

On November 22, 1970, a provincial historical plaque commemorating the oldest school building in Toronto was unveiled on the grounds of the Enoch Turner Schoolhouse Museum, 106 Trinity Street, Toronto. This is one in a series of plaques erected throughout the province by the Archaeological and Historic Sites Board of Ontario, and latterly by the Ontario Heritage Trust.

The unveiling ceremony was arranged and sponsored by the Enoch Turner Schoolhouse Foundation; John Pope acted as program chairman. Speakers included Professor J.M.S. Careless of the Archaeological and Historic Sites Board; Henry Price, MPP St. David; N. Godderham, chairman of the Schoolhouse Foundation and a descendant of one of the main subscribers to Trinity Church. The plaque was unveiled by Professor Eric Arthur, noted architectural historian.

In June 2009, a bilingual plaque was installed. The new plaque reads:

ENOCH TURNER SCHOOLHOUSE

In 1849, this building opened as Ward Street School, Toronto's first free school. Enoch Turner, a wealthy local brewer, financed the construction and operation of this school on land donated by Little Trinity Church. Its students were neighbourhood children of poor immigrant families, many of whom were Irish. The Toronto Board of Education assumed responsibility in 1851 when municipally funded education was adopted, and renamed it Trinity Street School. In 1859, the school moved to a new location and this structure and property were returned to Little Trinity Church. Following the addition of the west wing in 1869, the building served as a Sunday school and community hall. Threatened with demolition in the late 1960s, the Gothic Revival schoolhouse was saved and restored by concerned citizens including architect Eric Arthur. It re-opened as a museum in 1972 and remains the oldest school structure in Toronto.

ÉCOLE ENOCH TURNER

En 1849, cet édifice est inauguré en tant que Ward Street School. Il s'agit de la première école libre de Toronto. Enoch Turner, un brasseur local fortuné, finance la construction et le fonctionnement de cette école érigée sur un terrain gracieusement cédé par la Little Trinity Church. Les élèves sont des enfants du quartier issus de familles d'immigrés démunies, d'origine irlandaise pour la

plupart. Le conseil scolaire de Toronto assume la responsabilité de cette école en 1851, lorsque le financement de l'éducation est pris en charge par la municipalité, et la rebaptise Trinity Street School. En 1859, l'établissement déménage et ce bâtiment, ainsi que la propriété, sont restitués à la Little Trinity Church. Après l'ajout de l'aile ouest en 1869, cet édifice est utilisé en tant qu'école du dimanche et salle communautaire. Menacée de démolition à la fin des années 1960, l'école de style néogothique est sauvée et restaurée par des citoyens dévoués, dont l'architecte Eric Arthur. Elle rouvre ses portes en 1972, en tant que musée, et demeure à ce jour le plus ancien bâtiment scolaire de Toronto.

Historical background

At a meeting held on July 12, 1842, certain members of the Church of England in Canada who resided in the city of Toronto decided to build a new church and a school to serve Protestants who lived in the part of the city between Berkeley Street and the Don River. Most of this area had originally been a Crown Reserve known as the Government Park and used, among other things, to pasture the horses and oxen belonging to the Crown. About 1819, the park was granted to trustees as endowment for a hospital, and within 10 years, streets began to be laid out in the southern part. Certain trades, such as brickmaking and the burning of lime, had been carried on in the area for many years. There were possibly already a few cottages for workmen along the road connecting King Street with the Don Bridge (then regarded as part of Kingston Road and now part of King Street). No buildings, however, are shown in the park in 1816 and any existing in 1827 were recently built.

By the early 1830s, however, the picture was changing. The layout of streets had been pushed northward for some distance, building was going on in the park and some important new industries had been located there. Enoch Turner had started his large brewery on Palace Street (Front Street East) near the foot of Parliament Street and, in 1832, Gooderham and Worts finished their "lofty windmill" on the shore further to the southeast and began to grind flour; they soon added a distillery beside it. These and some other craft shops gave work to a number of men who began to settle in the park. As far north as North Park Street (now part of Queen Street East), there was a sprinkling of buildings, though beyond that they grew fewer and more widely scattered.

As late as 1834, when York became the City of Toronto, this area was outside the town in "the Liberties." But by 1842, with a larger population and built-up area, the south part was inside the city limits. The city then extended from the line of Bathurst Street to the Don River, its northern limit running just south of Dundas Street, except between Victoria and Church

streets. The part of the park within the city was divided between the wards of St. Lawrence and St. David. The new church was intended to serve the more populous section included in the St. Lawrence Ward, though it was, of course, realized that the parish could soon extend northward.

Sufficient funds were raised by subscription for Trinity Church, King Street, to be finished by 1844. Among the larger subscribers were Enoch Turner and the Gooderham Family. By the time a good-sized and not unhandsome church had been built, however, no funds remained to found a school. There were at that time no free schools in the province. The 1841 act had been an improvement on the first Common Schools Act of 1816, increasing the funds granted to common schools, setting up District Boards of Education and attempting to improve the quality of teaching. But fees paid by parents and any arrangement for a few free pupils were on a purely local and voluntary basis. Even the much more comprehensive act of 1846 had still only instituted "rate bills," charged against the parents of children attending school, with some more definite provision for children of indigent parents.

An amendment to the Common Schools Act of 1846 was passed in 1847, making it possible for incorporated towns and cities in Canada West to raise funds for schools by assessments on all real property, thus in effect making all common schools free. Acceptance of such assessments by corporations was voluntary, however, and the Town of Niagara seems to have been the only one to accept in 1848. The City Council of Toronto not only refused to assess real property for schools, but did not provide any other means of raising the funds required by the Board of Education. As a result, all common schools in Toronto were closed for a year from June 20, 1848.

This crisis seems to have determined Enoch Turner to build a school for Trinity parish that should be absolutely free and open to all pupils. The site was on the church property, just behind the church on Trinity Street. The whole cost of building seems to have been borne by Turner himself. The little Gothic schoolhouse was finished in November 1848. It is said to have been the first parochial school in the province. It was very likely the first entirely free school, though not, perhaps, the first free public school. When it opened, there were 240 pupils and writing desks for 80.

The difficulties over the Toronto primary schools were resolved after a different council had been elected and the School Act of 1850 had been passed. In 1851, the Toronto Board of Education took over Trinity Street School as one of its regular free primary schools for both boys and girls. The Board of Public Schools, in its report for 1858, recorded that Trinity Street School then had two female teachers and 137 pupils, both boys and girls. The work covered ranged from "in the alphabet" to the Third Book. Unfortunately, this seems to be the only detailed report available in the records of the Toronto Board of Education, though these

records show that this school continued to remain in use for many years, perhaps until Sackville Public School was built in 1887.

When it was given up as a public school, the building reverted to Trinity parish. It seems to have been slightly enlarged during its use as a public school, but the simple, early Gothic Revival style was retained in the additions. It was used for a time as a Sunday school and then as a church hall for a variety of community activities, concerts and lectures.

With the creation of the Enoch Turner Schoolhouse Foundation in 1971, the old schoolhouse was outfitted as an early Canadian schoolroom to be used by the children of the area. The Toronto Board of Education and the Junior League of Toronto Incorporated assisted in this project, as well as in attempts to put the West Hall Auditorium into use as a community centre. The Enoch Turner Schoolhouse now contains a museum as well as the re-created 19th-century classroom, and is visited by thousands of Toronto schoolchildren every year.



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