



820 MCPHILLIPS STREET

LORD NELSON SCHOOL

PREPARED BY PETERSON PROJECTS – DECEMBER 2009



820 MCPHILLIPS STREET LORD NELSON SCHOOL

Date of Construction: 1917

Building Permit: 789/1917 (Plans at City Storage)

Architect: Atchison, John Danley

Contractor: Sutherland Construction Company

ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST:

Lord Nelson School, built in the northwest corner of the city, is another of the fine brick and stone public school buildings completed by the Winnipeg School Division, solidifying its international reputation for outstanding design of its facilities.

Like so many other Divisional schools of the 1910-1925 era, Lord Nelson School is built on a raised foundation, clad in stone, with large windows to allow natural light and ventilation into the basement that held classroom space. The superstructure is clad in a dark brick and originally features banks of large windows accented with stone. The roofline is embellished with stone capping and other ornamentation. The front (south) and rear (north) façades were originally copies, with centrally located entrances set in classically detailed stone surrounds. On all elevations, brick pilasters with stone heads are present.



North façade and north addition, 2009

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

The school stands on its original site and appears to be in good structural condition. Alterations to the structure have been extensive: the front entrance has been altered with the addition of a projecting enclosure; windows have been replaced by smaller units, bricked in and/or stuccoed over; and a one-storey addition has been built on the north end. Some of the fine detailing is still evident, however, especially on the upper floors.

The structure measures approximately 18.9 x 26.5 metres and cost \$57,000 to complete in 1917.³

The architect of this block was well-known local designer John D. Atchison (1870-1959). Born in Monmouth, Illinois, Atchison was educated in Chicago, studying architecture at the Chicago Art Institute and the Chicago Manual Training School.⁴ In 1895, he opened his own practice in Chicago that continued until the early 1900s. He worked on the staff of the



East façade, 2009

World's Columbian Exposition and for the Chicago and Eastern Illinois Railroad. His commissions brought him to Winnipeg and by 1905 the city's prosperity and future prospects prompted him to relocate his business there.⁵

A list of some of the more prominent local buildings designed by J.D. Atchison over his career includes: Wardlow Apartments, 544 Wardlaw Avenue (1905, Grade II), Kennedy Building (Mitchell-Copp), 315 Portage Avenue (1906, Grade II), Dennistoun House, 166 Roslyn Road (1908, Grade III), N.W.C.T.A. Building, 291 Garry Street (1908, Grade III), Paterson Block, 54 Donald Street (1909, Grade II), Oldfield, Kirby and Gardner Building, 234 Portage Avenue (1909, Grade II), Canada Permanent Building, 296-98 Garry Street (1909, Grade II), Maltese Cross Building, 66 King Street (1909, Grade III), Chamber of Commerce Building (Great-West Life Building), 177 Lombard Avenue (1911, Grade II) Carlton Building, 354 Portage Avenue (1912, Grade III), Boyd Building, 388 Portage Avenue (1912, Grade III), Union Tower, 191 Lombard Avenue (1912-13, Grade II), Merchants' Bank Branch, 1386 Main Street (1913, Grade III), Curry Building, 233 Portage Avenue (1915, Grade II) and the Bank of Hamilton Building, 395 Main Street (1916-18, Grade I).⁶ In 1923, Atchison left Winnipeg for Pasadena, California, and continued to practice there, adopting the Spanish Colonial style for his residential work. He died in 1959.⁷ He has been given 20 points by the Historical Buildings Committee.



West façade, 2009

HISTORICAL INTEREST:

The school was named after Lord Horatio Nelson (1758-1805), British naval commander who won several crucial battles in both the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars. He was killed during the Battle of Trafalgar on the deck of the ship HMS Victory.⁸

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 public school buildings constructed during World War I and the fourth largest project completed in the City of Winnipeg during 1917;
- its associations- its long-term connections to public education in Winnipeg's north end;
- its design- a very good example of the Collegiate Gothic style;
- its architect- J.D. Atchison was a respected and important practitioner;
- its location- defines an important intersection and contributes greatly to the historic streetscapes of its neighbourhood; and
- its integrity- its main façades continue to display some of their original elements and design.



East and north façades, 1978

ENDNOTES:

- 1 L. Maitland et al., A Guide to Canadian Architectural Styles (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press Ltd., 1992), p. 166.
- 2 Ibid., p. 166; and Identifying Architectural Styles in Manitoba (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, Historic Resources Branch, 1991), p. 20.
- 3 City of Winnipeg Building Permit, #789/1917.
- 4 Winnipeg Telegram, September 18, 1906, p. 55; and F.H. Schofield, The Story of Manitoba (Winnipeg, MB: S.J. Clarke, 1913), Vol. II, p. 374.
- 5 F.H. Schofield, op. cit., p. 374.
- 6 Compiled from City of Winnipeg Historical Buildings Files; J. Wade, Manitoba Architecture to 1940 (Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press, 1976); Winnipeg Telegram, September 18, 1906, p. 55; Winnipeg Tribune, December 21, 1907; and F.H. Schofield, op. cit., pp. 374-75.
- 7 The Emerson Court House and Town Hall Building (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Recreation, Historic Resources Branch, 1985), pp. 8-11.
- 8 “Horatio Nelson, Viscount Nelson,” Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, October 2009.