



# Winnipeg Schools

A THEMATIC STUDY OF THE MODERN PERIOD, 1945 – 1975

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## BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

This is a study of the particular circumstances of the metropolitan area of Winnipeg in the post-war era that contributed to the ideology, planning, construction and adaptation of the large portfolio of school buildings in the urban region. It is a companion document to the 'Inventory of Winnipeg Schools 1945 to 1975' prepared by the Winnipeg Architecture Foundation in 2010. this paper is intended to provide a thematic framework to deepen the understanding of school buildings constructed in the city between 1945 and 1975, an era of reconstruction, an explosive baby boom and the city's entry into the modern era.

The growth of the metropolitan Winnipeg area, the change in construction technologies and the shift in pedagogical philosophies had administrators scrambling, taxpayers debating and young people finding a collective voice they had not previously known. This is the backdrop for the modern era when Winnipeg society encountered the post - world war through increased immigration and mass media, a more diversified economy and a significant change in material culture. Topics explored will include a brief history of education in the province up to the study period, including the economic elements of Winnipeg before 1945, the impact of the Depression and World War II, reconstruction and the pursuit of democracy within existing social systems of the institution of the school, fragmentation of suburban growth and the competition for tax dollars, rural depopulation and the exodus of native people from residential schools and reserves for the city. The Manitoba government's response to these post-war pressures was ideological and often uneven while those tasked with implementing policy were stretched to the limit by these factors and the relentless tide of baby boomers.

## EDUCATION IN MANITOBA TO 1945

The British North America Act of 1867 assigned the task of education to the provinces of Canada, with the exception of native people on reserves where the federal government retained control. The Manitoba Act of 1870 confirmed local responsibility, establishing a dual system of Catholic and Protestant school boards of equal authority over the provision of public schools. Previously, this had been the domain mainly of the churches, and these schools continued independently under the new authority. With so many other duties and concerns, the education of its children was not initially high on the new government's list of priorities so public education got off to a stuttering start until waves of newcomers to the province in the early 1880s pushed the matter to the fore. Increased value of literacy and a new-found professionalism in educators tied school construction with a growing awareness of the need to educate youth beyond the experience of family and home.<sup>1</sup> Premier Thomas Greenway found the dual system of school boards unsuitable to the evolving political situation of the 1890s and abolished the Protestant/Catholic duality in favour of a single Public School Board as the provincial standard, with independent, religious and French-language schools cut from any public support.<sup>2</sup>

The City of Winnipeg voted in school trustees for the first time in the 1880s, tasking them with finding land and building schools. They were fortunate in hiring Daniel McIntyre as Inspector and Superintendent of the Winnipeg School Division; he ushered in an age of professionalism in education that owed its sources to reformers in the United States and older cities in Ontario, both of which influenced education policy in Winnipeg for many years. Setting grades to

match age levels, standardising the curriculum, and developing construction standards for schools of space, safety and hygiene signified the bureaucratisation of schools and school policy.<sup>3</sup>

Like the other rural districts of the province, the smaller, mainly rural districts that now form the larger metropolitan area of Winnipeg were left to cope with both a smaller tax base and school-age populations. With no central authority over local school districts in the early years, the rural areas ballooned to many small administrative districts, sometimes with only one small local school, developing from 24 school districts in the postage-stamp province of 1871 to 1500 school districts before amalgamation in the 1960s. Standards of both construction and teaching were uneven and frequently, unappreciated, as the populace was conditioned to training either on the farm or in apprenticeship trades situations, and anything beyond basic reading and numbers was simply superfluous.

New provincial regulations in 1885 which dictated standards for the health and safety of the pupils coincided with a broader understanding of bacteriology and the spread of disease so both spacing and ventilation assumed more importance, as well as sanitation in an era of outdoor privies. Fire protection standards and civic water systems came under close scrutiny, especially following tragic school fires in Montreal and San Francisco. A particularly horrifying example of the need for increased fire safety occurred on 25 November 1922 when a fire in St. Boniface College killed ten people and injured eighteen more. Children were thought to develop into better adults when their learning situation was ordered, sanitary and secure, in particular with the school architecture itself providing a model of refined tastes in the absence of the cultural resources available in older cities. Heavy immigration in the years before World War I produced a

new imperative of ‘Canadianizing the foreigner’, to which the school system responded with English language classes for both school-age children and after hours for the adults.

As the city grew rapidly in population and tax base, so too it grew in confidence as Canada’s third largest city. As the “Chicago of the North”, it became an empire of sorts, built on the marketing and transporting of wheat and other prairie crops to the world. A trained architect and scholarly military man, Col. J.B. Mitchell was hired as the Superintendent of Buildings for the Winnipeg #1 School Division in 1888, a position he held for over 30 years while overseeing the development and construction of Winnipeg’s public schools buildings.<sup>4</sup> Mitchell developed school construction through the earlier forms of the large and grand schools, such as Isbister School on Vaughan Street to the more developed school models such as Laura Secord and LaVerendrye schools. All these were built in the grand fashion: square, or nearly square, with two or three storeys of masonry over a stone foundation, wide central hallways leading to broad staircases for ease of exit off either end, classrooms to either side of hallways with large windows admitting natural light over the left shoulder, and fire safety, heating and ventilation systems that represented the latest in technology, producing a standardisation of school forms as institutions vital to a community. Civic pride and a mandate for safety combined to create schools that were thought to be second to none in the nation. They were also tremendously expensive to build, heat, equip and maintain.

In the early years of the twentieth century Winnipeg’s population leapt from 101,057 in 1906 to 183,378 by 1919<sup>5</sup>. In that time some 30 new schools were constructed within Winnipeg, while the satellite communities also built proportionately and more or less held to the

same standards of safety and design. (Linwood School in St. James, Glenwood School in St. Vital and Provencher School in St. Boniface for example). While Col. Mitchell and later his replacement J. N. Semmens were the architects of the Winnipeg School Division #1 schools, many other leading city architects were responsible for schools in other districts as school design became significant work. Contracting firms bid publicly on the projects and many local firms were involved in school construction over the first thirty years of the new century.

Not just the physical form of schools evolved in this time but the courses taught evolved in response to new needs. Manitoba passed the School Attendance Act in 1916 requiring all children aged seven to 14 to attend classes, which pulled youth out of labour positions and boosted the number of years that children were expected to occupy a desk, while receiving an education well beyond the basics of the 'three Rs'. It also enshrined education as a legal right. As noted, a great influx of non-English-speaking children required considerable adaptation in many Winnipeg schools, which also staggered the ability of the new students to remain in the same age cohort. Middle years' curricula were developed to retain the interest of youths in the post-elementary grades. And for those who did go on, alternative programs in technical training were developed, as was the trend across North America. While shops and home-economy facilities were incorporated into the design of new middle school facilities, the construction of St. John's and Kelvin Technical Schools in 1912 (at a staggering sum of \$300,000 each) provided extensive work areas towards learning a broad array of skills that could at one time include radio technology, engine repair, woodworking, sheet metal, commercial training and domestic arts. These large new high schools were further outfitted with an auditorium, a gym, a library, labs, staff facili-

ties and a nursing care room.

As the city recovered from the battering of the First World War and the devastating flu epidemic which followed, the province was also adapting to altered economic circumstances brought on by a change of transportation routes through the Panama Canal since 1914, the reduction of British capital investment in Canada, a slower rate of immigration and the rise of other western Canadian centres. Taxpayers demanded lower education costs from their political leaders and the school division responded with smaller, more economical designs using local materials, day labour and an appearance which was becoming increasingly standardised across North America. All this while enrolment continued to climb by 17% between 1920 and 1925. With no choice under these pressures, ratepayers in Winnipeg voted the sale of \$1.5 million in Division debentures for school construction in 1925, with the proviso for a more restrained building program but almost certainly in anticipation of a return to the old growth pattern. It was not to be. The combination of drought, international trade crisis, commodity price decline and the reduction of local investment plunged Winnipeg, Manitoba and the prairies into a prolonged stasis from which it took nearly a generation to recover.<sup>6</sup>

## WINNIPEG IN 1945

Winnipeg in the immediate post-war period was very much different from today. It was a collection of urban and semi-rural municipal areas that had no central authority. Winnipeg proper consisted of 223,735 persons, surrounded on all sides by much smaller cities that shared some services such as a water system and co-ordi-



nated public transit routes (streetcars and buses) but in many other ways competed against each other for population, investment and ratepayers' dollars. Until the creation of "Unicity" joined the City of Winnipeg with the smaller urban districts in 1972, metropolitan Winnipeg consisted of the cities of Transcona, St. Boniface, St. Vital, West Kildonan, East Kildonan, Tuxedo, Old Kildonan, North Kildonan, Fort Garry, Charleswood, St. James and Winnipeg. Each of these maintained their own infrastructure, while some collaborated in school divisions and series of school building stock. There are presently seven school divisions within the city: Winnipeg, St. James-Assiniboia, Pembina Trails, Seven Oaks, Division Scolaire Franco-Manitobain, River East-Transcona and Louis Riel divisions. These are the legacy divisions which preceded urban amalgamation from the following: Winnipeg #1, St. Boniface, Norwood, Assiniboine North, Assiniboine South, Fort Garry, St. Vital, River East, Transcona-Springfield, St. James and Lord Selkirk school divisions. The study usually uses the modern-day reference to the school divisions.

