

STABILIZATION (1919-1939)

The upheaval wrought by the World War I, and the economic stagnation that followed until 1939, were to have a great impact on reformulating the educational curriculum, as well as on redefining the requirements for school design. There was continued attention to the provision of standardized one-room designs throughout this period, although the designers tended only to tinker with basic schemes established previously. In urban areas, however, there was a wholesale shift away from the designs of the pre-war years.

In the countryside, the obvious consequence of the economic deprivation of these years was first seen in the number of schools built. Although compulsory attendance had been established in 1916, with a resultant increase in the number of students attending classes, other factors were at work. The population boom had slowed, opportunities for agricultural employment declined and ever-increasing numbers of farm people were moving into towns and cities.

The simple fact was that few new school facilities were required. This is not to say, however, that the buildings that were constructed were not a source of interest with the Department of Education. Indeed, there were continued efforts to update and upgrade the standardized one-room designs introduced before the war. Furthermore, with the appointment during the 1920s of architect Gilbert Parfitt to the staff of the Department of Education, the attention paid to rural school design was of a high order.³⁹

At least four new designs were created in the mid-1920s; another was introduced in the 1930s. None of these designs, however, strayed very far from the norms established in the preceding decade, that is, domestic of windows on only one side of the classroom.

In fact, two of the schemes (Figures. 80 and 81) were only variations on the popular cottage-style design introduced in 1912. The other two 1920s designs offered a slightly different form, with entrances set alongside the window bank and sheltered by an extension of the gable roof (Figures. 82 and 83). A design introduced in the mod01930s combined the hipped roof of other standardized designs with the side entrance of these later schemes (Figure 84).

Because one-room designs were now so firmly within the control of the department, it was rare to hear of inspectors' complaints about the actual building. They were, however, still able as late as 1925 to raise concerns, especially about school grounds: The school grounds do not change from year to year. A little money well spent on the grounds would be a splendid investment. Pleasing surroundings and attractive environment have a very deep influence upon the life and spirit of the child.

Indeed, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, there were notable advances in the development of school grounds. The provision of a cup prize by the Lieutenant-Governor for the greatest improvement in school grounds was an incentive for many teachers and school boards (Figure 85).

School consolidation continued apace through these years, reinforced by developments during World War I which had seen a new emphasis on the need for consolidation. The xenophobia attendant in war time not only saw the abolition of the bilingual system in 1916, but also the encouragement of more rapid assimilation of "foreign" students into the mainstream. This was a goal, it was determined, that could best be accomplished with consolidated schools, where the influence of a "foreign" teacher could be more closely monitored.



Figure 80.

Niverville Schools, ca. 1928. An instructive comparison of the change in architectural sensibilities shows (on the right) a Hooper design from 1912 and (on the left), a standardized design of the 1920s adapted from a popular cottage-style scheme from 1912 (Figure 53). Both demolished. (PAM)

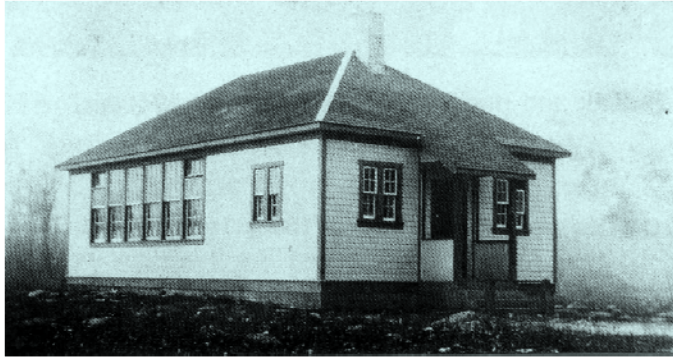


Figure 81.

Cork Cliff School, 1929. A second variation on the cottage-style design that was used in the 1920s is distinguished by a small porch protected by an extension of the roof. (*Reflections from Little Muddy River*, p. 77)



Figure 82.

