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Item No. 9.1.3
Heritage Advisory Committee
September 12, 2024

TO: Chair and Members of Heritage Advisory Committee

FROM: Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: August 22, 2024

SUBJECT: **HRTG-2024-00692: Request to Include 5450 Russell Street, Halifax in the Registry of Heritage Properties for the Halifax Regional Municipality**

ORIGIN

Application for heritage registration by the property owner.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Property owner-initiated heritage registration request.
- 5450 Russell Street (the 'property') was constructed circa 1916 as Alexander McKay School.
- The property has historical associations with Halifax's Late 19th to Early 20th Century Public Education System Reform and the Halifax Explosion.
- The property is a rare example of an early 20th century school in Halifax.
- The school was designed in the Edwardian Classicism style by well-known Halifax architect, Walter Johannes Busch.
- There are no financial implications identified.

RECOMMENDATION

Should 5450 Russell Street, Halifax score 50 or more points on evaluation as a heritage property under the HRM Heritage Property Program, the Heritage Advisory Committee (HAC) recommends that Regional Council:

1. Set a date for a heritage hearing to consider the inclusion of the subject property in the Registry of Heritage Property for the Halifax Regional Municipality; and
2. Approve the request to include 5450 Russell Street, Halifax, in the Registry of Heritage Property for the Halifax Regional Municipality, as shown on Map 1, as a municipal heritage property under the *Heritage Property Act*.

BACKGROUND

The property owner has applied to include the property located at 5450 Russell Street, Halifax (Map 1) in the Registry of Heritage Property for the Halifax Regional Municipality. The subject property is located within the block bound by Russell Street to the north, Gottingen Street to the west, Galley Lane to the south and Vincent Street to the east. The institutional building now known as Shambhala School was constructed circa 1916.

This application is being considered in accordance with Sections 14 (Recommendation as municipal heritage property) and 15 (Registration as municipal heritage property) of the *Heritage Property Act*.

HRM's Heritage Property Program

The purpose of the HRM Heritage Property Program is to help protect and conserve significant heritage resources including buildings, streetscapes, sites, areas, and conservation districts that reflect the rich heritage found in local communities throughout HRM. One of the aims of the Heritage Property Program is to recognize significant heritage resources through the inclusion of properties into the Municipal Registry of Heritage Property.

Under the Heritage Property Program, all registration applications for heritage buildings are evaluated by the HAC using "The Evaluation Criteria for Registration of Heritage Buildings in Halifax Regional Municipality" (Attachment A). The Evaluation Criteria for scoring a property and building are broken down into six categories as follows:

Criterion	Highest Possible Score
1. Age	25
2. Historical or Architectural Importance	20
3. Significance of the Architect/Builder	10
4. Architectural Merit	10
5. Architectural Integrity	15
6. Relationship to Surrounding Area	10
Total	100

Should the HAC score a property with more than 50 points on evaluation as a heritage property, a positive recommendation will be forwarded to Regional Council.

Nova Scotia Heritage Property Act

HRM's Heritage Property Program receives its authority from the *Heritage Property Act* which seeks:

"to provide for the identification, designation, preservation, conservation, protection and rehabilitation of buildings, public-building interiors, structures, streetscapes, cultural landscapes, areas and districts of historic, architectural or cultural value, in both urban and rural areas, and to encourage their continued use".

Sections 14(2) and 15(1) under the *Heritage Property Act* require that notice of recommendation be given to the property owner at least thirty (30) days prior to any Council decision to include the property in the Registry of Heritage Property for the Halifax Regional Municipality. The property owner is also given an opportunity to address Council before they decide on the registration request. Should a positive recommendation be forwarded to Council, heritage staff will ensure the required notices are sent to the owners and filed at the Land Registry.

DISCUSSION

Heritage registration applications are evaluated by the HAC relative to six evaluation criteria outlined previously, and described in greater detail in Attachment A. To assist the HAC in their evaluation and scoring, staff offer the following comments based on staff's research report (Attachment B).