Post-war prosperity, for which the modern period is known, happened slowly as the prairies recovered from the years of depression and war. While unemployment and inflation were low, wages lagged as material and labour shortages were brought up. Union membership had diminished and housing was in serious shortage. By 1944, fully 35% of Canadians lived in substandard housing and 2/3 of the population were tenants. Much of the housing stock in this city was substandard, some lacking even in running water. In 1941, 90% of Canadian homes used coal or wood to heat and of these, the majority did not have central heat. As conditions improved and wages climbed much of this was quickly addressed, although the safety nets of the modern era- medicare, old-age pension, a national hous-

ing policy, student aid- did not appear until later on. While the GDP doubled from 1945 to 1950, it tripled between 1945 and 1955 so much of the prosperity was delayed in the immediate period of reconstruction.<sup>7</sup>

These were taxpayers who had been through difficult times, and it took several years and much economic development to allow them to relax enough to enjoy the growth and partake in the consumer benefits. Many households continued to be stretched financially as post-war affluence was not distributed evenly and many groups such as new immigrants, native people leaving reserves, women and farm workers continued in much lower wage brackets for some time.

## GROWTH OF SUBURBS

In an effort to avoid the societal unrest following the first world war, the federal government stepped into developing housing for its returning veterans early and commenced a program of wartime housing while the war was still on, resulting in the construction of 10,000 prefab units at a subsidised rent across the country. Assistance to vets was rolled over into the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC); CMHC subsequently became available for mortgage loans to the general public by 1954. Wartime rent controls were lifted, so caught between gouging rents and slipping maintenance on old housing stock, many Winnipeggers took the plunge to buy a single detached home, which fuelled the rapid growth of suburbs and the filling of empty areas in the older urban neighbourhoods. As growth outpaced infrastructure, public transit lagged and a car increasingly became a necessity. Consumer goods – electric refrigerators, washing

machines etc. became part of the package as well.

In absolute terms, this was still a small city surrounded by even smaller municipalities. Winnipeg had a population of 221,960 in 1946, while the next largest districts were St. Boniface at 18,157, St. James at 13,892 and St. Vital at 11,993.<sup>8</sup> Many of the smaller districts had low density and substantial agricultural land bases, even though they had long ago incorporated as cities and towns.

The war had stimulated economic growth which eventually enriched Canadian workers and their families and allowed for more general prosperity but it did not happen immediately, nor were the benefits spread evenly throughout society. The housing boom grew slowly at first and picked up speed as the new-found prosperity trickled down. Hand-in-hand came a growing population boom, which started almost immediately following the war. While this growth was both predictable and expected, no one seems to have anticipated how large and far-reaching it would be. Housing starts jumped and land that had been unoccupied in the rings around the city suddenly became the site of enormous construction activity. All the districts listed above experienced significant growth as developers raced to fill demand. While all of this suburban development was new, not all of it was thoughtfully planned or designed with strong community elements in mind. As well, innovations in construction techniques and materials such as the use of plywood and drywall, prefab trusses, pre-cast or site-manufactured concrete and cinder block, and a rejection of expensive ornamentation allowed housing tracts and accompanying infrastructure to rise quickly and new areas to be populated within a short period. And many of these new residents were children. By 1961, one-third to one-half of the total population in suburbs were children age 14 years and under.<sup>9</sup> Further, 70% of all new

dwelling built were single detached houses, each with its own yard, all contributing to urban sprawl. The stage was set.

## DEVELOPMENT IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY

During the years of the Depression and the war years that followed from 1939 to 1945, Manitobans saw fit to elect relatively non-partisan coalition governments which administered the province in the most cost-efficient and results-oriented manner, and the same held true for the Department of Education. John Bracken led a farmer-based Liberal-Progressive alliance from 1922 to 1943, when Stuart Garson took over as premier. These were dark days when budgets were extremely tight and spending wrestled to a minimum. In 1944, the Manitoba government spent 19% of its budget on education which was lower than provinces such as Ontario and B.C., but not unusual in the context of the prairies.<sup>10</sup> Hobbled by tight budgets as they were, policy makers, officials and administrators in the Department of Education were well aware of the massive changes coming their way, and made their plans accordingly.

Still, it was an interesting time because enrolment had dropped in the province every year from 1931 to 1946, and then with only a small increase mainly driven by returning vets.<sup>11</sup> Public education had not been as accessible or valued during that period, and immediately post-war, a labour shortage and high wages combined to dissuade many youths to shorten their school years early in favour of entering the workforce. It was not until the public was faced with the sheer numbers of pre-school children that governments were able to convince ratepayers that increased public investment in education

was necessary to equip the new generation in the growing community to take their places of citizens of the new progressive and global society. The Manitoba Minister of Education, Cecil Rhodes Smith wrote in his inaugural address in 1948 that "Never in the history of our land has there been greater demand for education than that of today".<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, changes were made at a rapid pace even without a big budget to accompany them. In 1947, provincial legislation passed substantially increased grants for schools based on guaranteed grants per teacher no matter the variances of mill rate revenues, an increase of \$1.9 million intended to level the playing field across the province.<sup>13</sup> The curricula across the board for all grades were overhauled and some new textbooks mandated. And most importantly, the need for concentrated study of education was observed and filled by the first of the big post-war studies, the federal Rowell-Sirois Commission of 1940, which outlined the need for more and better educational facilities, more intensive and longer periods of study in Canadian student population, and the need for more specialists in technical and pedagogical policy making.<sup>14</sup>

Manitoba heeded the call, instituting a Legislative Special Committee Report on Education in 1944 which proposed radical new spending, with the first steps toward implementation on funding as noted in 1947, but these steps were more tinkering than systemic. In an annual report by the Minister of Education, in 1955, Scott Bateman pleaded for patience and perhaps political will:

"Despite the criticisms which are constantly levelled at education in general it is my belief that a first-rate job is being done in Manitoba. Changes have been made and will be made in methods, content and administration. It is our obligation to see that these changes are made as a result of thorough and careful consideration and planning,

and not because of irresponsible pressures and panics.”<sup>15</sup>

Answering this plea, the provincial government called the Royal Commission on Education in 1958, under the guidance of Dr. R. O. MacFarlane, a Harvard graduate who was the Minister of Education from 1946 to 1953 and who knew the shortcomings of the public school system in Manitoba all too well. His preliminary report was issued in 1958, and became the clarion call for Duff Roblin and the Conservative Party. In part on his party's platform of sweeping reform to education, Roblin was voted into office in June 1958, where he remained a champion of education reform until he left office in 1967. The MacFarlane Report, as is usually referred to, was issued in full in 1960. Among its recommendations was the abolition of ‘permit’ teachers (more on this later), the instruction of all teachers to become the responsibility of the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba and all normal schools to close, and for textbooks to be free and supplied by the Department of Education. Support for private schools was suggested as those students were paid for exclusively by fees raised by parents, which constituted double taxation. But the most far-reaching recommendation was the amalgamation of the more than 1,500 school districts within the province in order to offer better schools with the economy of scale that such groupings would offer.

At the same time that this report was in the works, there were also Royal Commissions undertaken in Alberta, Saskatchewan, B. C. and Prince Edward Island to study the topic. The other major study on education in this period was Roland Michener's Royal Commission on Local Government Organisation and Finance which called for further participation of the provinces on the financing of local education.<sup>16</sup>

Despite Roblin's willingness for reform, and that of his pro-

gressive Minister of Education Dr. George Johnson, it took many years to bring about these reforms. Rural citizens were especially reluctant to enter into amalgamation of school districts for many reasons, principally fearing the loss of the local school in communities that were already experiencing rural depopulation. But by the mid sixties, most of the agencies of education in Manitoba had been overhauled and brought into the modern era.

## EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

Educational philosophy or pedagogy had been undergoing substantial scrutiny, thought and reform for several decades before the period of this study. If the public school system harkened back to England for its roots, it was the American reformers of the late nineteenth century who took over that sphere of influence as North American policy makers grew in professionalism and sensitivity to local culture and bureaucracies. And as the Minister of Education had noted, the discourse was loud and public and in no way confined to the halls of academia. After all, all parents are consumers of the school system as well as being taxpayers and participants in civil society. They had a voice, they were confronted with change all around and they were empowered by the stronger influence of democracy in the modern period.

The most controversial reformers were the so-called progressives who held particular sway in the immediate period after World War II, led by the writings of American John Dewey who connected child psychology with social reform decades earlier. Dewey resonated particularly with a society that had seen democracy trampled around

the world, had seen revolution and the horrors of the Holocaust followed by poverty, revolution and class conflict. It had been an ignorant populace that allowed the terrible rise of fascism in Germany, for example. Democracy came to be seen as a system that required the full attention and participation of an educated citizenry, especially in the age of mass media that television ushered in. Dewey influenced the progressive theory as it percolated through academia and administration towards a system that was child-centred, participatory rather than didactic and contributing to a democratic atmosphere in the classroom that was self-discovery-based rather than competitive and memory-based. Naturally curious, students would be more individualistic, able to follow a critical path to see where it leads intellectually and less likely to follow mindless and destructive ideologies.<sup>17</sup> Keep in mind that Canadian society was not only transformed but radicalised after World War I, as the changes they fought to make were slow in coming and had to be lit by events such as the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919. Education, housing and support of returning veterans took on particular significance in this light but educational philosophy was a key component in public policy all round.

This is not to say that education was less hegemonic; it wasn't. In the words of Manitoba's Education Minister W. C. Miller in 1956:

The strength of democracy depends on the literacy of the people and the extent to which certain attitudes and habits prevail in their daily activities. The citizens must be well-informed and they must be trained in the ways of democratic living. Literacy, as history clearly records, though essential for democracy, is not of itself a guarantee of it...In addition to broad literacy, therefore, deliberate training in the democratic way of life is also essential.<sup>18</sup>

A survey in 1948 found that 98% of Winnipeg parents ap-



proved of school time used for sport activities (with more gyms and larger school yards being added to local schools), and 95% approving of student participation in music festivals, that is, a broadening base of what education entails.<sup>19</sup> The Minister of Education in 1945 endorsed sports teams, hobby clubs and limited student self-government (student councils) as part of a routine school experience as ways to cultivate the whole child, as well as making school days more attractive to keep students in school longer. Schools became laboratories for creating democratic citizens.

Critics, including an opposing pedagogical school of thought, felt that this approach turned out self-centred consumers who were intellectually lazy and unable to accept the maturity of responsibility for their later lives because they were too self-possessed. There traditionalists valued core subjects drilled into students' habits, respect based on the past and felt that a foundation of old-world values had seemed to be cast aside by new urban values. In 1953, in her book *So Little for the Mind* University of Saskatchewan professor Hilda Neatby argued that the progressives were responsible for a serious erosion in the scholarship of Canadian youth, that the new curricula were mush and that children were lazy, and possibly bad, by nature.<sup>20</sup> These debates were national in scope and played out in the pages of *Maclean's* and *Chatelaine* magazines, and the local papers were happy to leap into the fray as well.

By the late 1950s, the debate was over for all intents and purposes as school boards across the country had much more pressing issues to deal with the surge of enrolments, and in most jurisdictions, administrators and teachers got on with their work and coped as best they could with matters at hand. Schools had changed in many ways, as had attitudes to education, and the brave new world that cowered

many immediately after the war had grown and evolved into a more optimistic, more worldly society ready to embrace change, progress and full participation in a global village.

## COLD WAR RHETORIC

The 1950s was also the setting for a global Cold War between western powers, led by the United States against their former ally, the Soviet Union. Fear of Communism permeated North American society utterly, probably culminating in drills for students to survive an attack in the months leading up to the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 when 'brinksmanship' brought the opposing ideologies close to nuclear attack. Preceding this however, was the launching of Sputnik by the Soviets in October 1957, the earth's first satellite, which signified to the world that the west had lost the space race. As well, it was taken to symbolise the failure of North American science programs, right down to the high school level, and it did not go well for educators. The Winnipeg Tribune headline for 4 August 1956 read "Soviets Gaining Lead in Science" to the much shriller headline on the 1st of March 1958 which read "Soviet Sputnik has added urgency to the perennial education debate" (note the wording).<sup>21</sup> This did portend the swerving of the overall curriculum towards the sciences while further cementing the role of education in the democratic maturation of Canadian society; the die-hard traditionalists took it as a repudiation of the anti-intellectual content of Canadian education versus the more rigid, science-based Soviet school system. The Tribune got a sound-bite from local university professor Eugene Forsey who felt that public education had been sugar-coated to the point that high

schools were adolescent playpens and even college grads were ‘half-baked’ and incapable of serious analysis.<sup>22</sup>

As the sixties decade developed, Canadians grew in confidence of their role in the world. Advances in science such as the development of the polio vaccine by Canadian Dr. Jonas Salk in 1955, the opening of the Saint Lawrence Seaway in 1959, and finally getting our own Canadian flag in 1965 all contributed to greater self-assurance. Expo 67 in Montréal in 1967 show-cased Canadian accomplishments to the world and a flamboyant new prime minister in 1968 went a long way towards shedding our previous modest self-image.

## CHANGES REFLECTED IN WINNIPEG SCHOOLS

### **1. Technical Schools**

As referred to previously, high schools had been reconfigured by the range of options offered to students as early as the 1910s. The reality of higher education was that it remained the purview of the economic elite, with a very small percentage of students matriculating from Grade 12 let alone attending university. High schools adapted by offering a much broader range of courses to students, most especially in the technical and vocational fields. Attempting to keep the student in school longer, many new programs were developed in an expanded curriculum, which became particularly significant in the modern age when basic reading and writing was simply not adequate to meet the needs of a society where workplaces were becoming more technologically advanced and competing in diversified global markets. It was also seen as a means of social control to keep youth engaged and out

of trouble.<sup>23</sup> By 1955, many more students were entering high school than previously, and the dropout rate was falling. As well, students were now obliged by law to stay in school as the legal age was raised from 15 to 16 years in 1951.

Winnipeg #1 School Division had opened night school in the mid-1930s in an old Ford factory at 1181 Portage Avenue, which is now the Department of Education's Robert Fletcher Building, with classes for short-term technical classes for youth and those many unemployed to assist them developing some marketable skills and gain some self-esteem. Seconded for war work, especially emergency training and aircraft parts manufacture in the years after 1939, the facility then transferred to retraining vets after 1945. Working with the provincial education ministry, these classes came to be more organised, evolving into the Manitoba Technical Institute and later renamed the Manitoba Institute of Technology, forerunner of the present Red River College, which was constructed in 1961 and opened in 1963. Both the provincial and national departments of labour grew to have input both in the financing and the development of courses in supplying market demand for this school, and it became obvious that an entire high school needed to be devoted to the training of youth to prepare them to enter these specialised fields of study while still getting a broader high school education. This resulted in the opening of Technical-Vocational High School, Tec Voc, at 1555 Wall Street in 1951 (figure 1), which offered a broad range of courses combining applied knowledge with academic study. Areas listed in the curriculum at the time of opening included industrial arts to aerospace to hairdressing and commercial skills. The Art Deco design of the school embodies the faith in technology in the machine age within a sweeping two-storey campus that has seen several additions as it continues to adapt

to changing needs. In educating the whole student, a large gymnasium/field house was added as well as sound-proof rooms for music and recording as examples of the institution's evolution.



*Figure 1 – Technical Vocational Collegiate, 1555 Wall Street*

Technical education was brought further along with strong inter-governmental support in the opening of R. B. Russell Vocational High School at 364 Dufferin Avenue in 1967 (figure 2). The school combined efforts by several school divisions to fill the need for a school dedicated to special occupational training and an alternative to mainstream academics. Located centrally at the foot of the Slaw Rebchuk Bridge, the institution has proved itself nimble in meeting the needs of its teenaged academic community with a creative and evolving approach and a flexible attitude to higher learning. Low<sup>24</sup> and long with a facing of deep brown brick, traditional classroom spaces greet the street but it is in the rear of the school that it shows its true nature where canopied openings of various sizes speak to variety of programs.



