



An agency of the Government of Ontario

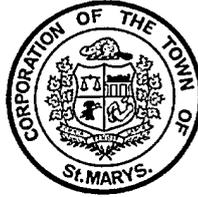


Un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

This document was retrieved from the Ontario Heritage Act Register, which is accessible through the website of the Ontario Heritage Trust at **[www.heritagetrust.on.ca](http://www.heritagetrust.on.ca)**.

---

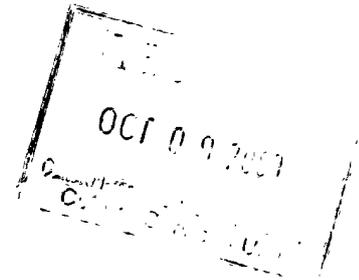
Ce document est tiré du registre aux fins de la *Loi sur le patrimoine de l'Ontario*, accessible à partir du site Web de la Fiducie du patrimoine ontarien sur **[www.heritagetrust.on.ca](http://www.heritagetrust.on.ca)**.



P.O. BOX 998  
175 QUEEN STREET EAST  
ST. MARYS, ON N4X 1B6  
PHONE: (519) 284-2340  
FAX: (519) 284-2881  
www.townofstmarys.com

# TOWN OF ST. MARYS

"THE STONE TOWN"



October 6, 2009

Ontario Heritage Trust  
10 Adelaide Street East  
Toronto, Ontario M5C 1J3

To Whom It May Concern:

**Re: New designation of property of architectural and heritage significance**

Please be advised that at a meeting of St. Marys Town Council, September 8, 2009, a bylaw was passed to designate St. Marys Central School at 189 Elizabeth Street, St. Marys, under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act as a property of heritage and architectural significance.

Please find attached a copy of the designating bylaw. A copy of the statements of designation has previously been sent to the OHT.

Regards,

Lizet Scott  
Deputy Clerk

**Bylaw 50 of 2009**  
**Corporation of the Town of St. Marys**

*Being a bylaw to designate the property known municipally as  
189 Elizabeth Street as being of architectural value or interest.*

**WHEREAS** Section 29 [4] of the Ontario Heritage Act authorizes the Council of a municipality to enact bylaws to designate real property, including all buildings and structures thereon, to be of architectural value or interest; and

**WHEREAS** the Council of the Corporation of the Town of St. Marys has caused to be served upon the owners of the aforesaid real property and on the Ontario Heritage Trust notice of intention to so designate this property and has caused such notice of intention to be published in local newspapers having general circulation in the municipality; and

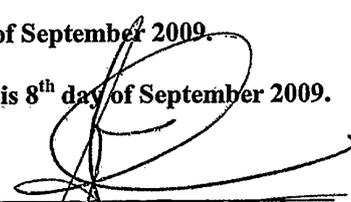
**WHEREAS** no notice of objection to the proposed designation has been served on the Chief Administrative Officer of the municipality;

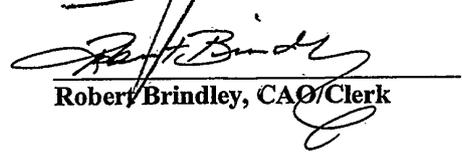
**THEREFORE** the Council of the Corporation of the Town of St. Marys ENACTS AS FOLLOWS:

1. There is designated as being of architectural value or interest the real property known as 189 Elizabeth Street, more particularly described in Schedule 'A' attached hereto.
2. The municipal solicitor is hereby authorized to cause a copy of this bylaw to be registered against the property described in Schedule A attached hereto in the proper land registry office.
3. The Chief Administrative Officer is hereby authorized to cause a copy of this bylaw to be served on the Ontario Heritage Trust and to cause notice of the passing of this bylaw to be published in local newspapers having general circulation in the municipality.

Read a first and second time this 8<sup>th</sup> day of September 2009.

Read a third and final time and passed this 8<sup>th</sup> day of September 2009.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jamie Hahn, Mayor

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Robert Brindley, CAO/Clerk

Certified a true  
copy.