1. Age

In February 1916, the Halifax Board of School Commissioners' School Sites and Building Committee began exploring the idea of using the site at the corner of Russell and Gottingen Streets for a new boys' school, after a devastating fire at Young Street School the month prior. The City of Halifax accepted the transfer of the site of the Young Street school for the acquisition of the property at the southeast corner of Gottingen and Russell Streets that same year. In April 1916, architect Walter Johannes Busch presented plans to the Commissioners for a ten-department (room) school which was accepted with minor modifications. The construction was largely complete that same year. The school is first identified in the 1916 McAlpine City Directory, and historical mapping shows the block as vacant until the 1918 Assessment Map.



Figure 1: The school building at 5450 Russell Street, Halifax (May 1, 2024)

The subject property was constructed circa 1916. Staff recommend a score of 9.

2. Historical Importance

Halifax Public Educational School System Reform

The mid-19th century and early 20th century was a transformative time for educational systems in Halifax, with the middle class advocating for large, formalized school systems to promote economic development and prevent social disorder. Prior to this, schools were mostly located around Grand Parade and were either large schools conducted by religious and philanthropic organizations, small exclusive academies, or smaller schools located in the schoolmaster's lodgings. The Education Act (or Free School Act) was passed in July 1864 after significant advocacy efforts for public school reform. The Act made schools free and open to all children, and generally regulated public schools in Halifax (e.g., teacher salaries, accommodations). The Board of School Commissioners was provided the ability to regulate and plan for the city's public schools. In 1888, the Compulsory of Education Act was passed which required every boy and girl living in Halifax between the ages of 8 and 14 to attend school during regular school hours. During this time frame, several new schools were built in Halifax as the population grew. Alexander McKay School, now known as the Shambhala School, is representative of Halifax's Public Educational School System reform which took place at the turn of the 20th century.

Halifax Explosion 1917

Alexander McKay School has historical associations with the Halifax Explosion, which devastated Halifax on December 6, 1917. Alexander McKay School was heavily damaged, and 55 pupils were killed. The immediate neighbourhood was severely impacted, including St. Joseph's School, St. Mark's Anglican Church and St. Joseph's Church. As one of the most severely impacted areas, the Halifax Relief Commission and Board of School Commissioners quickly established Alexander McKay School as temporary living quarters for reconstruction workers. They also installed a temporary 'shack' behind the school, initially used as a dining hall for reconstruction workers and later as classrooms for Richmond School, and St. Joseph's Boys and Girls Schools until the new buildings were constructed. Alexander McKay School played a pivotal role in the rebuilding of Halifax following the Halifax Explosion.

The school was named after Alexander McKay, who served as Supervisor of Halifax Public Schools from 1883 to 1916. Due to McKay's support for racial segregation of Halifax's schools, staff included his biography in the research report simply to inform the full history of Alexander McKay School. Staff recommend that the historical associations with Alexander McKay not be considered as contributing to the historical value of the property.

The subject property has local historical importance based on its representation of the history of Halifax's public education system, and the role the school played during the Halifax Explosion. Staff recommend a score of 11 to 15.

3. Significance of Architect/Builder

Walter Johannes Busch (1865-1924) was hired by the Board of School Commissioners to design Alexander McKay School. Walter trained under his father, esteemed architect Henry F. Busch, and worked as his assistant at the office on Bedford Row. Walter became an architect in 1887 and continued to work at his father's firm for the next fifteen years. After Henry passed away in 1902, Walter continued the business under his own name and specialized in educational building design. He designed ten Halifax schools, including St. Patrick's Girls' High School, Chebucto Road Public School, Tower Road School and Bloomfield School. Both Chebucto Road and Tower Road Schools are municipally registered heritage properties.

The contractors of Alexander McKay School were Falconer & McDonald, who had an office in the St. Paul Building on Barrington Street. A partnership between Alexander D. Falconer and Duncan G. McDonald, the firm also built institutional buildings at Dalhousie University (e.g., Macdonald Building, Nova Scotia Technical College) and various brick buildings across the province.

As a well-known local architect, and well-known local builders, staff recommend a score of 1 to 3.