*Figure 2 – R. B. Russell Vocational School, 364 Dufferin Avenue*

## **2. Winnipeg School Division**

Winnipeg School Division #1 faced specific situations and challenges in the post-war period. While it had a large portfolio of schools already, many of these were aged and in need of upgrading to new spatial needs and standards, and these consumed considerable resources as maintenance had been delayed for many years due to tight budgets, material shortages and labour shortages during the war years. As well, research into child development showed that the greatest range of intellectual development was found in early adolescence, the middle years. This combined with the demographic push of the baby boom and the policy of keeping students engaged with the educational process made for more attention to be paid to middle school years. And as intake at the kindergarten and Grade One levels

continued to swell in the late 1940s and early 1950s, it was obvious to all who could count that the wave of middle and high school students would hit in a predictable manner and a predictable number of years so high school construction was allotted more research, more planning and more priority than ever before.

Other factors included a push/pull to provide more education for adults in night school, English language classes, more common demand for kindergarten and greater use of recreation facilities in co-operation with civic sports programs and community clubs (see section on School yard Development). Already an established practice in high schools, lunchrooms became required in many more schools, one indicator of more women entering the workforce in the 1960s. Inclusion of students who were handicapped in different ways also spurred the construction of dedicated professional space such as for medical and dental checks, resource needs, Child Guidance Clinics for psychological testing and care and special schools for the deaf, blind and developmentally delayed. IQ testing became standard in most school divisions, and led to career counselling for older students. Codes required piles of flammable materials, such as art supplies, to be cleared from already-crowded classrooms and had to be stored centrally in a tidy manner. All these factors played into the changing space needs within a school.

Ellen Douglass School, opened at 700 Elgin Avenue in 1960 (figure 3) and named for the woman who had pioneered special education for the physically handicapped, is a one-storey school of the mid-century modern design that was purpose-built for children with big physical needs. Located adjacent to Children's Hospital in what became the Health Sciences Centre, this school is handicapped accessible in far-seeing ways such as a wheelchair ramp and lift, extra-



wide hallways and classrooms, medical rooms and adapted emergency exits. Because it was a leader in alternative schooling, Winnipeg #1 could serve the many smaller divisions for specialised service on a contractual basis.



*Figure 3 – Ellen Douglass School, 700 Elgin Avenue*

Deaf students were the domain of the province for this time period, and were schooled at the Manitoba School for the Deaf, now Canadian Mennonite University on Shaftesbury Boulevard and Grant Avenue. At least one facility came into play when that school closed and deaf students were integrated into other divisions, namely the Manitoba School for the Deaf at 242 Stradford Street, the former Alexander Ross School, built in 1975.



### 3. Ten Unique Schools

An especially intriguing collection of ten surviving schools was erected in Winnipeg #1 to fill the pressing need for more classrooms in the immediate post-war period. Constructed between 1947 and 1951, these schools are highly distinctive to this time only, a fleeting holdover from earlier masonry technology that flared and died with this lovely collection. While not full-blown Art Deco, their styles transitions from the smooth, curvaceous lines, flat ornamentation and decorative repeat that typified that look. Reusing variations on a single theme allowed the division economy of scale while producing handsome, durable elementary schools for burgeoning communities. Each one moves slightly towards more modern building technology as well as toward the evolving mid-century aesthetics. Together the collection speaks to the adaptation from bricks and mortar to cinder block and drywall construction. Included in the large collection is the magnificent Tec-Voc at 1555 Wall Street, the ‘jewel in the crown’ and by far the largest and most elaborate of the group. While it is difficult to determine who the architects were, one set of plans lists J. N. Semmens, who succeeded J. B. Mitchell as the chief architect for Winnipeg #1.

It is quite likely that other schools from this period shared the design elements described here but have undergone renovations that obscure their original design, for example Harrow School and Kent Road School.

The ten schools bearing the Art Deco details are as follows:



*Figure 4 - Inkster School*

Inkster School, 633 Inkster Boulevard - construction commenced in 1947 on this flat-roofed single storey school which was the template for the next few schools. Made of ruddy brown brick with contrasting trim in pale limestone, the school has retained its original multi-paned windows that harken back to the 'cottage-style' schools from the 1920s. There are two signature elements here that were repeated in each of the ten schools in this collection, that is, a raised tower entrance of limestone with a deeply recessed doorway in the crisp machine-age style of design, and highly distinctive 'dripping' limestone detailing of an angular cap and three stripes dripping from it to a depth of about two feet; this ornamentation is most often found as here at the tops of the pilasters around the auditorium/gymnasium.



*Figure 5 - Sargent Park School*

Sargent Park School, 1070 Dominion Street - construction commenced in 1948 and several additions were made over the next decade as the neighbourhood grew. The development of the Cindy Klassen Recreation Centre on the west side of the school yard has rendered its original front facade flipped to the status of rear entrance but it is here that the centre limestone entrance block rises above the single storey in a bold sculptural statement of vertical lines which draw the eye into the recessed door jamb under a lintel of repeating discs in true Art Deco style. The upper portion of the entrance block features the name of the school carved in the stone. The walls are the dark red-brown brick that most of these schools feature.



*Figure 6 - Weston School*

Weston School 1410 Logan Avenue – 1948- this variation is more spare in details with little ornamentation but featuring the streamlined facade and the distinctive tower entrance block, this time rendered in brick with restrained stone trim and offset to the side. The ‘dripping’ limestone trim on the auditorium pilasters are boldly in use here as well as a stone band at the roof line and at grade.



*Figure 7 - River Heights School*

River Heights School, 1350 Grosvenor Avenue - also begun in 1948, this is a large school, where its early additions were clearly part of the original plan as the west facade features identical entrance towers, which balance and complete a unified design in the limestone and are identical to the Weston tower. Subsequent additions maintained the form initially and then shifted fully into a more modern design. Here two tones of brown brick play off each other and are trimmed top and bottom with limestone. There is no detailing around the windows, which is a more modern element. The twin towers each have a name carved in the limestone and are identical to the Weston tower. Subsequent additions maintained the form initially and then shifted fully into more modern design.





*Figure 8 - Clifton School*

Clifton School, 1070 Clifton Street - from 1949, this school continues the established lines but features more ornamentation, with continuous bands above and below the windows, as well as at the parapet, and at grade, along with stone quoins where the original corners were. The entrance is offset to the east corner and while it is raised above the rest of the facade, it is much larger, made of brick and contains functioning space within. The namestone rides above the entrance block and is set up with small pilasters with the strong vertical lines echoed in the door jamb. This time, the dripping stone detailing is emphasized on the cap of the prominent brick chimney at the corner of the original portion. Together with its additions, the school presents a unified and handsome design.



*Figure 9 - Rockwood School*

Rockwood School, 350 Rockwood Avenue - with this school, the style was given full attention in the elementary school plan. The school is distinctive, well-suited to its large site, has had sensitive additions and has enjoyed a high level of maintenance over the years, since its construction in 1949. Like Clifton School, there is a concentration of stylistic decoration here, with more ornamentation and attention to detail than the earlier schools in the series. The centre entrance block rises above and ties the two ends of the design together while stone quoins and continuous stone bands above and below the windows cause the facade to be outlined. A pale mortar was used in the brick walls which lightens the effect. Each end of the building was also fitted with double doors in projecting vestibules for efficient exiting from this elementary school.



*Figure 10 - Technical Vocational School*

Technical Vocational High School 1555 Wall Street – known to be the design of architect W. A. Martin, Tec Voc nevertheless is the full-blown manifestation of this distinctive post-war style. This is a beautiful, bold structure that sweeps across its site and provides a feast of detail, line and ornamentation proclaiming the modern age work studied within. Its front elevation faces east into its yard, which makes it visually more available to its students rather than people on the street, for here is the prominent entrance block draped in large stone pilasters crossed with stone bands incised with the low-relief script “Knowledge without practice makes but half an artist”, which is the premise of the education offered within. In acknowledgement of its prominent corner location, the building sweeps dramatically to the north side with a second heavily-detailed entrance that plays off the contrasting brick and pale limestone trim with curved lines and prominent fenestration. Tec Voc has seen much alteration and several additions in its history but the historic portions of the school have been strongly respected.





