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A SURVEY OF MANITOBA SCHOOL ARCHITECTURE TO 1930

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This brief introductory survey of Manitoba schoolhouse architecture, and of the provincial education system which produced it, was prepared as part of a larger study of Canadian schools being undertaken by the Canadian Inventory of Historic Building. This paper is based on CIHB Phase I data collected in the early 1970s, on responses to a public questionnaire circulated by the CIHB in 1980-81, and by extensive primary source research. The study is not intended to be an exhaustive catalogue of extant school buildings, but attempts, rather, to identify major pre-1930 building types and to investigate the purposes and methods of their construction. This task has been rendered difficult by the paucity of secondary sources relating to Canadian school architecture and by the essentially fragmentary nature of the available primary source materials. This paper, nonetheless, endeavours to assess the major patterns of Manitoba school construction and to provide a basis for their further examination in a national context.

Introduction

By 1930 a comprehensive public school system had emerged from the smattering of privately supported schools that characterized the educational facilities of the new, thinly populated Province of Manitoba in 1870. The development of this school system, and the schoolhouses it produced, were the products of a variety of interacting political, social, and economic circumstances. Public attitudes, governmental leadership and the advance of architectural technology all played roles in the qualitive and quantitative evolution of Manitoba's schools.

The effects of these interacting influences are separable into four distinct chronological phases. The first of these was the period 1870-90 during which the schools and school system laboured under the divisive dictates of a sectarian schism in educational leadership. The second phase, 1890-1903, was marked by large-scale land settlement, the growth of a sophisticated urban school system in Winnipeg and the articulation of the province's school facilities under the ever more interventionist direction of a unified public education authority. The years 1903-14 were characterized by the standardization of rural schools, completion of the land settlement process, and a general economic buoyancy which stimulated the construction of generally larger and better schools. The period 1914-30 was dominated by the impact of World War I and the following decade of economic uncertainty which slowed the development of new school facilities and induced school boards to emphasize economy and simplicity in school construction.

A chronological examination of these various factors illustrates the steady growth of the Manitoba school system from its simple pioneer beginnings into a mature administrative entity regulating and controlling a complex and diverse pattern of educational facilities. Architecturally, this same chronology bears witness to a growing maturity and sophistication in schools and their equipment. The successful blending of these evolving administrative and architectural elements had, by 1930, produced one of the better systems of school facilities in Western Canada.

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MANITOBA SCHOOLS, 1870-90

Prior to the formation of the new province of Manitoba in 1870, the educational needs of the long-established Red River Settlement had been met by the largely church-funded schools operated by the Anglicans, Roman Catholics and Presbyterians, and by a small number of private non-denominational schools which had begun to appear in the 1850s. These schools, while sufficient to the needs of the 1565 whites and 10 000 Metis at Red River in 1870, were deemed inadequate upon the achievement of provincehood. Consequently, in 1871, the newly created Manitoba legislature moved quickly to establish a system of public education.[1]

The first Manitoba school act, modelled on Quebec's, set the pattern of provincial educational development until 1890. It provided for a dual system of Roman Catholic and Protestant public schools funded from the general revenues and by local taxation for school purposes. Locally elected three-man boards of school trustees were regulated and controlled by a strong central Board of Education according equal representation to Protestants and Roman Catholics. Each section of this board appointed its own superintendent of education whose duties included setting and maintaining the standards of construction and operation of its schools. This school system, which initially created 12 Protestant and 12 Roman Catholic school districts, accurately reflected the ethnic and religious composition of Manitoba in 1871. It did, however, give rise to increasing tensions over the next two decades as the early French-speaking Roman Catholic majority was inundated by successive waves of English-speaking Protestant migration into the province.[2]

These growing ethnic and sectarian tensions had little practical impact on schoolhouse construction as both cultural communities endeavoured to provide the best available educational facilities to the children of their adherents. As early as 1879, despite Manitoba's geographical isolation from the mainstream of educational development in eastern North America, both the Roman Catholic and Protestant school authorities articulated their growing consciousness of the proper architectural, construction and equipment standards for public schools. The Roman Catholic superintendent of schools paraphrased the views of Henry Barnard, the New England pioneer of better schoolhouses, in asserting that a school should have

> a central location, being airy and having facilities of access.... It should be plain and modest in style, yet comfortable [and] isolated from dwellings of persons lawless or disorderly. The school-room should be floored, well lighted, accessible to the sun's rays; and the windows, provided with blinds, should be so arranged as to readily admit fresh air.... The space which should be allowed for each pupil is three hundred cubic feet of air, and the ceiling should not be less than twelve feet in height.[3]

He concluded his assessment with the injunction,

> that which should be considered in the construction of a school house is not to gratify the professional amour propre of an architect, to raise a monument. The object should be to realize conditions of convenience and to provide scholastic accommodations.[4]

His Protestant counterpart warned,

> school houses must not be erected until detailed plans and specifications have been submitted to, and have received the approval of the Board. The Board having in view the circumstances of the country does not require all school houses to be built of the same material, or to be uniform, or permanent in their nature; but it is obvious that in the older and more settled parts, thoroughly good school houses are not only necessary, but will prove the cheapest in

the long run.[5]

By 1889 the Board of Education was setting relatively detailed standards for school buildings, equipment and grounds.[6] These regulations emphasized

> before letting any contract for the erection of a school house, or obtaining a loan by the issue of debentures for the same, school trustees shall submit a copy of the plans and specifications to the Superintendent of Education for the approval of the Board, and shall accompany the same with an architect's estimate or a bona fide tender for the completion of the work; and no school house shall be erected, or school furniture provided, except upon a plan duly approved by the Board.[7]

This early assertion of central regulatory control over the province's school architecture, which remained a constant of educational policy until after 1930, did not become fully effective before 1890 because of inadequate school inspection.

By the end of 1889 the embryonic Manitoba public school system of 1871 had expanded to 543 Protestant, and 98 Roman Catholic schools serving a total population of some 150 000 people.[8] These spanned a broad spectrum of styles and types which ranged from the first pioneering log schools of some rural districts to the multi-room frame or brick structures erected in a few of the province's rapidly developing urban centres. Of these 543 schools, 19 were brick, 6 were stone, 432 were frame, and 84 were of log construction.[9] The Roman Catholic schools very probably exhibited similar proportions of construction materials.

The most common type of Manitoba rural school in this period is represented by the one-room wood-frame Boulton School (Figure 1) which provided basic schoolroom accommodation with scant attention to size, ventilation or lighting. By contrast, the eight-room Protestant Albert Street School built in Winnipeg in 1884 (Figure 2) was a substantial two-storey brick-veneered structure. A Roman Catholic example of this type of building was the Provencher Public School built at St. Boniface in 1886 (Figure 3).

Despite the presence of these examples of urban graded schools, the predominant type of pre-1890 Manitoba schoolhouse was the one-room rural or village school. These buildings were of very mixed quality although, in 1891, one school inspector noted:

> it is gratifying to find that the school houses built during the last two or three years are generally larger, neater, and in every respect better suited for school purposes than the older ones.[10]

This view reflected the general opinion of the inspectors who found the school buildings themselves satisfactory though they noted many defects in lighting and ventilation. They also expressed frequent dissatisfaction with the quantity and quality of blackboards, desks, and other schoolhouse equipment. These same reports noted that school sites were generally well selected though little attention had been given to fencing or improving the grounds. The provision of an adequate supply of drinking water was another widespread problem in the rural schools. One inspector commented:

> the wells are not cleaned out often enough. In a case that once came under my notice, the decaying bodies of a dozen gophers were taken from the well which had supplied water, for drinking purposes, to a large number of persons.[11]

Manitoba's experience in providing educational facilities over the first two decades of

its existence was quite typical of the pioneering phase of educational development everywhere in Western Canada; central administrative authorities, created in advance of large-scale settlement, were able to draw on several decades of eastern experience in the provision of public schools to impose a strong central regulatory framework on local school boards. In a pioneering environment, however, the uneven and imperfect enforcement of these regulations affecting school construction resulted in buildings of very diverse quality. Most multi-room urban schools, whose cost and complexity justified some professional design input, tended to be "state-of-the-art" structures; their smaller rural and village counterparts were usually vernacular buildings exhibiting varying measures of adherence to often ill-understood government directions. Despite an evident improvement in the quality of Manitoba's rural schools just before 1890, the effective regulations of school construction and a general qualitative improvement in its schoolhouses had to await the controversial unification of the public school system along non-sectarian lines in 1890. This measure simplified educational administration in the province, expanded the resource base of many local school boards, and led to the creation of a staff of full-time professional school inspectors to serve as an essential functional link between a remote central bureaucracy and the local school boards who were funding and constructing the buildings.

