alexander A.B. Sovereign, a well-known photographer in Tent Town (a temporary pioneer camp-site near Minitonas) and then Swan River, during the early 1900s. There are a few other octagonal buildings in the province, typically for barns or agricultural display structures, but no one, except Mr. Sovereign, thought to apply this once-popular form to a house. That it has survived to this day is a testament to the original builders, who must have brought enormous skill to the corner notching features, as well as the Swan River Museum, which has preserved the building on its site – now covered with stucco to hold the hundred-year-old logs in place.

