310 VAUGHAN STREET

ISBISTER SCHOOL

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings & Resources Committee
Researcher: M. Peterson
April 2020
This building embodies the following heritage values as described in the *Historical Resources By-law, 55/2014* (consolidated update July 13, 2016):

(a) The structure is the oldest standing public school building in Winnipeg and has been continually used since its construction in 1898;

(b) The building stands as a reminder of the growth the Winnipeg public school system and the Winnipeg School Division in the late 19th century;

(c) It was designed by Samuel Hooper, well-known local architect and is an excellent example of the Queen Anne Revival style;

(d) Built of brick with stone accenting on a stone foundation, representative of contemporary construction methods;

(e) It is a highly conspicuous building in the downtown; and

(f) The building’s main façades have suffered little alteration.
...the walls that you see rising before you are an expression of the universal desire of our citizens to give their children who will succeed them such a training as will enable them to carry on worthily the work of nation building which their fathers have so well begun.1

When Ontario farmers, businessmen and their families began to immigrate on a large scale into Manitoba in the 1870s, they had a profound effect on the existing society. They brought the ideas and practices that had become part of their eastern lives. One of their most strongly held traditions was to have a properly organized and funded public school system.

Men like Ontario’s Egerton Ryerson had promoted the public school as the developer of good taste and manners, and as society’s great assimilator. When the number of non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants to Canada rose, the school assumed an increasingly large role in citizenship. Part of the process, as Ryerson and his contemporaries saw it, was to make the school building as attractive as possible. This meant that aesthetics, fire safety, ventilation and lighting had to be major considerations.

When these easterners began settling in Winnipeg, however, they found a school system limited mainly to those who could afford private classes. The public schools that did exist were substandard – classrooms were dimly lit and cramped and often located in rented rooms with questionable fire protection and sparse furnishings. The situation did not quickly improve since adequate public support, financial and otherwise, was not forthcoming until the late 1880s.

Three events in that decade ultimately created a modern educational system that became a source of pride for Winnipegers. Firstly, provincial regulations were adopted in 1883 to ensure minimum air requirements for each student, to provide professionally designed public schools,

1 Manitoba Free Press, September 27, 1898, p. 3. Excerpt from School Board Chairman Joseph Carman’s speech at the cornerstone laying ceremony, Isbister School, September 26, 1898.
and to guarantee outdoor space for urban students. This created a foundation for public school infrastructure and forced administrators to seek professional help in designing and building facilities.

The second major development was the 1885 appointment of Daniel McIntyre (1852-1946) as Inspector and Superintendent of the Winnipeg School District. For the next 43 years, McIntyre used his knowledge of U.S. and Eastern Canadian school systems and buildings, gleaned from numerous fact-finding trips, to improve the Winnipeg Division’s delivery of education. Better heating, lighting, ventilation and fire prevention and escape methods transformed the dark public schools into large, well-lit and airy structures.

The third event was the appointment in 1888 of a newly elected trustee as Chairman of the Winnipeg School District’s Committee on Buildings. The trustee, James Bertram Mitchell (1852-1945), would later become the Division’s Building and Supply Agent. Much like McIntyre, Mitchell’s design expertise evolved through a combination of common sense and his use of models provided by other jurisdictions. Until his 1928 retirement, the same year as McIntyre’s, Mitchell remained a fixture in the design department of the Division.²

But until 1907, this partnership relied on the plans of Winnipeg’s fine architects to create modern educational space.

From Winnipeg’s first public school, log building opened in 1871 at the corner of Maple and Henry streets to more substantial frame and later brick veneer structures built in areas of population growth, like the North End.³ The first substantial structure, South Ward School, was built in 1880 on the south side of Graham Avenue between Hargrave and Carlton streets (Plate 1).

