035

Williams Building
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Alternate Names
School for the Deaf
R.J.D. Williams Provincial School for the Deaf

Architect(s)
Harold Dawson, Provincial Architect, Government of the Province of Saskatchewan Department of Public Works, Regina

 Builders
R.J. Arrand Contracting Co.

Construction Dates
January 1930-1931

Recognition
University of Saskatchewan ‘B’ Listed

1. Statement of Significance

The Williams Building is a handsome brick structure, designed in a simplified Collegiate Gothic style by the office of the Provincial Architect, Harold Dawson, and constructed in 1931. It was originally built as a School for the Deaf, commissioned by the provincial Department of Education. It was a residential school, with an enrolment of 114 students between the ages of 6 and 18. The school was used for education in vocational work as well as drama productions and sports. In 1990, deaf children were integrated into the public school system, and the building was sold to the University of Saskatchewan. The Williams Building has significant commemorative integrity in its exterior style and materials. The interior has lost most of its heritage value, as the commemorative integrity of its interior layout, stylistic elements and materials has been compromised by renovations.

Note: The Williams Building is configured with floors numbered Basement, First Floor, Second Floor and Third Floor. This report follows the same convention.
2. Character - Defining Elements

2.1 Materials

The exterior of the Williams Building is composed of a red-brown facing brick made at Claybank, Saskatchewan and a structural brick made at Estevan. The brick is accented with Tyndall stone and a precast concrete product made to resemble cut limestone. The brick and artificial stone are shown in Figure 1 and the Tyndall stone in Figure 2. The artificial stone around the windows as well as the partition blocks were made in Saskatoon. The Tyndall stone surrounding the doorways came from Manitoba. Exterior hardware such as down spouts and ventilation grilles are made of copper (Figure 1). Copper, Tyndall stone and limestone are all materials common to the main campus at the University of Saskatchewan, and are character-defining materials of the Williams Building. Slate tile roofing is also commonly found on campus. The Williams Building roof was originally slate, but has been replaced with asphalt shingles. Two newer additions have been built with slate tile (Figure 3). For further information on building stones used at the U of S, refer to 'Appendix: Stone'.

Oak (Figure 5) was used for doors and frames. All of the original oak material has been replaced except for the transoms and lites around the two northernmost entrances. The quarter-sawn oak around these doors and their stained-glass transoms are character-defining elements (Figure 6).

Figure 4. The Williams Building, October 1945. Photo A-1865, retrieved from http://spldatabase.saskatoonlibrary.ca/internet/LHR_RADQuery.htm

Figure 5. Oak door.

Figure 6. Stained glass.

Figure 7. Red clay terra cotta tile located inside the principal entry.

Figure 8. Brick wainscoting.
The interior of the Williams Building holds very little heritage value in its materials, as almost all of its original materials have been replaced. The red terracotta floor tiles in the main entrance hall are original. Shown in Figure 7, this tile is in excellent commemorative condition.

Some brick wainscoting is still found in the anterooms to the gymnasium (Figure 8). The walls of the gymnasium have been covered with carpet. The original brick wainscoting may exist beneath the carpet. Building plans show that brick wainscoting with plaster walls and ceiling were a common material throughout the entire building. Existing brick wainscoting is a character-defining element of heritage value. The rest of the materials of the auditorium have been compromised; the wooden floor has been replaced with a vinyl composite tile, and the original ceiling has been concealed by a dropped ceiling.

Many materials specified in the plans no longer exist in the building. The original floor plan show terrazzo and maple flooring. Concrete floors were used originally for the playrooms. Brick wainscoting with plaster walls and ceiling were common materials throughout the entire building. A proprietary material called ‘J.M. Flooring Tile’ was specified for the buildings corridors, but has since been removed. None of the original blackboards remain in the building.
2.2 Form

The Williams Building takes the form of a modified ‘F’ in plan, with double-loaded corridors serving the central volume of the building. As shown in Figure 9, the Williams Building is asymmetrical, with two principle entries. The Williams Building sits at a scale of three storeys above ground with a half-exposed basement level. The building is 28 metres in length. The height and length of the façade lend the building an imposing presence. The scale of the building has not changed, and as such is a character-defining element. Figure 10 shows the form of the building before renovations. Figure 11 shows the form of the building after the 1970’s additions were carried out.

None of the original form of the building has been demolished but several additions have been made. The most notable addition has been to the massing of the auditorium. When the space was renovated to become a gym, its area and volume became larger. Despite this change, the exterior form of the Williams Building retains good commemorative integrity, and its front elevation has changed very little.

