

ESTABLISHMENT (1890-1902)

During the decade before the turn of the 20th century, Manitoba's educational system underwent considerable change. In 1890, the Thomas Greenway government addressed the simmering conflict created by the imbalance between the burgeoning English-speaking, overwhelmingly Protestant population and the much smaller French-speaking Roman Catholic population. The government abolished the existing dual system and replaced it with a single publicly funded system modelled on the Ontario School Act. The new system was wholly administered by a non-sectarian Board of Education under a responsible minister. A seven-member Educational Advisory Board was established to make regulations. Roman Catholic schools continued to operate as separate entities, but without public support.

On paper, the impact on actual school construction was to consolidate available resources - money, architects, inspectors, ideas - for one school within each district, rather than the two that were possible under the old system. And certainly, there were many fine new buildings constructed, especially in urban centres.

For the most part, though, the majority of one-room schools built during this period continued to be of the simplest plan, form and appointments; that is, a small rectangle, a gable roof and virtually no embellishments (Figure 21). The basic characteristic distinguishing school buildings from small farm houses continued to be the use of two or three evenly spaced windows on each long wall.

Modest increases in local economic security, availability of materials and broader dissemination of information, however, conspired to create an environment conducive to the construction of better one-room schools than was possible ten years earlier. The expression of these architectural advances ranged from the use of simple adornments, like bell towers and decorative wood trim (Figure 22) to more picturesque forms and rooflines (Figures. 23 and 24) to the use of more substantial materials (Figure. 25).



Figure 21.

Coates School, 1901. The basic one-room form continued to be used for the majority of rural schools during this period. Demolished. (*Our First Century*, p. 234)



Figure 22.

Soudan School, 1899. A fine bell tower and porch distinguished this handsome little building. Demolished. (PAM)



Figure 23.

Craiglea School, 1892. The building had a decided church-like appearance, with the grouping of windows beneath a decorated gable. Demolished. (*The Path of the Pioneers*, p. 100)



Figure 24.

Portage la Prairie School, 1896. This exceptional one-room design was the work of Winnipeg architect George Browne. Demolished. (*Canadian Architect and Builder*, 1896, n.p.)



Figure 25.

Tenby School, 1895. Built of concrete blocks manufactured on the site, the designer of this school also used a truncated pyramidal roof and twin dormers to create a novel form.

At the same time there were occasional attempts, at a local level, to apply standard designs. One especially interesting scheme, used at least four times in the Carman area during the mid-1890s, featured a shallow-roofed class space fronted with a shed-roofed entrance and a bell tower (Figure 26).

In French-speaking areas the design of small public schools continued to rely on the mansard or gambrel roof to distinguish them from the prevailing forms (Figures. 27 and 28).

This is not to say that the school inspectors were satisfied. In fact, local individualism was a continuing source of irritation to the department. An inspector's list of defects typically included the use of small porches, low ceilings, poor ventilation, inadequate flues, inadequate or poorly-located blackboards and a general disregard for aesthetics. An inspector's observation as late as 1900 is indicative:

The average school house is not a thing of beauty. It usually looks very base and bleak and uninviting, out and alone on the open prairie.

Still, the advances were impressive. The number of one-room school buildings almost doubled, to 1,127, between 1890 and 1902. By the end of this period, furthermore, many schools were constructed according to contemporary standards set by the Department of Education. Moreover, there was increasing attention given to providing ancillary facilities, like stables, privies and even on-site teacherages.



Figure 26.

Garnett School, ca. 1895. The combination of roof shapes created a distinctive design, one that became a standard for a few years in the Carman area. Demolished. (*Dufferin*, p. 173)



Figure 27.

St. Joachim School, ca. 1890. A squat gambrel and highly decorated bell tower distinguished this distinctly French building. Demolished. (PAM)



Figure 28.

