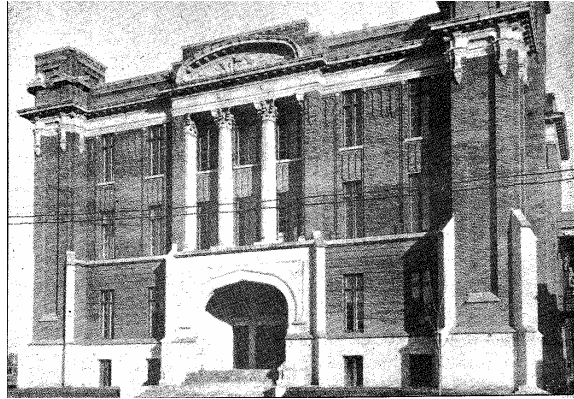


Fort William Collegiate Institute
512 Marks Street South



Year Built: 1907

Architect: R.E. Mason

Style: Combination of Classical and Medieval

Notable Features: Columns and stonework

Main entrance oak doors and windows in main lobby

Stained glass memorial windows

Designation Date: May 25th, 1983

By-Law No.: 104-1983

Legal Description: Plan 144 Lot 43 to 61 Pt Lot 62 Plan 144 Lot 43 to 55 W/S Catherine

Current Owner: Lakehead District School Board

Description:

Fort William Collegiate Institute was first constructed in 1907 to house the ever-increasing need for a secondary school in Fort William. Prior to the opening of the collegiate institution, high school classes were held in two classrooms of Central Public School from 1899-1900. Switching locations due to lack of space, the secondary classes were held in Ogden Public School until 1907. Both these public school buildings have since been demolished. Although enrolment in high school was increasing, attendance at a secondary school at the turn of the century was still “the preserve of the fortunate few...only the sons and daughters of the dominant groups in the local community; professionals like doctors, clergymen, lawyers and businessmen [tended to receive this level of education].”

The original Fort William Collegiate Institute building, which was eight or ten rooms, underwent massive reconstruction in 1918, under the leadership of local architect R.E. Mason. At this time the Vocational Wing of the present institution was added. A second addition was constructed in 1925, and a third in 1970. The stately structure acted as a “symbol of social importance to the community...and of material progress” in Fort William. When the Secondary School Board recommended that Fort William Collegiate Institute be closed in 1986, the fact that “dominant groups in Thunder Bay still [sent]

their children to the collegiate and their pressure along with the mystique of the school made its closure all but impossible.”

Although Fort William Collegiate was saved in 1986, a further review by the Lakehead District School Board in 2005 advised that the school be closed. High School enrolment was decreasing throughout Thunder Bay at this time due to a stagnant and aging population. It was decided that two high schools in the South Ward, instead of three, would be sufficient to handle the students. It was recommended that Fort William Collegiate close due to the costly repairs and renovations it would require to function. There is apparently some discussion of the building being renovated for residential uses.

Architecture:

The architecture of Fort William Collegiate Institute embodies the values of academia. Bill Williamson, a British sociologist wrote that “earlier educational institutions of dominant groups in society still carry historical weight and are exemplified even in the bricks and mortar of the buildings themselves,” and this certainly seems true for Fort William Collegiate. Constructed of brick and stone, the building is three and a half storeys high and is eclectic in design. The main façade, which faces Marks Street South repeats its main architectural features on both the Isabella and Catherine Street sides. The building boasts impressive stonework and features large columns which span from the second to third storey. The oak doors of the main entrance as well as the woodwork in the lobby area add to the stately décor of the structure.

Robert E. Mason; Architect

Mason arrived in Fort William in 1905, at the age of twenty-two in connection with the survey of the Grand Trunk railway. He became quite prominent in the area as an architect, and “many of the larger buildings stand as a monument to his skill.” He was observed as possessing a “cheery disposition” and was “always ready to say a genial word.”

Along with the Fort William Collegiate Institute, R.E. Mason designed the Fort William Police Station and Court House, many of the public schools in the area, the Kamden apartments, the Masonic temple and a wing of the McKellar hospital.