Lake Audy School, 1931. The basic rectangular form, with the bank of windows, is made almost sleek with an entrance set parallel to the building. (*Pioneers and Progress*, p. 54)

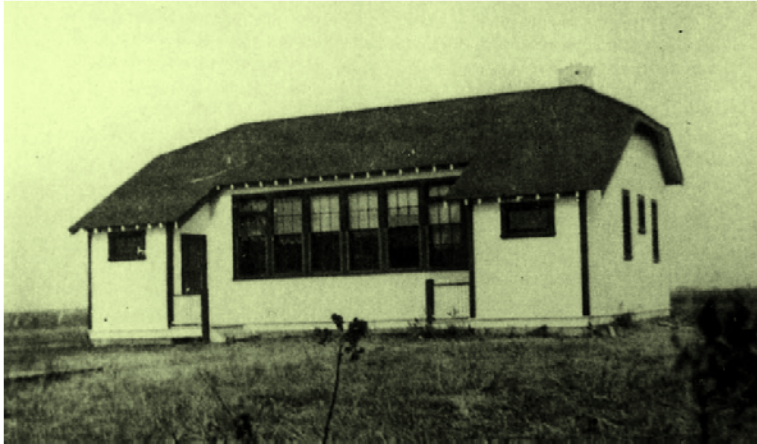


Figure 83.

Prestwick School, 1935. The new entrance configuration seen earlier was here adapted to provide entry on one side for girls, on the other for boys. Demolished. (*Then to Now*, p. 75)



Figure 84.

Gravelridge School, 1938. This up-to-date one-room structure featured insulbrick siding, for fire protection. Demolished. (*Schools - Our Heritage*, p. 77)

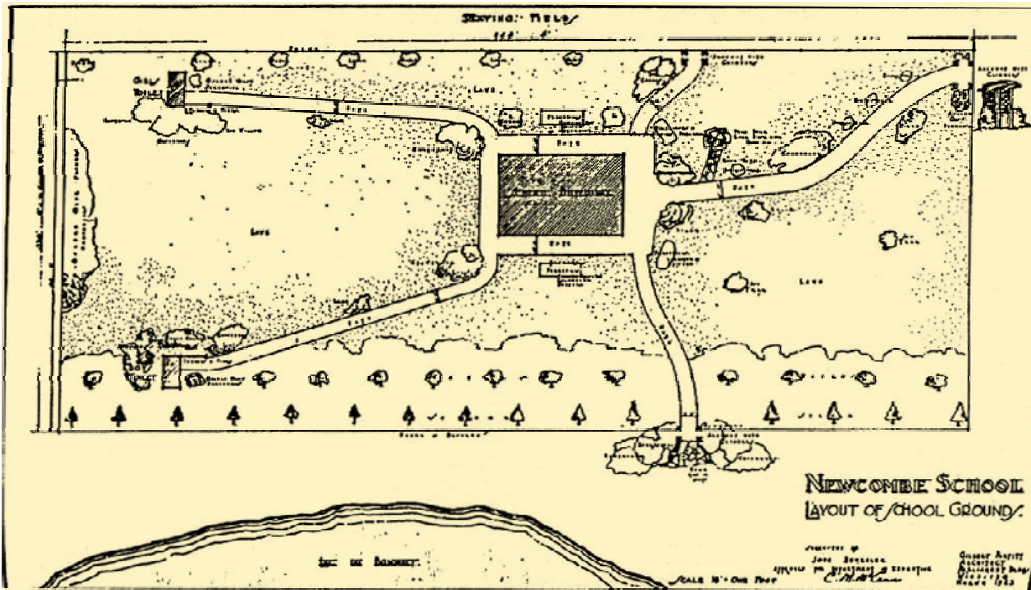


Figure 85.

Lac du Bonnet teacher John Bunzeluk was awarded a cup prize for this design of Newcombe School grounds, drawn up by architect Gilbert Parfitt for publication in the department's 1925 Annual Report.

The actual construction of consolidated schools more frequently resulted in smaller two-room facilities than the large (and expensive) consolidated schools built before the war. Several standardized two-room designs were developed. As with the new one-room schemes, most of these buildings drew much inspiration from the plans and forms of two-room designs from the preceding twenty years.

In most of the standardized schemes a long hipped roof created the dominant form, with a pedimented entrance providing a sense of gracefulness, while the now common window bank established a rectilinear pattern on the facade (Figures. 86 and 87). Another popular scheme featured the same roof shape, but combined it with a less formal hip-roofed entrance and window banks on the end walls (Figure 88).