4. Architectural Merit

Construction Type/Building Technology

The subject property was constructed with concrete framing clad in brick. The brick cladding has since been parged with stucco. There are relatively few brick buildings within the surrounding area of 5450 Russell Street. Brick was generally reserved for larger institutional buildings and are more detectable within the downtown area of Halifax. *It is important to note that although the brick has been parged with stucco, this modification could be reversed in the future.*

As a moderately rare example of a concrete framed brick building, staff recommend a score of 4 to 6.

Style

The institutional building at 5450 Russell Street was constructed in the Edwardian Classicism style. The style was popular in Canada from 1900 to 1930 and presented a simplified but formal design with Classical influence. Edwardian Classicism is characterized by its balanced facades, simplified but large rooflines, smooth brick surfaces and generous fenestration. Short colonettes and brick piers emphasize entryways, and Classical elements such as large plain stone lintels with keystones surround windows.

The character defining elements of 5450 Russell Street include, but are not limited to:

- Two-and-a-half storey, Edwardian Classicism style institutional building with rectangular long façade;
- Proud central bay on front (north) elevation, topped by parapet and segmental arch inscription stone reading 'A.D. 1916';
- Proud flanking bays on side (west and east) elevations, with flat roofline;
- Masonry cladding;
- Above-ground granite cut stone and rubblestone foundation;
- Granite string courses and lug sills;
- Flat and segmental arch windows;

- Two-leaf wood glazed entrance on the north elevation with tall multiple-light flat transom and arched transom;
- North elevation entablature surrounding the entrance with dentil trim, flanked by granite columns and step;
- Double-leaf entrance on the east elevation with blinded transom; and
- Double-leaf wood entrance on the west elevation with transom and surrounded by granite piers and step.

As a moderately rare example of an Edwardian Classicism style institutional building, staff recommend a score of 4 to 6.

5. Architectural Integrity

The institutional building at 5450 Russell Street has a moderate level of integrity. Based on visual inspection and original architectural blueprints by W.J. Busch, the following modifications have been made to the building since its initial construction in 1916:

- Red brick has been parged with stucco;
- A rear addition was constructed circa 1958;
- Changes to the transom above the north elevation entrance;
- Removal of dentil trim separating the first and second storey and brick piers at the north elevation;
- Windows have been replaced with five pane;
- Decorative cornice with brackets has been removed;
- Decorative brick detailing along some portions of the above-ground foundation have been removed;
- Voussoirs with keystones have been removed from first-storey windows;
- Entablature surrounding the west elevation has been removed; and
- Some doors and windows have been blinded.

The school has seen significant modifications to the exterior, although the form, massing and openings are largely the same. As such, staff recommend a score of 1 to 5.

6. Relationship to Surrounding Area

The institutional building at 5450 Russell Street has physical, historical and visual relationships with the surrounding area. It serves as a landmark as one of the few historical masonry buildings in the area and is surrounded by institutional uses in an otherwise predominately residential area (i.e., St. Joseph's School (once rebuilt), St. Mark's Church, United Memorial Church). The school also has physical, historical and visual relationships with St. Mark's Church, as another W.J. Busch designed masonry institutional building of a similar era.

For its physical, historical and visual relationships with the surrounding area, staff recommend a score of 6 to 10.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The HRM costs associated with advertising and processing this application can be accommodated within the approved 2024/2025 operating budget Planning and Development.

RISK CONSIDERATION

No risk considerations were identified.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The community engagement process for heritage registrations is consistent with the intent of the HRM Community Engagement Strategy. The level of community engagement was information sharing achieved through public access to the required Heritage Advisory Committee meeting. As a provision of the Heritage Property Act, no registration of a municipal heritage property shall take place until Regional Council has given the owner of the property an opportunity to be heard.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

No environmental implications were identified.

ALTERNATIVES

The Heritage Advisory Committee may choose to refuse the application to include 5450 Russell Street, Halifax in the Registry of Heritage Property for the Halifax Regional Municipality if the property scores less than 50 points based on the evaluation criteria. In doing so, the application will not proceed to Regional Council for evaluation.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

The Heritage Property Act.

