

111 POLSON AVENUE – LUXTON SCHOOL

James Bertram Mitchell (1907 & 1915)



On many fronts, Winnipeg was known as a leader in Western Canada and beyond. One area where the city was acknowledged as being at the forefront was the design and construction of its public school buildings for nearly the first three decades of the 20th century. Utilizing collected knowledge from school districts and boards across the continent, the Winnipeg School Division set out to build the safest, most efficient buildings possible. Aesthetics were also an important consideration, the schools were meant to be visually impressive and yet fit into their mostly residential neighbourhoods.

The responsibility for the design of these schools was, for many decades, in the hands of two men on the School Board – Daniel McIntyre (1852-1946) the Inspector and Superintendent and James B. Mitchell (1852-1945) Chairman of the Committee on Buildings and later the Division’s Building and Supply Agent – the Division’s architect. From 1888 until 1928, when both men retired, they

were able to produce dozens of well-designed structures with excellent lighting, heating and ventilation, fire protection and escape systems and interiors flexible enough to provide space for an ever expanding and evolving curriculum.

Luxton School on Polson Avenue was built in 1907-1908 at a cost of \$75,000. In 1915-1916 a major, 9-classroom addition was completed on its west side. In 1948, a gymnasium/classroom addition was built on the northwest corner of the facility and more recently, in 1987, a new gymnasium and kitchen was built onto the west end of the 1915-1916 portion.

The two original sections are finished with a wealth of ornamental features. The front (south) façade of the 1907 building includes two-toned brick cladding, round stone accenting, transom windows with stained glass panes, ornamental brickwork and brick parapet with geometric shapes, bracket-like elements and stone finials. Most conspicuous is the main entrance, set in a large stone portico with Doric Order columns, balustrades, dentils, volute-like bases, ornamental tin ceiling and an ornate parapet with a “LUXTON SCHOOL” panel. The front façade of the western addition continues the materials of the older section and includes a more substantial brick and stone entrance portico.

The interior is organized with classrooms on either side of wide, high ceilinged corridors with exit stairs at either end. Dark wood trim and ornamental tin ceiling panels were used throughout. One of the interior’s most unique features is a copper clad dividing wall in the 1915 staircase.

Luxton School’s design, raised basement, two storeys with central corridors was a departure from the taller schools built in the Division earlier. It was felt the new design heightened the ability of students to exit quickly and became the pattern for all Division schools built for many years after.

The school opened in September 1907 and was named for William Fisher Luxton (1844-1907), who had just died and the School Division’s first teacher, an M.L.A. and the found of what became the Winnipeg Free Press.

Elements of the building that would require approval if alterations were planned are:

Exterior:

- Large two-storey brick and stone public school structure built in 1907 with additions in 1915, 1948 and 1987, its front façade facing south onto Polson Avenue, its east façade facing an open playground, its west façade facing a back lane and its north façade facing Luxton Avenue;
- The main (south) façade of the 1907 building with its raised basement, two-toned brick with stone accenting, recessed windows with stain-glassed filled transoms in rectilinear openings and large, ornamental brickwork, raised stone entrance portico and flat roof with stone parapet with raised area holding a panel with the carved words “LUXTON SCHOOL”;
- The east façade with its continuation of materials and design of the front elevation;
- The north façade with similar materials and design elements as the front elevation and projecting entrances at its east and west ends;
- The 1915 addition with its raised basement, two-toned brick superstructure with stone accenting, large brick and stone portico with arched side openings, heavy brick and stone second storey balustrade, tin ceiling and panel carved with the words “LUXTON SCHOOL”, hidden east end, partially hidden west end with Flemish gable, rear (north) facade with brick chimney, partially hidden by an addition and a hipped gable roof with windowed dormers; and
- The 1948 addition with its raised basement auditorium section with large windows in rectilinear openings and one-storey classroom section with windows and transoms in rectilinear openings and corbelled brick accenting.

Interior:

- Elements of the ornamental tin ceiling;
- West staircase and metal accented dividing walls in the 1915 section; and
- Wide central hallway plan.