*Figure 11 - Shaughnessy School*

Shaughnessy Park School 1641 Manitoba Avenue – built beginning in 1950, this elementary school has seen much alteration but the east facade of the original school remains its public face and shows the evolution of the school division’s use of this style. While employing the ruddy brick of the collection, there is a central portion containing two classrooms that projects shallowly from the wall, and stone detailing similar to the earlier schools to outline the windows but then lifting to detail a low stepped parapet in the middle projection of the facade. A name-stone is located beneath the window of the extruded centre. Stylish side entrance porticoes replaced the centred entrance block of earlier designs, but only one remains.



*Figure 12 - Brock Corydon School*

Brock Corydon School 1510 Corydon Avenue – dating to 1950, this school shows a slowing of the use of this style so its ornamentation is more restrained and use of stone modest, but its forms and materials place it squarely in this collection. Like Tec Voc, it faces its east yard where the raised entrance block makes its final appearance. The low long lines and use of dark brick are retained here as are the contrasting stone bands evident on the east and portions of the west elevations. Both permanent and temporary additions to the school speak of the continuing need for more classroom space in the school.



*Figure 13 - Robertson School*

Robertson School 550 Robertson Street – built starting in 1951, this is the last known school in the collection. It clearly shows a style transitioning away from the collection but not yet into the fully modern idiom. The materials and form are the same, with use of the centre block entrance but the window band is near to the roof line and forms a larger ratio to the walls as a whole. While many of its windows have now been filled in and additions made to the original design, one can still see the stylistic remnants of earlier schools here.

#### **4. Other Changes in Services Offered**

Smaller school divisions in the metropolitan area followed the example of rural schools in making use of services provided by the Department of Education which they could not have accessed without the use of new technology. Radio broadcasts brought art, music and some science programs into the classrooms. The audio-visual library of the ministry also offered films and slide shows of various topics that made the teaching available to the smallest of schools.

French language training assumed more importance to some schools, and Ukrainian became an option as of 1963, followed by others including German and Hebrew. These and other languages came to become immersion schools around the late 1960s. Private schools had always existed, teaching in languages other than English but were not given any support by the province until 'shared services' were introduced by the Roblin government in 1965, with grant support voted in by 1977. Manitoba historian W. L. Morton calls this steadfast attitude to redress the rollback of support that formed the basis of the Manitoba's entrance into Confederation in 1970 as cold courage in the face of continuing opposition.<sup>25</sup> Roblin was committed to education as part of the province's social investment into the modern society, against the will of his party and even against the legislature but he had a vision that was eventually fulfilled of a Manitoba of a mosaic society.

## GROWTH OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS 1945-1975

Guaranteed freedom by the Manitoba Act of 1870, there have always been many independent schools throughout the province. These mainly fell into the category of religious-language based schools. Reflecting the growth of multi-cultural society due to immigration and religious freedom found here, there were 52 independent schools in Manitoba by 1958, constituting a student population of 9,500.<sup>26</sup> Of these, Catholic schools formed the largest group at 37%, with Mennonite and Jewish schools well represented. The schools, while not given public support until 1977, were obliged to meet provincial standards in their building codes, teacher qualifications and curriculum.

Many of the private and independent schools which operate within the city currently occupy schools declared surplus by the public school divisions, a fortuitous development for the large stock of schools in the city. The numbers of these schools in the study period varied in size so listing them is fraught; here is an attempt to show the range in c1960:

Winnipeg Catholic School Division: included Holy Ghost, St. Charles, St. Ignatius, St. Mary's, St. Paul's, Our Lady of Victory, St. Edwards, St. John Brebeuf and St. Maurice schools

St. Boniface Catholic School Division: Christ the King, Immaculate Heart of Mary, St. Boniface Diocesan High, St. Gerard, St. Joseph the Worker, St. Emile, St. Alphonsus and Holy Cross schools

Other schools: Talmud Torah, St. Johns Ravenscourt, Balmoral Hall, St. Aidan's Christian, Red River Valley Junior schools

A few of these will be examined closer; they vary a lot in scale, student population and construction as well as adaptation to present-day circumstances.

### **Winnipeg Mennonite Elementary School, 26 Agassiz Drive**

Constructed for the Fort Garry School Division as Agassiz Elementary School in the early 1960s, this vibrant elementary school features a modern design within a park-like setting and employing a fully modern style with a rare sloping roof line and unusual grey face brick.

### **Christ the King School, 12 Lennox Avenue**

Founded in 1955 as an adjunct to the attached church, this elementary school began quite small and has grown with its student population in a series of additions of classroom space and a gymnasium, which is a typical pattern for private schools.

### **Faith Elementary School 437 Matheson Avenue**

Formerly Talmud Torah School, this was founded in 1952 as a private school for the education of Jewish students but was sold for its new use when the original institution moved on. The school features all modern construction in a sprawling plan that has seen several additions. What is unusual is that the school has no yard of its own so its 133 students make good use of the park across the street.

### **St. Paul's High School, 2200 Grant Avenue**

The second building for this school, it was erected in 1964 according to the design of Mel Michener of the partnership Libling Michener. This school won the Massey Gold Medal for architecture for 1965, in appreciation of its excellence in plan, details, materials and functionality.



*Figure 14 — St. Paul's High School*

### **St. Joseph the Worker School 505 Brewster Street**

Built in 1960 to serve Catholic elementary students in the Transcona district, this is a modest building of modern design, u-shaped as it incorporates its two major additions. It shares services with the public school nearby, benefiting both institutions.



## DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL GROUNDS

In the early years, children did perhaps more work at home and their health was considered a private matter but as the approach to education became more comprehensive, the whole child was within the purview of the education system. One aspect of this was fitness as an indicator of health and a help in developing social aspects<sup>27</sup> of childhood. The playground became viewed as an extension of the education of the child. As well, teachers certainly noticed that children who had had some time to run around outside were better able to concentrate inside. School grounds were planned to be larger, starting in the 1920s and continuing to grow moving forward. In this respect, the suburbs had a clear advantage with open land more readily available.

As early as this same time, school boards entered into agreements with municipalities regarding use and maintenance of yards for use beyond the student population, in the same way that schools themselves came to be viewed as a community resource. Pick-up games of kick-the-can, baseball and skipping would always have gravitated to open spaces in urban settings. Formalising on what already existed in practice, municipal sports programs piggy-backed on school grounds, whether or not there was a formal maintenance agreement.<sup>28</sup>

By the 1960s, schools had developed really large yards, and at least two school divisions (River East-Transcona such as John Gunn Junior High (1966) shared a square city block with Transcona Collegiate) combined either two levels of schools sharing one large yard, and such as Bruce Middle School in St. James (1969) sharing with Athlone Elementary. Some St. James schools even shared grounds with



community clubs, with symbiotic results. As high schools developed their sports programs, their space requirements increased as well and here we can see the difference between the size of the yard for an old school, Kelvin for example and a new public high school such as Churchill, which has extensive grounds. Shared use is the norm for all but the grounds of independent schools and many of these have shared use agreements as well.

## DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE STUDY PERIOD AND RESPONSES TO IT

What did the baby boom actually look like and how did it affect a child's school experience? There are overall trends and there are circumstances that depended on what school division a child lived in.

As was noted, school enrolment stuttered in the years following 1945 because it had dropped every single year since 1931 to 1946. By 1947, attendance was up by 7% and seemed to be climbing regularly but not for all grades. An acute labour shortage after the war drove wages up and lured many youths away from high school. In Winnipeg #1 in 1948 there was a total of 30,199 children attending school; of these, more than half were in elementary (18,233), 7,178 were in middle schools and less than 7% were in high school (4,788).<sup>29</sup> While intake started to climb quickly after that, the numbers for high school actually dropped, and overall throughout the province enrolment dropped until the turnaround in 1954. It is no wonder that the expansive and costly addition of schools both planned and built in this period were a tough sell to taxpayers, who had to witness for themselves how their society and economy was changing to require

better education.

