



1150 SHERBURN STREET
PRINCIPAL SPARLING SCHOOL

City of Winnipeg
Historical Buildings Committee

March 1993

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By the time construction of Principal Sparling School was completed in 1913 (Plate 1), Winnipeg's public education system had evolved into a modern organization, including a full-time buildings officer who oversaw development of all schools in the District. These buildings became the envy of many divisions throughout North America because of their aesthetic quality, fire safety and interior design.

Manitoba's educational system consisted of private schools prior to the province's formation in 1870. These schools were funded by various churches and offered students clean, well-furnished buildings and well-trained educators. The public system that began in 1871 was more of an afterthought. Its first schools were under-funded and located in dark, cramped spaces. It was not until the late 1880s that financial and public support provided the impetus for creation of a modern school system.¹

This new system was based on the Ontario model of publicly financed schools developed by Egerton Ryerson and his contemporaries. With an ever-increasing number of non-British immigrants populating the Dominion, Ryerson saw the school as the ultimate assimilator, developing good taste, manners and citizenship among the students. As such, school buildings had to be as attractive as possible, properly ventilated and lit, and easy to evacuate in case of emergency.

When large numbers of Ontario farmers, businessmen and their families relocated to Manitoba, they brought with them the experience of modern public schools and a readiness and determination to support establishment of a similar system in their new province.

Several events occurred in the 1880s to give Winnipeg's public schools a stronger foundation. New provincial regulations were adopted in 1883, ensuring minimum air requirements, professional building designs and a minimum size for greenspace around schools. No longer would inadequate buildings house public students.

¹ M. Peterson, "Greenway School No. 1, 850 St. Matthews Avenue," Report for the City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee, August 1991, p. 1.

In a subsequent development, Daniel McIntyre (1852-1946) was appointed as Inspector and Superintendent of the Winnipeg School District in 1885. Over the next 43 years, he used his knowledge of United States and eastern Canadian school divisions to improve Winnipeg's delivery of education.

In 1888, newly elected trustee James Bertram Mitchell (1852-1945) was appointed Chairman of the District's Committee on Buildings. He later became the Building and Supply Agent, responsible for all purchasing and, after 1901, for the design of most new schools. Until his retirement in 1928, Mitchell remained an important part of the Division.²

Principal Sparling School, officially opened in the West End in August 1913, was named in honour of Reverend Dr. Joseph Walter Sparling (1842-1912), founder and first Principal of Wesley College, later the University of Winnipeg (Plate 2).³

STYLE

Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, public schools in Winnipeg were designed by local architects such as George Browne, Charles H. Wheeler and John H.G. Russell. These brick structures were three storeys high, almost square, and often included a tower. Exterior ornamentation was purposely kept simple to reduce the costs of construction.⁴

Mitchell initially continued this approach after he assumed direct control over school design.⁵ In 1907, however, he departed from previous layouts with his plans for Luxton School. In particular,

² Ibid., pp. 1-2.

³ The Winnipeg Telegram, June 17, 1912, pp. 1-2.

⁴ G. Bugailiskis, "Quiet Dignity. Aspects of Building Schools in the Winnipeg School Division No. 1- 1871-1928." Unpublished Master of Arts Thesis, University of Manitoba, October 1990, pp. 44-64. Below as "Quiet Dignity."

⁵ Ibid., p. 82.

Mitchell focused on improved fire protection and escape methods, then a topic of widespread public interest. The latest technology was utilized to make Luxton School and its successors safer.

Luxton featured a two-storey asymmetrical superstructure of rectangular plan, classrooms in a raised basement rather than on a third storey, and improved fire safety around the boiler and staircases.

Ornamentation included a rusticated stone foundation, balustrade and projecting portico (Plate 3). Ventilation and natural light, also considerations gaining support across the continent, were increased by utilizing large windows throughout.

This basic two-storey style subsequently was employed at other Winnipeg schools, including Principal Sparling School. Plans were not completely standardized since Mitchell varied the scope and type of ornamentation, size of building and interior organization.

