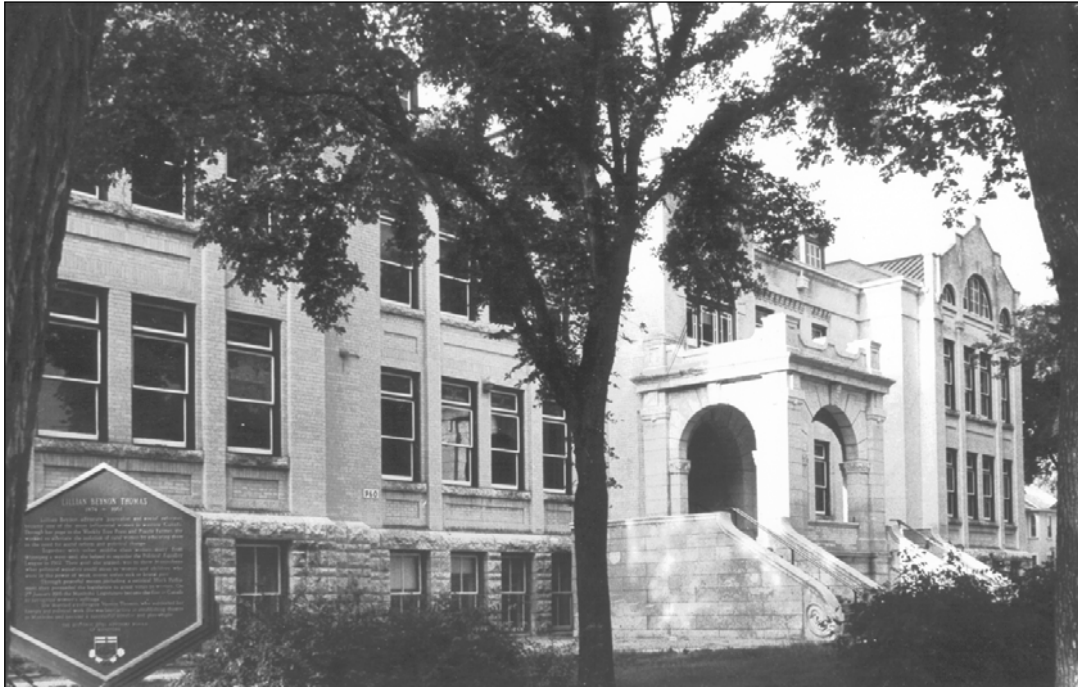


**960 WOLSELEY AVENUE – LAURA SECORD SCHOOL**  
*J.B. MITCHELL, 1912-13*



The prosperity and optimism of Winnipeg before World War One enabled the Public School Board to plan and erect institutions in the forefront of Canadian school construction. As one of only a few school buildings still to remain from this time period, Laura Secord School stands today as a tribute to the city's early educational leaders.

Two individuals determined the nature of school facilities in Winnipeg for over forty years: Superintendent of Winnipeg Public Schools, Daniel McIntyre; and James B. Mitchell, Commissioner of Buildings and Supply, Daniel McIntyre was educated in New Brunswick where he obtained a teaching license, and in 1878 was promoted to Superintendent of Schools in Portland, New Brunswick. In 1880 he resigned to study law. In 1883 he came to Winnipeg and was hired as principal of Carlton School. He was appointed Inspector and Superintendent of the Winnipeg School District No. 1 in 1885, a position he held until his retirement in 1928.

His colleague, James Bertram Mitchell, was born in Gananoque, Ontario, and at the age of fourteen was a bugler with the Gananoque Garrison Artillery. During the Fenian raid of 1870 he served as corporal receiving a medal and two clasps for service. He briefly studied architecture at the Montreal Art Institute and attended military school there. In 1874 he joined the North West Mounted Police as sergeant-major of "E" Troop, and served in Western Canada for three years. He resided in Winnipeg for ten years before running for the position of school trustee in 1888. In 1893 he was appointed Building and Supply Agent, a position he held for thirty-five years.

Both men firmly believed that education was not only essential to the foundations of character, but was also necessary to prepare students for commercial and industrial occupations and to teach citizenship to instill a Canadian national sentiment. The influx of large numbers of non-English speaking immigrants worried Winnipeg's elite and since compulsory education was not legislated in Manitoba until 1916, attracting students to Winnipeg's public schools was a major concern for many years. School trustees felt that a high attendance rate could be achieved by providing school buildings that were spacious, well heated, lighted, ventilated and equipped. If the educational facility was the most dignified and substantial building in the neighborhood, and was built solely to educate children free-of-charge, parents would willingly send their children to be educated.

Laura Secord School, built as an elementary school at a cost of \$218,000, is located in the city's West End. It was a practice of the School Division to purchase land for school buildings before an area became developed. But by the time plans were prepared for Laura Secord School, it was felt that the site was too small. New property, bounded by Lenore Street, Ruby Street and Wolseley Avenue, was purchased for \$79,000.

Nearly square in plan, the school is built around a large interior courtyard that made the structure light and airy. The school, two stories high over a raised basement, is built of a light-coloured brick with limestone trim and rustication. The main façade, facing Wolseley Avenue, features symmetrical end pavilions, each of three arched bays; a tall central tower (now removed); and an

attached projecting open portico with broad twin staircases. Large windows grouped in fours ensured that adequate amounts of daylight entered the classroom.

Besides the careful exterior ornamentation, Laura Secord School has remarkable interior finishes. The concern for fire safety was expressed in the wide hallways and the minimum use of flammable materials. Classrooms have large windows, most still with the original transoms of stained glass. The iron balustrade of the stairways incorporates small plaques bearing the school's letters.

While the school unofficially opened in mid-August 1913 with only a few classrooms ready, a formal opening occurred later in December with 1,200 residents of the district in attendance. During the opening ceremonies, held in the large auditorium (holding 800 people), the heroism of Laura Secord was recalled to the pupils and they were admonished to carry on that tradition. Mrs. Isaac Cockburn, Laura Secord's granddaughter, unveiled a large photograph of Canada's heroine.

Generations of children have received their primary education in this institution. Since its opening there has been little alteration to the building. A recent threat of demolition was countered by a campaign of the local residents who successfully lobbied to save this neighborhood landmark.