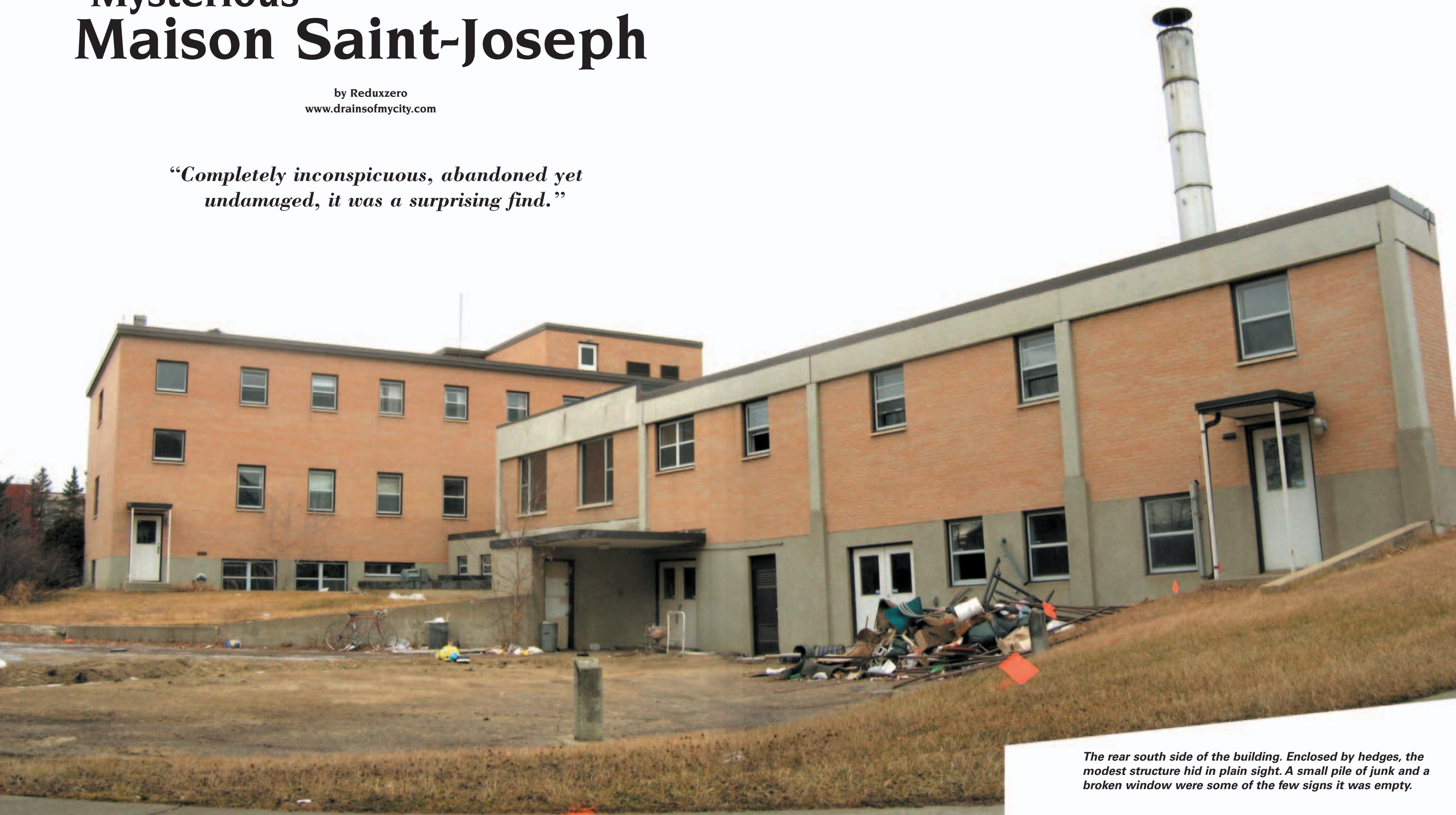


# The Mysterious Maison Saint-Joseph

by Reduxzero  
[www.drainsofmycity.com](http://www.drainsofmycity.com)

*“Completely inconspicuous, abandoned yet undamaged, it was a surprising find.”*



*The rear south side of the building. Enclosed by hedges, the modest structure hid in plain sight. A small pile of junk and a broken window were some of the few signs it was empty.*

## The Mysterious Maison Saint-Joseph



We never knew much about the secluded, yellow-bricked building tucked away in the residential neighbourhood. Sited on land occupying half a square block, the property was ringed by a fence, tall hedges and trees, effectively screening it from passerby. I'd hurried past the property countless times, and never even knew it existed. Nancy Drew, walking through the neighbourhood one early fall day, was the first to discover it was abandoned. A large dumpster parked outside filled with yellow asbestos bags, piled junk in the yard, and dark windows were unmistakable signs that the building was no longer in use. Completely inconspicuous, abandoned yet undamaged, it was a surprising find.