CONSTRUCTION

Principal Sparling School was built at a cost of \$138,000 by local contractors S. Brynjolfsson and Son.⁶ It is situated on land legally described as 59 St. James, Plan 843, Block 2, Lots 11/31,⁷ purchased in 1911 at a cost of \$30,500.⁸ Construction materials include rusticated Tyndall stone at the base and sand-lime brick for the load-bearing walls of the superstructure. Smooth- and rough-cut Tyndall stone appears as trim around doors, windows and along the roof.

The use of cream-coloured, sand-lime brick was a departure from traditional Division practice. It gave this school and its contemporaries an aesthetically lighter appearance which allowed the large buildings to blend into residential surroundings. Use of this local product also resulted from technological advances (high-pressure steam hardening) that made it a stronger, more durable and

⁶ Ibid., p. 157.

⁷ City of Winnipeg, Assessment Record, Roll No. 204290, Ward 2, PC 83.

⁸ Manitoba Free Press, November 18, 1922, p. 5.

cheaper option than imported brick.⁹

DESIGN

The school is rectangular in plan, its brick walls rising from the raised, rusticated stone base to a low-pitched hip roof. The front or east façade is symmetrical, with a centrally placed entrance and two windowless projecting areas at either end. Ornamentation is modest yet appealing. It includes Tyndall stone lug sills and continuous heads, a stone belt course placed just below the second-storey eaves, and corbelled brick sections leading from the walls to the roof. The projecting end sections feature stone-capped parapet gables with small round windows, now boarded up, and corbelled brick. Two small gable dormers with windows are found on front slope of the roof.

The main feature of the front elevation is the entrance. This one-and-a-half-storey classically detailed stone portico has stone columns, bases and capitals, and an ornamental panel with a carved stone medallion surrounded by a floral motif. Above the portico is a small stone plaque with the inscription, "Principal Sparling School." The area is further highlighted by an open tower rising high above the street. This component is embellished with square and rounded stone columns, a curved stone belt course bracketed by corbelled brick elements, and a stone-capped parapet.

The school's side elevations are similarly ornamented. Projecting central areas are topped with parapet gables. The gable ends feature corbelled brick and arched windows, while the parapet is finished with stone coping and ornamental finials in the form of globes. The north side also has an open fire escape and an entrance.

The rear of the school continues the ornamental language of the front façade. Another projecting entrance is located at the southern end of this elevation. A second, matching entrance at the northern end (Plate 4) was removed and a large, unsympathetically designed gymnasium that detracts from the aesthetic effect of this façade was added.

⁹ Construction, Vol. 3, No. 12 (November 1910), pp. 85-6.

Windows throughout the building are unmatched in both size and shape. Many feature stained glass in the uppermost pane, a familiar ornamental device in Winnipeg schools.

INTERIOR

Given Principal Sparling School's date of construction and its similarities with other schools of this vintage, it is not surprising that the interior organization mirrors facilities such as Greenway No. 1, 850 St. Matthews Avenue and La Verendrye School, 290 Lilac Street.¹⁰ The basement includes a cement-enclosed boiler room, several classrooms used for Nursery and Kindergarten classes, and a craft room, originally the shops or "Manual Training" room (Plate 5).

The original first and second floors were identically laid out, with wide central corridors running the entire length of the building and classrooms, offices, storage space, washrooms, and teachers' rooms situated on either side (Plates 6 and 7). This basic layout essentially is intact, although the subjects and grades taught have changed.

At present, much of the school's interior fabric remains unaltered. Finishing material still present includes dark wood trim around doors and windows. Access to the upper floor is gained by staircases at either end of the building and a small staircase located to the south of the main lobby. Small rooms located on the landings of the two main staircases are now used as a second office and a guidance room. The second-floor multi-purpose room has been converted into a music room and computer laboratory. The school now contains regular classes from Nursery to Grade 6.

INTEGRITY

The building appears in good structural condition and stands on its original site. The major alteration has been the addition of the one-storey gymnasium at the rear. Its design adversely affects the aesthetic quality of this elevation, but not that of the larger building.

