



1265 BARRATT AVENUE ISAAC BROCK SCHOOL

Date of Construction: 1913

Building Permit: 753/1913 (Plans at City Storage)

Architect: Mitchell, James Bertram

Contractor: Sutherland Construction Company

ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

Built in 1913 as Winnipeg's largest elementary school, Isaac Brock School has been meeting the educational needs of its neighbourhood for nearly 100 years.

The brick and stone building has four public façades, the front (south) faces Barratt Avenue and is distinguished by the central entrance tower featuring fine stone classically-based accents, similar to the design of the front of Principal Sparling School, 1150 Sherburn Street (built in 1913). Limestone is used to accent window openings throughout and the building features a raised foundation that allows for large basement windows to make the space useable for classrooms. The side elevations (east and west) both include projecting stone entrances.



West façade, 2009

The building stands on its original site, appears to be in good structural condition and does not appear to have suffered major exterior alteration. The cost of construction was given as \$240,000.¹

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."²

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.³

The architect for this school was James B. Mitchell, born in 1852 in Gananoque, Ontario to Scottish immigrant parents. After studying architecture at the Montreal Art Institute, he came west as a 21-year-old member of the first detachment of North-West Mounted Police in 1874.⁴ Mitchell was no stranger to the military life, having been a teenage bugler in the Canadian militia during the Fenian raids of 1866 and 1870.⁵ As Mitchell passed through Manitoba on the N.W.M.P.'s famous western march, he noted the prosperity of the area and returned to the province after his tour of duty ended in 1877.⁶ His military career also included membership in the Wolseley Expedition to the Red River Settlement in 1870 and serving as a colonel of the 100th Winnipeg Grenadiers in World War I.⁷



East façade, 2009

Mitchell was elected to the Winnipeg School Board in 1888 and four years later was appointed to the post of Commissioner of School Buildings (architect for the division).⁸ For 37 years until his retirement in 1928, Mitchell designed some 48 school buildings which cost more than \$8,000,000 to construct.⁹

Mitchell was assisted and supported by the Division's Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Daniel McIntyre. McIntyre held his post from 1885 until retirement in 1928, the same year Mitchell stepped down.¹⁰ These two men worked tirelessly to sell the idea of universal, proper education in Manitoba. Their success was recognized throughout the country and their legacy is the fine structures that have remained useful to the present.

Up until 1901, local architects prepared and submitted plans for new facilities to the School Board under the Supervision of Mitchell and McIntyre. During this period, 1888-1901, Mitchell himself designed two schools: Wellington School in 1898 and Somerset School in 1901.¹¹ After 1901, Mitchell took full control over design. He often used comparative research to aid in the creation of better buildings, touring parts of Ontario and the United States to understand their approaches, for example.¹²

Mitchell died in Winnipeg in 1945. In 1956, the J.B. Mitchell School (1720 John Brebeuf Place) was opened to honour one of the city's leading educational administrators.¹³



Rear (north) façade, 2009

HISTORICAL INTEREST:

The school was named after Major-General Sir Isaac Brock, British army officer who was in charge of the Upper Canada (present-day Ontario) army during the War of 1812 and is credited with several important victories. He died at the Battle of Queenston Heights on October 13, 1812.



Detail of front tower, 2009

RECOMMENDATION TO HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE:

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

- its historical importance- another of the fine public school buildings constructed prior to World War I by the Winnipeg School Division, internationally recognized as a leader in the design and construction of school buildings during this period;
- its associations- its long-term connections to its neighbourhood and the Winnipeg School Division;
- its design- an excellent example of a two-storey, classically detailed school building in the Winnipeg School Division;
- its architect- J.B. Mitchell was a respected and important practitioner;
- its location- a conspicuous building that contributes greatly to its neighbourhood; and
- its integrity- its main façades continue to display many of their original elements and design.



Rear (north) and east façades, 1978

ENDNOTES:

- 1 City of Winnipeg Building Permit, #753/1913.
- 2 L. Maitland et al., A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles (Peterborough: Broadview Press Ltd., 1992), p. 166.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 166; and Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg: Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, Historic Resources Branch, 1991), p. 20.
- 4 G. Bugailiskis, "School Buildings of the Winnipeg School Division No. 1," unpublished paper, Part B, p. 8.
- 5 *Ibid.*, Part B, p. 8.
- 6 S.C. Grover, "Earl Grey School - 370 Cockburn Street," Report for the Historical Buildings Committee, June 30, 1980, p. 2.
- 7 S.C. Grover, "960 Wolseley Avenue - Laura Secord School," Report for the Historical Buildings Committee, June 30, 1985, p. 2.
- 8 S.C. Grover, "Earl Grey School", *op. cit.*, p. 3.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 10 *Ibid.*, pp. 7-10.
- 11 G. Bugailiskis, *op. cit.*, Part B, p. 14.
- 12 *Ibid.*, pp. 7-10.
- 13 S.C. Grover, "Earl Grey School," *op. cit.*, p. 4.