  
**LIZET SCOTT**  
DEPUTY CLERK  
TOWN OF ST. MARYS

Oct 6/09



**STATEMENTS TO IDENTIFY AND DESCRIBE A PROPERTY FOR DESIGNATION**

**St. Marys Central School**

*Block 2 and Block A, east side Church Street South,  
north side Elizabeth Street, west side Peel Street South  
in the Town of St. Marys, Ontario*



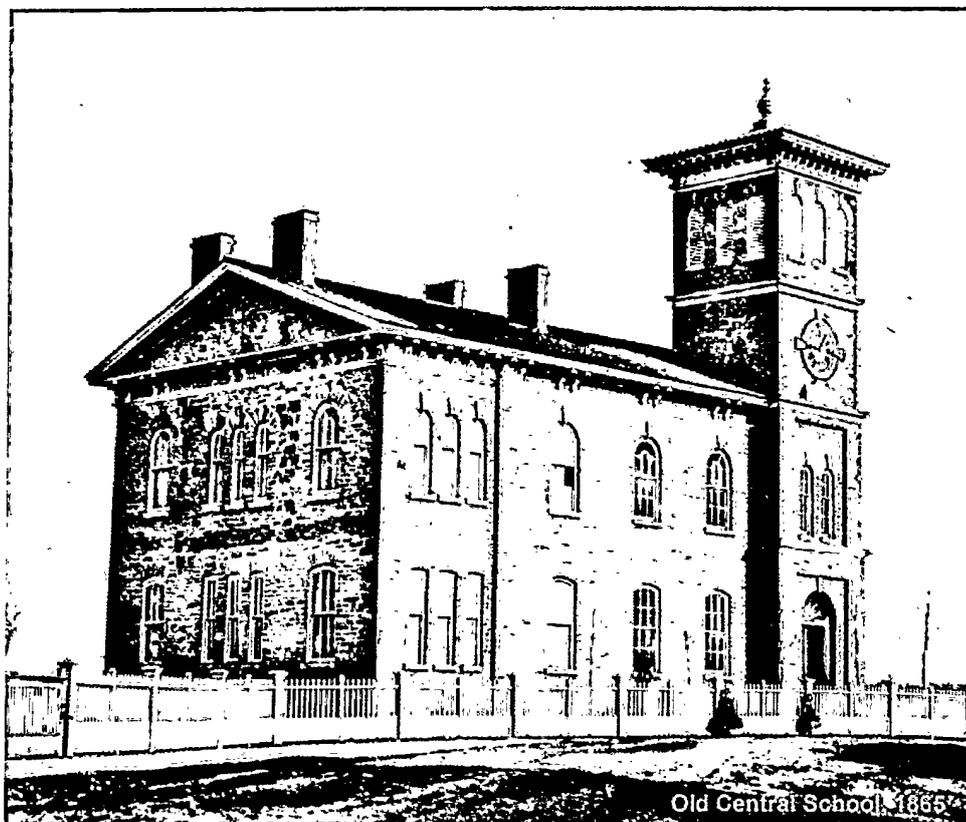
*Central School, summer 2008*

*Statements prepared by Heritage St. Marys, 2009*

central school was acquired – a parcel of land on the north boundary of the George Tracy’s farm in the south ward. (Tracy built and lived in the house that is today the St. Marys Museum.)

By 1857, the Board had at last secured funding and the cornerstone of the new school, “designed to be a thoroughly modern structure,” was laid with great ceremony, July 29, 1857. The first lessons in this original Central School were taught on March 1, 1858.

This first Central School was a rather austere and imposing building, two storeys tall with a clock tower in the southwest corner. The clock did not work; the hands always pointed to five minutes after nine and funds were never found to install real clockworks. The school had four large classrooms – two on each level – each one with space for as many as 80 or 100 students under the supervision of one trained teacher perhaps with the occasional help of an untrained assistant. The small room on the second floor of the clock tower was a small natural history museum – and also from time to time the location for the principal’s application of corporal punishment.



For a few years, this new facility met the needs of the growing population. But within a decade, the school board faced more accommodation challenges as more than 900 students between the ages of 5 and 16 were enrolled as students. Ratepayers of the West Ward began a vigorous campaign to have a ward school built on the west side of the river. As a result a small lot beside the old stone school on Queen Street was sold for \$100 and this amount was applied towards the price of a school site in the west ward.

At the first meeting of the board in 1865, the West Ward School question was discussed and on March 20, a committee reported in favor of the erection of the West Ward School. On April 17, the committee’s plans for a new two room stone school were adopted. Two lots between Ontario Street South and Thomas Street were purchased from James Redford for \$70 and site preparation began.