¹⁰ M. Peterson, *op. cit.*, p. 5; and M. Peterson, "La Verendrye School, 290 Lilac Street," Report for the Historical Buildings Committee, May 1992, p. 6.

STREETSCAPE

Principal Sparling School is an imposing structure, located in the midst of a residential district. Its colour and ornamentation add to, rather than detract from, the overall character of the neighbourhood and the immediate vicinity.

ARCHITECT

James Bertram Mitchell's entire architectural career was spent with the Winnipeg School Division (ultimately Winnipeg School Division No. 1). He designed nearly 50 schools, many of which continue to serve the Division (see Appendix I for biography). He has received 20 points from the Historical Buildings Committee.

INSTITUTION

Growth was slow for the Winnipeg School Division and public education in Manitoba. The 1883 provincial regulatory changes governing sites, design and construction of schools forced the Division to create a proper environment for students. Each pupil was to have a minimum amount of floor and air space, each classroom was required to contain two vents to circulate clean air, and sites were to be at least 0.1 hectare (one-quarter acre) in size.¹¹

As mentioned earlier, Division buildings initially were designed by local architects who submitted plans to Mitchell and the School Board for approval. Through this process, a three-storey model was adopted until 1907 when Mitchell introduced his two-storey plan (refer to "Style").

Another innovation, the bungalow-style or one-storey school, began to replace the two-storey structures in 1918-19 in response to several variables, specifically financial restraints. The two-storey schools had maintained a certain individuality due to each building's unique blend of ornamental elements. The bungalow schools, however, became standardized on both the interior

¹¹ "Quiet Dignity," p. 58.

and exterior.¹²

All three styles of building showed the remarkable ability of the Division to provide up-to-date facilities for students over three extremely different decades between the 1890s and the 1910s. Each newly devised school type combined the unique spatial needs of the curriculum with protective and health features at as reasonable a cost as possible.

EVENT

There is no known event connected with this school.

CONTEXT

Principal Sparling School can be placed in the context of: (1) the evolution of school design in the Winnipeg Division; (2) the growth of Winnipeg's West End; and (3) the school's role in remembering one of western Canada's educational pioneers.

The impetus for two-storey buildings such as Principal Sparling School grew out of a number of events across North America that heightened concerns over fire safety. The San Francisco earthquake and subsequent fire of 1906, a school fire in Montreal in 1907 that took the lives of 17 Kindergarten students and their principal, and a disastrous 1908 Ohio fire that killed 174 students and two teachers all affected the Division and its Board.

Because lack of adequate fire protection was blamed for most of the Montreal and Ohio deaths, there were immediate responses across the continent. Winnipeg officials passed a by-law requiring outside fire escapes on all schools three storeys in height, and the Canadian Fire Underwriters Association threatened to raise insurance rates dramatically unless the water supply system was

¹² M. Peterson, "Comparison of Sir John Franklin School- 386 Beaverbrook Street, Sir Sam Steele School- 15 Chester Street, and Wolseley School- 511 Clifton Street" and "Champlain School- 250 Machray Avenue," Reports to the City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee, July - August, 1991.

updated and manned at all times.¹³

Exterior fire escapes were added to many of the extant Winnipeg schools and Mitchell moved quickly to redesign the three-storey standard plan. Between 1907 and 1913, twelve new schools were built, costing more than \$1.32 million or an average of \$110,600 per school (see Appendix II). These buildings were substantially different, thus creating safer, fire-resistant structures.