We scouted it soon after that, noting that most doors were still locked, and the building appeared in good condition. A medium-sized building, it was roughly laid out like a cross; with a three-story section in the centre and what looked to be a large auditorium of sorts at the west end, with a chimney sprouting from the east wing. Alarm stickers were pasted prominently to every window and door on the ground floor, numbering in the dozens. There was a small courtyard of sorts around back, with large fruit trees, a fountain, a gazebo and a shed that looked as though it was being squatted in. With no obvious entrance, and signs of possible renovation work occurring inside, we decided to wait it out.

One day we returned for another look, and immediately noticed the gazebo and shed out back had been completely destroyed. The dumpster was also gone, the pile of junk had shifted, and ground-floor window was partially smashed out. Still very unsure what was going on with the mysterious building, and wary of the alarm stickers, we were hesitant to venture inside. We did, however, help ourselves to the delicious ripe apples and pears dropping from the trees in the back yard. And by sifting through the pile of junk in the driveway, we learned that the building had been called the Maison Saint-Joseph, and had presumably been a convent.

Fast forward to a mild day in mid December. Having put it off long enough, I decided to finally head out and explore the building. Strolling onto the property, I was pleased to see that the ground-floor window was mostly clear of glass. Feeling a little nervous, I purposefully went up to the window and climbed through the empty frame, dropping into the mechanical room on the other side.

Faced with a large green boiler and a couple workbenches, I scanned the room. Noting the shredded pipe insulation dotting the floor, I pulled my respirator out of my backpack and strapped it on. Drawing raspy breaths through the mask's filters, I crept to the doorway, stepping around stray chunks of debris on the floor. The building was silent and cold, and I peeked into the hallway. Ceiling tiles, insulation, and other debris lay on the floor in either direction, and there was no sign of anyone. Walking cautiously, I headed to the short end of the hallway to begin my exploration of the building.

The first interesting area I walked into was the gymnasium. The large, open space was dimly lit by daylight filtering through windows made of glass blocks. A bare stage occupied one end, with the under-stage storage carts rolled out; basketball nets hung down from the ceiling. The floor was dusted with a thin layer of white powder, revealing various marks and footprints. Along one wall, a simplified history of the convent had been painted out in sequence; using a growing tree as a

### Photos previous page:

#### Top:

**A view through the refectory, past the double doors and into the kitchen beyond. There was a small window (barely visible at left) where dishes were passed through the wall to the washing station.**

#### Bottom:

**A look at the elevator from the main stairwell. In some places, such as here, the paint was peeling from the ceiling and walls, leading me to wonder how long the building has been empty.**



### Photos this page:

#### Top:

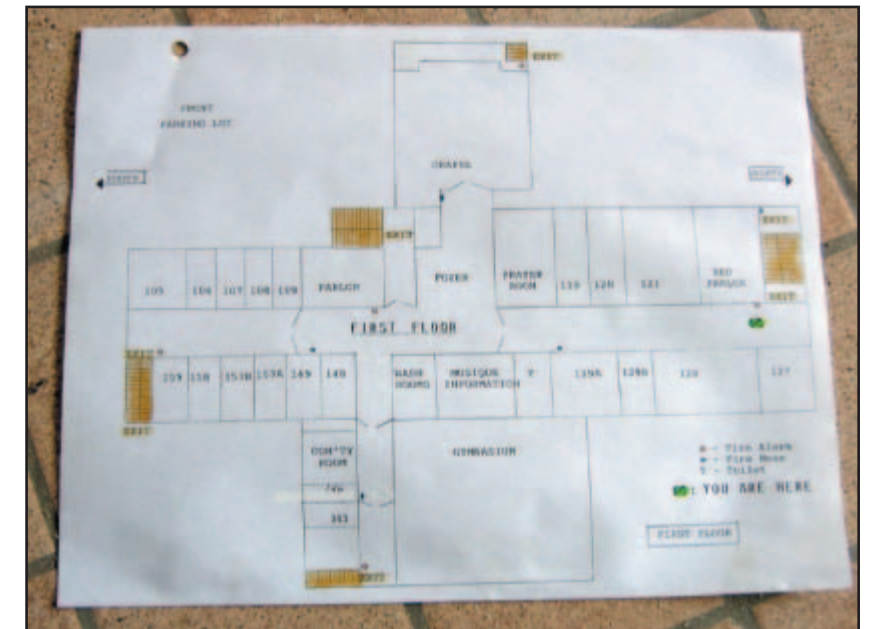
**The gymnasium, looking toward the stage. The storage carts have been pulled out from their spaces underneath the stage. Note the painting on the far wall; the trees formed a mural that stretched the length of the gym, detailing the religious group's history. A huge painting of a tree, the final one in the series, was painted on the back wall of the stage.**

#### Middle:

**Handy building floorplans were attached near the stairwells. This is the first floor, which featured nifty areas such as the chapel and the Red Parlour.**

#### Bottom:

**Large wooden doors, chained together, were the entrance of the main lobby. Behind the wooden reception desk was a large coat rack area, and an adjacent waiting lounge.**



**Photos this page:****Top:**

*Colourful glass block windows let in tinted light.*

**Bottom:**

*The plain altar, left behind. The small crosses on the wall were the only religious items left behind.*

**Photos next page:****Top:**

*Coming into the chapel, facing the altar area. Note the bolts sticking out of the floor, where the pews used to be.*

**Bottom:**

*A view from the altar, facing toward the main doors and second storey balcony. Note the confessional booths.*

metaphor. French and English words, on either side of the tree, described the religious order's major milestones as it spread and grew throughout the world.