Tenders were called and the contract for mason work was awarded to Knox and Caldwell for the sum of \$665, carpentry work to Craig and Hamilton and plastering at 18½ cents per yard to Robert Davy. West Ward School opened on the first of the year 1866, with Miss Elizabeth Cruttenden and Miss Kate Junor in charge of two primary classrooms.

The West Ward School resolved the overcrowding problem at Central for another few years but by 1889, the Public School Board was considering these options:

1. To procure a suitable site for a ward school in the north ward and the probable cost of the same, in view of building next year.
2. To build an addition to the Central School and probable cost of the same.

Neither of these options was acted upon but in 1903, a property adjoining the old Central School grounds to the north was purchased for \$2,500. These grounds were added to the Central School playgrounds and the house was converted into a school. Because of the shape of the roof of this former residence, this annex was locally known as the Dormer School.

Subsequently, the school board was also forced briefly to accommodate overflow classes by renting space in the first stone school at the corner of Queen and James Streets and in the old Town Hall – the Lock-up School on Water Street. But in 1908, the Lock-up building was sold to the St. Marys and Western Ontario Railway and demolished. The school board then managed to find a vacant room on Wellington Street North behind Willard's paint shop (now the site of the law office Waghorn, Stephens, Sipos) and to fit it for another overflow classroom. Clearly these were only short-term answers to a problem that required much more effective action.

During the first decade of the 20th century, the school board formed committee after committee to address these accommodation needs. On several occasions, the recommendations were put forward to build a suitable new school. In 1909, the recommendation got as far as a by-law vote presented to the ratepayers of St. Marys to raise \$40,000 towards this project. The by-law was soundly defeated: 84 in favour of this funding with 311 against.

In 1911, the School Board arranged for the architectural firm, McBride and Hepburn to examine both Central and the West Ward Schools. The report was not favourable to these existing buildings, particularly Central School: "... in the face of all those repairs, remodeling, etc. and the age of your building and the cost etc. that you would be much better in the long run to build a new school and place the same properly on your grounds."

In 1914, the Public School Board consisted of a persuasive group of men: E. W. White, Dr. W. F. Brown, J. Ready, W. H. May, George Gregory, W. H. Tovell and Thomas Gordon; the Chairman was J. R. Stanley, local doctor, historian of education in St. Marys, and vigorous proponent of the need for a new school. Through their persuasion, the Town of St. Marys finally agreed that the need for a modern public school building could no longer be ignored.

Financing was put in place and plans for the new building were prepared by the London and Hamilton architectural firm, Watt and Blackwell, who oversaw the project. An early plan was to build in brick but this was quickly rejected in favour of St. Marys limestone. Walter J. Leslie, a well known and experienced contractor, who had begun his career as a stonecutter and mason, was awarded the contract.



*Laying the cornerstone, new Central School, August 3, 1914*

The process of the construction of the school can still be traced: plans, specifications, tenders, and other original material for both the school and the addition of its kindergarten in 1923 have been preserved and donated to the archives at the St. Marys Museum by the W. H. May and the George Gregory families. Three different photographic views taken on the occasion of the laying of the cornerstone on August 3, 1914 show the school under partial construction. In addition, accounts in both local newspapers, the Journal and the Argus, document the letting and subletting of tenders.

The total cost of the school was quoted to be \$53,000. Of this, Leslie's tender was \$47,333 for the entire structure exclusive of the heating and ventilation. This work was done by the St. Marys Hardware Company for \$5,325. Included in the records of Leslie's tender were these subcontract to local and area businesses: hardware fittings from Purdom Hardware Company in London (\$358); plumbing and metalwork to the St. Marys Hardware Company (\$2,220); painting and glazing to John Willard of St. Marys (\$1,000); electrical work to E. Etherington, Stratford (\$212); plastering to William Scott and Sons, London (\$4,460) and roofing to Jarvis Company, Brantford (\$530).

#### **Associative value to community**

The people of St. Marys were extremely proud of the new Central School when it opened in 1915. It appeared in many postcard views and in promotional material to attract new business and industry to the community.

A number of significant educators taught within its classrooms and a century of local school children learned their first lessons there and formed many friendships on the school playground. The building has also been used for many community gatherings such as lectures, concerts, recitals and Children's Choir practices.