With only two storeys above the raised basement, the facilities were easier to empty in case of emergency. The basement, with its large windows, allowed the lower level to be used for classroom space, replacing the third floor of the older structures. All staircases were built of fire-resistant materials and fully enclosed for added protection. Interior corridors were widened to lessen overcrowding, and boiler rooms were surrounded by fire-resistant walls.¹⁴

Seven of the 12 schools built between 1907 and 1913 are extant and in use, including La Verendrye (Plate 8), Isaac Brock (Plate 9), Cecil Rhodes No. 1 (Plate 10), Greenway No. 1 (Plate 11) and Laura Secord (Plate 12). All are comparable in overall plan and design. However, ornamentation is unique to each building. Isaac Brock, Laura Secord and Principal Sparling each have ornamental towers above the main entrances, while Principal Sparling, Laura Secord and Luxton schools include entrance porticos. Cecil Rhodes No. 1 contains an ornamented parapet, finished with a swan's neck pediment. Greenway No. 1 is ornamentally very similar to, though larger than, La Verendrye. The former also exhibits two protruding wings topped by gable end parapets, much like Principal Sparling and Laura Secord. Overall, while much larger in scale, Laura Secord School, designated Grade II (1985), is most like Principal Sparling School.

In the context of its neighbourhood, Principal Sparling School was built during rapid spatial, economic and population growth in Winnipeg. The West End, as the residential neighbourhood surrounding the school became known, developed on both sides of Portage Avenue after the turn of

¹³ "Quiet Dignity," pp. 91-2.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 91-7.

the century. This was a response to the need for new middle- and upper-income residential areas after the commercialization and industrialization of traditional residential space in Winnipeg's downtown.

The area south of Portage Avenue developed into an affluent neighbourhood, while property north of the thoroughfare evolved into an ethnically mixed, middle-income district. The Icelandic community, however, was prominent in the area.¹⁵ An indication of area growth is provided by Principal Sparling's enrolment. When the school first opened, eight teachers taught 200 students. By 1922, there were 19 teachers for the 814 pupils.¹⁶

Reverend Dr. J.W. Sparling was born in Blanchard, Perth County, Ontario on February 14, 1842. He schooling included a Bachelor of Arts (1871) and an Master of Arts from Victoria University in Cobourg, Ontario, and a Bachelor of Divinity degree from Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, which years later conferred upon him a Doctor of Divinity degree in recognition of his years of educational work.¹⁷

Sparling was ordained a Methodist minister at Belleville, Ontario in 1871 and was pastor of churches in Ottawa, Kingston and Montreal. In 1888 church leaders, recognizing his educational expertise, sent him to Winnipeg to create and head a new Methodist college. Wesley College was opened in a lecture room in Grace Methodist Church with two professors. Within five years, the staff numbered six, and the college had moved to larger facilities, first on Albert Street and then on Broadway.¹⁸

In 1895, seeking a more permanent solution, Sparling purchased land on Portage Avenue, raised funds and built Wesley College. He was also credited with raising funds for numerous Methodist

¹⁵ M. Peterson, "828 Preston Avenue - The Rothesay," Report for the Historical Buildings Committee, February 1991, p. 1.

¹⁶ The Manitoba Free Press, November 18, 1922, p. 5.

¹⁷ The Manitoba Free Press, June 17, 1912, p. 1; and The Winnipeg Telegram, June 17, 1912, p. 2.

¹⁸ The Winnipeg Telegram, June 17, 1912, p. 2.

churches built in Winnipeg during his career. He was called "the Father of Winnipeg Methodism,"¹⁹ "the bishop of the Methodist Church,"²⁰ "a genius for finance," and "Western Canada's apostle of peace."²¹

He died in Winnipeg from a brain haemorrhage on June 16, 1912. Out of respect, students taking university examinations on June 18 stopped writing for five minutes.²²

LANDMARK

Principal Sparling School, due to its relative size and ornamentation, and its important social role, is conspicuous in the area.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 2.

²⁰ Manitoba Free Press, June 17, 1912, p. 13.

²¹ Winnipeg Tribune, June 17, 1912, p. 1.

²² Manitoba Free Press, June 19, 1912, p. 12.