Next, just down the hall, was the kitchen area. Mostly stripped out, a large black stove and some junk were the only remnants. A small staircase lead down into the separate pantry, which still contained shelves and a large deep-freezer. At the back of the pantry was an entire walk-in cooler, complete with panels of black cork insulation. Attached to the kitchen was a small dishwashing room, which adjoined the modest refectory.

Everywhere on this basement floor, sections of acoustic tiles in the false ceiling had been ripped out to expose pipes above. Moving through the basement, I found the laundry area. Served by a laundry chute, the room contained an institutional size washer and dryer, as well as some kind of large press/rolling machine. Next door, a room designated 'lingerie' was wall-to-wall shelves and racks; all of them empty of the clothing, bedsheets and linens they once held.

The darkest end of the basement was home to a large storage area packed with full-size wardrobes, and a couple smaller rooms. Entering a stairwell at the end of a hallway, I noticed a tiny booth built into a corner; literally a closet with acoustic tile on the walls, it housed a single telephone and a draw-curtain for a door.

I took the stairs up to the third floor, which turned out to be a dormitory level. A single hallway ran the length of the floor, both sides patterned with doors leading into the small rooms. The rooms were all different but essentially identical wallpapers, paint, curtains, and even carpet made each one unique in appearance, if not in size and layout. Several common washrooms, and a couple of 'infirmarie' areas helped fill out the floor.

Wandering down a small hallway, I stepped through a set of wooden double doors, and breathed out a quiet "Wow." I stood on a balcony overlooking a large room that was softly lit by daylight coming through colored glass panels on the walls. Wooden arches curved up to support the ceiling, and at the front was a raised platform. The former chapel was fairly plain; bare cream-colored walls adorned only by small wooden crosses, even the altar lacked any built-in decorative features. The pews had all been taken out, as had any other religious furnishings.

Passing by the building's lone elevator, I took the main stairs down to the second floor, and went through the main doors of the chapel. Noticing three doors just off the entrance, I took a peek into the confessional booths; which were empty aside from the little sliding window between booths. Following the path of wear on the carpet that lead between where the pews had been, I walked up the center of the room towards the altar. The large room was silent except for a slight creak of wood as I stepped onto the raised floor. I stood and stared at the room for a few minutes, noting the balcony at the back where I'd been minutes before, and the





wonderful multi-hued light that came through the windows. After a quick investigation of the area behind the altar, which consisted of a small room and a hallway, I left the chapel.

The second floor was fairly mundane. Hallways laid in a 'T' shape were flanked by various offices and lounges. Interestingly, a single wing of the building on the second floor was the only area that looked to have been alarmed. Bulky sensor boxes at the top of the doors were the only alarms I spotted in the entire building. Several of the offices had thick shag carpeting and leather-padded (soundproof?) doors; one room was even designated the 'Red Parlour', presumably because of its carpet. A couple of windows on this floor allowed views down into the gym.

Eventually the daylight began to fade and my fingers were pretty cold, so I decided to leave. Locating a nice back door to exit from, I removed my respirator and packed away my camera. A light snow had begun to fall as I headed for home.

Searching the internet, I learned that the building had been home to a french convent of nuns known as les Filles de Jésus. Beyond that, everything was unknown- the building's date of construction, occupation, and abandonment. Apparently the building was now owned by a developer, with eventual plans to demolish it and build a senior's care facility on the property.

A month elapsed, with only a single return exploration visit. Then, as I passed by one day, I was shocked to see a trackhoe busily ripping down the building. After racing home to get my camera, I returned to capture the demolition and record the final moments. The trackhoe had already torn down over half the building by the time I knew about the demolition, and I was unable to ever get back inside for a final tour. Luckily, I managed to get some photos and watch the destruction. The next day, all that remained was a deep pile of rubble filling the foundation. The mysterious Maison Saint-Joseph, which we barely knew, is no more. ◇

## Photos this page:

Top:

*A green bathtub's motorized chair lift*

Bottom:

*Pale daylight down the second-storey hallway.*

## Photos next page:

Top:

*Day two of the demolition in progress. It was fascinating to watch this trackhoe rip down chunks and walls with such ease.*

Inset Middle:

*A tree mural found in the remains of the gym.*

Bottom:

*The demolition site at the end of the second day. The building is just over half gone.*

