

RESEARCH REPORT



Ritson Public School
300 Ritson Road South
Oshawa, Ontario

Prepared for Heritage Oshawa

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1.0	Introduction	
1.1	Purpose of Report	4
1.2	Legislative Context	4
2.0	Description of the Property	
2.1	Location	5
2.2	Legal Description	5
2.3	Site Description	5
3.0	Historical Attributes of Ritson Public School	
3.1	Summary	5
3.2	Early Lot History	6
3.3	Ritson Public School	6
3.4	Additions	7
3.5	John Ritson	7
4.0	Condition of Ritson Public School	8
5.0	Architecture	
5.1	Date of Construction	9
5.2	Form	9
5.3	Masonry	9
5.4	Foundation	10
5.5	Roof	10
5.6	Entrances	10
5.7	Window Openings	10
6.0	Conformity to Applicable Designation Criteria	11
7.0	Proposed Designation Statement and Description	
7.1	Purpose	11
7.2	Location and Description of Property	11
7.3	Statement of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest	11
7.4	Description of Heritage Attributes	12
8.0	Recommendation	12

FIGURES AND APPENDICES

Figure 1 – Site Plan Ritson Public School

Figure 2 – The Growth of Oshawa School Population

Appendix A – Exterior Photographs of Ritson Public School

Appendix B – Interior Photographs of Ritson Public School

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Report

This report evaluates the heritage significance of Ritson Public School located in the City of Oshawa and examines the suitability for designation under Section IV of the *Ontario Heritage Act*.

1.2 Legislative Context

Ontario Regulation 9/06 under the *Ontario Heritage Act* sets out the criteria for determining cultural heritage value or interest, which is required in order to designate a property under the provisions of Section IV.

A property may be designated under Section 29 of the Act if it meets one or more of the following criteria for determining whether it is of cultural heritage value or interest.

1. The property has design value or physical value because it:
 - i. is a rare, unique, representative or early example of a style, type, expression, material or construction method;
 - ii. displays a high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit, or
 - iii. demonstrates a high degree of technical or scientific achievement.
2. The property has historical value or associative value because it,
 - i. has direct associations with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization or institution that is significant to a community,
 - ii. yields, or has the potential to yield, information that contributes to an understanding of a community or culture, or
 - iii. demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, builder, designer or theorist who is significant to a community.
3. The property has contextual value because it,
 - i. is important in defining, maintaining or supporting the character of an area,
 - ii. is physically, functionally, visually or historically linked to its surroundings, or
 - iii. is a landmark.

After analyzing the history and heritage attributed of the subject property, it is concluded that the subject property merits designation under the Ontario Heritage Act in light of criteria 1 (i), 2 (ii), 3 (ii), and (iii).

2.0 Description of Property

2.1 Location

Ritson Public School is located in the City of Oshawa. The school is located on the west side of Ritson Road South between Olive Avenue and Stacey Avenue.

2.2 Legal Description

Ritson Public School is located on part of Lot 8 on Concession 1, at 300 Ritson Road South. Land Registry PIN: 16348, City of Oshawa Municipal Plan C88.

2.3 Site Description

Built in 1923, Ritson Public School sits prominently on a rise on Ritson Road South. The school sits on a property that is 2.08 hectares (approximately 4 acres). The property consists of the school and is surrounded by green space that includes 2 baseball backstops, a soccer field, paved parking and play area and a school playground. There is a bus loop located on the east side of the school off of Ritson Road South. *See Figure 1 – Site Plan of Ritson Public School.*

