



290 LILAC STREET

LA VERENDRYE SCHOOL

PREPARED BY PETERSON PROJECTS – DECEMBER 2009



290 LILAC STREET LA VERENDRYE SCHOOL

Date of Construction: 1909

Building Permit: 401/1909

Architect: Mitchell, James Bertram

Contractor: Saul and Irish

ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

Another of the turn-of-the-century public school buildings designed and constructed by the Winnipeg School Division to provide safe, modern classroom space for the children of the Fort Rouge area – a role it continues to fill 100 years later.

The familiar design features are all present – raised basement with large windows to allow air and natural light into the classroom and related spaces, symmetrical front (east) façade with centrally located stone framed entrance accessed by a wide set of stairs, stone and brick cladding and large square headed window openings with stained glass panes as accents. Several large arched windows grace the front (east) façade. The building was designed in a unique “U” shape to increase the number of windows available for ventilation and light. The school’s unusual roofline includes both Flemish and rounded gables.



Front (east) and north façades, 2009

The building stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition. Alterations to the building have taken the form of a gymnasium addition completed in 1960-61.

The building, with its classically detailing and raised two-storey design, was the prototypical school built by the Winnipeg School Division for the first decade of the 20th century and beyond. The raised basement increased usable interior space while the two-storey height made it safer in case of fire – two important considerations for the Division. While degree of ornamentation varied widely, this basic plan was repeated throughout the Division and into the surrounding communities during this period.

Architect J.B. Mitchell was 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 the North-West Mounted Police (NWMP) in 1874.¹ As Mitchell passed through Manitoba on the NWMP's famous western march, he noted the prosperity of the area and returned to the province after his tour of duty ended in 1877.²

Mitchell was elected to the Winnipeg School Board in 1888 and later was appointed to the post of Commissioner of School Buildings (architect for the Division).³ Until his retirement in 1928, Mitchell designed some 48 school buildings costing more than \$8,000,000.⁴

Mitchell was supported by the Division's Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Daniel McIntyre. McIntyre held his post from 1885 until retirement in 1928, the same year as Mitchell stepped down.⁵ These two men worked tirelessly to provide universal, modern education in Winnipeg. Their success was recognized throughout the country and their legacy is the fine structures that have remained useful to the present.



Rear (west) and south façades, 2009

Until 1901, a number of well-known local architects prepared and submitted plans to the School Board for new facilities, under the supervision of Mitchell and McIntyre. Mitchell, however, designed Wellington School in 1898 and Somerset School in 1901.⁶ Thereafter he took full control over the design process. He often used his knowledge of advances in other school divisions to create better buildings, touring parts of Ontario and the United States to understand their approaches.⁷ He died in Winnipeg in 1945.

HISTORICAL INTEREST:

The school was named after noted French-Canadian fur trader and explorer Pierre Gaultier De Varennes, Sieur de La Vérendrye. Born in 1685 in Trois-Rivières, Québec, La Vérendrye, three of his sons, and a nephew set out from Montréal to find an overland route to the Pacific Ocean. They got as far west as what are now Saskatchewan and the Dakotas by 1738. Two of his sons may have reached the Rocky Mountains in 1742. Along the way, they established forts and fur trading stations, in the Winnipeg area; they established Fort Rouge in 1738 near the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine rivers.



Front (east) and south façades, 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 examples of public school buildings constructed in Winnipeg prior to World War I that gained it an international reputation for excellence of design and layout for educational facilities;
- its associations- its long-term connections to public education in Crescentwood and the Winnipeg School Division;
- its design- an excellent example of the Richardsonian Romanesque style;
- its architect- J.B. Mitchell was a respected and important practitioner;
- its location- defines an important intersection and contributes greatly to the historic streetscape of two major arteries within the Exchange District; and
- its integrity- its main façades continue to display many of their original elements and design.



North façade, 1992

ENDNOTES:

- 1 G. Bugailiskis, "School Buildings of the Winnipeg School Division No. 1" (unpublished paper), Part B, p. 8. Below as "School Buildings."
- 2 S.C. Grover, "Earl Grey School - 370 Cockburn Street," Report for the City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee, June 30, 1980, p. 2. Below as "Earl Grey School."
- 3 "Earl Grey School," p. 3.
- 4 Ibid., p. 3.
- 5 Ibid., pp. 7-10.
- 6 "School Buildings," Part B, p. 14.
- 7 Ibid., pp. 7-10.