

310 VAUGHAN STREET – ISBISTER SCHOOL
S. Hooper, 1898-99



Built during 1898-99, Isbister School is the oldest public school building in Winnipeg, having survived a purge of the public school system initiated by a 1948 report which condemned fourteen school buildings as “outmoded.” The other two schools to have survived are Somerset School (1901) and Pinkham School (1902-03). Together these schools mark a period of dramatic reformation of the public school system. Changes such as mandatory attendance and new teacher training programs were paralleled by the construction of larger school facilities.

Isbister School was one of the first three-storey school buildings in Winnipeg. Providing ten classrooms and an auditorium, it was among the largest facilities of its day. Finely finished with detailed woodwork, metal ceilings, and stained glass – all materials new to public schools – the school embodied the new attitudes towards education. Even the central ventilation and heating system was of superior quality and was a source of pride. Isbister School served as a model for other schools, with its symmetrical three-storey massing and gabled roof forms.

Designed by Samuel Hooper before he became Provincial Architect in 1904, Isbister School exhibits the same restrained eclecticism which appears in his later works. The nearly-perfect symmetry of each façade lends an appearance of stability to the buildings which is reinforced by the pedimented gables' allusion to classical architecture.

Isbister School functioned as a public school from 1899 until 1966. The school has served as the Winnipeg Adult Education Centre since 1967. Although obscured by portable classroom additions, the building retains its original form. Much of the interior, including the magnificent stairway, is largely in its original condition, presenting a rare image of a Winnipeg school at the turn of the century.