

442 WILLIAM AVENUE – PROVINCIAL NORMAL SCHOOL
Samuel Hooper, 1904-06



For 40 years, this 2 1/2 storey Neoclassical structure in central Winnipeg served as a pivotal link in persistent efforts to improve teaching standards in Manitoba's public education system. The building was the largest, most grandiose and longest operating of four Normal Schools constructed in southern Manitoba by the provincial government between 1903 and 1912.

Formal teacher training was first offered locally in 1882-83, just over a decade after Manitoba's separate Protestant and Catholic school systems were established. Sessions generally were short and conducted out of rented facilities in St. Boniface, Winnipeg and various rural centres. Training was not mandatory until the mid-1910s, nor did prevailing wages provide incentives to upgrade skills beyond the minimum necessary for a teaching licence.

These were only a few of the issues confronting public education at the turn of the century. The divisiveness of the 1890-97 Manitoba Schools Question remained fresh, while the political compromises reached during that debate continued to strain the unitary secular system that had

replaced denominational schools. Moreover, student enrolment was growing substantially as a result of immigration and natural population increase. Educators were pressured to cope with the influx and to ensure that students from non-English-speaking households were assimilated into the majority Anglo-Protestant culture.

Construction of the first permanent Normal Schools in St. Boniface, Manitou and Winnipeg signalled the importance attached to better teaching standards as a way to address broader educational concerns. This initiative was accompanied by adoption of Ontario's model school system under which classes for some youngsters also were located at Normal Schools, thus providing teacher-trainees with on-site experience and instructors with a means to advance educational doctrines and ideals.

Samuel Hooper's design of the school at the southwest corner of William Avenue and Gertie Street reflects the facility's Winnipeg location and its dual role as headquarters for teacher education in the province. During his tenure as the first Provincial Architect (1904-1911), Hooper sought to dovetail designs and materials to the relative importance of the centre in which a new government edifice was being established. As the provincial capital, Winnipeg was at the top of this architectural hierarchy.

The English-born Hooper worked as a stone carver while residing in London, Ontario from 1869-78, although he studied architecture before emigrating to Canada. He eventually moved to Emerson, Manitoba and later (1881) to Winnipeg where he went into partnership with monument-maker David Ede. Hooper continued this business after Ede's retirement, then began to practise architecture in 1895. His projects included renovation of St. Mary's Church and design of the Exchange Building, Isbister School, Land Titles Building and Carnegie Library at 380 William, just east of the Normal School. Prior to his death in 1911, Hooper oversaw an extensive provincial building program across southern Manitoba.

His Normal School features copious use of mottled grey Tyndall limestone on the main (north and east) facades, thus reinforcing the elegance and permanency conveyed by the Neoclassical styling.

Most striking are the building's corner entrance and its irregular roof-line marked by a cupola, three prominent pediments and gabled dormers.

The arched main entrance is set above grade within a stone portico. This latter element has pairs of Tuscan columns beneath an entablature with a carved name plate and provincial crest. Above are fluted pilasters with corinthian heads flanking a pair of rectangular windows, followed by a large cornice, dormer and cupola topped by a flagstaff. A stone balustrade originally surrounded the base of this dome.

The principal facades generally are smooth and plain. Some contrast is offered by the rough-cut finish on the raised basement; stone bands; bracketed cornices; and single circular openings in the pediments. Natural lighting is provided by large rectangular windows on all levels, including the attic dormers.

Constructed in 1905-06 at a cost of \$100,000 under general contractor W.H. Rourke, this L-shaped building has a stone basement, solid brick bearing walls, galvanized iron roof and interior courtyard at the rear (south side). As well, its original ventilation system was relatively advanced.

The interior contains a marble staircase at the main entrance, stamped metal ceilings framed with metal cornices at wall junctions, oak entrance doors with glass transoms, and fir and oak trim. The basement originally held a gymnasium, recreation room, classrooms, kitchen and utility space. Offices, classrooms and a library were on the main floor, while a laboratory, museum and art room, and facilities for manual and domestic training were located above. A caretaker's suite was installed in the attic in 1912.

Also in that year, a concrete chamber was constructed below the basement by the Dominion government, but it was never used for its intended purpose of scientific research. Settlement problems required the addition of piles under portions of the building in 1939. Steel tie rods also have been inserted to control shifting of the east wall.

The facility's model school, which garnered a favourable reputation among Winnipeg parents, was phased out in c. 1912 when teacher-trainees were sent into public schools for their practical experience. An annex to the Normal School was built in 1943 on Gertie; however, the need for more suitable space and the decision to centralize teacher-training in Winnipeg led to relocation of the institute in 1946 to the former Manitoba School for the Deaf in Tuxedo. It was here that Canada's first residential Normal School was opened, providing more specialized training supported by a larger staff.

Provincial offices, social services and vocational training programs subsequently occupied 442 William until 1979 when the building was vacated. It has remained boarded up while various groups have explored the possibility of converting the space to residential use.