

**Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador
Building Report**



Researcher: Deborah A. O’Rielly
Date: July 26, 2006
City: St. John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador
Address: 50 Parade Street and Merrymeeting Road
Building Name: Normal School/ Memorial University College/
Fisheries College/ Avalon Community College

Building Information

Date of Construction: 1924, 1933, 1955
Architect: A.J.C. Paine and J.H. Brown, Associated Architects;
Fetherstonhaugh, Durnford, Bolton and Chadwick,
Architects
Builder: Horwood Lumber Company, Colonial Construction
Company Limited
Name of Original Owner: Government of Newfoundland
Notable Subsequent Owners: Government of Newfoundland and Labrador
Notable Occupants: Normal School, Memorial University College,
Vocational High School, Fisheries College, Avalon
Community College, Royal Newfoundland
Constabulary
Building Use: Post Secondary/ Educational Institution
Major Building Material: concrete, sandstone, brick
Alterations: west extension added 1933, east extension added
1955

History

The opening of the Normal School/ Memorial University College in 1925 was a result of several years of effort by government and educators to provide quality instruction in a non-denominational system, and to improve teacher training. At the close of the 19th century, Newfoundland Prime Minister William Whiteway broached the topic of improved education for the country and reached out to the population for ideas in the matter. The purpose was to expand on the deficient system currently in place, and to reach more of Newfoundland's citizens by making education more accessible and affordable.

Newfoundland legislation in 1893 created the Council of Higher Education (CHE) and it was comprised of nearly two dozen representatives from the spectrum of religious interests in Newfoundland at that time; namely Roman Catholic, Church of England, and Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist (or more generally Protestant). At the turn of the 20th century it became apparent that students of Newfoundland schools were at an academic disadvantage when applying to Universities abroad and in Canada. With the focus in mind to improve the lots of Newfoundland youngsters the CHE initiated many programs to this end, including when, in 1917, all denominations came together in support of an experimental summer school for training teachers: a Normal School. At the same time the CHE gave official approval for the colonial curriculum to be expanded to two years of University level courses, though it was to take several more years for this to materialize, due to the onset of World War One.

Though slowed by war, the momentum was not stopped. By 1917 an interdenominational Summer Normal School was running, with representatives of the various churches taking turns in the principal's chair. It was so highly successful that it was repeated the following summer in 1918. By 1920 Government enacted legislation which created the first Department of Education and provided for the establishment of a non-denominational, permanent Normal school. The first Principal was Arthur Barnes, who was also the first secular Minister of Education, and he oversaw the construction of the new, non-denominational school on the corner of Parade Street and Merrymeeting Road between 1921 and 1923. The building was constructed as a memorial to those Newfoundlanders who served in World War One and plans were drawn up by Ottawa architect A.J.C. Paine on May 7, 1921.

The building was to grow over its lifetime, as did interest and subsequently, enrolment in post secondary programs. It has housed many schools, initially the Normal School, then Memorial University College, a Vocational High School, Fisheries College and Avalon Community College. Today it is being used by the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary.

The Buildings

Prior to its permanent location on Parade Street and Merrymeeting Road, the Normal School consisted of two rooms rented in the Church of England Synod Building. In the fall of 1924 a new, two acre campus was opened, funded partially by the Government of Newfoundland and partially by a \$75, 000/ 5 year donation from the Carnegie Corporation. Eventually to become Memorial University College, today it comprises three buildings, a central, Classical Revival style building (the original Normal School), a west wing built in 1933 as an extension of Memorial University College, and an east wing, Shop Annex for the Vocational High School/ Fisheries College, constructed 1955. These buildings stand today as physical reminders of the growth and expansion of the post-secondary education system in Newfoundland throughout the twentieth century.