APPENDIX I -

James Bertram Mitchell

J.B. Mitchell was born in 1852 in Gananoque, Ontario to Scottish immigrant parents. After studying architecture at the Montreal Art Institute, he came west as a 21-year-old member of the first detachment of the North-West Mounted Police (NWMP) in 1874.¹ Mitchell was no stranger to the military life, having been a teenage bugler in the Canadian militia during the Fenian raids of 1866 and a member of the Wolseley Expedition to the Red River Settlement in 1870.² As Mitchell passed through Manitoba on the NWMP's famous western march, he noted the prosperity of the area and returned to the province after his tour of duty ended in 1877.³ His military career also included service as a colonel of the 100th Winnipeg Grenadiers in World War I.⁴

Mitchell was elected to the Winnipeg School Board in 1888 and later was appointed to the post of Commissioner of School Buildings (architect for the Division).⁵ Until his retirement in 1928, Mitchell designed some 48 school buildings costing more than \$8,000,000.⁶

Mitchell was supported by the Division's Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Daniel McIntyre. McIntyre held his post from 1885 until retirement in 1928, the same year as Mitchell stepped down.⁷ These two men worked tirelessly to provide universal, modern education in Winnipeg. Their success was

¹ G. Bugailiskis, "School Buildings of the Winnipeg School Division No. 1" (unpublished paper), Part B, p. 8. Below as "School Buildings."

² Ibid., Part B, p. 8.

³ S.C. Grover, "Earl Grey School - 370 Cockburn Street," Report for the City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee, June 30, 1980, p. 2. Below as "Earl Grey School."

⁴ S.C. Grover, "960 Wolseley Avenue - Laura Secord School," Report for the City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Committee, June 30, 1985, p. 2.

⁵ "Earl Grey School," p. 3.

⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 7-10.

recognized throughout the country and their legacy is the fine structures that have remained useful to the present.

Until 1901, a number of well-known local architects prepared and submitted plans to the School Board for new facilities, under the supervision of Mitchell and McIntyre. Mitchell, however, designed Wellington School in 1898 and Somerset School in 1901.⁸ Thereafter he took full control over the design process. He often used his knowledge of advances in other school divisions to create better buildings, touring parts of Ontario and the United States to understand their approaches.⁹

Mitchell died in Winnipeg in 1945. In 1956, the J.B. Mitchell School (1720 John Brebeuf Place) was opened to honour one of the city's leading educational administrators.¹⁰

⁸ "School Buildings," Part B, p. 14.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 7-10.

¹⁰ "Earl Grey School," p. 4.

APPENDIX II -

Two-storey schools built by the Winnipeg School Division between 1907 and 1913:¹¹

SCHOOL	LOCATION	DATE	COST	EXTANT
Luxton	Polson Ave.	1907	\$ 75,000	Yes
Lord Selkirk #1	Poplar Ave.	1908	\$ 59,000	No
Cecil Rhodes #1	Cecil St.	1908-10	\$ 64,800	Yes
King Edward #1	Selkirk Ave.	1908	\$ 63,300	No
La Verendrye	Lilac St.	1909	\$ 80,000	Yes
Aberdeen #2	Salter St.	1909	\$ 72,000	No
Greenway #1	St. Matthews Ave.	1909	\$ 91,454	Yes
Lord Roberts #1	Beresford Ave.	1910	\$ 86,000	No
Laura Secord	Lenore St.	1912	\$208,000	Yes
Lord Selkirk #2	Kelvin St.	1912	\$150,000	No
Principal Sparling	Sherburn St.	1912-13	\$138,000	Yes
Isaac Brock	Barratt Ave.	1912-13	\$240,000	Yes

¹¹ G. Bugailiskis, "Quiet Dignity. Aspects of Building Schools in the Winnipeg School Division No. 1 - 1871-1928." Unpublished Master of Arts Thesis, University of Manitoba, October 1990, p. 157.

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Plate 1 – Principal Sparling School, 1150 Sherburn Street; built 1912-13, architect James B. Mitchell, contractors S. Brynjolfsson and Son; front or east façade. (Murray Peterson, 1991.)



Plate 2 – Reverend Dr. Joseph Walter Sparling (1842-1912), ca. 1888. (Photo courtesy of the Western Canada Pictorial Index, Slide 494/15828.)