2.3 Style

The Williams Building is Collegiate Gothic in its architectural style. Character-defining elements include the carved stone entries and their accompanying gothic arch transoms (Figure 12). String courses and quoining around the windows are also character-defining elements of the gothic style in good commemorative condition (Figures 12 & 13). The cut stone above the principal entry features trefoil and quatrefoil arches (Figure 15. The foliated cut stone ornamentation around the doors is also a character-defining element (Figure 16). The cut stone detailing serves to enhance the verticality of the building.

Figure 12. Gothic arch and transom.
Figure 13. Tyndall stone string course.
Figure 14. Stone quoins around windows, an archer slot window.
Figure 15. Gothic trefoil arches and the Sasaskchewan crest carved into the vertical stone elements surrounding the principal entry.
The roofline features a crenellated brick and stone parapet (Figure 17) on tower elements marking the two front entrances, gables and a pitched roof punctuated by dormer windows. The dormer windows have been maintained in their style but their materials have largely been replaced (Figure 18). The building also features narrow archer style windows surrounded by cut stone (Figure 14). The auditorium or gym still features double-height arched window openings, although the windows themselves have been replaced and covered with bars on the interior and the lower portion of the windows has been covered with brick, as shown in Figure 19. The arched windows lend character to both the interior and the exterior of the building. Figure 20 illustrates many of the character-defining elements of the building's exterior.

In the interior of the building, few gothic stylistic elements remain. The stained glass transoms above the entrances are visible from the interior of the building. Several other gothic character-defining elements have been lost to renovations. The auditorium used to have another set of arched windows that have been demolished. The building plans specified arched entries to the dormitory rooms located in the tower. With the reconfiguration of the tower these arched openings were removed.
2.4 Location

The location of the School for the Deaf, on Cumberland Avenue in Saskatoon, was a strategic choice (Figure 22). Dean R.J.D. Williams advised that the school not be in the capital (Regina), but in Saskatoon where it could govern itself with greater independence. Williams also related that he would like to see the school built near another school, to provide its students the opportunity for athletic competition. Williams recommended to J.G. Gardiner, then Premier of Saskatchewan, “that the Saskatchewan School for the Deaf be established in close proximity to the University of Saskatchewan. I cannot help but see a great future for the deaf if this plan is carried out.”

Another reason cited for this location was its proximity to the university farm. The education of deaf children at that time was often in vocational work, such as farming, so it was recommended that proximity to good farming methods, herds and flocks would be of value to the school.

2.5 Spatial Configuration

At the end of the 1960’s a total renovation of the school was announced and in the early 1970’s architects Holliday-Scott, Paine and Associates undertook this work. An elevator and stairwell were added to the south end of the building, which has affected the layout on all levels. To the north side of the building, a small addition featuring a ground floor loading dock was added. Figure 23 shows the building’s exterior before the renovations. The high chimney protruding from the basement boiler room was removed. The south facing windows were all covered by additions.

The basement originally had large open areas for the boys play room and carpentry shop. These have been enclosed and the basement is now substantially reconfigured. A daycare is now located in the south-west corner of the basement. Figure 24 shows the original configuration of the basement.

Figure 21. Gothic arch transom.

Figure 22. The location of the Williams Building is indicated in green on a contemporary campus plan.

Figure 23. A 1949 photo of the building shows its exterior before the 1970’s renovations. Retrieved from *The First Fifty Years: R.J.D. Williams Provincial School For the Deaf*. 
The most notable change to the spatial configuration of the building has been the expansion of the auditorium on the main floor to become a gymnasium. The expansion saw the removal of several south-facing arched windows. The windows still existing in the space have had their bottom portions filled in with brick. The stage and the open gallery overlooking this space from the second floor have also been removed. A staircase at the west end of the gymnasium has been added. Figure 25 shows an interior view of how the auditorium was originally configured with a stage.

Figure 26 shows the original main floor plan including the layout of the auditorium. Figure 27 shows the expansion and reconfiguration that converted the auditorium into a gymnasium. Outside the auditorium, the first floor has retained its configuration, arranged around a double-loaded corridor. Some rooms have been expanded through the deletion of partition walls. The northeast portion of the main floor has seen significant reconfiguration with its conversion from a dining area to a series of research gymnasiums and offices.

The second and third floors of the Williams Building have retained their configuration as a series of rooms arrayed along a central double-loaded corridor (Figure 28).