Normal School/ Memorial University College



Architect: A.J.C. Paine, Ottawa
Builder : Horwood Lumber Company Limited, St. John's
Date of Construction: 1924

The first building constructed was a Normal School for the training of teachers and was located on two acres of land, on the corner of Merrymeeting Road and Parade Street in downtown St. John's. The specifications for this original building were destroyed in the shipwreck of an unknown railway steamer to Newfoundland, but copies of the architect's blueprints still exist.

The architecture of the building is done in the Classical Revival style, with a seven bay façade. The Normal School is constructed of sturdy and enduring materials such as concrete, stone, brickwork and terracotta tile, while the trim and columns are made from cut sandstone. Originally a single building, it was symmetrical and balanced and covered an area of 20,000 square feet of floor space.

The outside walls were made of poured concrete; the floors were poured concrete beams and slabs in part, while the partitions were generally done in terracotta. The roof is made of steel beam construction with cinder beams for grading. The exterior façade shows sunken panels and quoining at either side with a cornice moulding extending the perimeter of the eaves. The end wings and the main door are set off by rounded pediments crowning the entablature of the three sections. The main entrance is set off with thick Tuscan Order columns, a plain entablature with cornice moulding and a carved relief of the British Coat of Arms in the tympanum of the extended entranceway. The main entry stairs are open at the bottom and narrow as they approach the main door, and there is a wide, closed railing on both sides of the stairs. The door itself is double, French, made of wood, with a transom above it and the trim comprises cut, dressed sandstone with detailed moulding. Surmounting the door is an open-topped, arched pediment encompassing a crest. This crest is carved in relief and is symbolic of the British Monarchy represented by a Tudor crown. It also features two torches of learning, symbolizing the light of knowledge; there are three floral emblems of England, Scotland and Ireland; and the letters "G" and "R" signifying King George V who was monarch in 1923.

The windows of this building are in their original locations and shapes, but have been modernized. They are nine pane and six pane windows, which are the original configurations. The front of the building also maintains the original dual entrances – the men's entrance and the women's entrance. These remain in place today and are low, flat roofed extended porches with

double doors, plain, moulded trim and a keystone. Each entrance sits just below an arched window. All windows have sandstone sills and lack trim. The sides of this building show what used to be regular fenestration of the windows, though on the western side they have been partially covered by the western 1933 extension and some openings are enclosed in boards. The eastern side, too, has an extension, but not as large as the opposite end and therefore the windows there are still exposed and in their original location and fenestration. A sandstone stringcourse, which acts as a sill, extends the perimeter of the original structure.

The rear of this building reveals, to a greater extent, the later additions of the west and east wings. Original to this side are the tall, arched window openings with keystones and sandstone trim, including the wide lower trim. The rear door resembles the windows in size, shape and decoration, though a modern, wooden staircase leads to this door. A wide rain sill constructed in sandstone runs the perimeter of the rear façade.

Condition of Building:

This building is presently in good structural condition. The front steps, made of granite, are showing some wear, vertical cracking, and slight deterioration. There seem to be no cracks in the masonry and the sandstone appears to be in solid condition. There is some mildew buildup on the sandstone near the main entrance where two large maple trees shade it. Some windows are cracked and broken.

The West Extension, Memorial University College



Architect: A.J.C. Paine and J.H. Brown, Montreal
Builder: Horwood Lumber Company, St. John's
Date of Construction: 1933

By the late 1920s enrolment was increasing steadily. However, with the onset of the Second World War the space in the school was at a premium, as the basement of the building was used during the war effort as a hospital; the grounds used for military drills and marching. The College appealed to the government to build an additional wing using funds from a trust account established for that purpose. The architect who designed the first building set to work to design an addition that was sympathetic in architecture to the original building.