Administrators knew the birth rate was escalating and they could see that emphasis would travel naturally from more elementary classrooms to a need for more middle years and finally a greater demand for high school classes, assuming they could convince more students to stay in school longer. What they did not know was just how big and how sustained the boom would become. Intake in Grade One, or kindergarten where available, peaked in 1956; the numbers for Winnipeg #1 for that year showed 1,974 new students for a total of 41,047 elementary school children. That means that in that one year alone, they had to come up with desks and classroom space for nearly two thousand new students. And they had had to be doing that for the last decade. Coping strategies in the various school districts will be discussed but it is obvious that most classrooms were very crowded and teacher-to-student ratios hovered in the zone of 1:35.<sup>30</sup> As well, there was a serious shortage of qualified teachers and one school administrator put it succinctly that schools teetered between education and catastrophe.<sup>31</sup> Overcrowding was further exacerbated because it was impossible to predict where the growth would be for the next few years in the absence of any comprehensive central urban planning authority.<sup>32</sup>

Nationally, the trends were the same as rural areas and reserves emptied out, immigration saw many newcomers arrive, parents became more engaged in the education process, and provincial governments strained to make the financial demands fair and reasonably efficient. The national statistics put fully one-half of the population of Canada in 1966 as under 21 years of age. By the 1950s national expenditures on schools consumed \$200 million<sup>33</sup> and schools had become big business for the entire construction industry. Many

have observed that this pressure led to standardisation of the child's experience of school and to the look of school buildings across North America so it didn't matter where a student attended, the overall experience and the school surroundings were similar whether the student was in Winnipeg, Vancouver or Minneapolis.

Coping strategies to the pressures of over-crowding locally included more school construction, larger classrooms, using gyms and auditoriums as classrooms, extending the hours of the school day or double-shifting into an earlier and later shift, adding prefab 'portables' to schools, many of which can still be seen today, having summer school classes as well as night or even Saturday school. Again, the growth patterns were not uniform. St. James grew especially quickly in the 1950s as developers built new housing that filled quickly. Between 1956 and 1966 the school population leapt from 5,000 to 9,000, putting such stress on the small city's resources that it eventually required assistance from the provincial government in managing their debt when the tax base had not kept pace with spending.<sup>34</sup> Again using St. James as an example, the bubble moved inexorably towards high school, causing the division to build firstly St. James Collegiate in 1950, Silver Heights in 1956 and then Deer Lodge in 1957. Two of these high schools were folded into the new amalgamated or consolidated Sturgeon Creek, late Sturgeon Heights, Collegiate, (Figure 15) which was built in 1970, while Silver Heights is now vacant and Deer Lodge has experienced limited reuse.



*Figure 15- Sturgeon Creek High School*

As a case in point, St. James School Division had to build many elementary schools and added onto existing schools in a number of creative ways. Typically, additions grew what had been a six or eight classroom school in a plan of a straight rectangle, to a T-formation or an L-formation, or sometimes a U-form to maintain as much natural light within the classrooms as possible. All these were done but one school in particular shows the strain of rapid expansion at the intake level. Just west of Mount Royal in the neighbourhood of Silver Heights, a dynamic community that grew quickly as a desirable neighbourhood for families with young children, Strathmillan School at 339 Strathmillan Road was built in 1953 and opened the following year. To the original school was added first one finger at a right angle to the original rectangular structure, then within a year another finger was added and a third finger was added in 1961, to make an unusual E-shape.



*Figure 16 - Strathmillan School*

Maple Leaf School at 251 McIvor Avenue had an addition to an older now-demolished, school in 1961 and this school in turn was given a large addition in 1975 and extensively renovated and added onto in 1999, as another example of how school boards coped, in this case the River East Transcona School Division.

A lively solution to the escalating student population can be seen at Ralph Maybank School at 20 Donnelly Street in Fort Garry. The original small school was designed by Donald Ross for the firm of Libling Michener Diamond and Associates.(figure 5) Initial construction of the ten-classroom rectangular school was in 1956 then an addition two years later was set perpendicularly to the original section. The building employed basic steel framing and walls of concrete block with a brick facing and an attractive but simple recessed entrance beneath a modern canopy. In 1967, another addition took the school to a squared-off U shape but most of this work remains hidden behind the early facade.



*Figure 17 - Ralph Maybank School*

Two of the city's oldest high schools, St. John's and Kelvin high schools, found their circumstances had outlived practical usage as the old schools were too small and not adaptable to the changes required in new schooling approaches. Through considerable acumen on the part of Winnipeg #1's professional building staff, both schools were replaced bit by bit the old to the new without closing either school to students. Many other of the old schools in this division were replaced by new schools of the same name but this was usually done on smaller, single-storey elementary schools with much less drama and over a longer period of time.

While there is no denying that a certain sameness overcame school design as demographic and financial pressures mounted, another good solution to the problem derived from establishing a good design and repeating it as 'twin' buildings within a small geographic



area. Examples of twinned schools include Ecole Robert Browning (figure 18) and Crestview schools in St. James, both attractive and durable designs by Pratt Lindgren and Associates, which were opened in 1963. While they have both had additions over the years and are no longer 'twins' per se, the facades of both demonstrate care and appreciation for a community resource. Allard School, now the Winnipeg Police Training Academy, is a twin to Heritage School, both constructed in 1967 to designs by Pratt Lindgren Snider Tomcej and Associates in a distinctive style that made them conducive to reuse. An earlier example in what was the Fort Garry School Division (now Pembina Trails) was the twinning of Ecole Crane with nearby Oakenwald School, both constructed in 1953 to plans by architects Prain and Ward. While both schools, which are elementary schools mere blocks apart, have had several additions, both have maintained their integrity to the front elevation, with changes mostly concealed behind.



Figure 18 - Ecole Robert Browning

Many buildings in the 1950s were purposefully built in stages as anticipation of demand grew; sometimes these additions were to an original plan for a unified whole and sometimes not. As the years stretched out, many schools added the facilities needed not so much for a growing population but to meet the needs of a new educational approach such as gyms, libraries and music rooms, and sometimes to meet developments in technological or building standards. When renovating in the 1970s, many schools had most of their windows covered over, in part to save energy and reduce heating costs as that became more of a concern, and in part because schools are particularly vulnerable to vandalism and arson. The loss of windows has seriously altered the intention of many good designs and further rendered a sameness to otherwise distinctive designs. Administrators always have tough decisions to make regarding the practical, economic and public use of resources regarding maintenance, which often puts them at odds with the professionals' original vision of the facility. It was also during this period that most older schools were pumped full of asbestos, a mineral combination used to insulate walls, water pipes and floors and to fireproof them. Long since discredited as dangerous to breath in its particles, asbestos remains in more than half of Manitoba's schools, undisturbed and carefully mapped, by law, so both workers and the school population remain safe when work does disturb the particles.<sup>35</sup>



## INTERIORS

A study of school interiors in the early years of the twentieth century in Vancouver found that schools of the period typically had eight classrooms, four per floor off a broad central corridor with a classroom capacity of about 30 to 50 students, a basement with separate play space for girls and boys, possibly an assembly hall and no real facility for administration.<sup>36</sup> This concurs closely with the Winnipeg school study by historian Giles Bugailiskis. As with the building as a whole, fire safety was paramount as standards came to reflect this through the use of fireproof materials in construction. Heating and ventilation systems closely followed advances in construction technology. Durability and an ability to be scrubbed clean were also important considerations and improvements in surface materials also changed the look of modern schools. Terrazzo floors became the first choice but often tile was the more economical option. Porcelain washroom fixtures became the norm, along with glazed tile washroom walls and floors. Although electric light was abundant everywhere in the city, natural light over the left shoulder was considered best so classrooms on either side of broad corridors were arranged for this particular light. Naturally, windows were long appreciated for one's ability to check out of matters at hand for a brief daydream, to rest one's eyes after reading and to make a brief connection with the outside world.

Interiors also became more functional in the modern sensibility, with useless ornamentation done away with (probably unsanitary anyway) and simple, practical materials such as drywall and acoustic tile employed. Engineered design made special sense in the classroom and modernism was certainly more economical. Elements were

both easier to clean and easier to replace. The colour palette favoured for much of the period was new tones and pastels of pink, yellow, aquamarine and turquoise, transitioning into earthier colours and materials in the latter years. Furniture too changed a good deal in the modern period from wooden desks nailed to the floor to tables and tiny plywood or plastic chairs for the littlest students, to desks that could be pulled together for group projects, to countertops and stools for high school labs. Sinks in art classes and in the younger grades were frequently used. Blackboards were ubiquitous; bookshelves in each classroom became the norm.

Maps coloured pink for the British empire were replaced with maps of Canada, showing a new-found confidence in its place in the world. The Union Jack was replaced by the new maple leaf Canadian flag in 1965 and “O Canada” replaced “God Save the Queen” in morning exercises. Even Her Majesty’s image was eventually dethroned in hallways and gymnasiums of local schools in favour of more topical fare, frequently the students’ own projects and artwork.