MANITOBA SCHOOLS, 1890-1903

This period of Manitoba's school development spans a number of important educational events which commenced with the passage of the education act of 1890 and culminated with the government's first attempt to directly determine the architectural style of the province's rural schools by the issuing of standard one-room school plans in 1903. It encompasses a number of important departures in Manitoba school design and building construction, and the evolution of Winnipeg's schools, which were carried out against a backdrop of steady provincial population growth (from 152 506 in 1891 to 255 211 in 1901).[12] In the same years the once co-equal Roman Catholic separate schools were thrust into an educational and architectural backwater while the effective implementation of intermediate school legislation increased the number of graded town and village schools. After 1892 the rapidly developing Winnipeg school system began to assume a distinctive and independent identity within the overall context of Manitoba's schools and to set exemplary standards for the construction of large schools throughout the province.

In 1890 the Greenway provincial government effectively destroyed Manitoba's denominational school system by creating a single public school system wholly administered by a non-sectarian Board of Education under a responsible minister. A seven-member appointive policy Educational Advisory Board was also created with the authority, among many other powers, to make regulations

> for the dimensions, equipment, style, plan, furnishing, decoration and ventilation of school houses and for the arrangement and requisites of school premises.[13]

This same legislation terminated the independence of the province's Roman Catholic separate schools. Nominally Roman Catholic separate school districts remained within the public system but their religious role was very severely restricted. Functionally separate schools remained, particularly in Winnipeg and St. Boniface, but they were operated as private schools without public support.[14]

These buildings continued to reflect traditional Roman Catholic school architecture far more than their public school counterparts which were largely integrated into the mainstream of provincial school development. This tended to improve the overall quality of the schools by eliminating the need to maintain

separate Protestant and Roman Catholic establishments in smaller religiously mixed communities. This often made it possible to erect and maintain one larger and better school.

Another basic facet of the evolutionary pattern of Manitoba's schools in the 1890s was the development of secondary education facilities in the form of intermediate schools offering some secondary education:

> These were extensions of the elementary schools in a single school district centering about a town or village. Extending up to grade ten at first, they marked the start of a free, public secondary education in a common school.[15]

The commencement of public funding for these schools in 1888 marked an important extension of educational opportunity to pupils outside the major population centres of Winnipeg, Brandon and Portage la Prairie, which had possessed collegiate institutes since 1882. These intermediate schools were a functional extension of the existing elementary schools under a single board of school trustees.[16] The practical effect of this legislation was the rapid development of larger and better-equipped graded schools in many smaller Manitoba urban centres. One of these new intermediate schools was the four-room Boissevain Central School erected in 1894 (Figure 4). In one decade this policy produced 50 intermediate schools, ranging in size from two to eight rooms, in addition to the distinct high schools or collegiates in the seven largest provincial centres.[17]

Rural Schools, 1891-1903

Despite the inception of a functional secondary education system in Manitoba in the 1890s, the predominant form of school construction remained the one-room rural school whose numbers increased from 554 to 1890 to 1127 in 1902.[18] Most of these new rural buildings were of improved frame construction although the older form of rectangular gable-roofed cross-lighted school continued to predominate (Figure 5). Most of these schools were built to acceptable Department of Education standards. In 1899 one school inspector noted, "the problem of providing the maximum accommodation, at the minimum cost, has been practically solved." He went on to describe one of the best examples of the new rural schools, that at Bankburn:

> The outside dimensions of this building are 30x24 feet, with ceiling 11 feet in height. It is built on a stone foundation. The floor is double, with paper between. The walls are of shiplap, paper and siding on the outside. On the inside they are back-plastered, strapped and plastered, two coats. The interior is finished in natural wood. The main entrance, which is near the corner of the building, leads into a vestibule, 6x6 feet. The actual cost of this building was a trifle less than $700. It will accommodate forty pupils comfortably.[19]

Despite the existence of the Bankburn building and other good rural schools, the new century witnessed a growing demand among the inspection staff for more effective inspection of new schools, and for the preparation of standard plans to assist school trustees.

> Trustees are, as a rule, anxious to put up the best school money can build, but in many cases ... the planning of the school house is left to the judgment of the local contractors, who need not necessarily be well versed in the important subjects of heating, ventilation, and lighting.[20]

This produced a situation where,

> although in the matter of new schools all plans have to be submitted to the Department of Education for approval, it sometimes happens that, after plans are approved, they are not adhered to, particularly in the matter of ventilation. The regulations provide that the inspector shall inspect and report on all new schools to the Department. There is no regulation providing that trustees shall notify the inspector when a new school is ready for inspection. Consequently, often by the time he gets to the school it is occupied, the contractor paid and all the business concluded. Any defects are of course reported, but generally too late to be remedied.[21]

In 1901 these complaints and suggestions moved the Educational Advisory Board to commission a set of rural school plans and specifications by Samuel Hooper, a prominent Winnipeg architect. This set of three plans was published in 1903 under the title, Plans and Specifications for Rural Schools.[22] These three widely disseminated plans largely ended the era of locally inspired one-room school design in Manitoba. Although their use was not made compulsory, they offered a ready-made school design solution at once acceptable to trustees and inspectors. Thereafter, rural one-room buildings tended to reflect the architectural preferences of the central educational authorities.

Winnipeg Schools, 1890-1903

During the early 1890s the Winnipeg Public School Board established a large measure of independence from the provincial educational authorities while launching a large-scale movement to replace the city's first generation of small and sometimes makeshift school buildings with larger and more modern structures. This program was carried out under the direction of Colonel J.B. Mitchell who was appointed Commissioner of School Buildings in 1892. Mitchell retained this post until 1929, thus lending a measure of managerial continuity to nearly 40 years of Winnipeg school construction. Mitchell's appointment coincided with the completion of the first of the new Winnipeg schools.

These schools differed markedly in architectural style and external detailing (Figure 6), but each of them was a three-storey building with two floors of four classrooms on each floor. Most had a third-floor assembly room occupying the space of two classrooms. Twelve of these schools were built in Winnipeg between 1892 and the end of 1902 when the Winnipeg School Board was operating a total of 19 schools with an enrolment of nearly 7000 students.[23] The board's policy towards the construction of its new schools was summarized as follows:

> The buildings erected should be of a solid, substantial character, which, when completed would provide comfortable and roomy basements for ... six, eight or ten classrooms and an assembly hall. Warm and comfortable play-rooms having closets in connection with same ... are now recognized to be a necessity, while the need for an assembly hall which permits all classes to meet together, is not now questioned.[24]

This era of three storey school construction in Winnipeg finally concluded with the completion of the John M. King and Wellington schools in 1905-06. The demise of this type of building appears to have been precipitated by growing concerns about the fire hazards posed by such structures and by an acceptance of the many advantages of two-storey schools. These schools, however, mark an important developmental stage in Winnipeg school design and a substantial civic achivement for a city of some 45 000 people.[25]

1890–1903 Summary

The first operative decade of Manitoba's non-sectarian public school system witnessed substantial achievements in schoolhouse construction. The number of rural schoolhouses doubled and their overall quality improved. The secondary school system was fully launched by the extension of multi-room graded schools to some 50 smaller centres while Winnipeg created a comprehensive urban school administration which rapidly expanded and up-dated the city's school facilities to meet its rising building standards. These substantial turn-of-the-century achievements of the Manitoba school system were to be eclipsed by the school growth of the next, buoyant, prewar decade.

MANITOBA SCHOOLS, 1904–14

These years were generally ones of very substantial economic and population growth for Manitoba as a whole and for Winnipeg in particular. The province's population doubled to half a million people as a new wave of overseas immigration filled its remaining arable lands. In the same period Winnipeg's population tripled to some 150 000 as it solidified its role as the entrepot, and financial hub, of the Prairie West.[26] These factors, and the general economic prosperity that ensued from them, moved Manitoba's educational authorities to press for an overall improvement in the architectural quality and facilities of the province's schools, and to embark on a significant experiment in rural school consolidation. This period, concluded by the commencement of World War I, marked the end of the massive growth in Manitoba's population, and in the prosperity which fueled the construction of a large number of expensive graded schoolhouses.