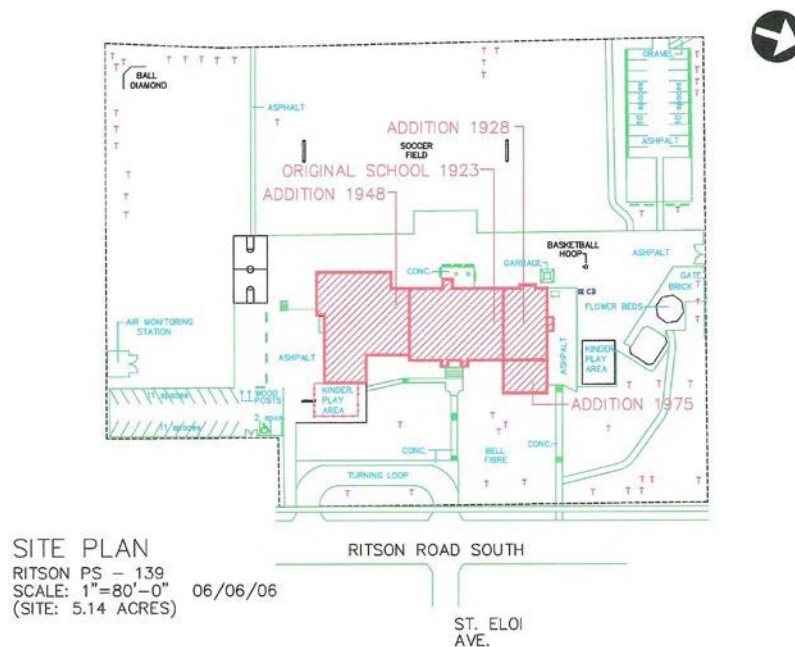


Figure 1 – Site Plan, Ritson Public School

3.0 Historical Attributes

3.1 Summary

During the 1920's the population of Oshawa was already on the rise due to its prospering industries this can be seen by the increase depicted in Figure 2 – *The Growth of Oshawa's School Population*. The baby boom after the first World War and the annexation of Cedar Dale accounted for the further increase as did the enforcement of the Adolescent School Attendance Act. This act was introduced in 1921 and it stated that children in urban areas under the age of 16 must attend school.

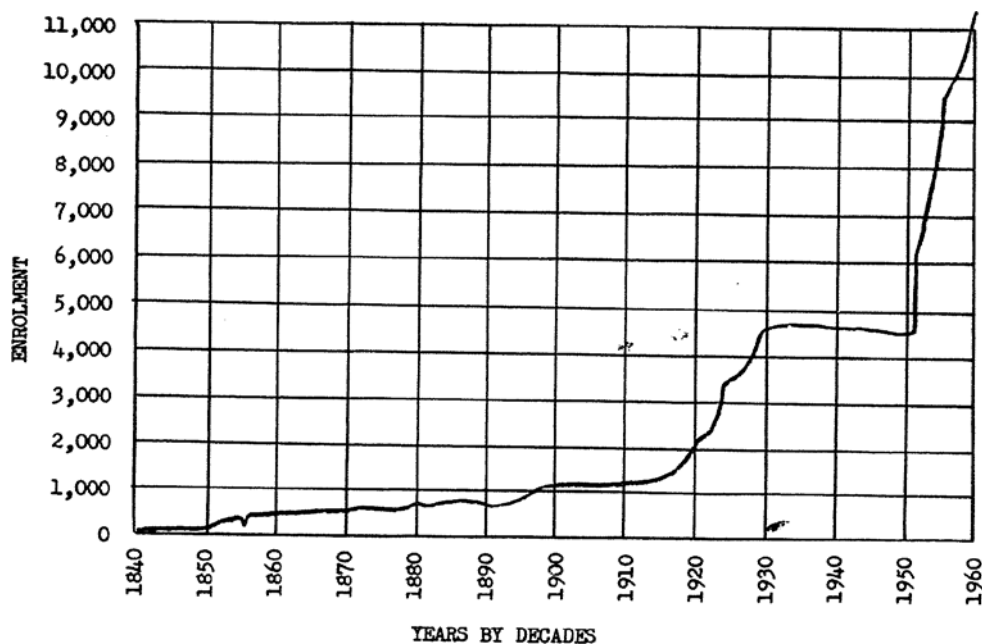


Figure 2 - The Growth Of Oshawa's School Population

When Oshawa became a city in 1924 there were eight elementary schools and the population of Oshawa was 3, 000. Ritson Public School was one of the eight elementary schools. Ritson Public School was erected in 1923, the first phase of construction cost \$54 000. There were a total of three additions added to the original school over the years, the last was added in 1975 according to the Oshawa Times.