In Winnipeg, the stagnation of the economy after World War I likewise was seen in the reduced number of buildings constructed, but also was expressed in a different architectural character. By 1918, the 45 existing schools of Winnipeg's School Division No. 1 were proving insufficient for a student population that had grown by 5,000 over the war years to total more than 30,000. However, the proposed solutions for the accommodation for these children were completely unfeasible. Tenders drawn up in 1918 for a series of new buildings would have cost so much - \$325,000 - that the Board rejected them outright.

A set of new designs, of much more modest size, styling and cost (\$100,000) were approved and by the end of 1920 eleven new schools had been constructed. Four of these buildings were the work of Col. Mitchell (Figures. 89 and 90). However, seven of this type, and eight subsequent school buildings were from a new hand, Col. J.N. Semmens (1882-1960), an architect with considerable experience with institutional design. And although he consulted with Mitchell on the designs, Semmens brought a new sensibility to the architecture of Winnipeg schools.



Figure 86.

Mountainside Consolidated School, ca. 1935. One of the typical two-room designs popular in the 1920s and 30s featured a classically-inspired pediment over the entrance. (PAM)



Figure 87.

Osborne School, 1938. Here, the gabled entrance to a standardized two-room design had detail work more commonly seen on domestic bungalows. Demolished. (*Down Memory Lane*, p. 100)



Figure 88.

Woodlands Consolidated School, 1920. Another popular two-room design used throughout this period. Demolished. (*Yesteryears*, p. 85)



Figure 89.

Greenway #2 School, Winnipeg, 1919. One of Col. Mitchell's modest one-storey schools, this building is distinguished by a curving roof over the entrance.

