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Little Stone School House
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Alternate Names
Victoria School

Designer
Alexander Marr

Builders
Alexander Marr, Nutana settlers

Construction Dates
1887

Recognition
Provincial Heritage Property, Designated in 1982
Municipal Heritage Property, Designated in 1967
University of Saskatchewan ‘A’ Listed

1. Statement of Significance

In 1887 the Saskatoon Board of Trustees secured five lots for a permanent school site. Later that year, the original Victoria School (now known as the Little Stone School House) became Saskatoon’s first permanent school and its first public building in any capacity. By 1905, the one-room school house was no longer needed, as a two room school had been built to accommodate its growing student population. In 1909, a new Victoria School was built, assuming the function of the Little Stone School in its original location. Figure 1 depicts the larger Victoria School with the Little Stone School in the foreground, around 1910.

W.P. Bates proposed the relocation of the original Victoria School from Nutana to the University of Saskatchewan. In 1911 the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (I.O.D.E.) Golden West Chapter, raised funds to preserve and relocate the building. Its stones were carefully dismantled, numbered and reassembled at their new location. The Little Stone School House is one of two surviving buildings constructed by Alexander Marr, an early and influential citizen of Nutana.

Figure 1. The newly constructed Victoria School (centre) circa 1910, with the Little Stone School House (right). To the left is a two room school house, built after the Little Stone School and before Victoria School, ca. 1910. Photo A-889 retrieved from http://scaa.sk.ca/gallery/uofs_buildings/.

Figure 2. June 2 1967, the Little Stone School reopens to the public. Photo A-4559 retrieved from http://scaa.sk.ca/gallery/uofs_buildings/.
In 1965 The Saskatoon Council of Women raised money for the renovation of the building as part of a Centennial Project. Figure 2 shows the reopening ceremony held on June 2, 1967. In 1981 the University of Saskatchewan took over the operation of the building (Figure 3). The Little Stone School House was recognized as a Municipal Heritage Site in 1967 and a Provincial Heritage Property on May 17, 1982.

2. Character - Defining Elements

2.1 Materials

The exterior of the Little Stone School Houses is constructed of prairie stones that were collected by settlers at the time of construction. Pink, red and gray granite, dark grey and black diorite and gabbro and dolomitic limestone or ‘greystone’ are all visible on the building’s exterior.* Since the settlers gathered the stones, the building is a product of community labour. Wood was used for the single door and the window frames and trim. A brick chimney protrudes from a roof shingled with wood.

The interior of the school retains its wooden floor. The interior walls are plaster, the lower portion of the interior walls are faced with painted wood. The window shutters are made of painted wood as well. Figure 4 shows these elements.

*For further information on building stones used at the University of Saskatchewan, refer to 'Appendix: Stone'.

Figure 3. May 12, 1981, President L. F. Kristjanson receives the key to the Victoria School House from E. Hirsch, President of the UFLSS Society. Also present, left to right, are F. Andrews, N. Dennison, and E. Holmes. Photo A-6666 Retrieved from http://scaa.sk.ca/gallery/uofs_buildings/.

Figure 4. Wood-paneled interior wall and wooden floor. In the background a wooden door is visible. The photo also features some objects associated with the historical period of the school house such as a lunch bucket, school bell, chamber pot and spectacles.

Figure 5. Teacher George Horn with his class in front of The Little Stone School House ca.1894 in its original location on Broadway Avenue. Photo LH-1321, retrieved from http://spldatabase.saskatoonlibrary.ca/
2.2 Form

The form of the building reflects the original intention of its builders to quickly and effectively provide a permanent space for education. The one storey building consists of a single room with a hipped roof; all that was needed to fulfill the purpose. Although the school house has been relocated to its current site at the university, its modest height and scale allow it to inconspicuously coexist with the neighbouring neo gothic buildings. Refer to Figure 5.

2.3 Style

The Little Stone School House cannot be classified as belonging to any particular architectural style, but is an example of the simple vernacular buildings typical of the early settlement of Saskatoon and western Canada. The use of stone would have differentiated it as an institutional building among the houses built in the neighbourhood of Nutana at the time of its construction. In its current location at the university, the stonework of the facade makes the building sympathetic to the rest of the campus, but its small scale and lack of decoration distinguish it from its current surroundings.

