

WINNIPEG REAL ESTATE NEWS

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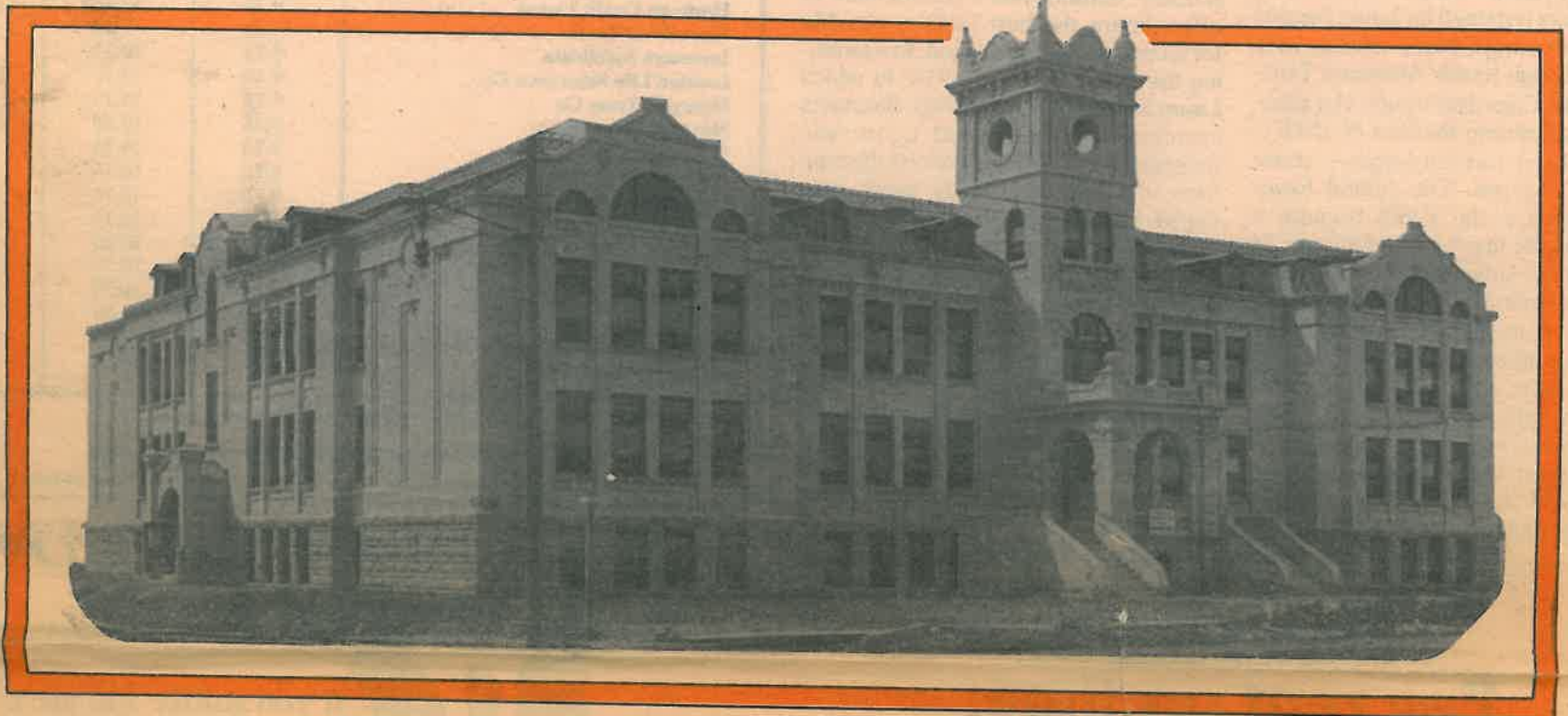
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Laura Secord is saved

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COURTESY OF
WINNIPEG REAL ESTATE BOARD

The historic Laura Secord school has been saved — after a six-year campaign by parents, school staff and organizations such as the Manitoba Historical Society.

Rather than destroy the building at 960 Wolseley Ave., the provincial government has approved \$2.5 million for needed renovations, particularly roof repairs and underpinning.

Under a plan drawn up by the Manitoba Public Schools Finance Board, renovations will include modernization of office space, sprinklers, lights, fire exits and more washrooms. A lift will provide assistance for handicapped students.

Phyllis Moore, school principal, said she hoped work on renovations would begin this summer. She said she believed the decision to save the school was based on the fact a large number of people wanted it preserved and because of its "proud history." She said residents in the area like the age of the buildings and homes, and many of the homes were being fixed up and preserved.

But a school division spokesman said a start on renovation this summer was unlikely. Architectural planning still needed to be done, and approved, and "I hope work will begin sometime this year — it depends on how long the red tape takes."

The Manitoba Historical Society was one of the leaders in the move to protect Laura Secord. It urged citizens who wished to preserve the school to speak to provincial and city politicians and school board members. The years 1890 to

1914 saw explosive growth in the Canadian west and in the City of Winnipeg in particular. Thousands of new immigrants flooded what could still be viewed as a pioneer society, not yet fully gelled, and sometimes overwhelmed by the changing conditions. Yet, despite the pressures of growth and uncertainties of change, it was a progressive society, capable of creative responses carried forward by a buoyant economy.

Laura Secord School was erected in 1912-13 at a cost of \$208,000. The dimensions are 165 feet by 152 feet to a height of 72 feet. Nearly square, the school is built around a large interior courtyard that makes the building exceptionally light and airy. Across the courtyard at ground level is the original shops room, isolated from the rest of the school in the interests of safety and covered with a long gabled skylight of fire glass. The school is two storeys high over a raised basement. It is made of a pale brick with a good deal of limestone trim and rustication. The front of the building, facing onto Wolseley Avenue, features symmetrical end pavilions each of three arched bays, and a tall central tower (now removed) that eased into an open portico with side entrances. The sides have large central pavilions with projecting stone porticos while the rear formerly had one large predimentioned projection. These wall projections correspond with variations in the roofline. Semi-elliptical dormers peek out from what is essentially a manshard shape, originally outlined with iron cresting. Most of the

attic is empty space supported by wooden rafters but the Ruby Street side contains several vacant rooms. This was the janitor's suite, with space for a family, and lit by extra windows onto the courtyard. With a narrow stairway that goes directly to the boiler room, the janitor could stoke up the boilers during the night to keep the school warm for the early morning.

Besides the careful exterior ornamentation, Laura Secord School also has some remarkable interior finishes. The iron balustrade of the stairways incorporates a small plaque with the school's initials on it. Each of the original classrooms has four long windows, each with a transom of beautiful stained glass. Several other windows in the school also have stained glass, such as the first floor offices. The crest of the school is executed in glass in a delightful little teachers' room at the base of the tower overlooking the roof of the portico. There is a large assembly hall on the south end which has a stage (and formerly a small balcony) but also serves as the gymnasium. The corridors, which are lit by the courtyard, are so broad that they are used as extra rooms for showing films, running races, etc. The spacious library, which occupies two former classrooms on the northeast corner, is also a pleasant feature. Careful layout and special consideration of interior spaces characterize the school's interior.

Laura Secord School was constructed by Thomas Kelly and Sons, the contractor. See LAURA, Page 2.