

“Education is More Important than Good Streets”

Laura Secord School reflects the prosperity and optimism of the times, and the conviction of Col. J. B. Mitchell, superintendent of buildings, and school superintendent Dr. Daniel McIntyre that nothing was too good for Canada's children. The design incorporated the best and most modern features, including wide corridors, fireproof construction, interior courtyards for natural light and ventilation, and a fully-modern heating system. There was a third-floor suite for the resident caretaker, with a narrow stairway to the boiler room. The school was built by Thomas Kelly and Sons for \$187,786.00, heating and ventilation systems installed by Jas. Ballantyne Co. for \$22,700.00. Fire escapes by Vulcan Iron Works were installed and could clear the school's population in two minutes.

Laura Secord originally took grades 1-9, becoming K-6 in 1960. Enrolment reached 774 in 1914 and peaked at 1013 in 1940. Those of us who had children attending in the early 1990s, when enrolment was around 500, wonder how 1000 children could ever have been packed in!

Today the wide corridors are bright with children's art projects, murals commemorating the 125th anniversary of WSD #1, and quilts made under the guidance of former principal Myrna Mitchell. During school hours there is a constant hum of activity. Current principal Cathi Hill has made the development of a school archive and the preservation of the school's history her project, continuing a tradition among Laura Secord principals of putting a personal stamp on the school.

Vicki Rempel attended Laura Secord in the 1960s.

One of my first memories of growing up in Wolseley at 181 Lenore Street was getting ready for school in September. My class was one of the last to wear the wool uniform tunic. I was always so impressed when I walked up to my school. It was the biggest, most beautiful building I had ever seen that was just for kids. I liked the limestone, its colour and touch.

It was in the cause of better T.V. reception, in that pre-cable age, that local residents banded together to insist that the tower which had always crowned Laura Secord School be removed. Like a noble blind poet, the tower looked out on all four sides with blank dials which had been meant for clock faces. The clocks had never been successfully installed. It seemed there was no effort to preserve anything but the hand-carved finials. I was told that the school would still be beautiful and that I would get a better picture on our T.V. set, but when the work was done, the tower looked like a toad squatting where a princess had been. And T.V. was the same as before, to my eyes.

J. B. Mitchell

“ . . . it should be known, appreciated and remembered by every parent in this Dominion that education is more important than good streets . . . and more public money should be spent to thoroughly equip the children for the battle of life, than is now being devoted for that purpose.”

In October of 1995 Laura Secord survived a fire that started in the roof – apparently caused by some repair work. Damage, to the dismay of students who hoped for an extended vacation, was limited to the ceiling of the gym. The grand old lady survived this challenge too.