Interiors were severely shaken up in some school designs from the late 1960s and into the 1970s with the concept of open-air classrooms. Adopted to a greater or lesser degree in most if not all of the public school divisions, but not necessarily in each new school design in this period, the premise was that classes became more unstructured as children developed each on her or his own schedule or path and could in turn learn from and share knowledge with children at the same intellectual level rather than in set grades. Classrooms shared spaces or had only vestigial dividers between them, so they became places where students worked on tasks singularly or together in casual ebb and flow. Another common feature was a sunken pit as a common area in the centre of the school for gatherings and con-

certs. Proclaimed to be lit by the radiance of intellectual flame of a child's mind, most windows in walls were dispensed with in favour of skylight or clerestory arrangements that flooded light into academic spaces from overhead. This philosophy caused a great deal of change to the exterior appearance of the schools as well, as fortress walls needed to be softened and sculpted into strongly angular or sinuous lines. One of the best examples of this kind of school is Dalhousie Elementary School at 262 Dalhousie Drive in Fort Richmond, built in 1969 to a design by Ward Macdonald and Partners. Limestone and precast concrete play off each other on the surface as the walls follow a plan on two axis, with bold entranceways accessed by broad exterior staircases.

While classrooms have remained 'open air' in Dalhousie, some other schools were eventually closed in with regular classrooms, which wreaked havoc with existing mechanical systems, which were becoming increasingly more sophisticated during this time.

Safety, sanitation, functionalism and economy were the guiding principles of modernist baby boom school design, in order to nurture, develop, protect and educate the most number of children to become the best individuals possible: a tall order but apparently within the grasp of the brave new world of the fifties, sixties and seventies.

## TEACHERS

As previously noted, while pedagogical theory was vigorously sparking theoretical application of new guiding principles, most teachers were simply coping in their classrooms as best they could. Teachers had long been under-valued in their roles, along with anything beyond the basics of education, for a very long time. No other occupation was subject to as much scorn and derision, right into the 1950s. This had precipitated very low wages which formed a vicious circle of underpaid and undereducated teachers, and administrators unable to attract staff with higher credentials. When Manitoba entered the post-war period, teachers were trained at provincially-operated Normal Schools where they learned how and what to teach. Women made up the larger portion of elementary teachers by far.

Wages were a big part of the problem. In 1950, the average annual wage for a teacher was \$2,095, compared to an industrial worker's \$2,818. Closer to the end of the decade in 1957, teachers' salaries had risen to \$3,331, in part reflecting supply and demand and in part reflecting a greater realisation of the need for better education by society as a whole.<sup>37</sup>

The labour shortage for qualified teachers was particularly acute in this early period. A number of strategies were adopted by the province and the school divisions to attract more teachers, and to keep them. The Department of Education voted a substantially increased grant for schools based on guaranteed wages to their teachers, no matter the variances of the mill rate revenues in 1947.<sup>38</sup> But demand remained urgent for several years following which precipitated compromises and slipping credentials.

In 1935 the Faculty of Education was formed in the Universi-

ty of Manitoba, at that time mainly for the training of high school teachers, however the post-war need was so urgent that a system of 'permit teachers' was developed in response to the shortage whereby a Grade 12 Matriculation grad could take one summer of teacher training and be hired by any school division in the province. Permit teachers were much the scourge but also the reality until the system was abolished in 1959. Meanwhile, the comprehensive MacFarlane Commission report of 1959 was adamant that all teacher education should be through the university and this policy was implemented by stages and finally complete in 1965. The normal schools were closed, the Manitoba Teachers' Society gained more professional status for teachers, and 'lifelong learning', that is, taking courses in summer and night to update skills and knowledge became the norm for Manitoba's teachers.

## FINANCING OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Like all other aspects of education, how schools were paid for evolved during the study period. School costs had been entirely local in the early days, and such a crippling burden to new communities put the education of children at risk of being devalued or absurdly under-funded. By 1946, money for the construction, staffing and operation of public schools in Manitoba had long been a combination of local levies or debentures raised by taxes on one's land and topped up by modest grants by the provincial government. The playing field was not level, depending as it did on the local authority's ability to pay, a system taxed to the max. as enrolment began to climb and stayed that way for nearly twenty years. Keep in mind that in the years of the

old-fashioned coalition governments before Duff Roblin introduced sweeping reforms to the system, Manitoba, for example, had the lowest per capita expenditure on education in the country at just \$61.91 per person.<sup>39</sup> By 1966, scant years later, Roblin's education budget was larger than the entire budget of Premier Doug Campbell in 1957.<sup>40</sup>

While the ministry was acutely aware of needs versus ideology, there were earnest attempts to smooth the burden. While always articulating the priority to build the most economical schools, grants were topped up to those divisions who did not have the tax base to pay basic needs; by 1959, Roblin increased the province's contribution to 53%, up from 44%, of divisional budgets. At the same time, he gradually brought in the reforms, particularly amalgamation, which contributed to both savings and efficiencies across the board. Enrolment continued to climb.

The federal government had brought in student loans for veterans in the late 1940s, and this was offered to the public at large as of the late 1950s. As well, the federal government entered the arena by assisting with the costs of technical/vocational training as manpower factored into the national labour force policy, in the mid 1950s; this would impact such local schools as Tec Voc and later, R. B. Russell.

As of 2011, school financing is a formula that has varied from a high of approximately 80% from provincial grants and 20% from tax on assessed value of one's property in 1981.<sup>41</sup> The ratio is subject to political will and is a contested issue in provincial election campaigns.

## SPECIAL TIMES AND CIRCUMSTANCES IN WINNIPEG'S HISTORY

There have been several specific events that impacted education in the city over the years.

The flood of 1950 devastated many districts and precipitated considerable damage to many of the city's schools. Fully 100,000 people had to leave their homes, the biggest mass evacuation in Canada's history. Floodwaters did not discern between old and new buildings, just at a time when intake was really starting to climb.

The polio epidemic in the fall of 1953 struck terror in the hearts of parents and administrators, and left hundreds of local children crippled and maimed, with several deaths as well. All schools were closed for nine days, children sent home and public gatherings discouraged. It recurred the following fall, or never really went away. An effective vaccine against polio was released by Canadian Dr. Jonas Salk in the mid-fifties and that particular horror ended.

Immigration to Canada had flowed to a trickle during the Depression years and stopped during the war. Not long after, authorities responded to humanitarian needs and relented to permit what were referred to as "Displaced Persons" (DPs) to enter Canada; Winnipeg welcomed its share and ultimately benefited from it. These were people who were economic and political refugees, thrust into a new society that had not a lot of infrastructure to receive them. The Hungarian Revolution in 1956 likewise caused a quick flood of refugees streaming into the schools. These international events placed heavy demands of the public school system, although not uniformly because the newcomers tended to be settled in certain neighbourhoods. English classes were re-introduced in affected schools as well as night school for adults. This was a foreshadowing of things to come. On the



horizon were sweeping changes to the nation's immigration policy. Canadian membership in the new United Nations did not permit closing immigration to any one group on racial grounds, hence the ban on Chinese immigration was lifted in 1947, although steep quotas continued. From 1946 to 1962, Canada received 1.75 million newcomers, almost all of them white.<sup>42</sup> This too was to change in the years following and local schools reflected the transition of Canadian society into a multi-racial and multi-ethnic society.

Another shift in local culture came about as a result of an exodus of families from the rural areas, brought about by changes in agriculture that reduced the need for farm labour and diversified the nature of Manitoba's economy. First Nations people received the right to vote in 1960, without forfeiting their status and many opted to leave their reserves in search of opportunities in urban areas. These children were often poor and needed extra assistance in coming to grips with their new communities, causing the school system to develop programs aimed at supporting native culture and keeping the students in school longer. Niji Mahkwa School in the old Aberdeen School at 450 Flora Street represents the latter part of this story as the school was rededicated in 1993 for the education of First Nations children. Other alternative programs dot the educational landscape, all sharing a common goal of keeping the students' interest with relevant curricula and a less rigid approach to acquiring an education.

Urban renewal did its share in scattering older neighbourhoods and altering school populations.

The last local circumstance affecting education in Winnipeg in the period 1945 to 1975 was the creation of Unicity, proclaimed on 1 January 1972. The biggest experiment of its kind in binding together disparate cities and municipal councils in a metropolitan area, Unicity-

ty swept away disparities among the local school districts, put an end to the competition for tax dollars that had hobbled some districts for years and brought about at least some efficiencies and economies of scale.

## SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION, ARCHITECTS AND BUILDERS IN WINNIPEG 1945 TO 1975

The accelerated growth of metropolitan Winnipeg created the construction of new schools, the refurbishing of old schools as new codes and new spatial needs required, and the addition of many gyms, auditoriums, music rooms and art rooms and lunch rooms to existing buildings. This growth was uneven across the board, dependant as it was mainly by how many new houses were erected where and when. While Winnipeg slowed in growth as its open areas filled, Charleswood continued to boom on well after. The opening of the new Lord Roberts School in 1970, a fine achievement in design and application of the latest educational practices, marked a moratorium of school opening in Winnipeg #1 for nearly a decade.

During the study period of 1945 to 1975, schools became big business for architects, builders and material suppliers. Engineered design, mass production, the use of new cheaper and prefab materials and an emphasis on stripped-down functionalism came together in modernism. It suited the times with its shiny new surfaces, its global application and its optimistic energy. Times were good.

There was more than enough work to around in the 1950s with the University of Manitoba's School of Architecture graduating young practitioners skilled in the art of modern design. Some school divi-

sions tended to hire the same architects over and over again, such as River East-Transcona's appreciation of the work of Ward, Macdonald and Partners, and its earlier form as Prain and Ward in the 1950s, who also did many school designs for Pembina Trails and Seven Oaks divisions. This concentration also contributed to a sameness of look around the stock of schools in the 1960s and 1970s. Another niche firm was Pratt, Lindgren and Associates, favourites of St. James-Assiniboia and Louis Riel divisions. Smith Carter Katelnikoff, and its variations of partners in the 1940s and fifties specialised in high school design for the St. James-Assiniboia School Division, as well as planning many other schools for Louis Riel and River East-Transcona. Libling Michener Diamond found that smaller private schools favoured their designs, although the grand and forward-looking Sturgeon Heights (now Sturgeon Creek) Collegiate was also their work. Duncan Ratray Peters Searle specialised in designs for Louis Riel, then St. Boniface School Division. Etienne Gaboury also produced some designs for St. Boniface, while Green Blankstein Russell did not design many schools but did produce two of the city's architectural gems: the small 'machine age' design, nearly intact still of Nordale School in 1948 and one of possibly only two octagonal schools constructed in Canada, Windsor Park Collegiate in 1959-60

Winnipeg School Division poses a special case in that almost all of their work was done in-house. Chief Architect William I. Enns led a squad of architects who may not have differentiated much between the relentless upkeep of their old building stock and the clamour for new; there was more than enough work to go around. Even a unique plan as distinctive as the second Gladstone School in Fort Rouge (figure 7) was not attributed to an individual architect.

An older architectural practice, Northwood and Chivers, de-

signed several schools in Charleswood and St. Vital. Another established firm, Moody Moore and Partners did two distinctive school plans, as did the local partnerships of Waisman Ross, Herman and St. Lawrence, J. N. Semmens, Johnson and Mager, Kurnarsky and Weinburg and Zunic and Sobkowich.

Contracting commissions were tendered as well and awarded to a broad number of local companies, possibly with some intent to spread the work around. Among the most successful at bidding on contracts and building schools throughout the city were B. F. Klassen Construction, Louis Ducharme and Associates, Arlington Brothers, Wallace and Aikins Ltd., and John Taubensce. These firms are not as easy to identify because in many cases their names did not appear on the plans or specs and it would require more depth of research to understand all the projects for all the divisions.

## RE-USE FOR SCHOOLS

As the birth rate slowed, some schools were de-populated and some creative new uses have been found over time. Large numbers of schools throughout the city and in every division have been rejuvenated as French and other language immersion schools. Independent schools have grown significantly in number and many former public schools have been re-used very successfully in this manner. One suburban school as an example is the former diminutive Ashland School, which now is home to the Montessori Learning Centre at 170 Ashland. Both Ellen Douglass School, a jewel of modern design, and Sir William Osler School have found new life as English language training centres. The former Prendergast School and St. Clements School are

now bursting with the sounds of young children again as day-care centres. School divisions have moved professional resource or maintenance operations into several of their old schools. The old Pembina Crest School on Pembina Highway adapted well as Winnipeg Technical College. But there are not enough happy endings to go around.

## CONCLUSION

As the demographic bubble travelled through the years, the school system responded first with a frantic effort at building new elementary schools, then middle schools and finally high schools as the bubble grew older. No one knew at the time how long it would last or where it would peak; only after were the demographics fully understood so administrators, teachers, parents and taxpayers coped as cheerfully as they could. And it was, after all, the education of any society's most precious resource. Just as a snapshot, 954 new classrooms and 47 new schools were added to the public school system in the province in 1961 alone. More students attended school, stayed longer and even graduated than anyone could ever have dreamed. By the time enrolment started to drop in 1972, more than half the nation's population was under 21 years of age. Youth culture swept across the globe, fuelled at least in western countries populated with young people educated to be capable and confident as full participants in the modern world.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Giles Bugailiskis, *Quiet Dignity*, p. 48

<sup>2</sup> Gerry Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984, p.216

<sup>3</sup> Bugailiskis, *op.cit.*, p.58. See also *Historic Schools of Canada Volume 4*, Parks Canada, foreword p.3 and pages 66 to 69

<sup>4</sup> *Op cit* p66 to 88

<sup>5</sup> *Op cit* p89

<sup>6</sup> Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History*, p.465

<sup>7</sup> Alvin Finkel, *Our Lives- Canada After 1945*, James Lorimer and Co. 1997, p. 8&9

<sup>8</sup> Alan Artibise and Edward Dahl, *Winnipeg in Maps*, Public Archives of Canada, 1975, p.62

<sup>9</sup> Doug Owram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996, p.81

<sup>10</sup> George Buri, *Between Education and Catastrophe; Public schooling and the project of post-war construction in Manitoba 1944-1960*, PhD These, University of Manitoba.

<sup>11</sup> Manitoba Department of Education Report, 1945 p. 12 and 1946 p.14.

<sup>12</sup> Buri, p.23

<sup>13</sup> Department of Education Report 1947 p.13

<sup>14</sup> Owram p. 112

<sup>15</sup> Department of Education Report 1955 p. 21

<sup>16</sup> Maureen Ellen Cousins, The educational policy of the Dufferin Roblin administration 1958-1967, M. A. Thesis University of Manitoba, 1998, p.25

<sup>17</sup> Buri p. 59-60

<sup>18</sup> Ibid p. 93

<sup>19</sup> Ibid p. 68

<sup>20</sup> Owram p.126 Department

<sup>21</sup> Winnipeg Tribune, 4 August, 1956 and 1 March, 1958

<sup>22</sup> Ibid 18 February 1958

<sup>23</sup> Department of Education Report 1955, p. 11



<sup>24</sup> More schools in this style may have been built but with alterations obscuring the original look

<sup>25</sup> W. L. Morton, *Manitoba: A History*, University of Toronto Press, 1957, p. 501

<sup>26</sup> Cousins, *op. Cit.* P. 5

<sup>27</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Department of Education Report 1948, p. 78

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 1948 p.76

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 1956 p99

<sup>31</sup> Buri, *op.cit.*, book title in a quote from a school administrator

<sup>32</sup> Since 1946 there was a Metropolitan Planning Committee of Greater Winnipeg, cooperation over civil defence, transit, waterworks etc. But it was not until 1960 that the Metropolitan Corporation of Winnipeg, with planning oversight of the extended city of half a million, did any comprehensive planning for the city as a whole take place.

<sup>33</sup> Owram p.120

<sup>34</sup> Mary McCarthy Ferguson, *A History of St. James 1867-1967*, p.82

<sup>35</sup> Winnipeg Sun, 28 May, 2009

<sup>36</sup> Vancouver Schools – Establishing Their Heritage Value, the Commonwealth Historic Resource Management Limited, 2008, p.288

<sup>37</sup> Buri op.cit. p.301

<sup>38</sup> Department of Education Report 1947 p.13

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 1955 p.100

<sup>40</sup> Cousins, op.cit.,p.1 and p.112

<sup>41</sup> Election 2011 Unspun: Public School Financing, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives: Manitoba Office

<sup>42</sup>

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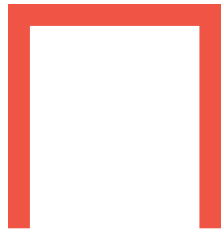
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