



405 PARR STREET
FARADAY SCHOOL

PREPARED BY PETERSON PROJECTS – DECEMBER 2009



405 PARR STREET FARADAY SCHOOL

Date of Construction: 1922

Building Permit: 1572/1922 (Plans at City Storage)

Architect: Semmens, John N.

Contractor: Sutherland Construction Company

ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

Another of the Winnipeg School Division's fine buildings, this one located in the North End of Winnipeg and built during the economic upturn that followed the end of World War I and continued until the stock market crash and subsequent Great Depression of the late 1920s and 1930s.

The front (west) façade features an ornate central section with large windows on both floors set in stone embellished frames. Two projecting entrances are also located in this area, once again accented with stone. At either end of the building are windowless projections both with stone panels with the school's name carved in them. The flat roof is highlighted by stone capping and raised areas. The north and south façades are similarly designed with numerous stone framed windows on both floors and unusual angled walls



Front (west) and north façades, 2009

with crenellation at the roofline. The rear (east) façade of the solid brick school includes large windows with more modest accenting.

The building stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition. Due to increasing enrolment, the school was doubled in size in 1925, the new section matching the original. A large one-storey addition was completed to the school's north end and in 1986, \$½-million in renovations were completed.

The school is one of Winnipeg's better examples of the Collegiate Gothic style. This style rose in popularity after 1900 as a reaction to the highly ornamented buildings of the earlier Gothic Revival style. The newer version opted for much simpler silhouettes and subdued ornamentation, in the words of one author, "a calm, disciplined monumentality."¹

Flat surfaces were preferred; buildings were often long, low symmetrical masses embellished with crenellated towers and the distinctive pointed arch of the Gothic style. Construction material was monochromatic, usually brick or stone, again a departure from the multi-hued façades of the Gothic Revival style. Inspiration for the detailing of the new style was found in the English Perpendicular Gothic design of the 15th century. Because it found widespread expression on the campuses of many North American universities and then in the public school system, it became known as Collegiate Gothic.²

Architect Colonel John N. Semmens was born in Toronto, Ontario in 1880, the son of a pioneer Methodist minister. He graduated from Wesley College and received his architectural degree from the University of Pennsylvania. In 1910, he moved west to Winnipeg, opened a practice, and soon became associated with the prominent New York firm of McKim, Mead and White. While in its employ, Semmens served as local supervising architect for the Bank



Front (west) and south façades, 2009

of Montreal project at the southeast corner of Portage Avenue and Main Street. During his career, he was twice president of the Manitoba Association of Architects, 1921 and 1941.³

In 1920 he was hired as a consultant for the Winnipeg School Division by J. B. Mitchell. In that role (which was expanded as Mitchell approached retirement in 1928), Semmens designed a great number of Winnipeg schools and supervised the planning of others. During World War II, Semmens organized the 2nd Battalion of the Grenadiers, but did not go overseas. He spent the remainder of the war as Commandant at Camp Shilo.⁴

In 1958 he moved to Victoria, B.C. and died three years later. A list of Semmens's major work in Winnipeg includes: Bank of Montreal, 335 Portage Avenue, (1911-13, Grade II, local supervising architect for McKim, Mead and White); Turner-Walker Block, 425 Henry Avenue (1912, Grade III); R.R. Scott House, 29 Ruskin Row (1914, Grade II); Sir Sam Steele, 15 Chester Street (1921, Grade III); and Wolseley, 511 Clifton Street South (1921, Grade III). He has been given 10 points by the Historical Buildings Committee.



Rear (east) façade, 2009

HISTORICAL INTEREST:

The school was named for Michael Faraday (1791-1867), an English chemist and physicist who contributed significantly to the fields of electromagnetism and electrochemistry – his discovery in 1831 of electromagnetic induction led to the invention of the electric transformer and generator and moved electrical power from a gimmick to powerful technology.

RECOMMENDATION TO HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE:

Under the Historical Buildings By-law, this building meets a number of important criteria:

- its historical importance- one of the few school buildings completed by the Winnipeg School Division in the 1920s and an excellent illustration of the Division's expansion during this period and the type of public school it built;
- its associations- its long-term connections to public education in Winnipeg and the North End;
- its design- an excellent example of the Collegiate Gothic style;
- its architect- J.N. Semmens was a respected and important practitioner;
- its location- a conspicuous structure that defines its block and contributes greatly to the historic streetscapes of the neighbourhood; and
- its integrity- its main façades continue to display many of their original elements and design.



Front (west) façade, nd

ENDNOTES:

- 1 L. Maitland et al., A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles (Peterborough: Broadview Press Ltd., 1992), p. 166.
- 2 Ibid., p. 166; and Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg: Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, Historic Resources Branch, 1991), p. 20.
- 3 Information courtesy of the Manitoba Association of Architects, Winnipeg.
- 4 Winnipeg Free Press, November 5, 1961; and J. N. Semmens, "Typical Schools of Western Canada" in The Journal, The Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, Vol. IV, No. 11 (November 1927), pp. 401-406.