



720 ALVERSTONE STREET

DANIEL McINTYRE COLLEGIATE

PREPARED BY PETERSON PROJECTS – DECEMBER 2009



**720 ALVERSTONE STREET
DANIEL McINTYRE COLLEGIATE**

Date of Construction: 1922

Building Permit: 287/1922 (Plans at City Storage)

Architect: Semmens, John N.

Contractor: Sutherland Construction

ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

Another example of the fine public education facility designed and built by the Winnipeg School Division in the pre-1930 era.

The original, L-shaped two-storey brick building rests on a raised stone foundation and features a wealth of ornamentation around its numerous windows and doors finished in lightly coloured limestone. Openings throughout the original structure include both square and pointed arch heads. The front (east) façade faces Alverstone Street and includes large projecting areas at either end of the elongated structure and two modestly projecting entrances. The south side includes a unique crenellated corner tower and two projecting wings with stone clad oriel windows on the second floor.



South façade, 2009

The building stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition. Additions in 1955, 1958, 1964, 1977, 1979, while significant, have not hidden the fine original design or architectural elements.

The school is one of Winnipeg's best examples of the Collegiate Gothic style. This style rose in popularity after 1900 as a reaction to the highly ornamented buildings of the earlier Gothic Revival style. The newer version opted for much simpler silhouettes and subdued ornamentation, in the words of one author, "a calm, disciplined monumentality."¹

Flat surfaces were preferred; buildings were often long, low symmetrical masses embellished with crenellated towers and the distinctive pointed arch of the Gothic style. Construction material was monochromatic, usually brick or stone, again a departure from the multi-hued façades of the Gothic Revival style. Inspiration for the detailing of the new style was found in the English Perpendicular Gothic design of the 15th century. Because it found widespread expression on the campuses of many North American universities and then in the public school system, it became known as Collegiate Gothic.²

Architect Colonel John N. Semmens was born in Toronto, Ontario in 1880, the son of a pioneer Methodist minister. He graduated from Wesley College and received his architectural degree from the University of Pennsylvania. In 1910, he moved west to Winnipeg, opened a practice, and soon became associated with the prominent New York firm of McKim, Mead and White. While in its employ, Semmens served as local supervising architect for the Bank of Montreal project at the southeast corner of Portage Avenue and Main Street. During his career, he was twice president of the Manitoba Association of Architects, 1921 and 1941.³



Southeast corner, 2009

In 1920 he was hired as a consultant for the Winnipeg School Division by J. B. Mitchell. In that role (which was expanded as Mitchell approached retirement in 1928), Semmens designed a great number of Winnipeg schools and supervised the planning of others. During World War II, Semmens organized the 2nd Battalion of the Grenadiers, but did not go overseas. He spent the remainder of the war as Commandant at Camp Shilo.⁴

In 1958 he moved to Victoria, B.C. and died three years later. A list of Semmens's major work in Winnipeg includes: Bank of Montreal, 335 Portage Avenue, (1911-13, Grade II, local supervising architect for McKim, Mead and White); Turner-Walker Block, 425 Henry Avenue (1912, Grade III); R.R. Scott House, 29 Ruskin Row (1914, Grade II); Sir Sam Steele, 15 Chester Street (1921, Grade III); and Wolseley, 511 Clifton Street South (1921, Grade III). He has been given 10 points by the Historical Buildings Committee.



Addition to north end, 2009

HISTORICAL INTEREST:

The school was named in honour of Daniel McIntyre (1852-1946), who was appointed in 1885 as Inspector and Superintendent of the Winnipeg School District. For the next 43 years, McIntyre used his knowledge of U.S. and eastern Canadian school systems and buildings, gleaned from numerous fact-finding trips, to improve the Division's delivery of education. Better heating, lighting, ventilation, and fire prevention and escape methods transformed the dark public schools into large, well-lit and airy structures that made Winnipeg a leader in North America in the planning and construction of school buildings.

It was originally designed as a four-storey structure but financial constraints within the school division led to the construction of a two-storey facility.⁵



West façade, 2009

RECOMMENDATION TO HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE:

Under the Historical Buildings By-law, this building meets a number of important criteria:

- its historical importance- an important 1920s-era school building constructed by the Winnipeg School Division during a boom period;
- its associations- its long-term connections to education in Winnipeg;
- its design- an excellent example of the Collegiate Gothic style;
- its architect- J.N. Semmens was a respected and important practitioner;
- its location- contributes greatly to the historic streetscape of its neighbourhood; and
- its integrity- its main façades continue to display many of their original elements and design.



Front (east) façade, 1978

ENDNOTES:

- 1 L. Maitland et al., A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles (Peterborough: Broadview Press Ltd., 1992), p. 166.
- 2 Ibid., p. 166; and Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg: Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, Historic Resources Branch, 1991), p. 20.
- 3 Information courtesy of the Manitoba Association of Architects, Winnipeg.
- 4 Winnipeg Free Press, November 5, 1961; and J. N. Semmens, "Typical Schools of Western Canada" in The Journal, The Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, Vol. IV, No. 11 (November 1927), pp. 401-406.
- 5 G. Bugailisikis, "School Buildings of the Winnipeg School Division No. 1: An Inventory of Extant School Buildings to 1940" report for the City of Winnipeg Department of Environmental Planning, 1986, p. 49.