## Architectural Significance

Central School is a large and imposing building in the Classical Revival style: the roofline is adorned with a large cornice and the two main entrances with Doric columns supporting massive pediments. The building, unlike almost all of its contemporary counterparts in the province, is constructed of solid limestone quarried from the local quarries and laid in the broken-coursed ashlar style by local stonemasons. In the building files is a letter from a local brick-layer who maintained that it would cost one-third more to built the school in stone than in brick but members of both the School Board and Town Council were adamant that the famous local limestone be used. As well, the owner of the local Horseshoe Quarry offered to cut costs and donate \$500 if St. Marys stone was used. The result is a massive, two-storey stone school described at its completion as “magnificent.”

Fashion in school layout during this period required separate playgrounds and separate entrances for boys and girls. Two monumental two-storey bays project from the main façade and mark these entrances. From these, large second-storey windows bring light into the interior staircases and hallways. The actual doorways and large transoms are further outlined by massive porticos, constructed of concrete, denoted “art stone,” and provided by the Canada Art Stone Company of Toronto. More modest bays project from both east and west sides and again light the wide interior space. The building is rectangular in shape, aligning the original ten classrooms alongside these halls and across the east and west sides of the building.

Current fashion also dictated windows on only one side of each classroom: hence the broad windowless expanses at the east and west ends of the Elizabeth Street façade. In fact the variety of surface planes and arrangement of fenestration on the exterior of the building clearly reflects the function within. The basement extends above ground to accommodate almost full windows and additional full-size rooms for separate boys’ and girls’ playrooms, lavatories, a room for manual training or domestic science, and a boiler and fuel room. The 1914 construction provided for a possible addition of a kindergarten and one additional classroom – accomplished in 1923.

Walter Leslie is described in the Canada Census 1901 as a stonecutter. Soon after this census, he and W. A. MacNeill became partners in a contracting company. During the first decade of the 20th century, the federal government built a series of new post offices. Leslie and MacNeill won contracts (either entirely or for the stonework) for new post offices in Kincardine, Strathroy, Welland, St. Marys (1906), Leamington and Parkhill. Leslie himself built and lived in two brick houses: 232 Thomas Street (constructed 1899) and later 311 Queen Street East (1910).

It is possible that local stone mason and bricklayer William Cockram was one of the local masons who also laid stone in the construction of Central School. In a letter to the architects dated May 5, 1914, Cockram submits a tender of \$28,471 for both stone and masonry work. (Dr. W. F. Brown, a member of the School Board in 1914, employed both Watt and Blackwell as architects and William Cockram as builder of his large renaissance revival house, 218 Jones Street East.)

Walter Leslie had obvious qualifications as a mason and as a general contractor. It is interesting, however, in reading through the correspondence between him and the architects to note numerous instances in which he seems not to have given complete satisfaction. In a letter dated July 24, 1914, Watt and Blackwell are annoyed that he has done nothing on the school for three weeks – because he is busy with “the Kintore job.”

### **Features for Designation:**

All exterior features mentioned in this report are included in this designation – most notably the stonework, concrete door surrounds and original fenestration. While researching this school, we have not found another educational building of this scale and design and from this period that is constructed of stone: most school boards by the pre-war years of the 20th century had turned to brick as an easier and cheaper alternative.