2.4 Location

The Little Stone School house was originally located at what is now the corner of Broadway Avenue and 12th Street, a spot known as the 'Five Corners.' It stood here until the early 1900’s, originally serving the hamlet of Nutana. The relocation of the school house is an aspect of its history that contributes to its character and heritage value. In 1909, the building was no longer required for its original purpose, and faced demolition. W.P. Bates proposed that it be relocated. The local chapter of the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (I.O.D.E.) raised funds for the undertaking and in 1911 the stones of the School House were carefully numbered, disassembled and reassembled on the campus of the University of Saskatchewan (Figure 6). The Little Stone School House currently resides on the U of S Campus adjacent to College Drive. It is framed by the Health Sciences, Dentistry and St. Andrew’s College Buildings.

As Figure 7 demonstrates, the Little Stone School House bears reminders of its relocation. In at least one instance, a number is visible, as a reminder of the process of relocation.
2.5 Spatial Configuration

The ‘one room schoolhouse’, of which the Little Stone School House is a typical example, is a building type common to the early history of Saskatchewan. Therefore, the spatial configuration of the Little Stone School House is an element of historical value with respect to its prairie context.

The eastern and western walls of the school feature windows which would originally have provided the main light source for the space. Figure 9 shows a window complemented by a gas lamp with a reflector, which would have supplemented natural light at night. The use of natural lighting is a character-defining element.

The building is accessible through a single door on its north face. Upon entrance, visitors are greeted by a small vestibule. Beyond the vestibule is the single classroom. The south side of the school is windowless, providing an uninterrupted surface for the blackboard. This dictates the orientation of the room’s furnishings towards the south of the room so that pupils face towards the chalkboard. Figure 8 shows the spatial configuration of this ‘one room school house’, characteristic of this type of building. The desks were arranged on skids so they could be pushed easily into the ante room to make space for social events.

Figure 9. A wooden window frame and shutters. These shuttered windows allowed for the space’s illumination. When natural light was not accessible, gas lamps with reflectors such as the one pictured would have to be used.

Figure 8. The spatial configuration of the one room school house. Desks oriented towards the chalkboard with the stove in the centre of the room.
2.6 Systems

The masonry walls of the Little Stone School House provide its primary structure. They also help to define its historical character, since load bearing masonry walls were a common feature of early architecture in the province, but are now increasingly rare. The roof structure is not visible, but is assumed to be a system of hipped rafters. The Little Stone School House has maintained the integrity of its structural system.

The school house was heated by a single pot bellied stove. The original stove was located against the back wall of the room. The current stove is not original to the building, but is contemporary with it, and was donated by Mr. J.J. Black of Paynton. It has been refitted to burn gas and now sits in the centre of the room, due to modern regulatory requirements. A large stove pipe conceals the gas supply line. (Refer to Figure 8.)

2.7 Uses

The Little Stone School House is the oldest public building in Saskatoon. At its Nutana location, this building served not only as a school, but also as a meeting house, election centre and dance hall. The School House reportedly had a small collection of books for public loan in the early days. The first Anglican Communion in the city was held here. It served this multi-purpose function from its founding in 1887 until 1905 when a two room school house was built. (See Figure 1). After its relocation, the Little Stone School House was used for storage by the University of Saskatchewan for many years. It was refurbished in 1965 and opened to the public and school tours in 1967. In 1981 the university took over its operations. The building is currently used for tours during the spring and summer.

2.8 Cultural & Chronological Associations

Victoria School was the heart of the neighbourhood of Nutana for a number of years and can be associated with that community. It can also be associated with another municipal heritage property, the Marr Residence. The Marr Residence and the Little Stone School are the only two buildings built by Alexander Marr still surviving. Marr was a prominent Nutana resident. Being one of the largest homes at the time, the Marr Residence was requisitioned and used as a field hospital for Canadian Militia wounded in the North-West Rebellion of 1885. The hospital closed in 1885, shortly before Marr built the Little Stone School. The Marr Residence is shown in Figure 10.
3. Associated Objects

Unfortunately none of the original furnishings of the Little Stone School remain in place. When the Saskatoon Council of women refurbished the building, they collected and furnished it with period objects and furniture. As many of these objects came from other prairie school districts, they associate the Little Stone School with the wider history of education on the prairies.

