

Dundas Historical Society Museum

139 Park Street West

Dundas, Ontario

L9H 5G1

October - 1981

Re: Dundas Central Public School - From notes assembled in January - 1978

The Town's first Board of School Trustees was formed in 1847, at which time, they took over the village school, formerly privately operated by Robert Spence. It was a stone building on the northwest corner of Park and Princess Streets. Mr. Spence was hired to run the school and was paid two shillings per month for each pupil.

In 1857, the Public and Grammar School (Grammar School became the High School) decided to use one building, and so the first Dundas Union School was opened. The present Dundas Central Public School was built for this. The Public School used four rooms on the first floor and the Grammar School used the two upstairs rooms. The entire school, consisted of what is now the front part only of Dundas Central School.

In 1871, schooling became compulsory for children from seven to twelve years of age.

There was no kindergarten until 1873.

By 1874, attendance had increased to the extent that more space was necessary, so the School Board purchased the red brick building at the corner of Main and York Streets. This was generally known as the Ward School.

In 1885, an addition was built on to Central Public School and all the children returned to that building and the Ward School was vacated. 458 pupils were registered. The Ward School was sold.

In 1909, a building was erected towards the back of Central Public School, and this was used as a High School, leaving more room for Public School students. By 1922-23, the Ward School was again used for the overflow of pupils. The building was rented this time.

By 1930, a new High School was built (Dundas District High School) and the Public School took over the first high school for some of their classes.

The latest addition to Central Public School was officially opened May 16, 1961 by the Hon. Ray Connell, Ontario Public Works Minister. This addition contained two new classrooms and a gymnasium with a capacity of 800. It is 90 feet long by 70 feet wide. It has a balcony with fixed seating for 274 people. The stage at the east end is 25 feet long and 62 feet wide. An electrically operated soundproof door divides the gymnasium into halves, with the door in place, two physical education classes or volleyball games can be carried on simultaneously.

The gymnasium can be turned into a full size basketball court by removing the door. Portable chairs can be placed on the main floor of the hall to

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accommodate over 500 people.

The new lower floor classroom is used as a manual training room for boys. The second floor classroom has been turned into a home economics department, complete with cooking ranges and washer-dryer combinations. The rooms hold 35 students each.

This addition was designed by W. W. Allen, Architect and erected by Tope Construction Company of Hamilton.

The washrooms and show rooms in the old section of the school have been renovated.

The entrance and lobby of the addition face on to Victoria Street.

Statement of Significance Dundas Central School (City of Hamilton)

Description of Historic Place

The building at 73 Melville Street, known as Dundas Central School, is situated within the historical Town of Dundas, now a constituent community within the City of Hamilton. The two-and-a-half storey red brick building was built in three stages. The original structure, constructed in 1857 in the Greek Revival Style was designed by Francis Hawkins of Dundas, with a large expansion in 1885 and another in 1919. The exterior, selected elements of the interior and the scenic character of the property are protected by an Ontario Heritage Trust conservation easement agreement registered in 1990. The property is also designated by the Town of Dundas (now the City of Hamilton) under Part IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act* (Bylaw 3751-88).



Heritage Value

Historic Value:

Dundas Central School is significant as one of the earliest purpose-built public schools in Ontario. The passage of the 1850 Common Schools Act allowed municipalities to fund construction and operation of public schools from property taxation, inaugurating a standardized public education system. Influenced by Egerton Ryerson's educational reforms in the 1800s, a new institution called the Central School emerged. These were large-scale schools specifically designed for formal learning and featured graded curriculums, multiple classrooms, and an expanded teaching faculty. In contrast to this was the ward schools, which were smaller, often single room schools designed to serve rural areas. The first central schools were built in Brantford, Chatham, London and Hamilton in the early 1850s. Dundas built its central school in their example in 1857. It taught both common (elementary) and grammar (high) school curriculums, differentiated grades and was outfitted with modern mechanical services, a playground and expanded school supplies. The grammar school was located on the upper floor and the ground floor was for the common school. The school built an eight-room addition in 1885 and another four-room extension in 1919 to accommodate growing student numbers. Enrollment continued to increase and a separate Dundas District High School was built in 1930. Dundas Central still operates as an elementary school out of the historically significant building.