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Plate 3 – Luxton School, 111 Polson Avenue; built 1907, James B. Mitchell, architect; front elevation. (Murray Peterson, 1991.)

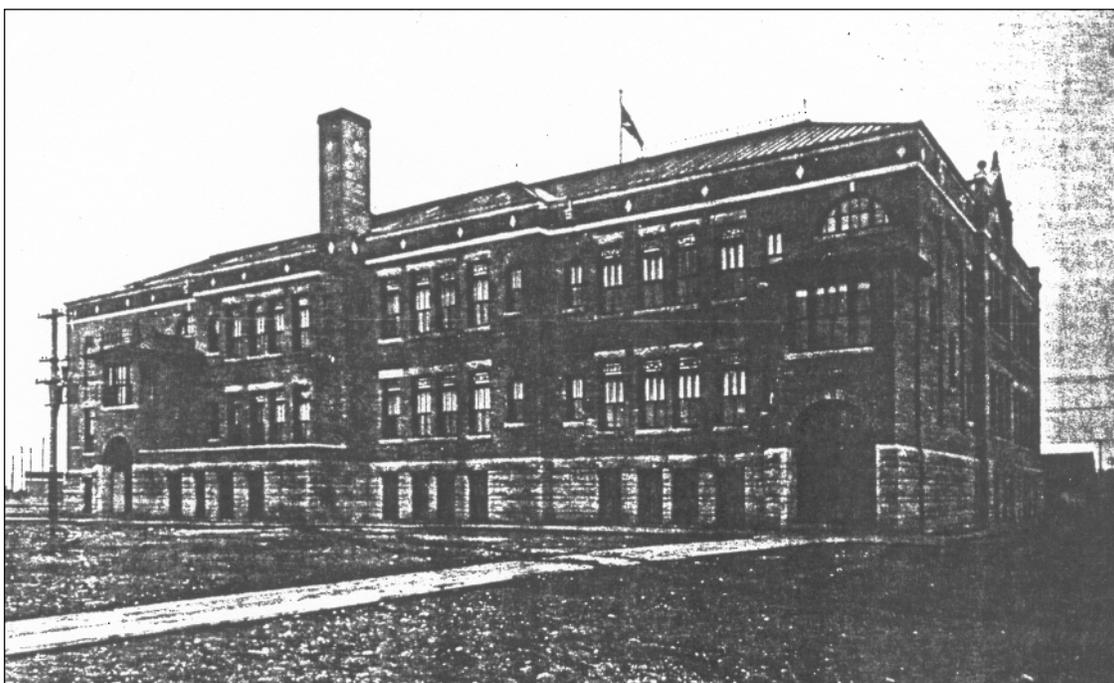


Plate 4 – Principal Sparling School, 1150 Sherburn Street, n.d.; rear or west façade. (Courtesy of the Winnipeg School Division No. 1, Research Department.)