One-room Schools, 1904–14

In 1914 there were some 1300 one-room rural schools in Manitoba. This figure indicates a numerical increase of only 350 or so buildings of this type in a decade; in fact, it represents a much larger number of new one-room schools as many older districts replaced their pioneering buildings with a better class of school.[27] Until about 1912, when a further inexpensive cottage-roofed standard school plan was introduced by the educational authorities, most of these new schools were based on the three designs produced by Samuel Hooper for the Educational Advisory Board in 1903 (Figures 7-9).[28] All of these plans emphasized left-side lighting which was just then becoming a widely accepted feature of school construction. Numbers 1 and 2 were the most popular of these designs; Number 3 appears to have been built only in very small numbers.[29]

These four basic one-room school designs virtually monopolized Manitoba's one-room school architecture in the pre-1914 period.[30] They were primarily of frame construction although there is evidence of the utilization of other materials. These designs created a stultifying uniformity in Manitoba's rural schools, but their widespread use did ensure certain minimal standards of school construction and facilities.

Graded Schools, 1904–14

In the decade before World War I the number of graded (multi-room) schools outside of the Winnipeg area underwent a marked quantitative increase to a total of 160 buildings containing 669 classrooms. There were several reasons for this development; an increase in the number of high schools and collegiates, a substantial growth in the number of graded elementary schools, and the growing popularity of

rural school consolidation. These schools, erected to meet a variety of local needs, necessarily spanned a wide range of architectural styles, types and qualities of school buildings.

These schools are, however, divisible into a few distinct categories of structures. Generally, the larger and more substantial of these schools, those of four or more rooms, were two-storey structures of solid brick or stone construction, with low-pitched hip roofs, like that built at Elkhorn in 1910 (Figure 10). There was also a distinctive Manitoba type of two storey, two- or four-room, wood-frame school built in some numbers in these years (Figure 11). Another common pattern of prewar multi-room school was the two-storey two-room school with its entryway and halls located at one side to facilitate its easy expansion into a four-room school (Figure 12). There were also numerous examples of one-room additions to existing one-room schools and a few instances of the construction of one-storey two-room schools.[31]

The most common characteristic of these pre-1914 multi-room schools, as evidenced in the school inspector's reports, was the general desire of school trustees to equip them as fully as possible. For instance, the new six-room Deloraine Public School was a solid brick structure on a stone foundation:

> on the outside it is a plain and handsome structure; on the inside there is nothing wanting that seems necessary for the convenience of an up-to-date modern school.[32]

In 1901 another inspector noted, "in all buildings now being provided there is evidence of a desire to comply with the regulations and suggestions of the Department."[33] This improvement was most apparent in the critical areas of lighting, heating and ventilation because, in the decade before World War I, design innovations and a rapidly evolving technology had provided school architects with solutions to many of the technical problems that had plagued larger school design in preceeding years. This generation of schools was also much better equipped than their predecessors. In 1911 one school inspector noted that Gretna had erected a new four-room brick school of this genre at a cost of $17 500:

> this is one of the finest school buildings in the province, and contains every convenience that money could procure. In addition to the four classrooms there is a library, a laboratory and a boardroom. The basement is divided into two compartments by sliding doors. The intention is to use this compartment for a gymnasium and an assembly hall for school entertainment.[34]

In 1913 the deputy minister of education, cataloguing the progress of a decade, wrote:

> this has been pre-eminently a period of advance in the style and quality of our school architecture; larger buildings have been built, many having been constructed of permanent material; more attention has been given to sanitation and equipment.[35]

This extensive qualitative and quantitative evidence of a maturing school system anxious to offer better educational facilities owed much, in the first instance, to the private architects who designed most of the multi-room schools, and to the school boards which funded them. The underlying impetus for improvement, however, came from the Department of Education and its inspectional staff. By the end of 1913 the tiny professional inspectional staff created in 1890 had grown to 23 inspectors, plus a special agent for consolidation, and an organizer of schools among foreign-speaking people. Departmental staff and inspectors consistently emphasized the creation of more populous school districts and the consequent construction of

larger and better schools offering a wider range of educational opportunities.[36]

School District Consolidation

In the early years of the 20th century, with the organizational and architectural difficulties of providing suitable urban educational facilities well on their way towards solution, educators throughout North America turned their attention to the much more perplexing task of extending comparable educational opportunities to students in the countryside. One of the mechanisms for addressing this difficult problem was rural school district consolidation. It consisted of uniting several contiguous rural districts and transporting their students to a larger central school. This practice was introduced in most Canadian provinces but it was embraced most enthusiastically in Manitoba.[37] It started in Manitoba in 1905 with the consolidations at Virden and Brandon; by 1911 there were 19 such consolidated school units in operation. One educational analyst noted that:

> Manitoba is the one province that is pushing the consolidation movement vigorously and persistently ... backed by liberal government grants and the personal cooperation and encouragement of the Minister of Education and the Deputy Minister.[38]

Many of these first consolidations were not large buildings. They spanned a range from one to seven rooms, but the number and quality of larger up-to-date consolidated schools increased rapidly over the next few years. By 1914 there were 77 consolidated districts in Manitoba. A further 33 consolidations occurred before the movement began to lose its impetus at the end of World War I because of rapidly rising construction costs and the prohibitive difficulties in securing cheap and efficient transportation for students.[39] Consolidation did not provide the whole answer for Manitoba's rural school problems; it did however, yield a substantial legacy of larger permanent rural and village schools in the decades immediately before and after the commencement of World War I.

Winnipeg Schools, 1904-14

As Winnipeg's population trebled between 1904 and 1914, in step with its continuing commercial dominance of the Canadian West, its inventory of school facilities more than doubled to 46 buildings. Many of these schools, erected in the generally economically buoyant years after 1907, were markedly more structurally and stylistically sophisticated than their pre-1904 predecessors. In this period the Winnipeg School Board opted whole-heartedly for a new type of large massively proportioned and extremely expensive elementary school accommodating up to 1200 students (Figure 13). These buildings varied in exterior architectural detailing while exhibiting a common plan. No expense was spared in this construction program. A description of these buildings provides some insight into the state of architectural technology and contemporary school design:

> These schools differ in plan from those formerly erected by the board. To begin with, they are only two stories in height. Their general plan is that of an oblong, with classrooms on both sides of a well-lighted corridor. The old assembly hall has been omitted, and the additional space has been given to the corridors, which, adjacent to the classrooms, are easily accessible and excellently suited for the physical work of the school. Three exits, remote from other, make it impossible for any fire that might occur to prevent the escape of the children. Great care has been taken in the construction of these buildings to render them fireproof; the floors

> over the boiler room, fan room and manual training room, and those of the stairways and landings throughout, are of reinforced concrete, while the stairs are of iron. All electric wires are laid in conduits, the partition walls are of brick, and the plaster is laid on hollow tiles instead of lath, so that no fire which might occur in the basement could reach the classrooms by way of the walls. The schools are heated by steam, which is supplied by boilers, with direct radiation in classrooms and corridors. Fresh air, which passes through tempering and heating coils, is supplied to the classrooms by means of a fan driven by electric motors, between the tempering and heating coils, and the air is passed through a spray which washes it, and at the same time increases its moisture. Every care has been taken to provide the best possible sanitary conditions.[40]

This same type of building, with some internal refinements and stylistic and decorative tinkering, continued to dominate Winnipeg school design until 1914.

One facet of this pre-war school construction program was the erection, in 1910-11, of the first two large technical high schools in Western Canada (Figure 14). These elaborately equipped schools, built at a time when other western cities had no similar schools, placed Winnipeg in the forefront of this movement.

Winnipeg's very expensive prewar school construction program culminated with the erection of the massive 32-room Isaac Brock School in 1914 at a cost of $250 000. The collapse of the prewar construction boom in 1913 and the onset of war in 1914 together with a number of other related economic factors then sapped Winnipeg's commercial strength and expectations. This precipitated a period of severe retrenchment in the once-lavish provision of Winnipeg's municipal services, including schools.[41] Thereafter, its school construction program was to proceed at a much more measured and modest pace.

1904-14 Summary

The great economic prosperity enjoyed by Manitoba through most of the pre-war decade clearly produced a substantial growth in the size and quality of its schools. Effective central leadership in the provision of rural school facilities, a variety of design innovations and improvements in the province's multi-room schools, and Winnipeg's energetic building program thrust Manitoba into the forefront of Canadian school building construction during the years 1904-14. It would appear that these architectural and administrative advances were the product of a prosperous maturing society able and willing to avail itself of the best contemporary school construction technology.