By the 1890s, Winnipeg’s population was beginning to grow at an increasing rate straining many of its existing facilities, including public schools. In 1898, the School Board voted to build four new 3-storey brick structures (Plate 2), including an 8-room brick school to serve the growing residential district north of Portage Avenue. It was quickly determined that a larger building was necessary and the Board increased it to 10 classrooms with an assembly hall. Land was acquired on Vaughan Street north of Portage Avenue, plans were finalized, tenders called and let for the $29,336 Isbister School and the cornerstone was laid by School Board Building Committee Chairman Angus Browne on September 26, 1898 and the school opened to pupil in March 1899 (Plates 3 and 4).4

STYLE

Isbister School is an early and excellent example of the Queen Anne Revival style as applied to a large public building.5 The style borrowed heavily from English architecture of the 15th century, blending classical and medieval motifs into a picturesque form. Asymmetry was achieved through any number of combinations of porches, bay windows, projecting wings, balconies and other devices. Roofs were usually irregular and complex, with dormers, gables and ornamental chimneys. Variations in materials and colours were also used to animate the façades. Given this freedom of design, however, accomplished designers were still able to create balance in the structures, offsetting busy surfaces by placing calmer elements nearby.6

The popularity of the style in Canada began in the 1880s and lasted until World War I. On the prairies, pre-1900 examples of the style were not numerous because large-scale development occurred after the turn-of-the-century. Post-1900, it was quickly adopted for use in the growing residential districts, especially the more affluent neighbourhoods where its showy qualities were greatly admired.

6 L. Maitland et al., op. cit., p. 98.
CONSTRUCTION
Isbister School is a solid sand-brick, three-storey structure on a raised stone foundation and measures approximately 22.9 x 24.7 metres (see Appendix I for more technical information). Isbister School’s three-storey plan with central hallway became the model for several other public school buildings completed between 1899 and 1907.

A large, modern addition attached to the west side of the building was completed in 2003-2004, designed by Penner Prins Architectural Collaborative.7

DESIGN
The symmetrical front (east) façade begins at grade with the raised foundation clad in rusticated stone and interrupted by windows in rectilinear openings (Plate 5). The central section of this elevation received the most ornamental treatment. The main entrance is recessed, flanked by stone columns and a stone balustrade and topped by a modest stone belt course with stone brackets (Plate 6). The stone cladding of the ground floor continues up and finishes in an arch filled with decorative brickwork above two second storey windows with stone sills and heads in rectilinear openings. Above the arch, the third storey windows in rectilinear openings, more ornamental brickwork and stone detailing, a carved stone panel with the words “ISBISTER SCHOOL”. This area is topped by the ornate tower, with arched openings, brick and stone balustrade, copper-clad cupola, complete, metal-clad entablature, oval window openings, square lantern and high, bellcast pyramid roof with flag pole (Plate 7).

The remainder of the front façade features windows in rectilinear openings on the first and third floors and arched on the second floor, ornamental brickwork and stone accenting and unmatched gable ends with round (south) and arched (north) window openings (Plate 8). A limestone date stone is located in the northeast corner.

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7 Canadian Architect, October 2006. The addition won a Prairie Design Award.
The south façade includes the same design of windows, rectilinear and arched and a projecting section that holds the open metal fire escape, gable end and ornamental brick chimney (Plate 9). Part of the wall to the west of this projecting section is windowless. The north façade matches the south façade (Plate 10).

Part of the rear (west) façade is covered by the 2003 addition, the wall to the south exhibits fenestration and detailing similar to the side elevations (Plate 11).

**INTERIOR**

According to contemporary accounts, a reception hall and foyer was located just inside the main entrance. The central hallway featured oak staircases at the east and west ends accessing both upper floors. V-joint wainscoting and pressed ornamental tin ceiling were used in the foyer and elsewhere in the building (Plates 12-14).

The basement held mechanical rooms and playrooms. Four large classrooms with attached cloakrooms were located on the main and second floors with wainscoting, tin ceilings and panes of stained glass. The third floor originally held two classrooms on the south side and a large auditorium on the north (later divided into two more classrooms).

Today, changes to the interior have been required as upgrades were required and programming has changed.

**INTEGRITY**

The building stands on its original site, appears to be in good structural condition for its age and has not suffered major exterior alterations.

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8 Designated interior elements are: stairway banisters; wainscoting; pressed tin ceilings and stained glass.
The roof was fully restored in 2001, the exterior of the building was cleaned in 2005 (Plate 15) and the windows were replaced in 2017 (Plate 16).

