

## PIONEER (1871-1889)

Manitoba's entry into Confederation in 1870, the adoption of the Manitoba Schools Act in May of 1871, coupled with significant population growth, economic advances and developments in communications and transportation all combined to transform education in the new province. Over the next eighteen years the loosely organized sectarian school system of the early 19th century was gradually replaced by a modern, publicly funded system with increasingly up-to-date standards and facilities.

The Manitoba Schools Act was modelled on Quebec's, with the adoption of a dual system based on religious affiliation, Roman Catholic or Protestant. The fourteen-man Board of Education established by the legislation had equal representation from each section, an accurate reflection at that time of the religious and ethnic composition of the province. And each section was funded equally from government revenues and local taxation, had its own board, superintendent and authority over curriculum, texts, teachers, administration and building inspection. Twelve school districts were created for each section following the established parish system.

The greatest immediate impact on actual school building construction came with the two superintendents appointed by each section: for the Protestant School Board, the Reverend W. Cyprian Pinkham; and for the Roman Catholic Board, Elie Tasse. Both men were well-versed in the educational theories of the day, and were especially cognizant of the school building proposals of the American theorist Henry Barnard.

Barnard's theories had been widely disseminated through his 1848 publication, *School Architecture*. The standards he set - basically for adequate internal appointments to promote health and learning and an attractive external design - found great favour throughout North America (Figures. 7 and 8). In Upper Canada (later the Province of Ontario) Egerton Ryerson, the powerful Superintendent of Education during the 1850s and 1860s, took up Barnard's ideas almost with a religious zeal. His influence on eastern Canadian school design was quickly felt in the province of Manitoba, especially with the influx of great numbers of Ontario settlers into Manitoba during the 1870s and 1880s.

The sophistication of the Manitoba system, apparent on paper, was actually difficult to perceive in the field. In these early years, Tasse and Pinkham encountered considerable difficulty. Their journals are replete with criticisms of school designs and conditions. Schools often were closed when inspectors arrived and attendance was poor. An inspector's report from 1874 suggests some of the problems, here with the school at East Kildonan:

The school is a roomy building, but the snow occasionally drifts in at the roof, and melting, drops down in several places.

The considerable knowledge residing in the educational bureaucracy exceeded the existing economic conditions and technology. In the 1870s Manitoba was still in a pioneering stage of development. The immediate concern of many settlers continued to be clearing the land and struggling with the variety of natural calamities that affected their crops. Even in the growing urban centres in the province, typical occupations still only required limited levels of literacy. The provision of schooling tended to lag. Moreover, local school districts had no organized means for tax collection and classes often were held in other facilities, or in small log structures, constructed from locally available materials (Figure 9).

And despite inspectors' protestations - and threats to withdraw government grants - there was little that could be done to rectify the situation. Grants were only applicable to salaries, not buildings, so that it was almost impossible to enforce the regulations. Thus, while plans were to be submitted for approval, it was more often the case that local authorities were left to their own devices in finding accommodation or in selecting a contractor who could best carry out their wishes for a minimum cost.

This is not to say that local efforts to meet standards were unknown. Trustees were reported to be keen to provide as good a building as their means permitted, but often were constrained by the limits of the local contractor who lacked experience in the important subjects of heating, venting and lighting. However, some school districts met and even surpassed the standards as early as 1875:

The school house in this district [Morris, Figure 10] is built of brick, and is the first school house of this material in the Province. It is 16 x 20 feet, and built in such a manner as to admit enlargement, when the needs of the district demand greater accommodation.

The great disparity in building environments (and also likely in the level of teaching provided) were what inspired the Department of Education in their determination. Without the standards that would ensure a certain level of quality for all students, both in their buildings and in their teachers, it must certainly have seemed doubtful that the province could prosper in the rapidly changing Canadian society that increasingly required an acceptable level of education.



**Figure 9.**

A romanticized representation of the first public school in Winnipeg, built in 1871, and located in Point Douglas. Demolished. (PAM)



**Figure 10.**

The handsome school building in Morris was the first in Manitoba to be built (in 1875) of brick. Demolished. (*Furrows in the Valley*, p. 65)

In the City of Winnipeg, the situation was quite different. Large, modern schools were quickly constructed, and by 1880 the city boasted several substantial brick schools. Each section of the Board relied on a different architectural expression for their buildings. For the most part the Catholic section drew on the French Second Empire tradition, while the English section relied on Gothic Revival and Italianate styling.

The Protestant Board completed a dozen schools by 1889.<sup>14</sup> The inspectors were well pleased:

The City of Winnipeg now enjoys educational advantages of the highest order. During the past summer [1877] two large and very handsome school houses have been erected. The Central School [Figure 11] is a T-shaped building, on the plan 28 by 94 feet, built of brick in an American style of architecture, having over one hundred large, well proportioned circular-headed windows.

The construction of another Central School (No. 2), in 1882 (Figure 12), reflected the rapid growth of the city, its increasing wealth and a sensibility to building standards that was to characterize Winnipeg's Protestant school buildings through this period.