MANITOBA SCHOOLS, 1914-30

World War I, and the decade of economic uncertainty that followed in its aftermath, plunged Manitoba school boards into a period of austerity from which they did not recover until the eve of the Great Depression in 1930. The war itself fueled the economy, but inflation and a scarcity of skilled labour and building materials postponed all but the most essential construction. In 1919 it was noted that

> building materials have advanced until the cost of the ordinary schoolhouse is more than twice what it was four and a-half years ago. If the cost were being levied and paid at once probably it would not be out of proportion, but when it is extended over a period

of years much of the payment will be made after prices have dropped and the burden will be felt.[42]

Continuing postwar inflation, declining agricultural prices, and a series of poor crops that persisted into the mid-1920s perpetuated this spirit of retrenchment and caution. This continuing economic malaise did not halt postwar school construction, but it did produce a marked preference for more simply constructed and less elaborately styled and decorated and, therefore, less costly schools. Brick or concrete exterior detailing, for instance, often replaced the pre-war preference for decorative stonework. Simultaneously, the sometimes "palatial" fittings and facilities of many prewar urban schools were succeeded by much more utilitarian designs and equipment. Plain one-storey buildings and box-like, flat-roofed, rectangular four-room brick structures increasingly supplanted a more elaborate and stylistically indulgent prewar school architecture. This utilitarian trend was evident in many of the province's smaller urban centres, and quite overt in financially straitened Winnipeg.

One-room Rural Schools, 1914-30

During these years, the one-room rural school, which still formed a large proportion of the 2019 Manitoba schools in operation in 1930, continued to develop under the close supervision and direction of the central educational authorities. Standard one-room government school plans continued to dominate smaller school construction in this period. Heating and ventilation were substantially improved by the general introduction of the patented Waterbury or Smith jacketed stoves. Many postwar one-room schools also began to be built with full basements to accommodate hot-air furnaces, indoor chemical toilets, and meeting or recreational facilities. The innovations in building designs and facilities in these years, however, were generally marginal developments in styling or detail as the early introduction of suitable standard plans had solved the basic architectural problems of providing adequate rural school facilities before 1914.[43]

The most common type of one-room school built in Manitoba during World War I was the hip-roofed gable-dormer school (Figure 15), which was issued as a standard official plan abut 1912. It was generally of frame construction although some prosperous districts erected it in brick while a few poorer ones built with logs.[44]

One popular wartime use of this type of building was as a first compulsory building in "foreign" districts. Government took full advantage of the generally xenophobic wartime atmosphere and the hostility to public schools that existed among some Mennonite, Galacian and Ruthenian communities to assault the private schools that had been set up in those communities. This long-standing irritant to central educational authority was generally disposed of by the compulsory creation of a school district under the direction of the official school organizer, followed by the construction of a standard plan school at the community's expense. This vigorous wartime policy virtaully eliminated the ethnic private school in Manitoba.[45]

The immediate postwar period witnessed the introduction into general use of a new standard one-room school plan. This was a rectangular building with a bell-cast gable roof, distinctive gable-end returns and a matching entry porch (Figure 16). It was erected in substantial numbers in the 1918-20 period in new districts, and as a war-delayed replacement school in older districts.[46]

During much of the 1920s the most common type of Manitoba one-room rural school plan appears to have been that built at Taras, S.D. 1256 (Figure 17). This was a gable-roofed building with a small side entry porch facing the window bank. Slightly re-styled versions of the earlier squared cottage-roofed school design also continued to be built through these years. At the very end of the 1920s there was

also evidence of the introduction of a standard rectangular school with a hipped-gable roof.[47]

All of these schools owed much of their quality and consistency to the standard plans issued by the central educational authorities. This process of centralized control was strengthened even further by the appointment of an architect, Gilbert Parfitt (later provincial architect), to the staff of the Department of Education sometime before the mid-1920s.[48] The postwar improvement of rural school facilities was accelerated by the general availability of good patented heating and ventilating systems, and by a concentrated drive to improve the hygiene and sanitation of these schools. The school inspectors continued to rail annually against the defects of the rural school but their criticisms were generally ones of ever more petty detail, or of the externals of outbuildings and grounds. Undoubtedly there were many rural schools of poor quality remaining in Manitoba in 1930, as there were everywhere in Canada. Their continued presence, however, stemmed from poverty or trustee choice, not from an absence of available knowledge, suitable architectural plans, or expert advice.

Two-room Schools, 1914-30

The most common type of two-room school in Manitoba after 1914 was a one-room right-angled gable-roofed addition to an earlier one-room gable-roofed school. This form, which was more common in Manitoba than in the other western provinces, probably stemmed from Manitoba's tendency to form larger rural school districts than its counterparts, and from its more compact and populous settlement pattern. The many examples of the linear two-room one-storey hip-roofed centre-entry school, the other major post-1914 two-room school type, would indicate that it originated as a standard Department of Education design.[49]

A few examples of the older type of two-storey two-room school continued to be built until about 1918, but the less expensive one-storey style predominated both in the wartime and postwar periods.[50] This trend would appear to indicate a measure of central leadership towards economy, and a financially induced trustee preference for plainer and cheaper rural and village schools.

Larger Multi-room schools, 1914-30

The larger schools erected in Manitoba's smaller urban centres in the years 1914-30 represent, as always, the greatest variety of styles and types because of the diversity of their design origins and the multiplicity of educational roles they fulfilled. Most, because of their size and structural complexity, were privately designed within general Department of Education guidelines and, almost without exception, they were constructed of stone, brick or other fireproof materials.

Post-1914 examples of this category of school building can be separated into three basic types. Until 1918, due to wartime restrictions, most larger school construction was limited to a number of traditionally styled rectangular two-storey four- and six-room consolidated schools. After 1918 this pattern of school was supplanted by the flat-roofed box-like four- or eight-room school exemplified by the Earl Oxford School built at Brandon in 1928 (Figure 18). This style, which first appeared on the Prairies about 1912, reflected a growing tendency to less expensive schools with lower profiles and less ornamentation and exterior ostentation. Another equally popular style of postwar school, reflecting the same aesthetic and financial considerations, was a one-storey hip-roof four-room building like that erected at Brookdale in 1925 (Figure 19). Both of these postwar styles, which continued in popularity until 1930, offered permanent and efficient schoolroom accommodation at a relatively low cost.[51]

Most of the larger post-1914 graded schools erected in Manitoba's smaller urban centres were equipped with a high standard of interior fittings and facilities despite evident parings of many of their external architectural conceits. This growing emphasis on the comfort and convenience of the students reflected the increasing understanding and acceptance of the requisites of good school accommodation by architects and school boards. The nature and extent of these facilities are indicated by a description of the Wingham Consolidated School erected in 1921.

> The school building, the outside dimensions of which are 63x64 feet, has a high basement which gives it the effect of being full one and one-half storeys. On the main floor are four large school rooms with a large centre hallway and commodious separate cloak rooms for each room. The square tower above is large enough for two good sized rooms, one used as the principal's office and school library, the other as a science classroom. The basement is exceptionally well lighted, the lower sills of the windows being above the ground level. It contains the heating plant, the electric lighting plant and sewage pumps, a large gymnasium, manual training room and most important of all an auditorium seating 200 persons, which is to be used as a community hall as well as a school meeting room. The auditorium is fitted with a large platform with adjustable partitions and can readily be used as a stage with ample room behind the back drops. The partitions make it possible to partition off lunch rooms, etc.
>
> The four school rooms ... are equipped with the most modern appliances obtainable. Each accommodates 30 desks which are of the adjustable variety with a box for books and other belongings of the pupil under each seat. The windows are large and are designed to give perfect lighting to each room, and ventilation is automatic in connection with the hot air heating system, the air being changed continuously.[52]

Winnipeg Schools, 1914-30

After 1914 Winnipeg's size, growth pattern and particular school construction problems continued to set it apart from other Manitoba urban centres. Its relative economic decline, overburdened financial resources and continuing school population growth produced a very distinctive pattern of school construction in the financially troubled years between 1914 and 1930. This pattern was marked by a conscious turning away from elaborate and expensive prewar styles of school construction towards a more modest and strictly functional school architecture.