ATTACHMENTS

Map 1: Location Map

Attachment A: Evaluation Criteria




Attachment B: Research Report

Report Prepared by: Elizabeth Cushing, Heritage Planner II, 902.478.2586

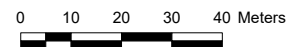


Map 1 - Location Map

5450 Russel Street,
Halifax

-  Historic Richmond and Hydrostone Proposed Heritage Conservation District
-  Registered Heritage Property
-  Subject Property

HALIFAX



HRM does not guarantee the accuracy of any representation on this plan.

Attachment A

HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY HERITAGE PROPERTY PROGRAM EVALUATION CRITERIA

**EVALUATION CRITERIA
FOR REGISTRATION OF HERITAGE BUILDINGS (Revised 2004)**

1. AGE

Age is probably the single most important factor in the popular understanding of the heritage value of buildings. The following age categories are based on local, national and international occasions that may be considered to have defined the character of what is how the Halifax Regional Municipality and its architecture.

Date of Construction	Points	Timeline
1749 - 1785	25	Halifax Garrison Town to the Loyalist migration
1786 - 1830	20	Boom period following construction of Shubenacadie Canal
1831 - 1867	16	From Boom to Confederation
1868 - 1899	13	Confederation to the end of the 19 th century
1900 - 1917	9	Turn of the Century to Halifax Harbour Explosion
1918 - 1945	5	The War Years
1945 - Present	3	Post-War

** Maximum score of 25 points in this category*

2. HISTORICAL OR ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE

A building can receive points for:

- A) Having specific associations with important occasions, institutions, personages and groups,
OR
B) For being architecturally important unique/representative of a particular period.

2A) Relationship to Important Occasions, Institutions, Personages or Groups

Nationally	Points	Comments
Intimately Related	16 - 20	
Moderately Related	11 - 15	
Loosely Related	1 - 10	
Provincially	Points	Comments
Intimately Related	11 - 15	
Moderately Related	6 - 10	
Loosely Related	1 - 5	

Locally	Points	Comments
Intimately Related	11 - 15	
Moderately Related	6 - 10	
Loosely Related	1 - 5	
No relationship to important occasions, institutions, personages or groups.	0	

** Maximum score of 20 points in this category, scoring from one of the three categories only*

2B) Important/Unique Architectural Style or Highly Representative of an Era

Importance	Points	Comments
Highly important, Unique, or representative of an era	16 - 20	
Moderately important, Unique, or representative of an era	11 - 15	
Somewhat important, or representative of an era	10 - 1	
Not important, Unique, or representative of an era	0	

** Maximum score of 20 points in this category.*

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF ARCHITECT/BUILDER

Is the structure representative of the work of an architect or builder of local, provincial or national importance?

Status	Points	Comments
Nationally	7 - 10	
Provincially Significant	4 - 6	
Locally Significant	1 - 3	
Not Significant	0	

** Maximum score of 10 points in this category.*

4. ARCHITECTURAL MERIT

The assessment of architectural merit is based on two factors:

A) **Construction type/building technology**: which refers to the method by which the structure was built (early or rare uses of materials), and building techniques;

AND

B) **Style**: which refers to the form or appearance of the architecture.

Construction Type/Building Technology		
A) Construction type	Points	Comments
Very rare/ early example	7 - 10	
Moderately rare/ early	4 - 6	
Somewhat rare/ early example	1 - 3	
Not rare/ common example	0	
B) Style	Points	Comments
Very rare/ early example	7 - 10	
Moderately rare/ early	4 - 6	
Somewhat rare/ early example	1 - 3	
Not rare/ common example	0	

** Maximum score of 10 points for Construction Type, and a maximum score of 10 for Style - a total maximum of 20 points in this category.*

5. ARCHITECTURAL INTEGRITY

Architectural Integrity refers to the extent to which the building retains original features/ structures/ styles, not the state of the building's condition.