Architectural Value:

The Dundas Central School is significant as an example of early central school architecture. The school was built in three stages in 1857, 1885 and 1919 in Greek Revival, Queen Anne Revival and Edwardian styles. The earliest structure was designed by Francis Hawkins in the Greek Revival style and built in 1857. Made of red brick on a raised, cut limestone foundation, it is a symmetrical cross-gabled building. Pilasters divide the façades of the seven-by-six bay structure into which windows are placed. The bricks are laid in a Flemish bond in the recessed bays, stretcher bond in the pilasters and common bond above the foundation. Its double-hung 6/6 sash windows with stone lug sills are adorned with moulded wooden pediments. The central (south) entrance contains steps and a double door with transom, framed by a pedimental frontispiece of wooden pilasters with Corinthian capitals, a bracketed frieze and pediment with dentils and acanthus leaf trim. Above the entrance are two double-hung 4/4 sash windows framed in one sill. The south, east and west elevations of the two-and-a-half storey building have a large pedimental gable and a bracketed raking cornice with dentils. The southern gable was rebuilt in 1885 to accommodate a new bell tower, since removed. Two vented openings in its tympanum were originally double-hung sash windows. Alterations made in 1885 complement the original edifice's aesthetic by maintaining similar architectural scale and construction material. The 1885 gabled addition built in the Queen Anne Revival style extends from the 1857 building's north elevation. It retains identical brickwork and bracketing as the earlier structure. Five bays wide and almost flush with the 1857 structure, two front gabled dormers with arched vented openings bisect the building. Pairs of single-hung 4/2 sash windows are arranged in each bay and two pairs of single-hung 6/2 sash windows on the southern end of the structure extend below the second storey to mark two side double-door entrances with transoms, a porch and steps. A small third addition in a restrained Edwardian style was built in 1919 north of the 1885 structure, with a flat roof and pedimented parapets. Single-hung 4/2 windows are arranged in groups of three and two. Another extension was added in 1961. The interiors of the 1857 and 1885 structures retain original window trim, wooden paneled doors and wainscoting from the 1885 remodeling throughout both their floors. Two barrel-vaulted pressed tin ceilings exist on the upper floor of the 1857 school.

Contextual Value:

Dundas Central School's contextual significance is apparent through its location in the heart of a historic residential community. It occupies an entire block and is adjacent to St. Augustine's Catholic Church and numerous 19th century residences. The school is just north of King Street, the historic downtown core of Dundas, in close proximity to other local landmarks including the Collins Brewhouse and the Carnegie Gallery.

Character Defining Elements

Items that contribute to the historical value of Dundas Central School include:

- One of the earliest purpose-built central schools in the province
- The second oldest remaining example of central school architecture in Ontario; and
- Association with the history of public education in the Province of Ontario.

Exterior features that contribute to the architectural value of Dundas Central School include:

- Greek Revival style of the 1857 structure
- Two-and-a-half storey construction built in three stages;
- Front entrance with transom framed by a wooden portico frontispiece with Corinthian pilasters and a frieze bracketed by vertical scrolls and dentils with acanthus leaf trim;
- Red brickwork in Flemish, Stretcher and Common bond on a raised cut limestone foundation;

- Decorative pilasters throughout exterior creating recessed brick panels;
- Pedimental gables on the south, east and west elevations with dentil ornamentation and brackets;
- Thirty four double-hung 6/6 sash windows with moulded wooden pediments and stone lug sills;
- Sympathetic 1885 and 1919 additions respecting the 1857 structure's aesthetic through similar scaling and materials;
- 1885 addition built in the Queen Anne Revival style almost flush to 1857 north façade;
- Gabled dormers with vented openings bisecting the structure;
- Two double entrances with transoms on the both façades near the juncture with 1857 building;
- Brackets on a gabled cornice;
- Thirty six 4/2 single-hung sash windows and stone lug sills;
- 1919 addition designed in a restrained Edwardian style with a flat roof and pedimented parapets; and
- Twenty three 4/2 single-hung sash windows on stone lug sills arranged in pairs or groups or three.

Interior features that contribute to the architectural value of Dundas Central School include:

- Original paneled wood doors from 1885 throughout both floors
- Original wood trim and wainscoting from 1885 throughout the halls on both floors; and
- Two barrel-vaulted, pressed tin ceilings in the south-east and south-west rooms on the second floor of 1885 addition.

Characteristics that contribute to the contextual value of Dundas Central School include:

- Setting within a historic residential neighborhood in Dundas
- Proximity to numerous nineteenth century residences and St. Augustine's Catholic Church; and
- Proximity to Dundas's historical downtown commercial centre.



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