Winnipeg's school construction was kept to a minimum during the war years as the school board sought "to avoid as far as possible any large capital expenditure." By the end of 1918 the 45 operating Winnipeg schools were totally inadequate to house a student population that had grown by nearly 5000 over four years to a total of 30 225 pupils. Consequently, at the end of 1918, plans were drawn for a series of new schools. The tenders on these designs came in so high that the board was forced to reject them in favor of

> the erection of one-storey buildings, temporary in their character, and much less expensive in construction.... In all 26 rooms are being provided in this way at a cost of $100,000. The contract price on the original plans for the same number of rooms would have been $375,000.[53]

Four of these schools were built in 1919 and seven more, of a somewhat more permanent nature, in 1920. Their costs, however, were minimized by employing a single consulting architect, Colonel J.N. Semmens, for their design, and erecting them by day labour under school board supervision rather than by contract.[54]

By 1921-22, financial restraints had eased somewhat and ten additional schools were constructed. These were more substantial and stylistically sophisticated buildings than their immediate postwar predecessors although they too were built with a careful eye to costs. The largest and best of them was the Daniel McIntyre Collegiate designed by Colonel Semmens and erected in 1922 at a cost of $600 000 (Figure 20.)[55] Winnipeg's school population growth slowed after 1922 and few new schools were required before the onset of the Great Depression.

Winnipeg's post-1914 school construction program was characterized by wartime retrenchment, immediate postwar austerity, and by the cautious and gradual reassertion of the architectural values that had marked its prewar schools. Even the most elaborate of these postwar buildings, however, concentrated more on the provision of functional school space than had their grander prewar predecessors where cost and functionalism had sometimes been subordinated to considerations of civic pride and optimism.

1914–30 Summary

An examination of the various types and sizes of Manitoba schools constructed after 1914 clearly indicates the impact of the war, postwar inflation and financial retrenchment on all categories of school building. Architectural styles were simplified, decorative adornments diminished and, in many instances, two-storey schools gave way to more cheaply constructed one-storey structures. This same period witnessed a general improvement in the facilities of the smaller rural schools under strong Department of Education leadership while competent professional design and construction supervision appears to have been the norm for all larger schools. On the whole, however, it was a period in which cautious architectural pedestrianism supplanted prewar aspirations to erect grand and enduring cultural monuments.

Conclusion

An examination of Manitoba's schools in the 60-year period between 1870 and 1930 illustrates the steady growth of a school system well-attuned to perceived public needs. Strong and consistent central leadership in directing the course and architectural standards of school development combined with the relatively early availability of professional architectural services to produce school buildings of a generally high quality. Manitoba's educational authorities and architects were assisted in this achievement by the province's relatively early and compact settlement, by two decades of general prosperity before World War I, and by the willingness of most boards of school trustees to build to the limit of their means. All of these factors combined to give Manitoba schools a very distinctive architectural and chronogical profile.

The development of Manitoba's school buildings was marked by several important initiatives. The creation of a functionally unitary public school system in 1890 ended the previous sectarian fragmentation of community school building efforts and rationalized school administration. The early creation of an integrated intermediate school system, rural school consolidation, and Manitoba's consistent policy of encouraging the formation of larger school districts, served to stimulate the growth of larger multi-room schools at early dates.[56] The Manitoba Department of Education provided serviceable standard plans for one-room rural schools from 1903

to 1930, and, probably, for two-room rural and village schools from about 1912 to 1930. Prior to 1914, dynamic and thriving Winnipeg provided its provincial hinterland with a larger pool of architectural talent than was available in the other Prairie provinces. All of these factors facilitated Manitoba's overall leadership in Prairie schoolhouse construction in the prewar period and contributed to its continuing, though declining, ascendency in the years 1918-30.

Between the end of 1870 and 1930, Manitoba's schools grew from 32 buildings with an enrolment of 1500 pupils to 2019 schools containing 4266 classrooms and an enrolment of 151 846.[57] Much of this large quantative, and the accompanying qualitative, improvement was concentrated in the much shorter span of years between 1890 and 1914. It represents a successful blending of general prosperity, central educational leadership and positive community response in advancing the functional quality and stylistic character of Manitoba's schoolhouse architecture in the first 60 years of the province's history.

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57. Report, 1930, p. 19.

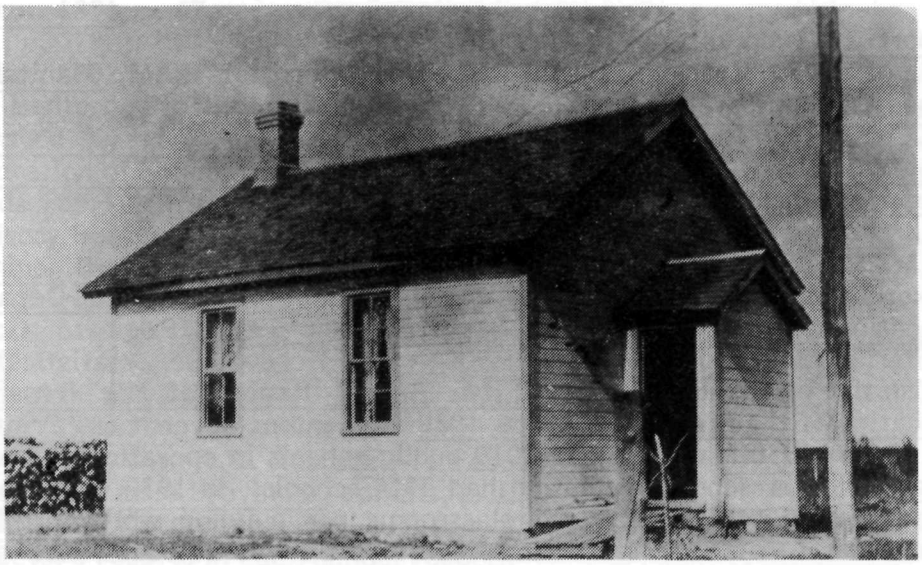


Fig. 1. Boulton School - The one-room frame Boulton School, built ca. 1890, was typical of the small vernacular buildings that characterized Manitoba's rural school construction in the 1880s. They were generally poorly lighted gable-roofed buildings in which little attention was paid to ventilation, cloakrooms, entry porches or other amenities. (Manitoba Archives photo.)

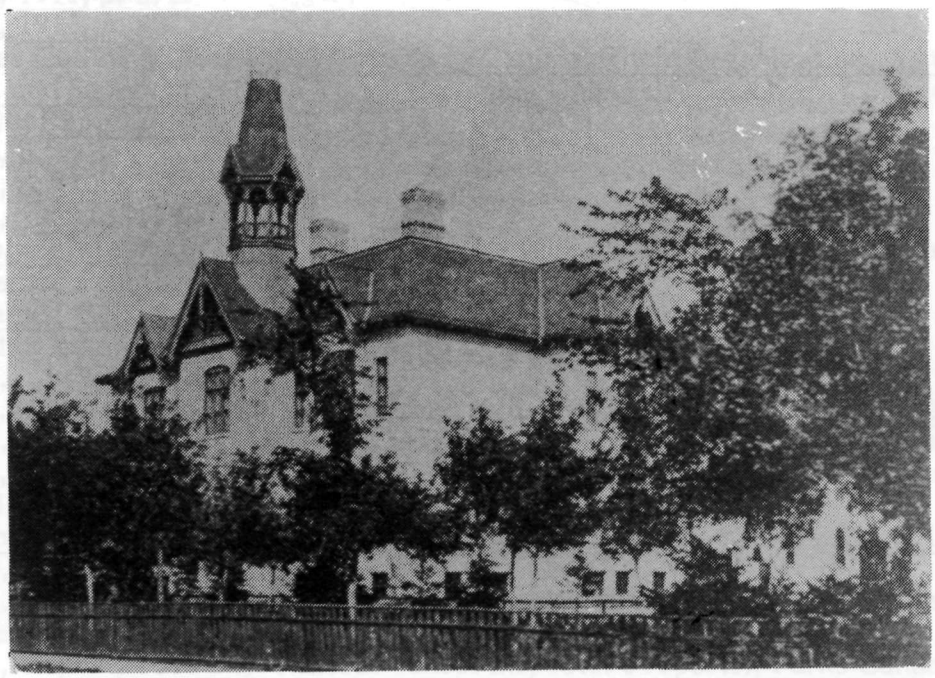


Fig. 2. Albert School, Winnipeg - Built in 1884, this two storey brick-veneer structure was one of the first of Winnipeg's larger public schools, and one of the few multi-room buildings in the then thinly settled province. Its design features a mansard roof, roof line cresting, and large delicately styled belfry favoured by school architects of the period. (Manitoba Archives photo.)