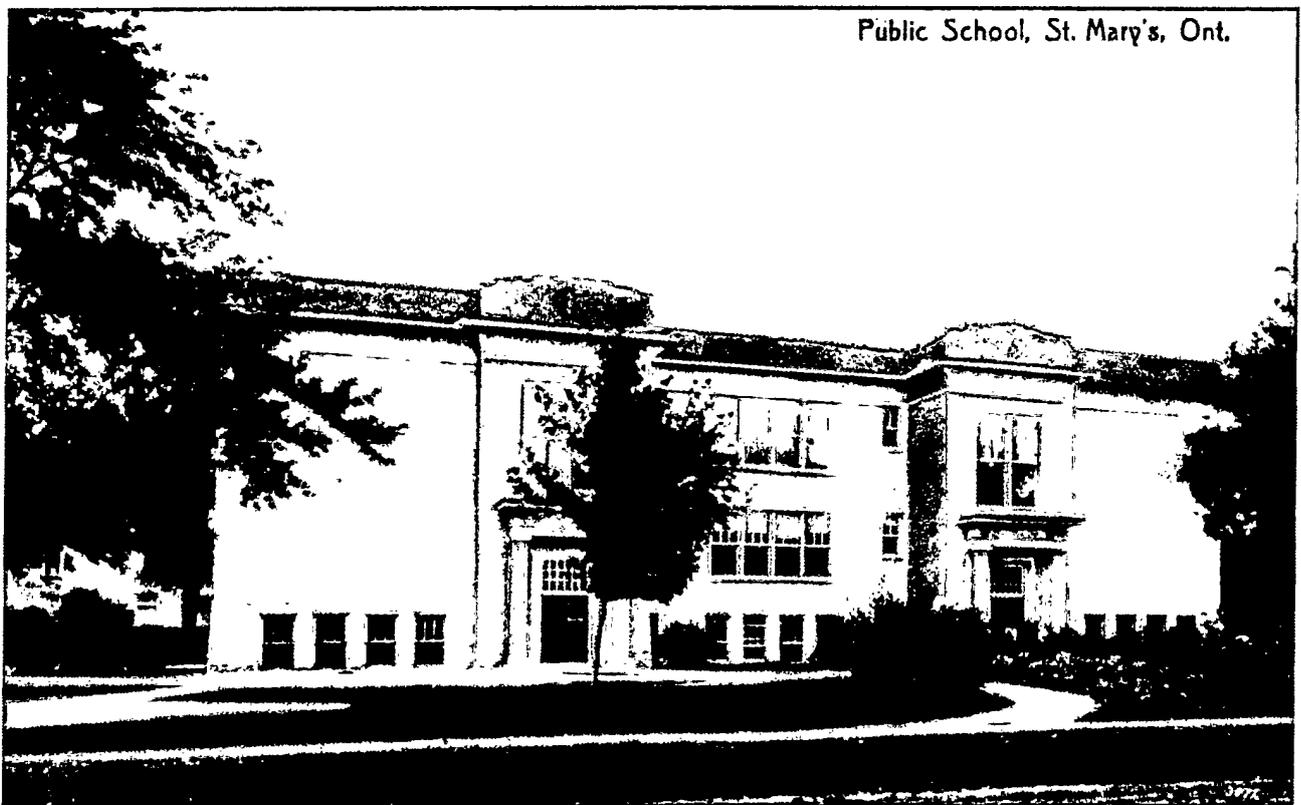
Central School is certainly the largest stone structure in St. Marys, a town that has a collection of several dozen stone buildings. It is equally important as the last example of institutional (even domestic) stone construction in St. Marys. Stone was still quarried locally and exported by rail until the late 1920s but by then local building in stone (begun 80 years before) had ceased.

### **Other milestones:**

1923: Addition of a library and assembly room on the north side of the building

1982: Addition of a gymnasium and extensive renovations to the interior.

2008: Avon Maitland District Public School Board declares Central, along with Arthur Meighen Public School, “prohibitive to repair” – both schools to be closed in 2010.



*Postcard view, ca 1920*

## **Bibliography:**

Stanley, J.R. *Our St. Marys Schools*. [St. Marys] St. Marys Journal [ca. 1911] with a series of later updates in the St. Marys Journal.

Johnston, Dana. *Going to School in Ontario: The Urban Primary School 1850-1930*. [Ottawa] Parks Canada, 1984. Research Bulletin No. 213. [Includes a photograph of St. Marys Central School, p. 21]

Telfer, Ken. Transcription and Summary of articles relating to construction of St. Marys Central School: St. Marys Journal, August 6, 1914; St. Marys Argus, May 14, 1914; St. Marys Argus, March 18, 1915; other research from related articles in both newspapers.

St. Marys Museum. R. Lorne Eedy Archives. Plans and elevations, tenders for St. Marys Central School and Kindergarten Addition, 1914, 1923.

Bruce, Wm. Geo. *School Architecture; a handy manual for the use of architects and school authorities*. Fourth Edition. Milwaukee, Johnson Service Company [1910]. With the bookplate of W. Fletcher Shepherd Architect [Fletcher grew up and practiced in St. Marys before moving to Toronto.]

*These statements were prepared by Larry Pfaff, Chair of Heritage St. Marys, and by the staff of the St. Marys Museum and Archives, January and February, 2009.*