Architecture	Consider any additions/ removal/ alterations to windows, doors, porches, dormers, roof lines, foundations, chimneys, and cladding.	
Exterior	Points	Comments
Largely unchanged	11 - 15	
Modest changes	6 - 10	
Major changes	1 - 5	
Seriously compromised	0	

** Maximum score of 15 points in this category.*

6. RELATIONSHIP TO SURROUNDING AREA

Points	Comments
6 - 10	The building is an important architectural asset contributing to the heritage character of the surrounding area.
1 - 5	The Architecture is compatible with the surrounding area and maintains its heritage character.
0	Does not contribute to the character of the surrounding area.

** Maximum score of 10 points in this category.*

Attachment B

Research Report

5450 Russell Street, Halifax

Prepared by:

HRM Planning & Development
Elizabeth Cushing, Planner II - Heritage

8 August 2024



HALIFAX

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Age

The following report was largely informed by the Halifax Board of School Commissioners School Sites and Building Committee records from 1914-1929 (Halifax Municipal Archives 102-53-5).

5450 Russell Street Halifax is located within the block bound by Russell Street to the north, Gottingen Street to the west, Galley Lane to the south and Vincent Street to the east.

In February 1916, the Halifax Board of School Commissioners' School Sites and Building Committee began exploring using the site at the corner of Russell and Gottingen Streets for a new boys' school, after a devastating fire at Young Street School the month prior. The 'fireproof brick' building was expected to cost approximately \$107,387 to construct. The City of Halifax accepted the transfer of the site of the Young Street school for the acquisition of the property at the southeast corner of Gottingen and Russell Streets that same year. In April 1916, architect Walter Johannes Busch presented plans to the Commissioners for a ten-department school which was accepted with minor modifications. The construction was largely complete that same year (Figure 1). The school is first listed in the 1916 McAlpine City Directory, and historical mapping shows the block as vacant until the 1918 Assessment Map (Figure 2).

The school and surrounding area were devastatingly impacted by the Halifax Explosion. Alexander McKay School was heavily damaged by the Explosion and at least 55 pupils were killed. The Halifax Relief Commission installed a temporary 'shack' behind the school, initially used as a dining hall for reconstruction workers and later as classrooms (Figure 3 and Figure 4). Busch provided a quote in February 1918 for explosion repair work at Alexander McKay, which included plaster work, repairs to roof and stairs, new windows, entrances, fences, library bookcases, etc. for a total cost of \$33,187. The repairs were completed in late 1918. The school ultimately cost \$114,840.45 to construct (approximately \$2.1 million today; Figure 5).

The subject property has been owned by Shambhala School Society since 2000. The Shambhala School, formerly Alexander McKay School, was constructed in 1916.

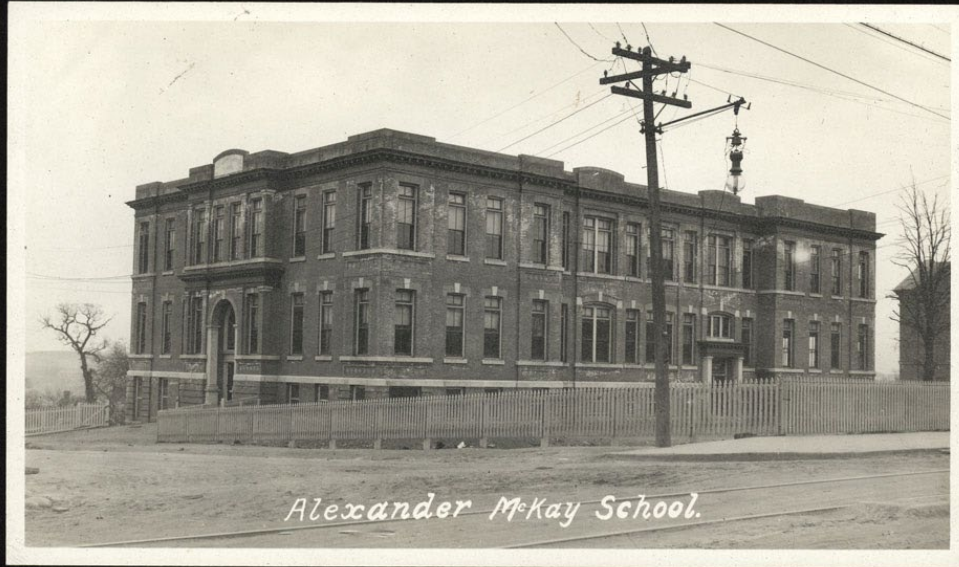


Figure 1: Alexander McKay School circa 1916 (Source: Halifax Municipal Archives)