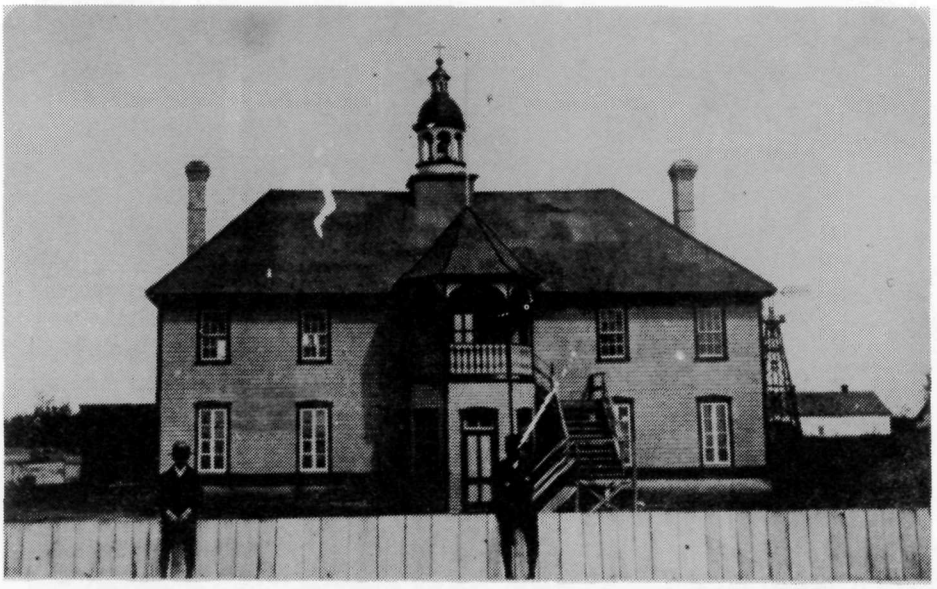


Fig. 3 Provencher School, St. Boniface - This wood-frame Roman Catholic public school was built in 1886. The separate second-storey entry stairs may have been used to segregate boys and girls on separate floors, a common practice in the 1880s. (Manitoba Archives photo.)

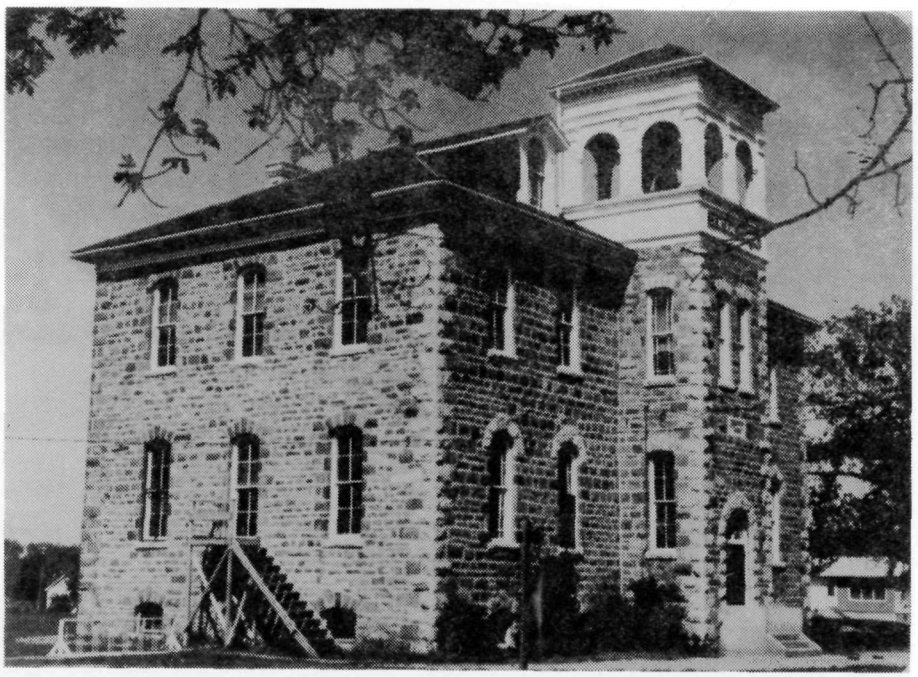


Fig. 4 Boissevain Central School - A two-and-one-half-storey school built of local sandstone in 1894, this building was typical of the early graded schools erected in a number of smaller Manitoba urban centres in this decade. They offered superior facilities and spurred the commencement of high school instruction on the local level. (Manitoba Archives photo.)

Fig. 5 Pleasant Plains School, No. 819 - Built of granite fieldstone at a cost of $414 in 1894 and originally named Arsenault School, it continued in educational use until after 1930. With its small add-on frame porch and poor lighting facilities it is structurally indistinguishable from the common type of rural school erected a decade earlier. (Manitoba Archives photo.)

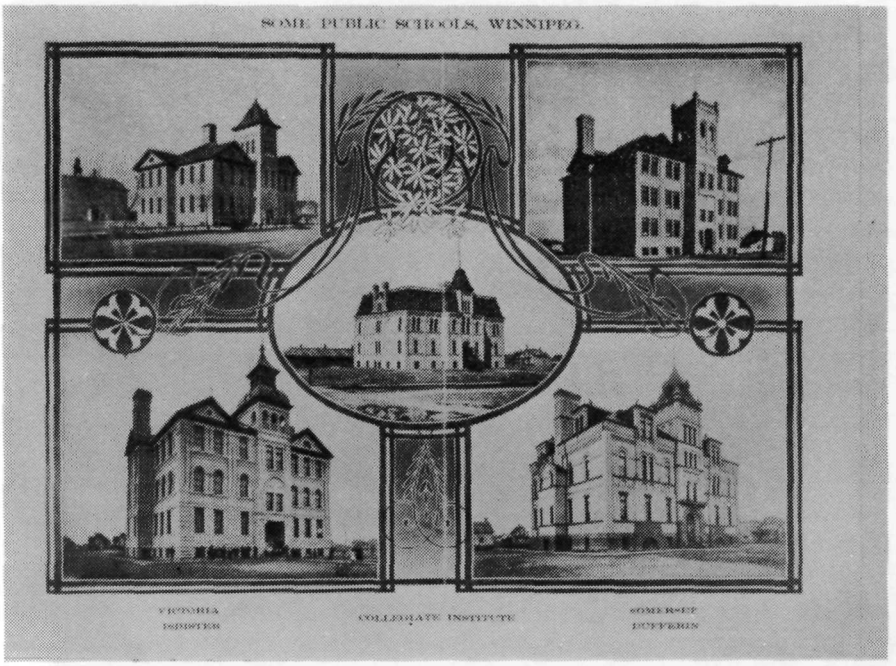


Fig. 6 Some Winnipeg schools, 1903 - These buildings illustrate the spectrum of larger Winnipeg schools built between 1877 and 1901. The two-storey Victoria School was erected in 1877 and expanded in 1881 and 1898. The other schools - Collegiate (1892), Dufferin (1895), Isbister (1898) and Somerset (1901) were all similarly proportioned three-storey 10-room buildings with third-floor assembly halls. Despite their stylistic variations, all were characterized by large central entry towers. (Manitoba Archives photo.)

Fig. 7 Ridgeville School - This building is a good example of Manitoba's standard one-room school plan No. 1, drawn by Winnipeg architect Samuel Hooper in 1903. (Manitoba Archives photo.)

Fig. 8 Riding Mountain School - This structure was built according to Manitoba's first one-room school plan No. 2. It was a more elaborate and expensive version of Plan No. 1. (Manitoba Archives photo.)

Fig. 9 Union Point School - This example of Thomas Hooper's Manitoba standard rural school plan No. 3 was not popular in pre-World War I Manitoba. (Manitoba Archives photo.)

Fig. 10 Elkhorn Public School - Built in 1910, this structure is representative of a type of larger and more expensive and ornate public schools erected in many smaller Manitoba urban centres in the prosperous decade before World War I. (Manitoba Archives photo.)

Fig. 11 Ochre River School, No. 919 - This two-storey two-room frame building, erected in 1910, was a common and distinctive type of pre-1914 Manitoba multi-room school. Its inexpensive frame construction, frequency of appearance and characteristic styling and exterior finish strongly suggest its origin as an officially designed standard plan. (Manitoba Archives photo.)

Fig. 12 Snowflake Consolidated School - This two-storey two-room structure was built in 1911 to house one of the rural school consolidations then being actively promoted by government. This building, with its entry tower and halls located to one side, was typical of quite a number of Manitoba schools erected in this period as this design facilitated the school's easy expansion to four rooms in the event of rapid population growth. (Manitoba Archives photo.)

