

340 COCKBURN STREET – EARL GREY SCHOOL
J.B. Mitchell – 1912-13



In the early years of this century, our public school system underwent massive changes to accommodate and reflect transformations in Manitoba society as a whole. The arrival of thousands of new immigrants, many of whom were regarded with suspicion, forced a measure of calculated assimilation through the schools. At the same time, Canadians' pride in the British Empire was at a peak and there was open admiration for, and adoption of, British methods.

At the time, a great enlightenment had gripped British (and most other Western) institutions, of which women's suffrage and free, universal education were integral parts. To cope with the monstrous ills which plagued society, education was considered a panacea. This optimism permeated the specific design of large, well-lit "Board Schools", which were built by the hundreds across England. The Board Schools greatly influenced Canadian educators, particularly Winnipeg's Commissioner of School Buildings, J.B. Mitchell. Mitchell was a stalwart of Empire: he was a member of the original North West Mounted Police force, a former colonel, and a strong advocate of the values of education (enlightenment) in a healthy, pleasant

atmosphere. In a forty-year career with the School Board, he designed many schools which embodied his values. His designs include the original St. John's and Kelvin, Dufferin, Somerset, Norquay, LaVerendrye, Lord Selkirk and Earl Grey Schools. J.B. Mitchell School, opened in 1956, is named in honour of his contributions.

Earl Grey School, built in 1914, is a massive brick structure, named for a popular governor-general of Canada. The design is U-shaped to give maximum light while making the most of the schoolyard. Its details reflect Mitchell's study of the Board Schools – its impact is one of stability. The institution in the school proved to be equally dynamic: it was chosen for an experiment in forming the junior high school as an intermediate bridge for students of a particular age and interest. Following the success of Earl Grey Junior High School, this pattern was eventually adopted in most provinces. Elective areas of study and rotating classes in specialized rooms and labs created an interesting environment and encouraged students to complete the entire curriculum.

Earl Grey School also made a name for itself in sports, drama and music. At one time, both signatures on Canadian dollar bills were those of former Earl Grey students: James E. Coyne, Governor of the Bank of Canada and Robert E. Beattie, the Deputy Governor.

At present, the school remains an active, vibrant place. Its exterior is virtually intact with the exception of a gymnasium added to the rear. The interior is bright and sweeping, with large curved windows and beautiful woodwork.