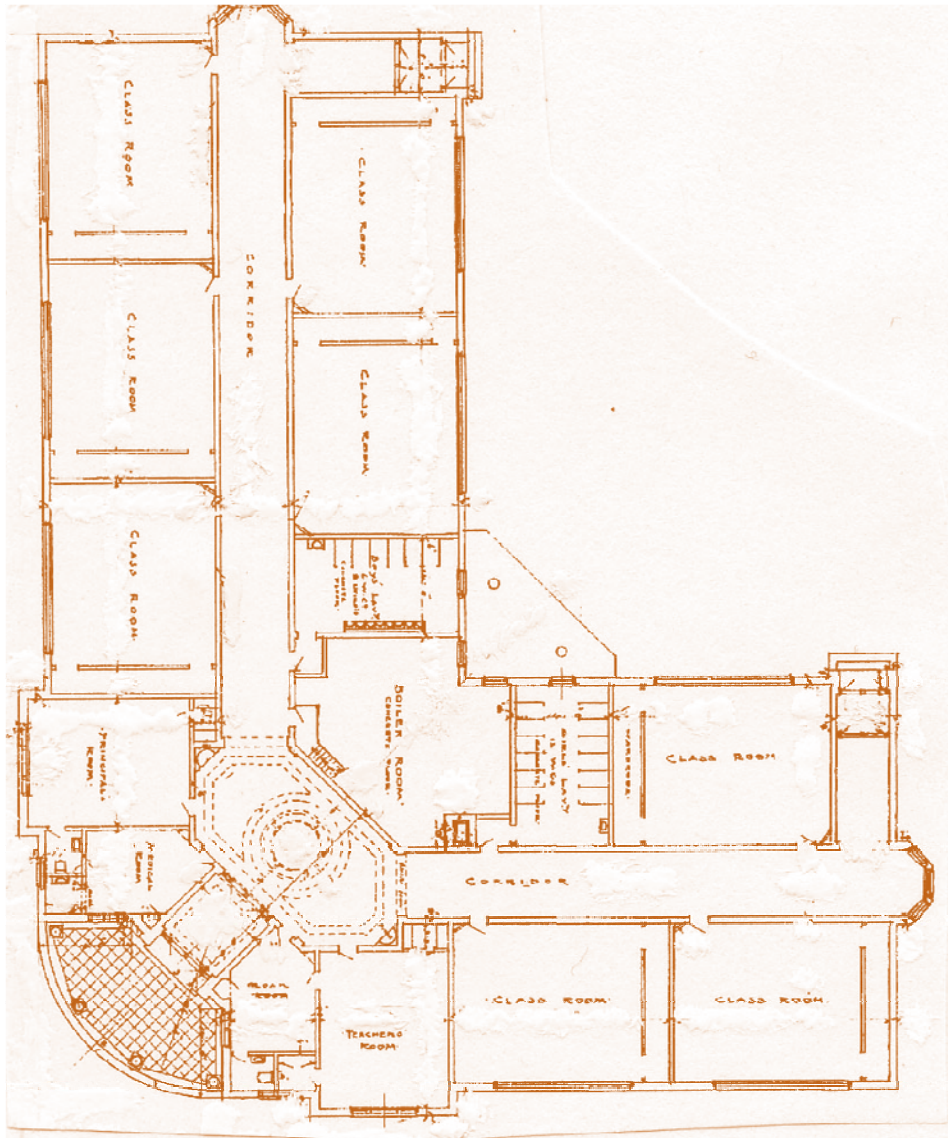


Figure 90.
Greenway #2 School, Winnipeg, floor plan. The design, which was clearly organized to accept additions as the population changed, was reflective of the uncertain conditions of the time. (Building Department, Winnipeg School Division No. 1)

By the time that Col. Semmens took over the role as Consulting Architect for Winnipeg's schools, a completely different architectural expression was gaining popularity for the design of educational facilities. A particular strain of the Late Gothic Revival, Collegiate Gothic became de rigueur for many educational facilities throughout North America.

Collegiate Gothic was an academic style, derived from the medieval precedents of European universities, especially the schools at Oxford and Cambridge. The English roots of the style were to result in the application of many Tudor architectural forms and details. Thus, bay windows, decorated gables, shallow Tudor arches and crenellations were all carefully combined for effect. In its most ambitious interpretation, schools were designed on a sprawling, irregular plan focused on an interior, grassy quadrangle. Heavy, squat towers with gates provided entry into this cloistered space. While the style was often carried out in stone, Semmens' preference for red tapestry brick coincided nicely with the pinched economic circumstances of the period.

Many of Semmens' designs were one storey in height, long and low, but with delightful external details and with large windows and light-filled classrooms. Although the modest configuration was largely dictated by economic circumstance, Semmens also felt it held certain advantages over the enormous schools of the preceding decade. He considered one-storey designs not only more suitable for young students, but also believed they fit better into a neighbourhood.

In general, Semmens reworked three basic schemes for his school designs, all of a modest, but thoughtful character. The earliest of Semmens' new schools were actually quite personal, and unusual designs, combining many elements of the Collegiate Gothic with Classical Revival forms and details. One of his first designs, with decorative gables that likely warmed Col. Mitchell's heart, was to be used several more times in slightly different formats (Figure 91). A two-storey section featuring Classical Revival elements, like columns and pediments, was flanked by low one-storey extensions with more Gothic inspiration.

A second, simpler type, dispensed with the two-storey section and made the most of a very long single storey silhouette, and a very simple interpretation of Collegiate Gothic (Figure 92). Architectural delight was reserved for the entrances, where a variety of Gothic Revival details were used. This type of school was also popular throughout the city's other school districts, where a variety of other architects created similar buildings (Figure 93).

The third basic design scheme provided for a two-storey structure, and was typically a more fully realized expression of the style. In these cases, Semmens usually worked out a T-, H- or U-shaped plan that created the projecting wings where a stark profile and crisp stone details were used for the clear delineation of Collegiate Gothic forms and details (Figure 94).

The highlight of this period, and of Semmens' career as a school architect, was the design of Daniel McIntyre Collegiate, built in 1922. At a final cost of \$600,000, more than double the price of the 1912 Isaac Brock and nearly as big, Daniel McIntyre was a very ambitious expression of Collegiate Gothic (Figures. 95 and 96). Although it was not completed to his original plan, the building nevertheless is the best example in the province of that style. The rambling plan, the quadrangle and the great variety of Tudor details that were hallmarks of the style are all seen on Daniel McIntyre.



Figure 91.

Champlain School, Winnipeg, 1920. Col. Semmens brought an appreciation for the Classical Revival to his designs of certain modest Winnipeg schools, although Col. Mitchell likely appreciated the decorative gable.



Figure 92.

Sir Sam Steele School, Winnipeg, 1921. With its long low profile, this is a good example of Semmens' modest one-storey school designs.



Figure 93.

Assiniboine School, Winnipeg, 1920. A slightly different expression of Collegiate Gothic, by an architect for the St. James School Board, combines a hipped roof, a steeple, bungalow-style brackets and broad expanses of stucco.



