



**1045 GROSVENOR AVENUE**  
**GROSVENOR SCHOOL**

PREPARED BY PETERSON PROJECTS – FEBRUARY 2009



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## 1045 GROSVENOR AVENUE GROSVENOR SCHOOL

**Date of Construction:** 1922

**Building Permit:** 1573 & 2506/1922

**Architect:** Semmens, John Nelson

**Contractor:** Sutherland Construction Company

### ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

Grosvenor School has been a landmark building in its Crescentwood neighbourhood since its construction more than 80 years ago.

The building is constructed of Fort William Tapestry brick with limestone accenting. It is designed in an unusual “T” shape, the east façade, facing Guelph Street, includes a projecting two-storey section with stone framed entrance, second floor brick and stone buttresses, stone shield and battlements at the roofline. Two large banks of windows set in stone frames are also found on this elevation. The south end includes a stepped parapet with stone capping and a stone tablet with the school name and the north end is filled on both floors by large windows. The elongated section attached to the west wall of this section continues the window layout and design of the east section and includes an entrance on the south façade. At the west end is the 1959 addition.



East façade, 2009

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The building sits on its original site, appears to be in good structural condition and has not suffered major exterior alteration.

The school is one of Winnipeg's good 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."<sup>1</sup>

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 15<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

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



North façade, 2009

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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.<sup>4</sup>

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.

#### HISTORICAL INTEREST:

The school was built as a 12-room structure for elementary students; only eight of the classrooms were occupied when the building opened. The 1959 additions was built as extra classroom space and for a general-purpose room but is now used for the library and gymnasium.<sup>5</sup>



West and south façades, 2009

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RECOMMENDATION TO HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE:

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

- its historical importance- one of only a handful of early 1920s school buildings completed in Winnipeg in the post-World War I era;
- its associations- its long-term connections to Winnipeg School Division No. 1 and education in Crescentwood;
- its design- an excellent example of the Collegiate Gothic style;
- its architect- J.N. Semmens was a respected and important practitioner;
- its location- defines an important intersection and 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.



East façade detail, 2009

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ENDNOTES:

- <sup>1</sup> L. Maitland et al., A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles (Peterborough: Broadview Press Ltd., 1992), p. 166.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 166; and Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg: Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, Historic Resources Branch, 1991), p. 20.
- <sup>3</sup> Information courtesy of the Manitoba Association of Architects, Winnipeg.
- <sup>4</sup> 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.
- <sup>5</sup> Historical information from the Grosvenor School website, [www.wsd1.org/grosveno/Grosvenor\\_School/History.html](http://www.wsd1.org/grosveno/Grosvenor_School/History.html), no date.