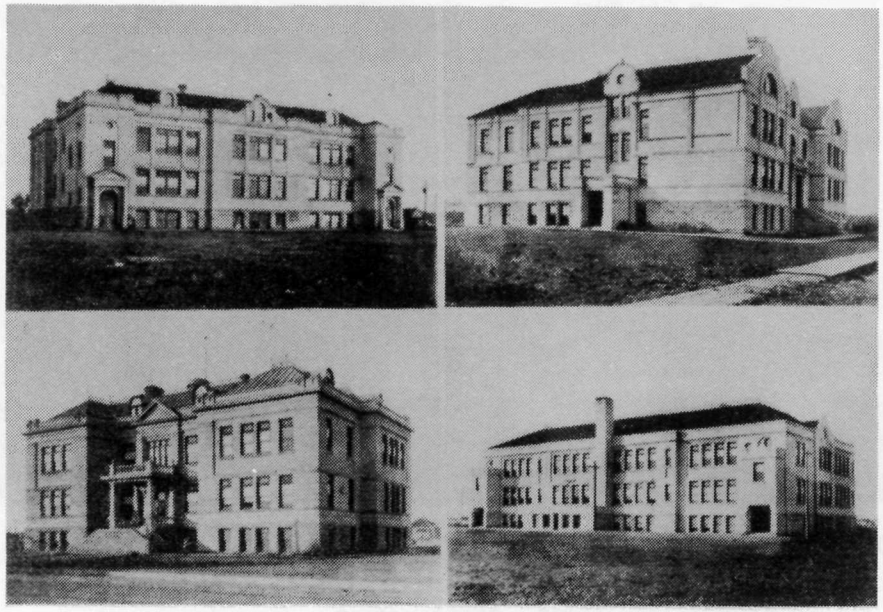


Fig. 13 Four Winnipeg schools - these buildings, constructed in the years 1907-09, reflect Winnipeg's 1907-14 policy of erecting large and elaborate schools to house up to 1200 students. Over this period a substantial number of them were built in a variety of styles without much regard to their cost. (R.R. Rostecki photograph from Annual Report of Winnipeg Pubic School District No. 1, 1909-10.)

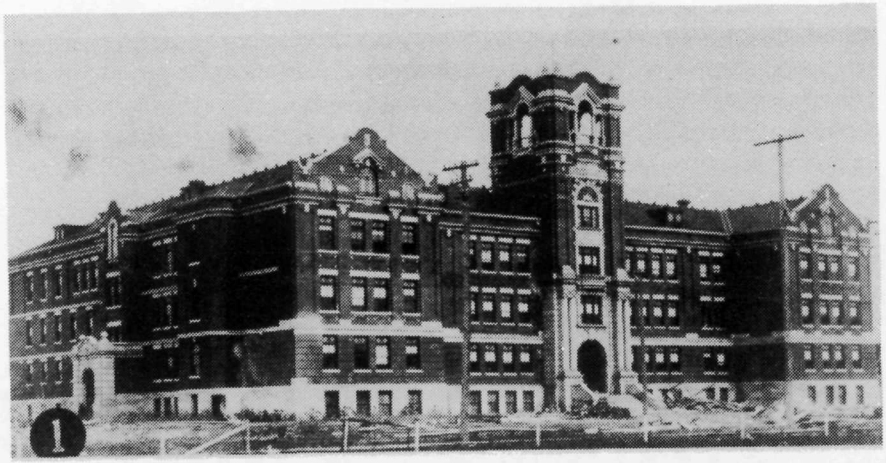


Fig. 14 Kelvin Technical High School, Winnipeg - This was one of two massive schools of this type erected in the city in 1910-11, before other Western Canadian cities had begun to address seriously the question of technical high school education. (Manitoba Archives photo.)

Fig. 15 Willow View School, No. 1616 - Built in 1913, this one-room hip-roof frame school was of a type that became popular across the Prairie provinces just before World War I. This school was built for $1500 from a standard Manitoba Department of Education plan and specification; it is the first Manitoba plan emphasizing the use of "banked" left-side lighting. (Manitoba Archives photo.)

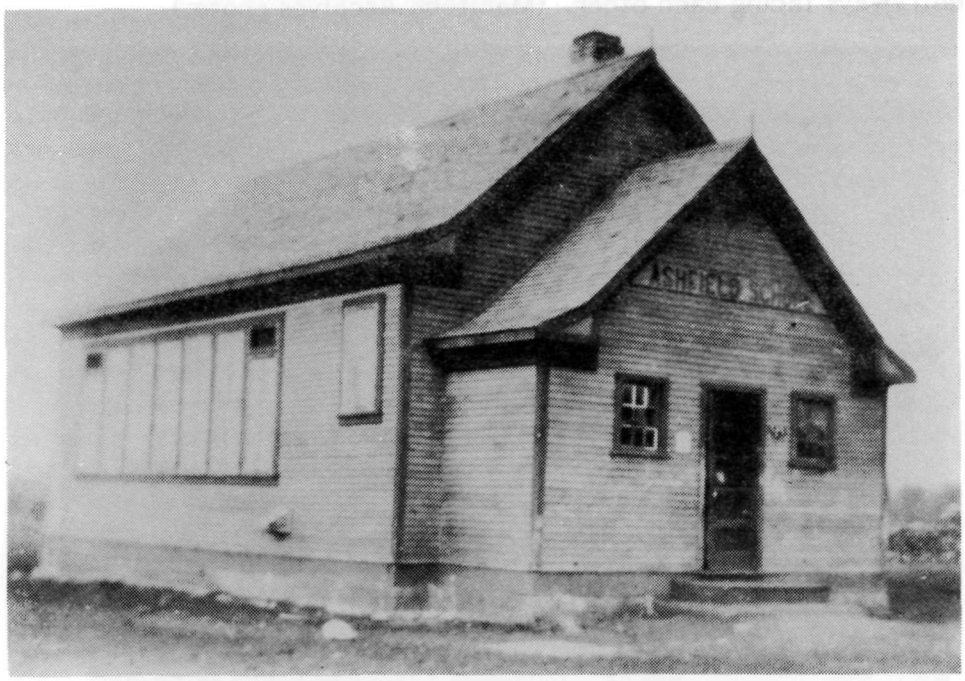


Fig. 16 Ashfield School, No. 428 - This school, erected in 1918, was a commonly built standard government rural school plan in the immediate postwar period as many districts undertook war-delayed improvements in their school buildings. Its most distinctive feature was its bell-cast gable roof and matching entry porch. (Manitoba Archives photo.)

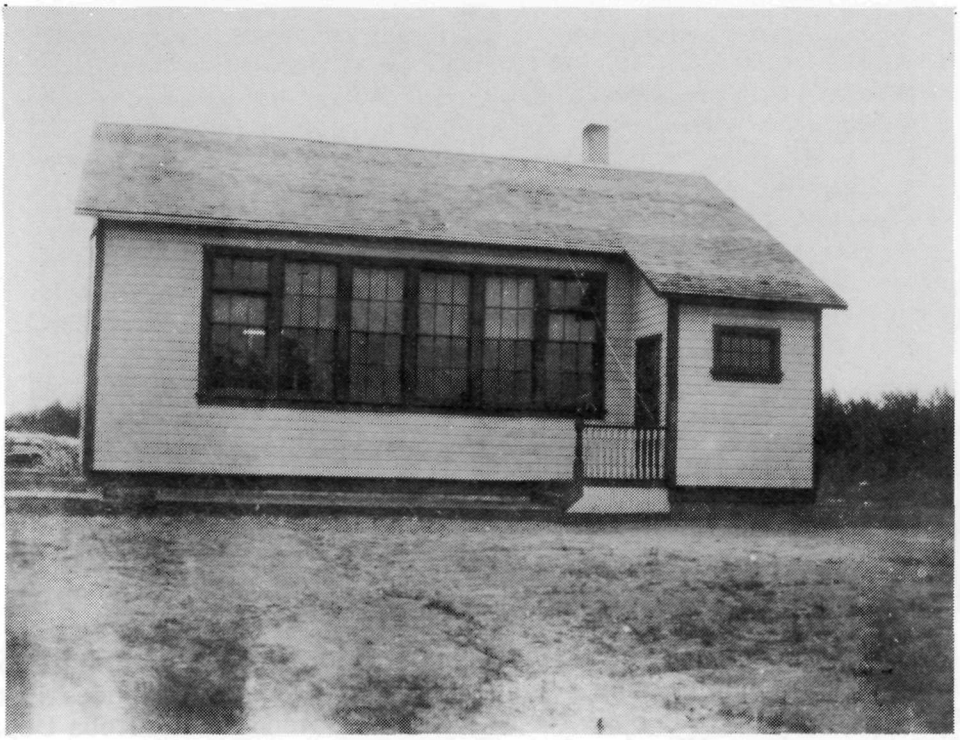


Fig. 17 Taras School, No. 1256 - Built in 1925, this was the most common type of school built in rural Manitoba through most of the 1920s. This design, almost certainly an official standard plan, was also built in a linear two-room version with separate entryways facing each other. (Manitoba Archives photo.)

