

598 ST. MARY'S ROAD – ST. VITAL FIRE HALL & POLICE STATION
Alexander R. Melville, 1914



The permanent settlement of the area that is now known as St. Vital was a result of Métis families looking to farm as their traditional way of life – fur trading, transporting goods and the buffalo hunt – began to disappear in the early to mid-1800s. Along the Seine River, Métis families were known to have settled along its banks in the early 1820s and other Francophone families followed – names like Riel, Genthon, Lavallee, St. Germain, Guay, Mager, Ritchot and Mouard.

The first school was organized in 1860 and named St. Vital and the Rural Municipality of St. Vital was created in 1883, enlarged by its amalgamation with the Rural Municipality of St. Boniface in 1891.

In the early 1910s, Municipal leaders struggled with balancing the traditional rural, agrarian and Francophone settlement that represented the majority of the region with the growing urban areas, as developers, mostly Anglophones, bought up farms and subdivided them into residential lots,

streets and avenues. With this development came a heightened need for modern civic services – sewers, paved roads, telephones and streetcars. One of the most important services was fire protection and the Municipal Council opened its modern hall in 1914 near the intersection of the area’s two main thoroughfares: St. Mary’s Road and St. Anne’s Road.

The large brick and stone structure was designed by A.R. Melville, the same architect responsible for dozens of pre-World War I fire stations built throughout the City of Winnipeg. The basic plan called for equipment space on the ground floor with stables and a hay loft for the horses loft to rear, residential, office and recreational space for the firefighters on the second floor and storage space in the attic. In the St. Vital building, space was also provided, in the south end, for the police, a magistrate’s office and jail cells. Much of the interior ceiling is still covered in the original ornamental tin.

The exterior includes many ornamental features including a rusticated limestone base, dark brick superstructure, arched equipment entrances, an oriel window set in the stepped or Flemish gable with Palladian window on the third floor and the hose drying tower complete with arched windows and brickwork, complete entablature with heavy overhanging eaves and stone accenting.

Over time, changes have been made to both the interior and exterior. All the windows have been replaced, the big equipment doors have been modernized, the cresting has been removed from the roof and two brick additions have been built on the rear. When the municipal offices and council chambers were moved into the second floor of this building in 1924 in an effort to save money, the firemen’s bedrooms were remodelled into offices and the council chamber was located in the attic. Today, the ground floor is used by the St. Vital Historical Society and as an ambulance station; much of the second floor is used by an antique radio club (civic offices and council moved to a new building in 1960). One of the more interesting spaces is at the rear of the second floor, where the 1950s-era wood and glass counters used to serve the public are still intact.