Ritson Public School is significant as an example of standardized architecture that typified educational institutions during the 1920's. The original six room structure is characterized by its neo-gothic inspired central projecting entranceway, additional entranceways on the north and south facades. This practical and functional design was easy and inexpensive to execute and was notable for its boxy form and separate boys' and girls' entrances. Typical of some mandated school policy, the windows are banked along the east and west sides to allow abundant natural light, leaving sufficient wall

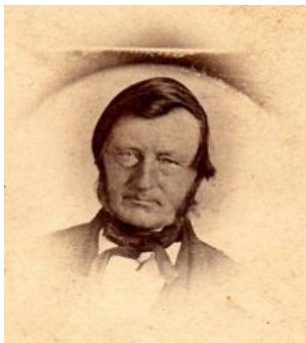
space for large blackboards. This was an early policy in the school system but is evident in the design of Ritson since the north and south facades lack the windows that the west and east facades contain.

3.2 Early Lot History

The 1877 Beers Map of the Village of Oshawa indicates that John Ritson owned 200 acres of Concession 1 Lot 8. Ritson Public School lies on the southwest ¼. John Ritson was the first teacher in the area. He taught at one of the first schools in the Village of Harmony in the early 1820's.

3.3 Ritson Public School

The school was named after John Ritson, who came to Oshawa in 1820. According to Pedlar, he was travelling through Ottawa when his wagon broke down on Kingston Road. He decided to stay in Oshawa when he heard of the need for teachers and became Oshawa's first school teacher in the Village of Harmony.



He purchased land on Concession One, where the present Ritson Public School is located. He lived with his wife and seven children. Mr. Ritson took an active part in the community and the agricultural township fairs. In 1853 he was the first vice-president of the County of Ontario Agricultural Society. *See photo left, John Ritson. (Courtesy: Oshawa Community Museum)*

The first principal of Ritson Public School in 1923 was Mr. Harvey W. Knight who became an inspector of Public Schools in 1943. He witnessed an addition of six rooms to the school in 1928. Another addition was added in 1948, this included five rooms and facilities for Oshawa's second Kindergarten classroom. Still another addition was necessary in 1975.

3.4 Additions

In 1928, the Board of Education approved the first addition. The plans for this addition were prepared by architect C.C. Stenhouse. It was approved by the Board of Education and was added in 1928. This was a two-storey six-room addition that would increase the accommodation of the school by fifty percent. The six room addition consisted of four classrooms and two semi-finished rooms in the basement. The basement playrooms would be used for emergency classrooms. The addition was built on the north side of the original school building of Ritson Public School.

The Board of Education awarded the contract to W.J Trick, a local contractor, to build the addition to Ritson Public School. W.J. Trick was the first Mayor of the City of

Oshawa from 1922-1925. The contract price was \$21 315. The plumbing and steam fitting were done by F.D. Gerard at a cost of \$7 650. C.B. DeGuerre received the electrical wiring contract for \$996. This was the last addition made to a school in Oshawa for 20 years. Due to the depression and World War II there was little construction until the 1950's.

Further additions were made to the school in 1948, a kindergarten classroom. This made Ritson Public School the second school in Oshawa to add a kindergarten class, prior to this time kindergarten was regarded as a waste of money, according to Olive French. The first kindergarten class room was located at Centre Street now E.A. Lovell Continuing Education Centre. The last addition was made to Ritson Public School in 1975 on the southern side of the building.

The playground that is located on the property was purchased through a school community rally that was held in memory of young student that had passed away due to meningitis years ago. (durhamregion.com July 9, 2012)

3.5 John Ritson

John Ritson was born in England in 1790 and came to Oshawa in 1820. He was travelling through the area from Ottawa when his wagon broke down on Kingston Road. He decided to stay in Oshawa when he heard of the need for teachers, and soon became Oshawa's first school teacher.