1150 SHERBURN STREET – PRINCIPAL SPARLING SCHOOL

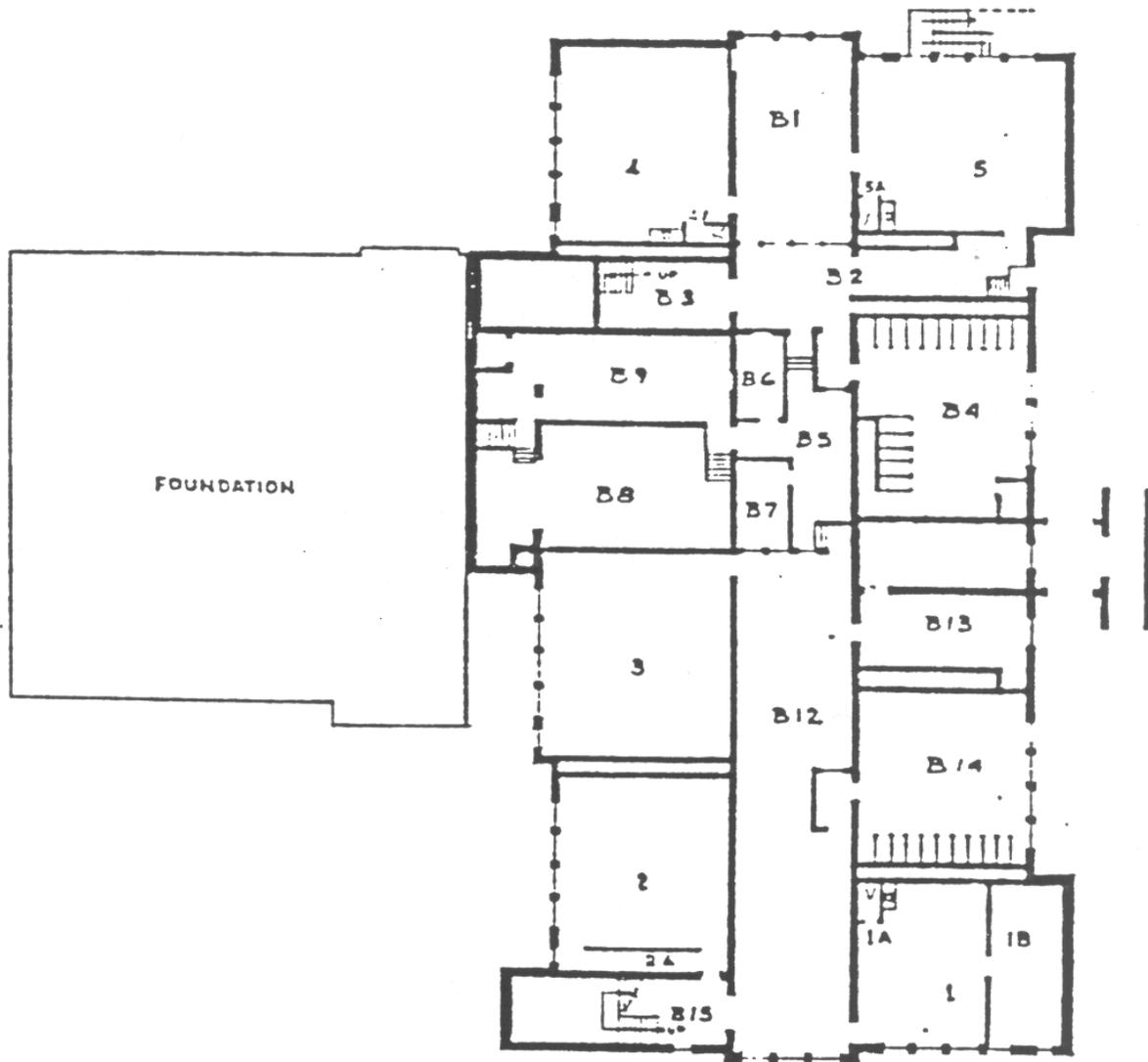


Plate 5 – Principal Sparling School, 1150 Sherburn Street, "Basement Floor Plan," 1986. (Plan courtesy of the Winnipeg School Division No. 1, Research Department.)

