

Laura Secord a school of advanced design

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of steel and brick, with floors of reinforced concrete and a stone foundation. The partition walls were brick, with the plaster laid on hollow tiles instead of lath. The stairs were made of iron. Heating and ventilation were also an important part of Mitchell's school design, demonstrated to the height of technological capacity in Laura Secord School.

Of particular interest in the high schools and older three-storey elementary schools was the new fire escapes. Large steel tubes, shaped in a gentle spiraling curve were connected to the building by iron balconies. Manufactured and designed in Winnipeg by Vulcan Iron Works, these slide escapes could clear a school's population in two minutes.

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 staircases. The sides have large central pavilions with projecting stone porticos while the rear formerly had one large pedimented projection. These wall projections correspond with variations in the roofline. Semi-elliptical dormers peek out from what is essentially a mansard 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 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 had 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 contractors who achieved great notoriety for their role in the Legislative Building scandal. The contractors were convicted in 1916 of defrauding the Manitoba government and were ordered to repay \$1.2 million.

Pupils in the new Laura Secord School came from comfortable homes in the west end. The district, which was new in 1912, developed rapidly, and the school grew as a part of the thriving community. It was almost exclusively Anglo-Saxon in its ethnic composition and rigorously middle-class.

The school is named for Laura Secord Ingersoll, a young Ontario woman who trekked through hostile American Territory to warn Canadian troops of a planned ambush during the War of 1812.

The school has undergone some structural changes. The central tower was removed in the 1960s because it was structurally unsound and the rear of the school has suffered some alteration. The shops room in the centre of the courtyard has its skylight darkened and it is now a craft room. To bring the hallways rear exits, and assembly hall into

accordance with fire codes, all have had some modifications. Despite these changes, most of the school's exterior and a good deal of its layout and finishing is original to 1912. This further underlines the care that was taken in the design of these large schools.

These schools have been described as the academic counterpart of the handsome banks on Main Street, the functionally elegant warehouses of the downtown or the masterful Legislative Buildings inasmuch as the same pride, confidence and big budget is reflected in all these building types. In a study of public school buildings across the province, Ivan Saunders observed that Winnipeg's "large, massively proportioned and extremely expensive elementary schools" demonstrate a commitment to offer citizens the best facilities possible for an enlightened education. In examining the period 1904 to 1914, to which Laura Secord School belongs, Saunders concludes: "The great economic prosperity enjoyed by Manitoba through most of its pre-war decade clearly produced a substantial growth in the size and quality of its schools . . . Winnipeg's energetic building program thrust Manitoba into the forefront of Canadian school building construction during the years 1904-14. It would appear that these architectural and administrative advances were the product of a prosperous maturing society able and willing to avail itself of the best of contemporary school construction technology."