John married Mary Catherine Stone on December 29, 1822. He purchased land on Concession One, where present day Ritson Road is located. John and Mary had seven children, six daughters and one son. In addition to being an educator, John Ritson took an active part in the agricultural advancement of Canada by holding various offices in connection with township fairs. In 1853 the County of Ontario Agricultural Society gave him the honorary position of First Vice-President.

John Ritson died on October 31, 1862, and is buried in Union Cemetery in Oshawa.

Note: *He was originally buried in the Pioneer Memorial Cemetery on Bond Street in Oshawa.*

4.0 Condition and Current Use

Overall the school is in fair condition. According to a report the main expenditures at this time include but not limited to making the building accessible, there are numerous major building components that are in need of replacement but not high priority at the time this report was written November 2011. The school grounds such as the pavement, parking lots, playground asphalt, concrete steps and walkways all needed to be repaired. See Appendix for photos.

5.0 Architecture

When Oshawa was designing several new schools in the 1920's, Modern Classicism and Neo Gothic were popular architectural styles. Modern Classicism is characterized by simplified forms of Classical elements that still achieve a formal composition. In comparison, the Neo Gothic is more decorative. Typical elements are monochromatic exterior wall finishes, stone accents, low pitched roofs, a mix of large flat and Gothic or ogee door and window openings, tall chimneys and decorative Gothic motifs. The emphasis is on horizontal composition, rather than the height of the Early English Gothic Style. (Blumenson: 1990.)

Urban school buildings of the period were typically built in the Neo Gothic style with some expression of Modern Classicism evident. The blended style, with emphasis on Neo Gothic detailing was typically used for scholastic buildings that it became known as Collegiate Gothic. Oshawa Collegiate and Vocational School that opened in 1930 and Dr. S.J Philips are good examples although vary in examples. Ritson Public School is not as grandeur but does combine elements of both Modern Classicism and Neo Gothic Style mainly in the gothic arched multi-paned window located above the front entrance doorway on the east façade and on the entranceway on the north façade.

By the twentieth century, the learning environment and needs of students and teachers had been analyzed and presented in standardized formulas for design and construction. Published plan books such as *Modern Schoolhouses*, offered floor plans, architectural designs and technical specifications for new construction.

5.1 Date of Construction

Ritson Public School was built in 1923. Various additions were added to the original school structure throughout the years starting in 1928 there was a two-storey six room addition added to the school on the north extension. In 1948 there was another addition added, a kindergarten classroom and lastly in 1975 the last addition was made to the south extension.

5.2 Form

This is a large rectangular, two storey structure with a projecting frontispiece entrance and a flat roof. It faces east and occupies a block of land (2.08 hectares 1.27 (greenspace) with orientation to the southeast corner. The east (main) façade achieves symmetry through central placement of the main entrance, the balanced window groupings and slight recessing at the north and south ends. Although the west and east facades are similar in massing and fenestration, the west, north and south facades lack the simple decoration of the east wall although the north facade features a similar entrance with arched window and doorway. Reflective of the Neo-gothic style.

5.3 Masonry

This is a red brick structure with smooth stone detailing. There is a stone band forming the bottom of the window openings on all levels including the ground level window openings.

5.4 Foundation

The foundation is concrete.

5.5 Roof

The roof is flat with parapets over the front entranceway on the east façade and on the north façade over the BOYS entranceway and on the west façade on the north end of the façade.

5.6 Entrances

Typical of the Neo Gothic Style, the main entrance is a decorated frontispiece that is accessed by a stairway to the first level doorway. This example features double leaf, door with glazing. Over the door is a gothic inspired window opening that is multi-paned, with an oversized arched transom. The entranceway and window are crowned with a hood like moulding around the archway.

The north façade contains another entranceway with the same arched shaped window opening. The entrance doors and transom are recessed within an arched shape opening. There is a cement stone above the entranceway with the engraving BOYS. The south façade most likely contained the same entranceway with similar archway with GIRLS indicated above until the addition was added. A portion of the south façade of the original structure has been obscured by the addition that was added in 1948. This indicated that there were separate entrances for boys and girls. This is indicative of early schools in Ontario during the 1920s.