Montcalm School, 1899. A mansard roof reflected the architectural heritage of this French district. Demolished. (PAM)

Despite the continuing focus on agricultural employment, there was increasing recognition that an education could be an entree to clerical, business and professional careers in the rapidly growing urban markets of the province. The expansion of towns and cities during this period generated demands for larger, graded educational facilities, as well as for secondary (or collegiate) institutes. By 1892 Winnipeg, Brandon (Figure 29) and Portage la Prairie all had established collegiate institutes, with the facility in Winnipeg a separate building (Figure 30). In smaller urban centres there was a building boom as large graded schools were constructed. By 1900 fifty such facilities were completed.

Naturally, the physical size, public expense and significance of these buildings demanded a greater architectural sophistication than was deemed necessary for small one-room schools. An architect was often commissioned to prepare drawings, and although the department was still empowered to approve the designs, the local desire to create distinctive - and often picturesque - buildings was still prevalent (Figures. 31 and 32).

While there was a great, and exciting, range of designs produced during this period, there were still basic similarities, with roots in Ontario, where many of the design problems associated with this building type had already been effectively worked out (Figure 33). Typically, the building was organized around a central staircase, with a standard classroom size (26' x 32') of two to four rooms on each floor. The basic plan was easily adaptable to any of the popular stylistic schemes of the period, Gothic Revival, Romanesque Revival, Italianate or Second Empire.

In Manitoba, this type of building was invariably bulky, on a near-square plan and two storeys in height. Considerable attention was given to the roof design, although the most common form was a hip. In fact, the most popular architectural expression derived much of its character from the Georgian tradition, with its formal, handsome features. The grandest of these buildings were constructed of stone and brick, but many schools were erected with a wood frame, covered with wood siding.



Figure 29.

Central School, Brandon, 1892. This ambitious design featured twin towers topped with steep mansard roofs, a popular architectural expression used for large public buildings of the period. Demolished. (*Brandon. A Prospect of a City*, p. 73)



Figure 30.

Winnipeg Collegiate Institute, 1892. Again, the mansard roof was used, here to provide extra space, likely for an auditorium. Demolished. (PAM)



Figure 31.

Gretna Public School, 1892. This was an impressive design built of wood and adorned with many picturesque elements, including the bell tower, roof cresting, the interesting window shapes and their playful disposition in the walls. Demolished. (*Gretna. Window on the Northwest*, p. 121)



Figure 32.

Elkhorn School, 1896-97. The basic box shape was here enlivened with an inset entrance bay, gable extensions containing the windows and a combination of round- and segmentally-arched windows. Demolished. (*Steel and Grass Routes*, p. 73)



Figure 33.

Almonte High School, Almonte, Ontario, 1875. Buildings like this formed the basis for the design of large late-19th century schools in Manitoba. ("The Noblest Monument is the School"; *The Urban Public School in Canada Before 1930*, p. 63)

In Manitoba, the form could be very simple, with only the hipped roof and a central pediment (Figure 34). Or it could be a very sophisticated expression of the style (Figure 35). More often it was reworked with the addition of a central pavilion, a picturesque bell tower and sometimes other stylistic influences, especially Romanesque Revival or Italianate (Figure 36).

Another fairly common design that came into use towards the end of the period featured a corner tower (Figure 37). The dramatic form created by the corner tower was intended only as a temporary measure. As the student population of the community increased, it was anticipated that a second wing would be added to the building and the tower would be transformed into the central focus of a symmetrical design.

One other school design used during this period produced a more modest building, consisting of two classrooms. These structures were typically low, with hipped roofs and a range of features and details common on other schools designs (Figure 38).

Perhaps the greatest concern evinced by inspectors about these buildings focused on their fenestration. Like their one-room counterparts, there was a concern that there were too few windows. In many schools the openings were too tall and narrow, admitting only a modest amount of light (Figure 39).

Meanwhile, the fallout from the dissolution of the dual system continued to have repercussions throughout this period. The apparent victory of the Anglo-Ontario population to reform the educational system as a unitary one was continually under attack. Indeed, in 1896 the issue was instrumental in toppling the federal Conservatives.



Figure 34.

Holmfield School, 1901. The most basic expression of the Georgian style still created a handsome building. Demolished. (*By the Old Mill Stream*, p. 43)



Figure 35.