Figure 94.

Grosvenor School, Winnipeg, 1922. An example of Semmens' two-storey designs, this one carried out in the spirit of Collegiate Gothic.

Figure 95.

Daniel McIntyre Collegiate, Winnipeg, 1922. The return to large school construction was carried out in Semmens' ambitious interpretation of the Collegiate Gothic. The tower and the section to the right were never built. (Building Department, Winnipeg School Division No. 1)

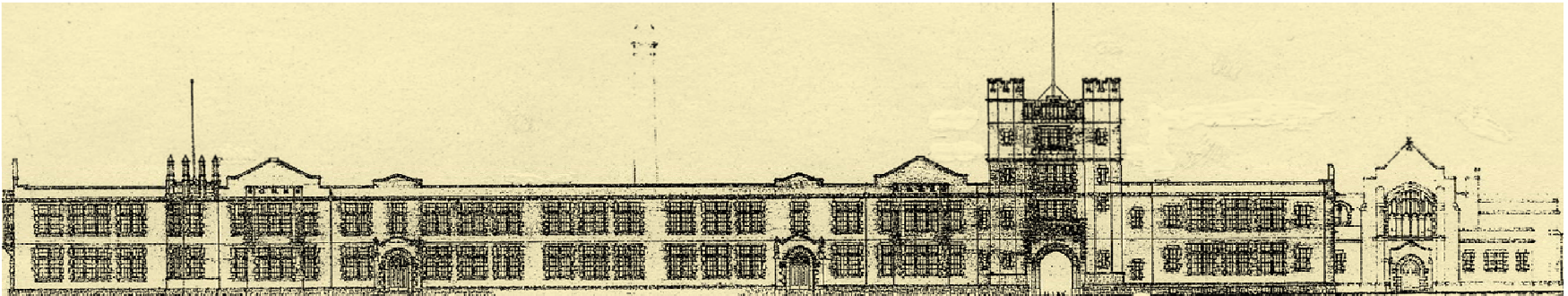
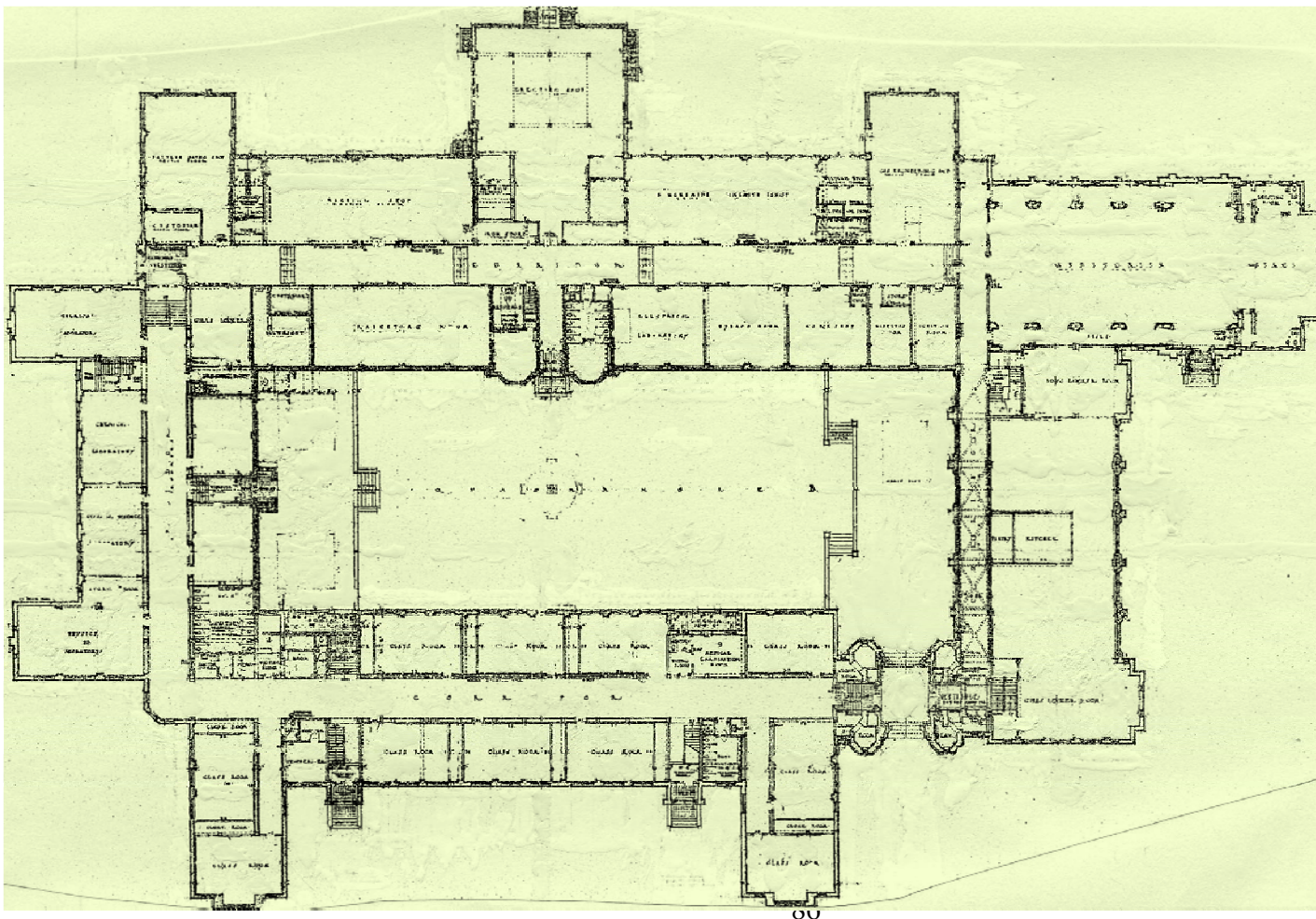