A plaque associates the Little Stone School with the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire, who undertook the relocation of the school (Figure 11). The plaque commemorates an important time in the history of the Little Stone School House when it was decided that the building had heritage value and should be saved rather than demolished. Figure 12 shows another plaque associating the building with one of its contributors. The Union Jack flag visible in Figures 13 and 15 was donated by the Golden West chapter of the I.O.D.E.

Other associated objects include the student desks which were donated by the Saskatoon public school board and West Saskatoon School District of Langham (Figure 13). Most of these desks bear the marks of heavy use over the years by many generations of students.

The teacher’s desk pictured in Figure 14 was donated by Miss Pat Hanna of Elstow. The desk was used in the Elstow town school for many years. The chair in Figure 14 originally belonged to Mr. W.M. Holliston, the former principal of Buena Vista Elementary School and the namesake of Holliston School. It was donated by Mr. Tom Porteous, principal of Caswell School.
The pump organ pictured in Figure 15 was donated by Mrs. Jean Foster who attended the Little Stone School in her youth. The organ was made in Detroit in 1883 and sent by train to Moose Jaw in 1888. Railways did not serve Saskatoon until 1890, therefore the organ was brought to Sutherland from Moose Jaw by horse and wagon.

The clock visible in Figure 13 was used in Victoria School for many years. Also visible are pictures which define the character of the space. The school houses a hand painted picture of Queen Victoria signed by the monarch herself, a picture of the Fathers of Confederation, a picture of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, a family photograph of the first teacher, Mr. James Leslie, a photograph of Sir John A. MacDonald donated by John G. Diefenbaker and several photographs of the school. Photographs of King George V and Queen Mary originated in the Delisle-Donovan area. On the opposite wall are maps and map cases (visible in Figure 16) donated by the West Saskatoon School Unit.
Smaller items associated with the history of the school are a pencil box and a pen, pen holder, paste bottles and a round ruler. An exercise book and report card are also within this building. These objects exist in a fragile state of commemorative integrity and are housed within the display case shown in Figure 17. The display case holds additional associated items: shiny rocks, bird’s nests, lumps of coloured glass, and a skull pierced by an arrowhead have all been viewed as objects used for show and tell. The display case also includes a slate used in the Little Stone School in 1902 (Figure 18). Figure 19 shows a lesson book used in the school in 1899.

Further items of heritage value inside the school are the lamps, blackboards, globes, a model of a red river cart, several slates, pencils, easy readers, primers and copy books. A very old pencil box was found on the original site of the Little Stone School and donated. A pen, pen holder, two tuning forks, a pail and cup for drinking water, an old earthen ware drinking fountain, washbasin, towel roller and lunch pails are all on display. Two bookcases hold an impressive collection of historically significant literature including instructional books dating back to 1875.
4. Supporting Documents


Macpherson, J. (n.d.). A member of 1895’s Grade 4 class comes to visit.


Saskatoon Council of Women. (n.d.). *Background Information*. Saskatoon, SK: Saskatoon Council of Women.


5. Summary of Character - Defining Elements

Materials
- prairie stone walls (pink, red, gray granite)
- grey and black diorite
- greystone
- wooden door, trim, window frames, shutters and shingles
- brick chimney

Form
- hipped roof
- one storey single massing

Location
- building relocated to University of Saskatchewan in 1911

Spatial Configuration
- one room school house
- vestibule
- natural lighting (originally no electricity)
- orientation towards chalkboard
- stove as heat source

Structure
- load-bearing stone walls

Uses
- education (first school in Saskatoon and early library)
- first public building in Saskatoon (meeting house, dance hall, election centre, first Anglican communion in city)
- museum

Cultural & Chronological Associations
- see uses above
- Marr residence