Deloraine School, 1893. One of the most handsome rural school designs from this period stood for only eight years, succumbing to fire in 1901. (*Deloraine Scans a Century*, p. 127)



Figure 36.

Boissevain School, 1894. Subdued Italianate influences were expressed in the design of the tower and the window caps. Demolished. (PAM)



Figure 37.

Oakwood School, Oak Lake, 1898. Like several others, this building was designed to be enlarged with the addition of a wing on the right side. (*Ox Trails to Blacktop*, p. 122)



Figure 38.

Napinka School, 1896. Two classrooms were located on the main floor; a library, storage and furnace rooms were in the basement. (*Our First Century*, p. 251)

In 1897 the new Liberal administration of Wilfred Laurier was able to reach a compromise with Manitoba's government that established bilingual schools in areas where ten parents could petition the local authorities for a school. Of course, the compromise was intended to address French concerns, but its implication was to be immediately felt with the arrival of the first waves of eastern European, especially Ukrainian, settlers to the West. These immigrants naturally took advantage of the provision to establish their own Ukrainian-English bilingual schools.

The implications for the construction of actual school buildings, however, were minimal. The schools that Ukrainians built initially differed little from the rough log structures constructed by all pioneering settlement groups. Also, by the time they had advanced past the first phase of settlement - after the turn of the century - standardized building designs were available (and their use encouraged) by the Department of Education.

The growth of an increasingly sophisticated system continued apace in Winnipeg. By the early 1890s the Winnipeg Public School Board had established a considerable measure of independence from provincial authorities and had undertaken to replace the city's first generation of small buildings with larger, more modern, structures. This program was carried out under the direction of Col. J.B. Mitchell, Commissioner of School Buildings from 1892 until 1928.

Twelve of these schools were built between 1892 and 1902, to house 7,000 students. The first of them, Norquay, was designed by George Browne and was to be the standard used for other buildings (Figure 40). The schools certainly differed in appearance, designed as they were by at least seven different architects, but there were some constants, largely because Mitchell and Superintendent Daniel McIntyre determined the general layout.



Figure 39.

Morden Collegiate, 1894. A handsome building indeed, but the use of small windows arrayed on all sides of the classrooms created internal lighting problems in many large schools. Demolished. (*Morden Centennial*, p. 83)



Figure 40.

Norquay School, Winnipeg, 1892. The basic design of this school, prepared by George Browne, was to be used for several others between 1890 and 1902. Demolished. (PAM)

The schools were all three storeys in height with a central tower and shallow hipped roof, and were planned on a twelve-room module, with a fairly constant classroom size (24' x 32') (Figure 41). Each school was an exceptional architectural project, solid, impressive, but often also richly decorated, even fanciful, producing an inviting impression for the students (Figures. 42, 43 and 44). Increasingly, a school building's exterior was being seen as explicitly part of the school's total didactic role, as implied in the Board's annual report for 1899:

With no museums or picture galleries or other agencies for the cultivation of taste and promotion of art amongst us, it is important that the school should not fail in its duty in this respect.

After 1901 control of school design fell directly to Commissioner Mitchell, who hired draftsmen to prepare plans. Not surprisingly, the variety of building expression declined. But the quality of design also changed, with a reliance on a rather stolid symmetry and modest detail (Figure 45).

The Department of Education continued efforts to improve its standards in areas additional to the physical condition of the buildings. More attention was given to playgrounds in Winnipeg, with the construction of fences, the sowing of grass at the front of the buildings and the planting of shade trees. These initiatives were tied in with Arbour Day, first celebrated in Winnipeg in 1893 with the planting of 300 trees.