STREETSCAPE
Isbister School is an important part its streetscape/neighborhood. By World War I, this area was a mixed collection of single family dwellings, terraces, apartment blocks and retail stores (Plate 17). Larger structures were also located nearby: the Y.W.C.A. on Ellice Avenue (Plate 18) and Wesley College (today’s University of Winnipeg), on Portage Avenue (Plate 19). Most of the contemporary neighbouring structures have been replaced with newer buildings (Plate 20).

Today, the school building sits on a large piece of property, set back from Vaughan Street with landscaped front grounds (Plate 21).

ARCHITECT/CONTRACTORS
British-born architect Samuel Hooper (1851-1911) designed Isbister School. Hooper began his prolific career in and became Manitoba’s first provincial architect when the office was created in 1904 (see Appendix II for biographical information). He has received 20 points from the Historical Buildings and Resources Committee.

The contractors were Daniel David Wood and Archibald C. Sutherland. Wood was a local builder and fuel dealer born in England in 1859. He came to Canada at the age of 10 and the family settled in Brantford, ON, where he started a brick contracting business. In 1882, he arrived in Winnipeg and spent the next two years working for various railways. At the time of his death on December 30, 1925, Wood was listed as President of D.D. Wood & Sons Ltd. (with Victor A. and D.J. Howard) and the Fort Garry Construction Co., Ltd., was connected to the Alsip Brick and Tile Co., and a large shareholder in quarries in Stony Mountain. Wood also served as a City Councillor from 1889-1902.9

9 Winnipeg Tribune, December 31, 1925, p. 8.
Wood built a number of large projects in the city including:¹⁰

- Norquay School, Lusted Avenue, 1892 (demolished)
- Bank of Hamilton Building, 1897 (demolished)
- Isbister School, 310 Vaughan Street, 1898 (Grade II)
- Gladstone School, Osborne Street, 1898 (demolished)
- Stovel Block (large addition), 245 McDermot Avenue, 1900 (Grade II)
- Bank of Commerce, Main Street, 1900 (demolished)
- MacDonald Warehouse, 116-118 Market Avenue, 1901 (demolished)
- Sacre-Coeur School No. 2 (J.B. Somerset School), 775 Sherbrook Street, 1901 (demolished)
- Carnefac Block, 188 Princess Street, 1901 (List of Historical Resources)
- Lechtzier Bath House, 216 Pacific Avenue, 1903
- Balmoral Court Apartments, 540 Balmoral Street (1905)
- Wellington School, 680 Beverly Street, 1906 (demolished)
- Travellers Building, 283 Bannatyne Avenue, 1906-1907 (Grade II)
- Maw’s Garage, 114 King Avenue, 1907 (Grade III)
- Corydon Avenue Telephone Exchange, Corydon Avenue at John, 1907
- City of Winnipeg Assessment Office, 185 King Street, 1909 (demolished)
- Winnipeg Police Headquarters (addition for Patrol & Signal Station), 170 Rupert Avenue, 1911 (demolished)
- Alsip Sandstone Brick Company Factory, Elgin Avenue, 1911 (demolished)

Little is known about Archibald C. Sutherland, who was born in Scotland in 1859 and came to Canada in 1874 or 1878.¹¹ He is listed in the City of Winnipeg Building Permit Ledger Books, from 1900-1905, working mostly on small buildings, residential and commercial. The family lived at 69 McDonald Avenue in Point Douglas, in a house built in 1894 by D.D. Wood.¹² By 1909, the family is no longer listed in local directories.¹³

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¹⁰ Author’s files; and R.R. Rostecki, op. cit., p. 4.
¹¹ Canada Census, 1901 and 1906.
¹³ Henderson’s Directory, 1900-1910.
Construction on the school began in June 1898, the name was chosen in July – honouring Alexander Kennedy Isbister (1822-1883) – Plate 22. Isbister was born in present-day Saskatchewan and was educated at the Red River Settlement and then the Orkney Islands. He worked for the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) as a trader and explorer. He returned to Scotland and studied law, being called to the Bar in 1864. Isbister became a well-known educator and tireless advocate for the rights of his countrymen, both Indigenous and Métis, in the face of the HBC monopoly. He established trust funds and left money in his will to benefit scholars in Manitoba. Beyond the public school, Isbister Street and the Isbister Building on the Fort Garry campus of the University of Manitoba are named in his honour.