The West Extension was added to the western wall of the original building. It was built in the Classical Revival style of architecture and reflects the design of the original building, with an extended bay with a recessed panel and an arched pediment at the roof eave. This extension was joined to the western façade of the main building and extends westerly on Parade Street, then borders on Merrymeeting Road on the north side. The westernmost façade has five bays with windows of various sizes, in their original openings and fenestrations. Each bay is

delineated by a brick pilaster and a stringcourse of sandstone running above the windows. The main floor windows feature three arched windows and openings with keystones. The north façade, on Merrymeeting Road, has a twelve bay façade. Multipaned windows are organized in a regular fenestration pattern, the upper windows noted by the small brick sills and stringcourse above; the lower windows set off by the small sills and sandstone squares in the upper corners. This side of the building has extended bays on each end, and the northeast corner extends south to join with the main building.

The main entrance to the west extension is located at the front of the property. Two wooden and glass panel doors with a transom are sheltered by a covered, open porch. The porch entrance is set at an angle against the building and has heavy cornice moulding, while two pillars and two pilasters made of sandstone support the structure. Each of these pillars is designed in the Tuscan Order, resembling the main door pillars, and they rest on cushion bases.

Condition of Building

This building appears to be structurally sound and there are no visible cracks in the brickwork. The front bay eave has some rust running down the face, due to deterioration of the window metalwork above it. The main entrance sandstone pillars have been painted. The porch roof needs paint and flashing repaired.

The East Extension, Shop Annex



Architect: Fetherstonhaugh, Durnford, Bolton and Chadwick, Montreal
Builder: Colonial Construction Company Limited, St. John's
Date of Construction: 1955

In 1946 a proposal to Commission of Government brought forward the idea of an extension for the Memorial University College, since attendance was increasing exponentially. It was also a way to build a second memorial to those Newfoundlanders who fell in World War Two. The requirements of the College at the time saw a pressing need for a library, additional classrooms, offices, science labs and additional rooms for students. Consultations began in 1948.

By this time the Normal School was fully assimilated into the Memorial University College syllabus and the college was in the process of achieving the status of degree conferring

institution. One of the first acts of the new Provincial Government of Newfoundland was to elevate the college to the status of Memorial University of Newfoundland on August 13, 1949. While the University needed more space, eventually it was determined to build a larger institution on Elizabeth Avenue in St. John's. The need for an additional east extension was still desired, though. The buildings on Parade Street were to house a Vocational High School and the extension was to contain a diesel shop, machine shop, automotive shop, classrooms, lockers, toilets and tool cribs to expand the curriculum into apprentice workshops. It was decided that a one storey, concrete poured building would be erected. The roof trusses had to be strong enough to hold a travelling crane that was to be used by the automotive and diesel shops.

This building, the Shop Annex, differs vastly from the previous two buildings erected on the same grounds. It is a one storey flat roofed building with garage doors at the front façade and long, low windows set in recessed concrete panels along the eastern and northern sides. The Shop Annex lacks any ornamentation, suggesting its utilitarian purpose. It is joined to the main building at the northeast corner and the east and north walls overlap by a thickness of the wall of the new building (thirty centimetres). The reasoning was twofold: if a second floor was to be erected it would make the job easier; and the heating system would be protected from exterior elements if it could pass through the wall from the main system in the main building. The roof trusses and walls were designed to hold a second storey.

Condition of Building

The exterior concrete shows some signs of cracking and old repairs to cracks. The windows appear to be in good condition and in their original openings and fenestrations. Garage doors appear to be modern. Exterior concrete should be cleaned and repainted.

Sources

1. Architects Blueprints, Provincial Archives RG 43/41/83, 1923.
2. Baker, Melvin, and Graham, Jean: Celebrate Memorial!: A Pictorial History of Memorial University of Newfoundland, Division of University Relations for Memorial University's Anniversaries Committee, 1999.
3. "Daily News", September, 1925
4. Department of Works, files, Provincial Archives GN 73/2/B, Boxes 85, 86
5. "Evening Telegram", September 1925
6. MacLeod, Malcolm: A Bridge Built Halfway: A History of Memorial University College, 1925-1950, McGill-Queens' University Press, 1990.