

Port Arthur Collegiate Institute
401 Red River Road



Year Built: 1909

Architect: Henry Simpson

Style: Queen-Anne

Notable Features: four storey central tower

Curved step gables/curved crenellations atop tower

Designation Date: May 25th, 1983

By-Law No.: 106-1983

Legal Description: Town Plot Pt Reserve C Pt Lt 8 N/S Waverly 55R1076 Pt 1 Less
55R11180 Pts 1 & 2

Current Owner: Lakehead University

Description:

Port Arthur Collegiate Institute (PACI) was designed to impress. The castle-like structure was purposefully placed atop a hill with a clear view of the harbour, so that arriving visitors would glance at the stone school and assume Port Arthur was a place of “good style and progress.”¹ The academic purpose of the building was made evident through the design; it is an imposing and stately structure in appearance, one that “reflects the values and beliefs of the dominant social groups it served.” Port Arthur Collegiate Institute is positioned in beautiful Waverly Park, which has the distinction of being the second oldest municipal park in Ontario, and the only designated Heritage District in Thunder Bay.

The cornerstone for the school building was laid in 1909 by James Conmee, mayor of Port Arthur in 1884. Upon completion of construction, the City bought Carronades (short cannons) from the militia for the grounds of PACI. The Carronades were being stored on St. Helen’s island in Montreal, and as each cannon weighed nearly a ton and there was no ferry or wharf on the island it was necessary to wait for winter before transporting the cannons on an ice bridge. The Carronades grazed the property of

¹ Scott Anderson, *PACI building site perfect location*. Chronicle Journal, February 9th, 1989

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the collegiate from 1911 to 1955, when they were removed because of crumbling bases and kept at the Board of Education's storage yard. This proved to be unsafe, as the Carronades were stolen one night and taken to a scrap yard. They were later recovered and it was decided that the Carronades should be permanently cemented to the stone walls at Hillcrest Park.

Port Arthur Collegiate Institute served the community as a high school until 2007 when the Lakehead School Board determined it should be shut down due to decreasing enrolment. Students of the school were relocated to Hillcrest High School, which is also set to be closed. A new high school is being built on Balsam that will accommodate the student population of both these institutions. Lakehead University has purchased the PACI building and is planning on using the structure for a law school, set to open in 2010.



**Port Arthur Collegiate Institute,
View from Waverly Park**

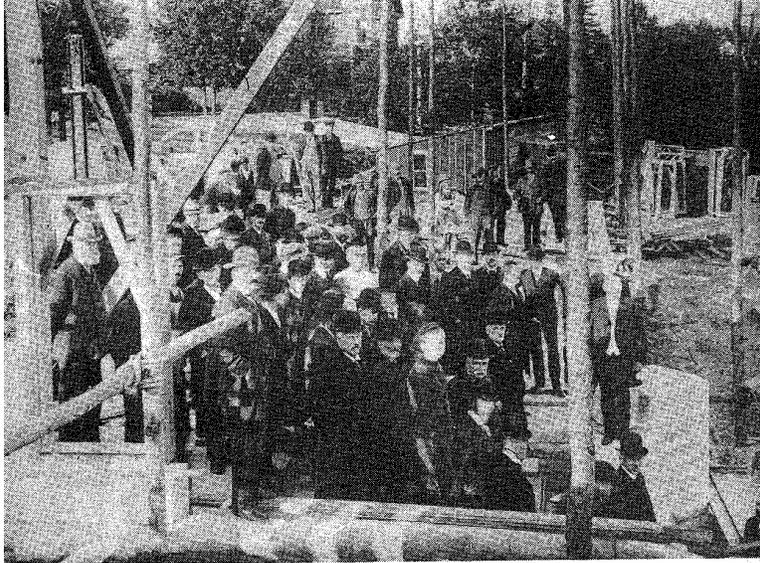
Architecture:

Constructed of Simpson Islet stone, the original portion of the Collegiate combines medieval and Flemish architectural features popular in the Edwardian period. Originally symmetrical, the school has a four-storey central tower flanked by two tree-storey wings. The curved step-gables of the wings repeat the curved crenellations atop the tower. Rounded battlements project from the topmost corners of the tower and oriel windows from the second level. The entrance is on the first floor of the tower and reached through a round arch. Both the tower and the wings have buttresses at the corners.

Numerous alterations have been made to the building over the decades, including additional classrooms in 1925 and 1954, as well as an ill-received gymnasium in 1972. Pat Vervoort, former chairman of the Local Architectural Conservation Advisory Committee stated that the gymnasium addition was built “with complete disregard for

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what was there...it's a good example of what Frank Lloyd Wright (a famous American architect) said you should do with your (architectural) mistakes – plant ivy and cover them up.” The building is thankfully saved from further unsightly alterations, as it was formally designated as a Heritage Site in 1983.



Laying the cornerstone, 1909