In 1964, the school was closed due to dwindling enrolment caused by the replacement of the residential neighbourhood with commercial ventures. Three years later, however, the building re-opened as the Winnipeg Adult Education Centre. This institution has been very successful, necessitating the opening of the large addition in 2004 (Plates 23 and 24).

A Historic Sites Advisory Board of Manitoba plaque is located in the southwest corner of the building.

There is no known significant historical event connected with this building.

This was one of the Winnipeg School Board’s first modern public school buildings completed in the city. It was completed as the City’s population began to expand, seriously taxing the aging building

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stock. All types of modern structures were completed to meet this demand and school buildings were planned and built throughout the city.

**LANDMARK**

Its ornamentation and setting increase the conspicuousness of Isbister School.
APPENDIX I

CITY OF WINNIPEG - Preliminary Report

Building Address: 310 Vaughan Street
Building Name: Isbister School

Original Use: educational
Current Use: educational

Roll No. (Old): 525040 (---)
RSN: 158739

Municipality: 12
Ward: 2
Property or Occupancy Code: ---

Legal Description: 1 St. John, Plan 129, Block 3, Lots 866/870, south 4’ Lot 871, Lot 878, Lots 879/883

Location: southwest corner Webb Place

Date of Construction: 1898
Storeys: 3
Heritage Status: Grade II (October 1982)

Construction Type: Brick and stone foundation

3672/1960 [CS] $7,000 (construct fire escape); 3872/1971 $2,000 (alterations); 2199/1993 $2,000 (interior alterations); 6281/1993 [CS] $10,000 (construct miscellaneous building); 114557/1999 $14,500 (replace roof); 116083/1999 $32,000 (interior alterations); 327366/2003 $2,100,000 (addition); 341345/2003 $100,000 (foundation only for addition); 184288/2018 $40,000 (replace windows)

Information:
- 2004 addition- 11,948 sq. ft.

ARCHITECT: SAMUEL HOOPER
CONTRACTOR: DANIEL D. WOOD

---VAUGHAN STREET---
APPENDIX II

Samuel Hooper

One of Manitoba's most prolific and well-known architects, Samuel Hooper, was born in Hatherleigh, County Devon, England, in 1851. After attending school, he became an apprentice architect for his uncle. In 1869 the Hooper family immigrated to Canada, settling in London, Ontario. After nine years, the entire family returned to their native England but the 27-year old Samuel came back to Canada the next year, choosing Emerson, Manitoba, as his new home. The lure of opportunities in the big city prompted his move in 1881 to Winnipeg.

Together with Winnipegger David Ede he set up the Hooper Marble and Granite Company that created many statues and monuments. Hooper remained as president of the company for many years (Ede left in 1883), while his son, John S. Hooper, managed the business. Works designed and carved by the firm included the decorative Tyndall stone ornaments on the Merchants' Bank (1903), since demolished; a bust of Queen Victoria for the 1898 Jubilee Fountain in Assiniboine Park; and a commemorative monument of the Hon. John Norquay in St. John's Cemetery. Probably the most famous work was a monument to the fallen soldiers of the 1885 Riel Rebellion. This piece was originally placed in front of City Hall but later moved.1

In 1893 Hooper became an architect in the public works department of the provincial government. Together with this employment and the presidency of the granite company, he began a private architectural practice in ca.1905 with Albert Lee Houkes (Hooper and Houkes). Shortly after, this partnership was dissolved and Samuel created his most successful partnership – that of Hooper and Walker (Charles H.). Hooper's final partnership was with his son, Samuel Lawrence Hooper (Hooper and Hooper). S.L. Hooper was born in Winnipeg in 1888. After his father's death, Samuel L. became president of the granite company and formed the architectural firm of Hooper and Davis (William T.).2 He died during the influenza epidemic in January 1919.3

1 Manitoba Free Press, October 20, 1911; and Winnipeg Tribune, June 10, 1967.
2 Henderson's Directory.
3 Manitoba Free Press, January 9, 1919, pp. 5 and 12.
In 1904, the provincial government created the office of provincial architect to oversee design of numerous public buildings being planned in the province. Samuel Hooper was appointed to this position and held it until his death of bronchitis and asthma in England in 1911.