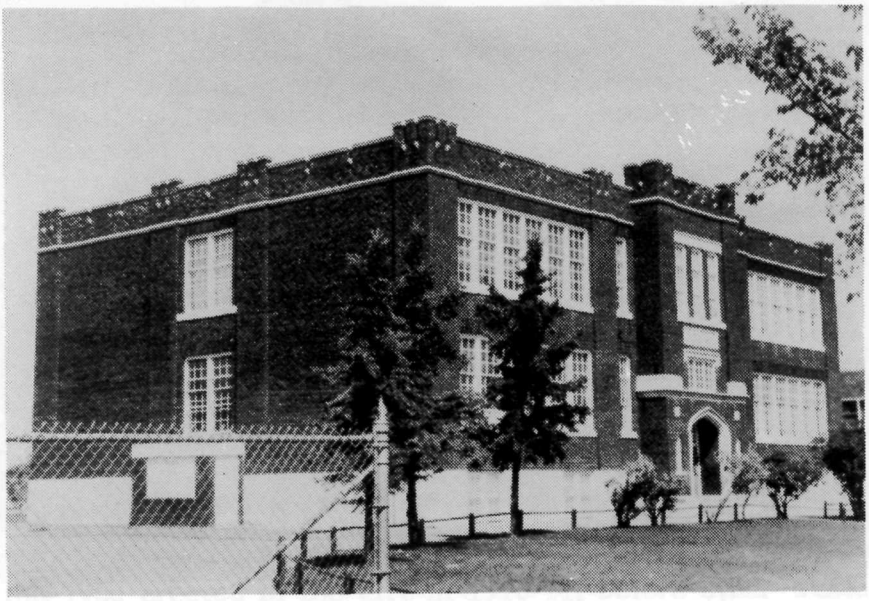


Fig. 18 Earl Oxford School, Brandon - This building, erected in 1928, was the most common form of two-storey postwar Manitoba school. Its simple rectangular form, flat roof and lack of expensive decorative detail made it attractive to school districts in the economically uncertain 1920s. This school, built during the brief economic upswing near the end of the decade, is one of the more elaborately detailed examples of its type. (Manitoba Archives photo.)

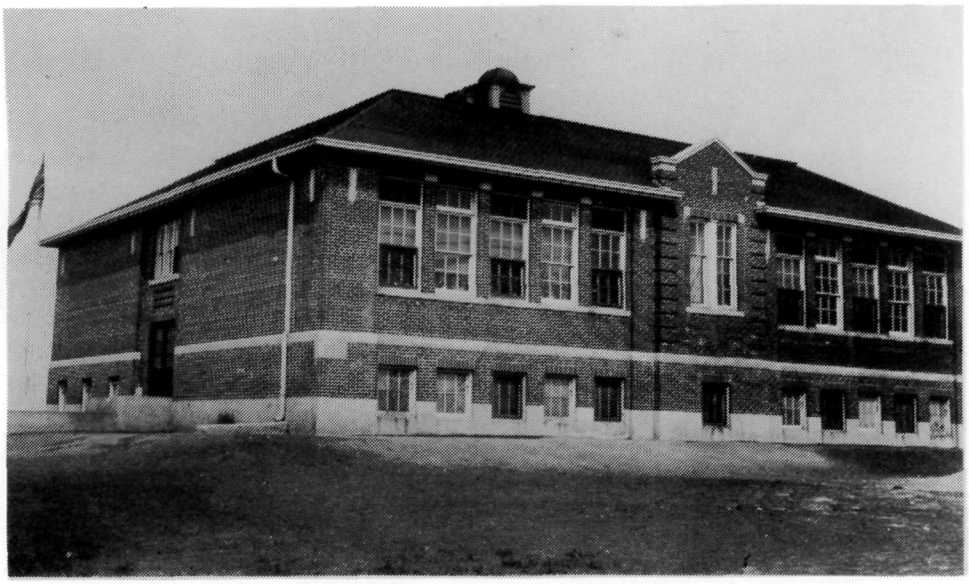


Fig. 19 Brookdale School, No. 1299 - This four-room one-storey brick school, built in 1925, was a common form of postwar construction. Its very functional low-profile design featured efficient space utilization and inexpensive styling and decoration. Built for $27 000, this school clearly indicates the general postwar trend to greater cost consciousness and simplicity of construction. (Manitoba Archives photo.)

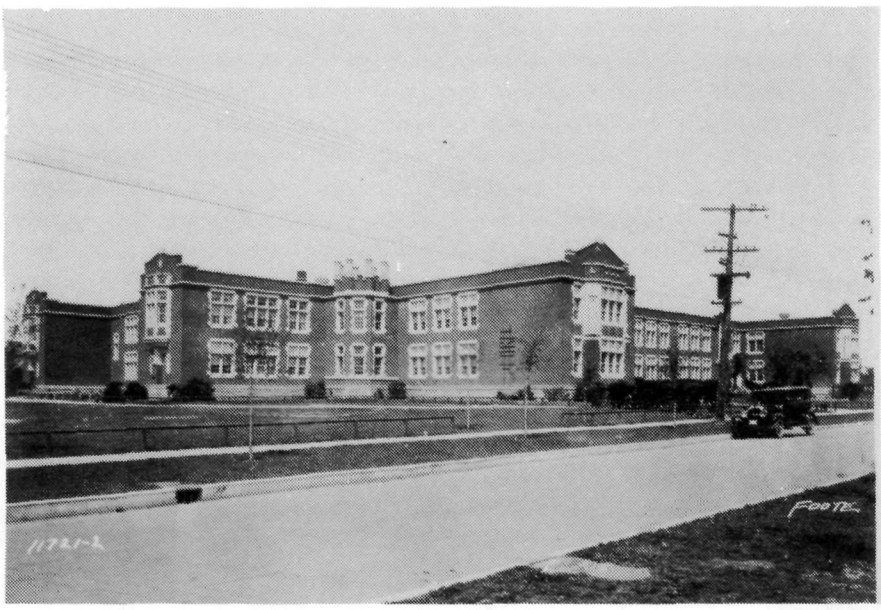
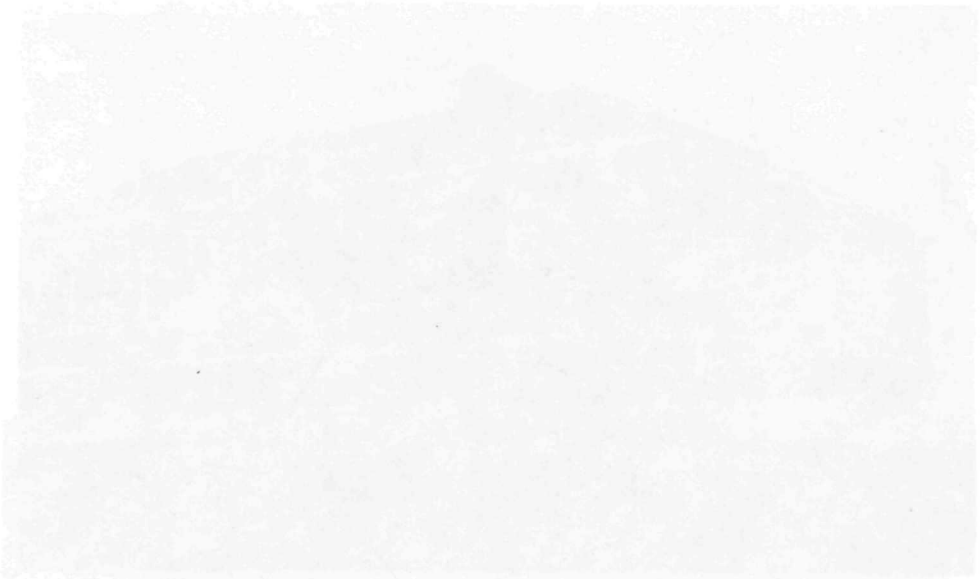


Fig. 20 Daniel McIntyre Collegiate Institute, Winnipeg - This large, prestigious and expensive 1922 building was the finest of Winnipeg's postwar schools. Even it, however, exhibited structural, stylistic and decorative economies that set it apart from Winnipeg's immediate prewar "educational palaces." (Manitoba Archives photo.)



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