

# Advisory Committee of Council Information Report

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Committee	Heritage Guelph
Date	Monday, June 12, 2023
Subject	<b>131 Ontario Street: Cultural Heritage Evaluation Report</b>

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## Description

This information report provides a cultural heritage evaluation and draft statement of significance and determination of cultural heritage value or interest for the Tytler Public School at 131 Ontario Street for Heritage Guelph's review and comment in preparation for a notice of intention to designate the property under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act.

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## Executive Summary

### Purpose of Report

This information report provides a cultural heritage evaluation draft statement of significance and determination of cultural heritage value or interest for the Tytler Public School at 131 Ontario Street for Heritage Guelph's review and comment in preparation for a notice of intention to designate the property under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act.

### Key Findings

Tytler Public School at 131 Ontario Street is listed as a non-designated built heritage resource on the City of Guelph's Municipal Register of Cultural Heritage Properties under Part IV, Section 27 of the Ontario Heritage Act. This report recommends that Tytler Public School meets five of the prescribed criteria for determining cultural heritage value or interest, in accordance with Ontario Regulation 569/22 made under the Ontario Heritage Act.

### Strategic Plan Alignment

The key findings and recommendations of this report align with Strategic Plan priorities areas. The designation of Tytler Public School at 131 Ontario Street under Part IV, Section 29 of the Ontario Heritage Act contributes to the City's priority of Building our Future. By conserving significant built heritage resources the City moves in a direction that continues to build strong, vibrant, safe and healthy communities that foster resilience in the people who live here. The conservation of cultural heritage resources is aligned with building and maintaining vibrant and resilient communities.

# Report

## Location

The subject property is located at 131 Ontario Street, east of Short Street and west of York Road. Legal Description: PLAN 113, Lot 50, Lot 51, Lot 8 to 10, Part Lot 11, Part Lot 7, Part Lot 52

## Cultural Heritage Evaluation

The history of public education in Ward 2, named "St. Patrick's Ward" in the 1906 Historical Atlas, and before that, the "East Ward" in Cooper's 1862 and 1875 maps, began in 1828 with the construction of a simple one-room schoolhouse located approximately at the intersection of Fountain and Neeve Streets. According to a Guelph Mercury article from May 4, 1908, this was the first purpose-built school in Guelph, known as the "Galt Academy" and later "The Old Stone School" and "East Ward School." The location of the school close to the Grand Trunk Railway, which reached Guelph in 1856, meant that lessons were frequently disturbed by the loud rail traffic. A new location was sought, and in 1878 a site on Ontario Street was chosen for the "New East Ward School."

According to the Guelph Mercury's Building Operations columns, the New East Ward School was designed by Guelph architect John Hall Junior in the Italianate style. It was built of stone with a "T shape" layout and a 36-foot belfry on the north corner (Mercury, 27 Nov. 1878). The Mercury details that the "the building is divided into two school rooms, each 22 by 28 feet. There are two entrances into the school—one for boys and the other for girls... The building is heated by stoves. The total cost was about \$1,900" (Mercury, 27 Nov. 1878). The Guelph City Directory 1882-1883 recorded that Miss Asenath Way was the only teacher employed at the school.

Guelph's population grew rapidly during the turn of the century, increasing by 32% from 1901 to 1911. (9,800 in 1881 to 11,497 in 1901 and 15,175 in 1911 - Statistics Canada). In his 1906 Annual Report of the Public School Inspector of the City of Guelph, Inspector Dr. William Tytler noted that "in the very near future the Board will have to consider the question of providing additional accommodation for the younger children... Relief is required in St. Patrick's and St. James' Wards... Whether this accommodation is to be provided by extending St. Patrick's or St. James Schools, or by the erection of a new school near the boundaries of these wards, is for the Board to consider" (Tytler, 1906, p. 4). The Guelph Board of Education elected to demolish the limestone New East Ward School in 1907 and construct a four-room schoolhouse, the oldest portion of the current Tytler structure. The Board elected to rename the school "St. Patrick's Ward School," a name it held from 1908-1922.

St. Patrick's Ward School was constructed during the tenure of Dr. William Tytler, Inspector and Secretary of the Guelph Board of Education from 1892-1924, previously the first principal of the New East Ward School from 1878-1888. Tytler was an educational reformer who championed multidisciplinary education and promoted the construction of new school facilities across Guelph in the first quarter of the twentieth century. In a 1906 report to the Board of Education, Tytler noted that "it is now universally agreed the rooms where our children spend such a large

share of their time should be, not merely comfortable, well-furnished, well heated, and well ventilated, but also as elegant and attractive as they can possibly be made" (Tytler, 1906, p. 4). Tytler encouraged the Board to make schools "not only comfortable and sanitary, but even attractive and beautiful." Tytler's vision for a new school, informed by the Progressive Education and City Beautiful Movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is evident in the school's Romanesque revival style and ornately decorated classrooms with pressed metal ceilings.