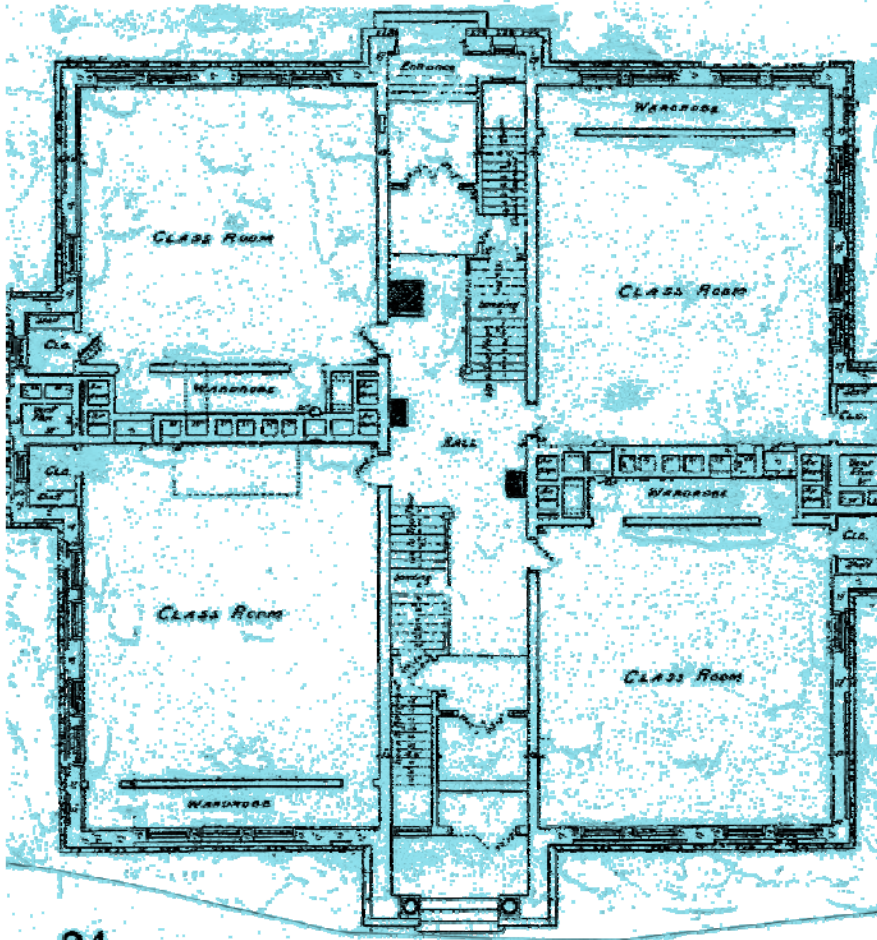


Figure 41.

Alexandra School, Winnipeg, 1902. This straightforward floor plan was typical for Winnipeg schools from this period. Demolished. (Building Department, Winnipeg School Division No. 1)



Figure 42.

Mulvey School, Winnipeg, 1893. Another of George Browne's designs, this building featured fine detail brickwork and an impressive array of window shapes. Demolished. (PAM) and 44).



Figure 43.

Dufferin School, Winnipeg, 1895. An exciting design produced by C.H. Wheeler featured pinnacles and dormers, decorative brickwork and a variety of openings. Demolished. (PAM)



Figure 44.

Isbister School, Winnipeg, 1898. Designed by Samuel Hooper, the building is exceptional, its comforting symmetry enlivened with a picturesque tower, highly decorated chimneys and a richness of detail, not only on the facade but along each wall. (Building Department, Winnipeg School Division No. 1)

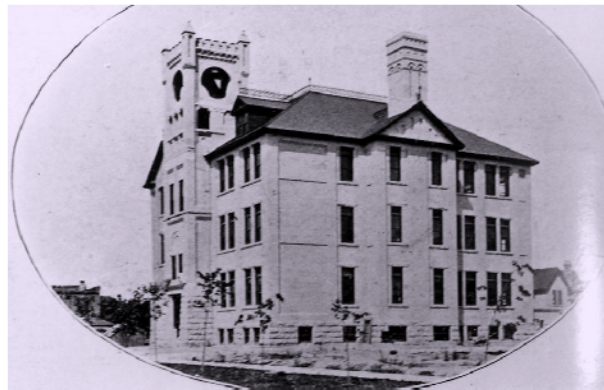


Figure 45.

Alexandra School, Winnipeg, 1902. Commissioner of School Buildings, J.B. Mitchell, used this basic design for most of his buildings from this period. (PAM)