Figure 24. The original basement configuration of the Williams Building. Retrieved from Facilities Management Division Asset Record System, File WILL-4-T.

Figure 25. A photo, ca. 1945, shows how the auditorium was originally configured. Retrieved from The First Fifty Years: R.J.D. Williams Provincial School For the Deaf.
Figure 26. The original first floor plan of the Williams Building. Retrieved from Facilities Management Division Asset Record System, File WILL-5-T.

Figure 27. The expansion of the auditorium, L to R: the basement plan, the first floor plan. Retrieved from Facilities Management Division Asset Record System, File WILL-147-T.
2.6 Systems

The structure of the Williams Building appears from the original drawings to be a cast-in-place concrete frame. Floors are composed of cast-in-place concrete on a ribbed metal lath overlaid with steel tile and concrete. The foundation walls and footings are in cast-in-place concrete, and roofs are framed in a combination of steel and wood. Figure 29 shows a typical exterior wall section.

2.7 Use(s)

Owing to the specific training required for deaf children, the School for the Deaf originally accommodated a wide assortment of uses. The curriculum was based on vocational training, including a broad range of activities such as carpentry, leatherwork, book binding, etching, printing, drafting, painting, sewing and millinery. These activities were all housed in the basement and had their own dedicated shops or labs. To support them, the basement also held a fitting room, a repair department, as well as a boiler and fuel room. Large play rooms were also contained within the basement. Many other types of vocational training were undertaken there including hairdressing, cooking, bee keeping, gardening, welding and meat cutting (School for the Deaf Book Committee, 1983). Figure 30 shows students working in a metal shop in the basement of the Williams Building.
No physical evidence of the former uses or their configurations remains in the building. The first floor of the building housed more common uses. The auditorium held social functions such as performances, graduations and awards ceremonies. Figure 31 shows the auditorium being used for a drama production. The first floor also held classrooms, and a general office with a vault. Figure 32 shows a classroom in use. The first floor is still used for office space and classrooms; the vault is still in place. The northeast portion of the first floor was originally used as a kitchen, servery and dining room. A hall and museum were also located here. The kitchen, hall and museum have been replaced by research gymnasias. Figure 33 shows the northeast portion of the first floor being used as a dining room.

The second and third floors of the building were both used as dormitories (Figure 34). This use has been discontinued and these floors now contain classrooms and offices.

Although the specific uses of this building associated with its history as a school for the deaf have ended, it continues to be used for similar educational purposes.
2.8 Cultural & Chronological Associations

The Williams Building is associated most notably with its namesake, Rupert J.D. Williams. Williams was the dean of the school from its opening in 1931 until 1963. Williams was rendered deaf in his childhood by spinal meningitis and attended Manitoba’s school for the deaf. He moved to Saskatoon in 1927 and undertook a review of the education of deaf children in Saskatchewan. Williams died in 1973. In 1982, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the school, the building was renamed in his honor.

The original function of the Williams Building associates it with education of the deaf in Saskatchewan. The sign above the door of the school is a character-defining element marking this cultural association (Figure 35).

James Thomas Milton Anderson was the Premier of Saskatchewan at the time of the construction of the Williams Building. On September 27, 1930 Anderson laid the building’s cornerstone (Figure 36). A granite monument to honor Premier Anderson was erected in front of the building (Figure 37).
3. Associated Objects

Behind the cornerstone is a cavity containing a time capsule (School for the Deaf Book Committee, 1983). The cornerstone and the contents of the time capsule are heritage objects associated with the building (Figure 36).

4. Supporting Documents

Saskatchewan Archives Board. Ed. Department of Education (15) General Correspondence (1922-1940).

Facilities Management Division (2011). Asset Resource Database [Data File]. Retrieved from \usask\fmddfs\files\iis\IIS_Public\ARS.


5. Summary of Character - Defining Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>brick walls, tyndall stone decoration and trim, oak doors &amp; millwork,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>stained glass windows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form</td>
<td>scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style</td>
<td>gothic arch entries, cut stone arches, arched windows, crenellation,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>parapets (battlements), archer style windows</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spatial Configuration</td>
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<td>sloped roofs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uses</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>servery, vocational training, play rooms, sick wards, auditorium/gymnasium</td>
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<td>Cultural &amp;</td>
<td>J.T.M. Anderson, R.J.D Williams, sign reading ‘School for the Deaf’,</td>
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<td>cornerstone &amp; time capsule</td>
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