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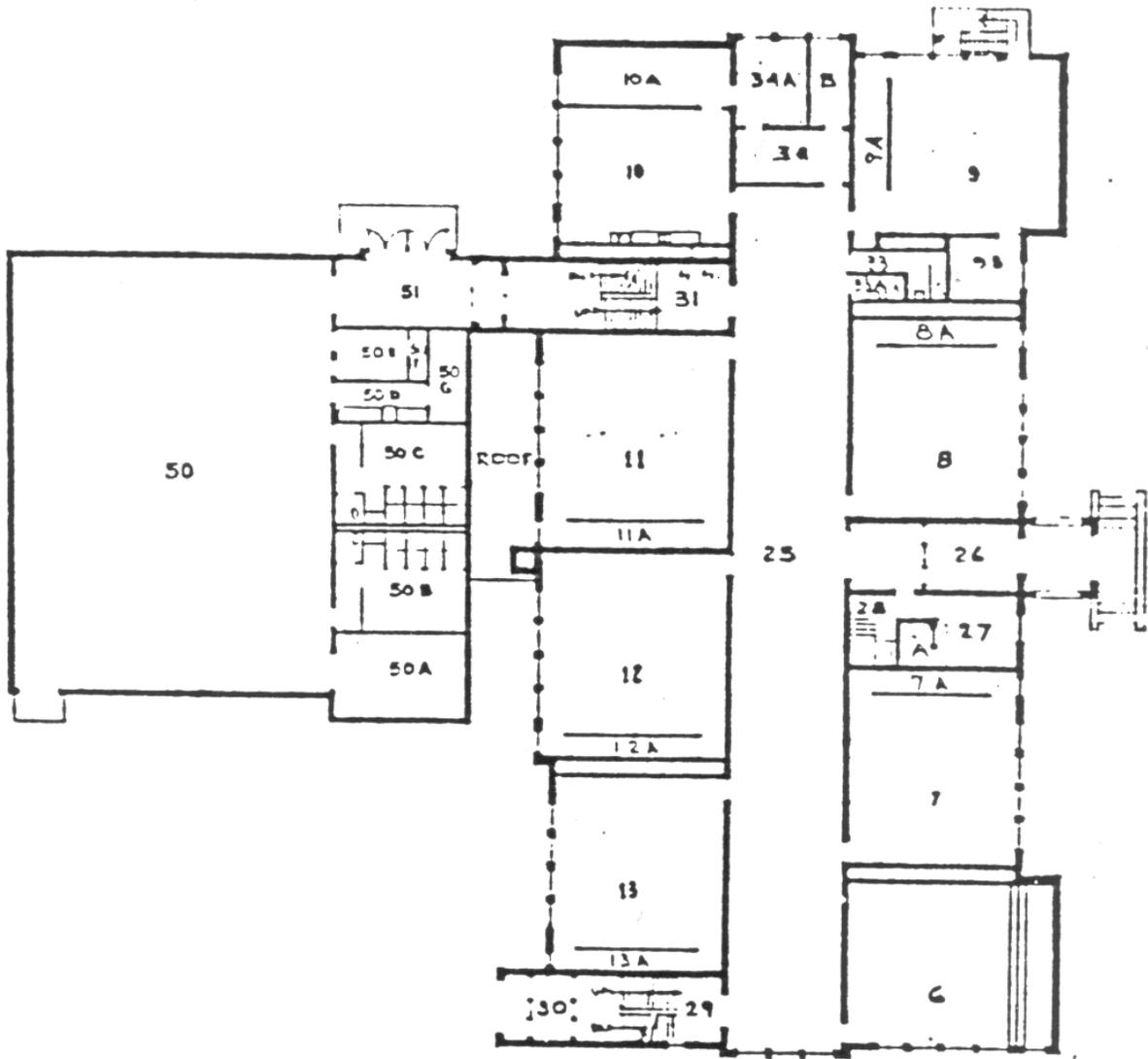


Plate 6 – Principal Sparling School, 1150 Sherburn Street, "First Floor Plan," 1986. (Plan courtesy of the Winnipeg School Division No. 1, Research Department.)

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Plate 8 – La Verendrye School, 290 Lilac Street; built in 1909, architect James B. Mitchell.
(Murray Peterson, 1991.)



Plate 9 – Isaac Brock School, 1265 Barratt Avenue; built in 1913, architect James B. Mitchell.
(Murray Peterson, 1991.)

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Plate 10 – Cecil Rhodes School No. 1, 136 Cecil Avenue; built 1908-10, architect James B. Mitchell. (Murray Peterson, 1991.)



Plate 11 – Greenway School No. 1, 850 St. Matthews Avenue; built in 1909, architect James B. Mitchell. (Murray Peterson, 1991.)

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Plate 12 – Laura Secord School, 960 Wolseley Avenue; built 1912-13, architect James B. Mitchell, 1905. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)