The Roman Catholic section of the Board of Education was just as ambitious. And while Tasse felt school buildings should be "plain and modest in design,<sup>16</sup> structures like St. Boniface College (1881) and Provencher School (1886) were nevertheless impressive buildings (Figures 13 and 14).

The arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway into Manitoba in the late 1870s and its extension to Brandon in 1881 created new opportunities for settlement, and the need for school building construction. By the mid-1880s, most of southern Manitoba had been opened, primarily by pioneers from eastern Canada. As a result, of course, many new school buildings were added to the responsibilities of the respective sections.



**Figure 11.**

Central School, Winnipeg, 1877. This Italianate design by architect C.A. Barber was the winning entry in a contest established by the English Section of the Board of Education. The building was almost a direct copy of a Barnard design.<sup>10</sup> With the construction of Central School No. 2 (below) as a girls' facility, Central No. 1 became a boys' school. Demolished. (PAM)



**Figure 12.**

Central School No. 2, 1882, was by James Chisholm, one of Manitoba's most influential early architects. The design combined the influences of the Italianate Revival in the windows and Gothic Revival in the tower. Demolished. (PAM)



**Figure 13.**

St. Boniface College, 1881, exhibited typical French architectural traits, with its mansard roof, arched dormers and central pavilion. Demolished. (PAM)



**Figure 14.**

Provencher School, 1886. The stairs may have been used to segregate boys and girls. Demolished. (PAM)

In Brandon and Portage la Prairie, for example, large schools had been built by the Catholic and Protestant sections by 1883 (Figures 15 and 16). Throughout the countryside, hundreds of new schools were constructed with the opening of the frontier.

The typical one-room school building was small (20' x 24'), gable-roofed, and despite its construction in wood frame, probably not any warmer than its log predecessor. There was only a modest range of styles and appointments (Figures. 17, 18 and 19). Within, the one-room schools continued to provide accommodation for all ages and grade levels, up to the eighth grade.

Criticism from the authorities on low building standards persisted, however. The most common complaint was that the buildings still did not conform to recommendations, either for design or hygiene (specifically good air circulation, adequate lighting and a safe heat source); local prejudices were felt to be too influential in school building design. Nevertheless, there were considerable improvements. The greater number of and larger windows in most new schools created a better internal environment, allowing in more light and producing better ventilation. Window placement was actually one of the most distinctive characteristics of the new schools. Typically three windows were arranged on either side of the school's long walls. Many builders used the windows for minor decorative embellishment. Bell towers also were common additions.

The arrival of Icelandic and Mennonite settlers in 1875 established two quite different responses to the existing educational framework. The Icelanders were quick to adapt to the educational system and to building expectations. The Mennonites, however, were steadfast in their independence and their early school buildings followed Mennonite traditions rather than the mainstream (Figure 20).





**Figure 15.**

St. Joseph's Convent and School, Brandon, 1882. Demolished. (PAM)



**Figure 16.**

Central School, Portage la Prairie, Demolished in 1949. (PAM)



**Figure 17.**

Mount Prospect School, 1882. The simplest of plans, forms and appointments describe this tiny school house.



**Figure 18.**

Star Mound School, 1886, features pedimented caps atop the three windows. The broad porch was added at a later date.



**Figure 19.**

Sandhurst School, 1884. The basic form was here enlivened with a clipped gable roof. Demolished. (*Ox Trails to Blacktop*, p. 127)



**Figure 20.**

Mennonite School, Hochfeld, ca. 1880. With its long plan and shuttered windows, this school could have been mistaken for a traditional Mennonite house. Demolished. (PAM)

Considerable changes to the educational system continued apace. In 1877 the University of Manitoba was established. In 1882 the first Normal Teacher Training Schools were formed by each section. These facilities were critical for the success of the educational system. They provided training for teachers entering the profession and, in the egalitarian spirit of the system, ensured that students throughout the province received instruction from teachers with the same skill level. To address some building concerns, in 1885 a set of regulations was passed by the Legislature that laid down explicit standards for the construction, design, heating and ventilating that were to be followed in school districts. Greater control was given to inspectors and the changes to school design and construction were considerable. In 1889, moreover, the Superintendent of the Protestant School District No. 1, Daniel McIntyre, was sent to the United States to learn more about ventilation and hygiene.

By the end of the 1880s, there were 719 school districts operating in the province, 636 of these with purpose-built schools. The evolution of the building stock was impressive. The greater proportion were neat little wood frame buildings, less than 100 were of log, about 25 were stone and eight were brick.

Throughout this period, however, the imbalance between the number of students and schools in each section (in 1886, 543 Protestant and 98 Roman Catholic<sup>20</sup>), was bound to cause conflict. As early as 1874 the quickly growing Anglo-Ontario population of the province had succeeded in having the annual school grant divided according to aggregate attendance, rather than equally to each section. By the latter half of the 1880s the situation was explosive.