A list of work completed by Hooper and his various partnerships includes:

**Samuel Hooper-**

St. Mary’s Roman Catholic Cathedral, new front façade, 353 St. Mary Avenue (1896) – List of Historical Resources
Grain Exchange Building II, 156 Princess Street (1898) – Grade II
Isbister School, 310 Vaughan Street (1898) – Grade II
Provincial Deaf and Dumb Institute, Portage Avenue (1900) – demolished
Western Building (Schmidt Foundry), 90 Albert Street (1901) – Grade III
Provincial Gaol, 444 York Avenue (1901)
M. McMannus House, Edmonton Street (1902)
Icelandic Lutheran Church, Sargent Avenue (1902)
Thomas Scott Memorial Orange Hall, 216 Princess Street (1902) - demolished
St. Mary’s Academy, 550 Wellington Crescent (1902) – List of Historical Resources
Holman Meat Company Abattoir, Logan Avenue (1903) – demolished
St. Mary’s Roman Catholic School, St. Mary Avenue (1903) – demolished
Carnegie Library, 380 William Avenue (1903-1905) – Grade II
Knox Presbyterian Church, Selkirk, MB (1904)
Avoca Apartments, 329 Sargent Avenue (1905) – demolished

**Hooper and Walker-**

Winnipeg General Hospital, Bannatyne Avenue, veranda addition (1905)
R.C. McDonald House, 26 Amherst (now Avonherst) Street (1905)5
Marshall-Wells Warehouse, 136 Market Avenue (1905-1906) – Grade III
Icelandic Good Templars Lodge, 635 McGee Street (1906)
St. Joseph’s Orphanage, Portage Avenue (1906) – demolished
Sherwin-Williams Warehouse, Catharine Avenue (1906)
Central Police Station, Rupert Avenue (1906) – demolished
St. Jude’s Church, Wellington Avenue (1906) – demolished

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Hooper and Walker- (continued)

Adelaide Block, 107 Osborne Street (1906)
Black Warehouse addition, 80 Lombard Avenue (1907) – List of Historical Resources
George Maxwell House, McMillan Avenue (1908)
Carnegie Library addition, 380 William Avenue (1908) – Grade II
Hon. Robert Rogers House, 197 Roslyn Road (1908) – demolished

Provincial Architect's Department-

Provincial Land Titles Building, 433 Broadway (1903-1904)
Neepawa Land Titles Office, 329 Hamilton Street, Neepawa, MB (1905)
Manitoba Agricultural College (1905-1907), 139 Tuxedo Avenue
Provincial Normal School, 442 William Avenue (1906) – Grade II
Provincial Telephone Building (Freed Building), 474 Hargrave Street (1907-1909) – List of Historical Resources
Brandon Court House, 1104 Princess Avenue, Brandon, MB (1908-1911)
Minnedosa Court House, Minnedosa, MB (1909)
St. John’s Telephone Exchange, 405 Burrows Avenue (1910) – List of Historical Resources
Provincial Law Courts Building (with V.W. Horwood), 411 Broadway (1911-1916)
University of Manitoba, Administration Building (1911-1913) – List of Historical Resources
University of Manitoba, Taché Hall Men’s Residence (1911-1913)