5.7 Window Openings

Single, double and triple groupings of window openings are arranged in a symmetrical pattern. The hung sashes have been replaced with fixed ones that are one over one. All openings have cement lugsills.

6.0 Conformity to Applicable Designation Criteria

In light of the findings of this report, it is concluded that the school known as Ritson Public School meets several of the criteria outlined in Regulation 9/06, as follows:

- 1(i) is an example of an early school that dates from an early period of education within the City of Oshawa. It is representative of the work of CC Stenhouse, architect and W.J. Trick, contractor and Mayor of Oshawa 1924-1925
- 2(ii) it has direct association with John Ritson, an early settler and contributor to Oshawa. John Ritson was Oshawa's first school teacher. John Ritson owned the land on which Ritson Public School currently stands.
- 3(ii) it is historically linked to the City of Oshawa, the building sits on the land that was once owned by John Ritson who the school is named after.
- 3(iii) Ritson Public School is a landmark in the City of Oshawa, it sits on a prominent rise on Ritson Road South.

7.0 Proposed Designation Statement and Description

7.1 Purpose

Should the Heritage Oshawa Committee and Council agree that designation of Ritson Public School is appropriate, it is recommended that the following designation statement and description be incorporated into the designation by-law.

7.2 Location and Description of Property

Ritson Public School, located at 300 Ritson Road South in the City of Oshawa, was in use from 1923 until 2011. The history of the Ritson Public School spans almost a century. When Oshawa became a city in 1924 there were eight elementary schools and Ritson Public School was one of them.

7.3 Statement of Cultural Heritage Value or Interest

The structures cultural heritage value results from their historical significance and their importance as a cultural heritage educational institution that was built in the 1920's during a period of growth in the City of Oshawa. There were eight schools when Oshawa became a city in 1924, Ritson Public School was one of them.

The property has historical value as it is representative of architect CC Stenhouse, from an early period in the development of the City of Oshawa and the school is named after and built on land that was once owned by John Ritson, Oshawa's first school teacher.

The cultural heritage value Ritson Public School is related to its architectural or design value, as it is comprised of the Neo-gothic and Modern Classicism.

7.4 Description of Heritage Attributes

- The School dates from an early period in the development of the City of Oshawa.
- It is representative of the work of architect CC Stenhouse and Oshawa Mayor & Contractor, W. J. Trick.
- It is named after an early settler, significant contributor and Oshawa's first teacher John Ritson.
- The architecture of Ritson Public School is an example of the Neo-Gothic/Modern Classicism, representative of early schools/educational institutions in the 1920s.
- Its location on a prominent rise on Ritson Road South. It is a landmark in that community.

8.0 Recommendation

It is recommended that the property Ritson Public School, location at 300 Ritson Road South, in the City of Oshawa be considered for designated in accordance with the provisions of Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act for its cultural heritage value.

Sources

Conveyances Abstract and related documents. *Durham Land Registrar's Office*

Beers, J.H. & Co. *Illustrated Historical Atlas of County of Ontario*. Toronto: 1877

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French, Olive Manuscript: *The Story of Oshawa Schools: 1800 – 1967*. Oshawa Community Archives

Oshawa Community Archives, Ritson Public School File

Ross, J. Douglas. Education in Oshawa from settlement to city. 1969

Thomas Bouckley Collection. The Robert McLaughlin Gallery

Bell, Robert T. Photographs. Interior. 2012

Appendix A – Exterior Photos



South East Façade – September 2012



West façade – September 2012



North façade with original BOYS entrance – September 2012



North façade – September 2012



North façade – September 2012



Arched Transom, north entranceway – September 2012



Main Façade (East) – September 2012



Entranceway East Façade – September 2012

Appendix B - Interior Photos

The interior photographs of Ritson Public School were taken by Robert T. Bell – June 2012