The oldest portion of Tytler Public School, constructed in 1908, is a two-and-a-half-story red brick structure upon a rock-faced stone foundation laid in a random ashlar pattern, capped by a steep hipped roof with two hip roof dormers. The street facing façade is punctuated by a centrally placed three-story frontispiece, a centered, ornamented doorway that is slightly raised from the rest of the building. The frontispiece features a gabled-roof with stone coping on the parapet, Palladian windows on the second and third floors, and a round-arched entrance with a recessed door and pressed metal porch ceiling. Above the entrance is a carved stone tablet within a band of diapered, rock-faced brick that creates a repeated X pattern between two band courses of stone. The tablet reads "Guelph Public Schools 1878 - 1906," which commemorates the period when the East Ward School stood on the site. The frontispiece is enhanced with decorative brickwork, including four terra cotta lion heads that flank the side arches of the frontispiece, two of which are severed down the middle to fit the wall corner. The front doors open into a large stairwell that leads to the first floor and second floor corridors. The stairwell was significantly altered from its 1908 form, likely during construction of the additions to the school in the 1960s. This alteration resulted in an inaccessible balcony on the second floor in front of the Palladian windows. The corridors feature high ceilings, large wood baseboards, and maple hardwood floors. The classrooms feature large windows, intricately decorated pressed metal ceilings and crown molding, maple hardwood floors, wood wainscotting, and hall doors with large transom windows and original hardware opening mechanisms.

The Guelph Mercury records that the construction employed carpenter George Scroggie, Dempsey Bros painting, plasterer J.J. Mahoney, Mahoney Bros plumbing, and architect William Mahoney for a total cost of \$13,000 (Mercury, 12 Sept 1908). In his 1908 Annual Report, Tytler described the school as "a credit to the city and the Board of Education... in many respects this stands as the most satisfactory schoolhouse in Guelph" (Tytler, 1908, p. 4). However, he also regretted that "it was not decided to make St. Patrick's School a six-roomed, instead of a four-roomed school" (Tytler, 1908, p. 4). This decision is likely the reason why the 1907 Fire Insurance Plan depicts the initially intended six-roomed school, while the 1911 Fire Insurance Plan depicts a four-roomed school.

The school represents the first institutional commission of architect William Mahoney, who was born in Guelph in 1871 and studied architecture in Chicago in 1893-94, a time of great architectural innovation spurred by the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. One of the most significant Guelph-based architects of the early twentieth century, Mahoney designed several notable local structures, including 176 Woolwich Street in 1906 (now The Woolly Pub), an addition to St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in 1908, and, in partnership with Aaron Austin, the Royal Theatre in 1935 with its distinctive brick façade on Macdonell Street (now

Trapper's Alley). However, he is best known for designing sixteen Carnegie libraries throughout southwestern Ontario. He opened his own office in Guelph in 1905 and operated under his own name until 1919, when he formed a partnership with Aaron Austin that lasted until 1931.

Mahoney's 1908 design recognized the likelihood of future structural expansion and utilized the "egg carton" building plan, with a central corridor and flanking classrooms that permitted expansion if the need for more classrooms should arise (Guy & Cottrell, *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, 2013). The continued growth of Guelph's population, especially in the working-class St. Patrick's Ward, necessitated expansion a mere three years after the new school opened its doors. According to Tytler, "the St. Patrick's Ward School has had its accommodation severely taxed during the year. In view of the certain increase of population in that locality, the Board felt that steps must be taken without delay to provide for the expected influx of pupils" (Tytler, 1911, p. 4). The School Board purchased the lot adjoining the school along Toronto Street and again hired William Mahoney to design an additional four rooms to the school, (F40-0-2, Box 51, *Public School Journal* 1907-1915, page 325, October 14, 1912) despite being held responsible for the collapse of the frontispiece gable during a severe windstorm in April 1909 (*Guelph Mercury*, April 8, 1909). The extension in 1912 was designed to blend seamlessly into the original structure, with the addition of a protruding gabled entryway on the west façade, crowned by a stone fire escape datestone with a scroll and wreath motif carved in high relief. Though this addition doubled the size of St Patrick's School, the continued growth of industry in St Patrick's Ward caused Tytler to warn the Board in his 1911 Annual Report that "we must not entertain the idea that this addition to the capacity of the school will be all that is required in that locality" (Tytler, 1911, p. 3).