Figure 96.

Daniel McIntyre Collegiate, Winnipeg, main floor plan. The rambling plan and the quadrangle are key features of Collegiate Gothic. (Building Department, Winnipeg School Division No. 1)



Semmens' tenure as the school district's architect ended in 1925 and a range of other designers was used through the last half of the 1920s and for the few buildings constructed in the 1930s. W.A. Martin was selected for several of these commissions. Martin's designs were generally more blocky than were Semmens', with a modesty of shape, detail and even colour. Projecting wings were nearly flush to the main wall surface; gently arched gables and name plates were used for decorative appeal, while the combination of buff-coloured brick and soft grey concrete details produced quiet, elegant buildings (Figure 97).

The developments in Winnipeg were to have immediate influence on school designs throughout the urban centres of the province. Although there continued to be exceptions (Figure 98), the few new schools that were constructed in the province's smaller urban centres during the 1920s and 30s tended to mirror architectural developments that were being established for schools in Winnipeg.

Thus, buildings tended to be low and horizontal, of red brick and with Late Gothic Revival or even occasionally Georgian Revival styling (Figures. 99 and 100). Brick or concrete external detailing generally replaced the pre-World War I preference for expensive carved stone. Inside, these new schools were equipped with internal fittings and appointments of the highest standards. The inclusion of gymnasias was a key advance. This was a response to war time needs; recruiting officers found that young men were generally in poor physical condition. And in larger communities like Brandon, Portage la Prairie and Dauphin, there were typically more sophisticated expressions of the stylistic variables possible (Figure 101).



Figure 97.

Queenston School, Winnipeg, 1931. W.A. Martin's design was informed with a certain architectural wit, like the juxtaposition of differing quoin designs on the two end bays.



Figure 98.

Roblin School, ca. 1920. One of the most striking designs from this period, this building recalled the continued local efforts to produce schools of distinction. Destroyed by fire. (*Shell River Municipality. Century One*, p. 314)



Figure 99.

Brookdale Consolidated School, 1924. Long and low, with a shallow hip roof, the building was distinguished by a modest gabled entrance. (*Carberry Plains. Century One*, p. 242)



Figure 100.

Earl Oxford School, Brandon, 1928. Col. J.N. Semmens, the architect for most of Winnipeg's schools of the early 1920s also designed several school buildings in Brandon, in a similar style: a restrained interpretation of Collegiate Gothic in red brick.



Figure 101.

Smith Jackson School, Dauphin, 1921. Dramatically long, the building was enlivened with the red brick and stark white Classical details used in Georgian Revival designs. Demolished. (*Dauphin Valley Spans the Years*, p. 88)