Hooper and Hooper-

McClary Building, 185 Bannatyne Avenue, addition (1909) – Grade III
St. Vital Municipal Hall, St. Mary’s Road (1911) – demolished
Assiniboia Municipal Hall, 3180 Portage Avenue (1911) – List of Historical Resources
Cycel Court Apartments, 195 Furby Street (1911)
Stores, 837-847½ Main Street (1911)
Winnipeg Garage Company Garage, 253 Edmonton Street (1912)
Panama Court Apartments, 785 Dorchester Avenue (1912)
Pasadena Apartments, 220 Hugo Street North (1912) – Grade III
Canada Paint Company Warehouse, Sutherland Avenue, southwest corner May Street (1912)
Carman Apartments, 423 Burrows Avenue (1913)
Hooper and Davis-
Midtown Building, 267 Edmonton Street (1912)
Garrick Hotel addition, 287 Garry Street (1913)
H. Hirsch House, Manitoba Avenue (1913)
Apartment Block, Corydon Avenue (1914)
Rivera Court, 161 Cathedral Avenue (1914)
Maple Leaf Apartments, 915 Corydon Avenue (1914)
St. George’s Hall Building, 1575 Alexander Avenue (1914)
Stores, 161-169 Lilac Street (1914)
Public Press Building addition, 275 Sherbrook Street (1914)
Empress Hotel, Winnipeg Beach
Plate 1 – South Ward School, Graham Avenue, ca.1880. The school was later known as Ward 2 School and then Carlton School before its demolition in 1903. (Archives of Manitoba.)
Plate 2 – Winnipeg’s public schools, ca.1905. Isbister, Vaughan Street (top left); Machray, Mountain Avenue, built 1899, demolished 1921 (top right); North Central, also known as Norquay School, Lusted Avenue, built 1892, demolished ca.1956 (middle); Dufferin, Alexander Avenue, built 1896, destroyed by fire 1936 (bottom left); and Gladstone, Osborne Street, 1898, demolished 1962 (bottom right). (Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg-Views 66/21.)
Plate 3 – Isbister School, 310 Vaughan Street, ca.1900. (Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg- Schools-Isbister 2.)
Plate 4 – Isbister School, Vaughan Street, coloured post card, taken after 1908. Note the metal tube fire escape on the south façade. The building in the background is the Y.W.C.A. that stood on Ellice Avenue. (University of Alberta Libraries, Peel’s Prairie Provinces, Postcard 924.)
Plate 5 – Isbister School, 310 Vaughan Street, main (east) façade, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)
Plate 6 – Isbister School, 310 Vaughan Street, detail of main (east) entrance, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)
Plate 7 – Isbister School, 310 Vaughan Street, detail of main tower, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)
Plate 8 – Isbister School, 310 Vaughan Street, east façade gable ends- south (top) and north (bottom), 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)
Plate 9 – Isbister School, 310 Vaughan Street, south façade, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)
Plate 10 – Isbister School, 310 Vaughan Street, north façade, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)
Plate 11 – Isbister School, 310 Vaughan Street, rear (west) façade, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)
Plate 12 – Isbister School, 310 Vaughan Street, main staircase, ground floor, 2004. (M. Peterson, 2004.)
Plate 13 – Isbister School, 310 Vaughan Street, second floor hallway with original wainscoting and tin ceilings, 2004. (M. Peterson, 2004.)
Plate 14 – Isbister School, 310 Vaughan Street, stain glass and tin ceiling, staircase landing, third floor, 2004. (M. Peterson, 2004.)
Plate 15 – Cleaning of Isbister School, 310 Vaughan Street, 2005. (M. Peterson, 2005.)

Plate 16 – Replacement windows, Isbister School, 310 Vaughan Street, 2017. (City of Winnipeg, 2017.)
Plate 17 – City of Winnipeg Fire Atlas, Vol. I, Sheet 113, February 1918 showing the area around the school and: #1- Isbister School; #2- Y.W.C.A.; and #3- Wesley College. (City of Winnipeg.)
Plate 18 – Young Woman’s Christian Association Building, 447 Ellice Avenue, ca.1910. This structure was built in 1908 and date of demolition, ca.1950. (University of Alberta Libraries, Peel’s Prairie Provinces, Postcard 969.)
Plate 19 – Wesley College, date unknown. (Reproduced from www.manitobaphotos.com_postcard_nd.)
Plate 22 – Alexander Kennedy Isbister, date unknown. (Archives of Manitoba.)
Plate 23 – 2004 addition to Isbister School, west and south façades, 2020. (M. Peterson, 2020.)
Plate 24 – Third floor hallway of 2004 addition to Isbister School, looking east towards original building, 2004. (M. Peterson, 2004.)