By the end of the First World War, the influx of industrial workers to St Patrick's Ward required further expansion of the school, and William Mahoney, now partnered with Aaron Austin, was again chosen to design the six-room addition. Unlike the Romanesque 1908 and 1912 constructions, Mahoney and Austin designed the 1921 addition in the Collegiate Gothic style, the most popular institutional architectural style of the interwar period in Canada. The Collegiate Gothic is a late variation of the Gothic Revival style, inspired by the university campuses of Oxford and Cambridge in England. The 1921 addition includes features typical of the Collegiate Gothic Style, such as red brick walls with limestone sills, symmetrical facades, crenellated parapets and decorative brickwork. The building features a symmetrical south façade, with evenly spaced windows and a central two-tiered frontispiece. The first tier of the frontispiece features a double door entrance flanked by side lights and a transom light surrounded by a limestone gothic arch with rock-faced limestone quoins and voussoirs, all capped by a crenellated limestone parapet wall. The second tier of the frontispiece is defined by a two-story, stacked staircase window with a crenellated limestone parapet wall along the roofline. The fenestration pattern on the south façade is symmetrical with four large five sash window openings flanking the frontispiece.

When the School was reopened in February 1922, it was renamed Tytler Public School in honour of Dr. William Tytler, former principle of the New East Ward School that was once located on the site. A forward-thinking educational reformer, he supported the inclusion of nature, music, and art in the school curriculum

(Stead, *A People's History*, 2002, p. 21) and tirelessly lobbied the Board of Education to construct schools that would not only accommodate the increasing number of Guelph's student population, but that were to the highest technical and architectural standards.

In the post-war period, the school continued its expansion with an auditorium erected in 1965/1966 designed by Guelph-based architect William Jarrett and constructed by Guelph-based contractor Angelo Battaglia. Three years later a library was designed by another Guelph-based architect, Jack Campbell; also constructed by Angelo Battaglia. Both the auditorium and library were constructed of a red brick that was compatible with the earlier portions of the school. However, both additions were designed in a utilitarian mid-century Modernist style that contrasts starkly with the ornamented Romanesque and Collegiate Gothic constructions of William Mahoney. The library features three narrow, floor-to-ceiling windows on the south façade, with an overhang above the parking lot supported by steel beams. The gymnasium is a large brick structure connected to the 1908 portion of the school with a glass encased, ground-level entryway facing Ontario Street.

### **Statement of Significance**

The subject property is worthy of designation under section 29, Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act because it meets five of the prescribed criteria for determining cultural heritage value or interest, according to Ontario Regulation 569/22. The heritage attributes of 131 Ontario Street display: design or physical, historical or associative, and contextual value.

### **Design/Physical Value**

The subject property meets Criterion 1 of 569/22 because it exhibits design or physical value as a rare example of the Romanesque Revival style of Edwardian educational architecture in the City of Guelph. Additionally, it is the only elementary school in the City of Guelph that combines the Romanesque Revival, Collegiate Gothic, and mid-century Modernist architectural styles in one structure.

### **Historical/Associative Value**

The subject property meets Criterion 4 of Ontario Regulation 569/22 because it has direct associations with the theme of education and industrialization in St. Patrick's Ward through the course of the twentieth century. Tytler's architectural expansion throughout the twentieth century attests to the growth of industry and influx of workers residing in St. Patrick's Ward. The six phases of school construction on the site (1878, 1908, 1912, 1921, 1965, and 1968) convey the history of St. Patrick's Ward throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The various phases of expansion directly parallel the expansion of industry and housing in St. Patrick's Ward during the twentieth century.

The subject property meets Criterion 5 of Ontario Regulation 569/22 because it yields information that contributes to an understanding of the St. Patrick's Ward Community. The children of St. Patrick's Ward were educated on this site from 1878-2013, and it has served the community as a meeting place and venue for public events. The five phases of construction that compose the current structure

yield information on the growth of the traditionally working-class St Patrick's Ward community.

The subject property meets Criterion 6 of Ontario Regulation 569/22 because it reflects the educational ideas of Inspector of Public Schools, Dr. William Tytler, the City of Guelph's most significant educational reformer of the early twentieth century. Additionally, the 1908, 1912, and 1921 constructions reflect the architectural work of William Mahoney, one of the most significant Guelph-based architects of the early twentieth century.

### **Contextual Value**

The subject property meets Criterion 6 of Ontario Regulation 569/22 because it is important in defining, maintaining, and supporting the character of the area. Tytler Public School is an integral component of the Ontario Street and Toronto Street streetscapes, and the Ward West cultural heritage landscape. Located in the heart of St. Patrick's Ward, the subject property represents one of the only institutional buildings in the neighborhood. With a height and massing significantly larger than most non-industrial structures in the area, the building is a landmark in the community.

### **Attachments**

Attachment-1: Historic Documents - Plans, Maps, Registers, Newspapers, Elevations

Attachment-2: Historic Photographs

Attachment-3: Current Exterior Photographs

Attachment-4: Current Interior Photographs

### **Departmental Approval**

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