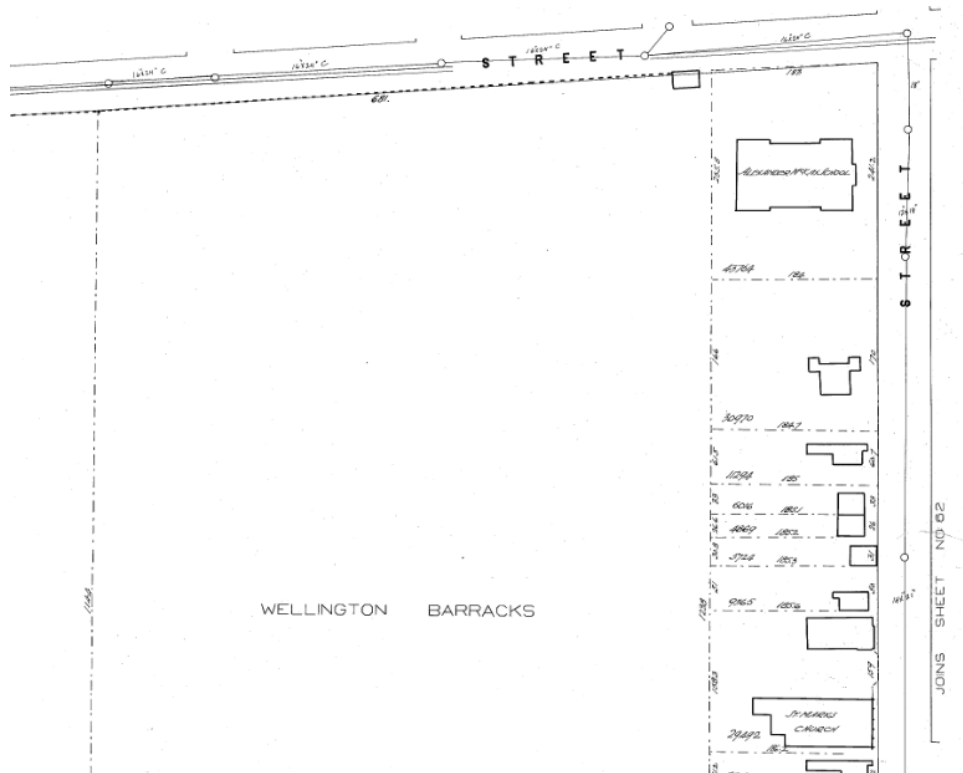


Figure 2: 1918 Assessment Map showing the corner of Gottingen and Russell Streets. Alexander McKay School is visible at the top right.



Figure 3: Temporary Dining Hall for Reconstruction Workers behind Alexander McKay School, 1918 (Source: Nova Scotia Archives)



Figure 4: Reconstruction Workers with Alexander McKay School behind them, 1918 (Source: Nova Scotia Archives)

Alexander McKay School

Land	7,395.		
Building Contract	89,729.		
Heating "	12,600.		
Architect	<u>5,116.45</u>		
	114,840.45		
(App. Governor in Council July 6, 1916.)			
Extra Lavatories			
Falconer & McDonald	1,328.00		
Architect	<u>66.40</u>		
	1,394.40		
(App. Governor in Council Oct. 15, 1917.)			
<u>PAYMENTS</u>			
	<u>Falconer & McDonald</u>	<u>Farquhar</u>	<u>Architect</u>
1916			
Aug. 15	12,000.		2,854.72
Oct. 7	12,000.		300.
Dec. 5	18,000.		450.
1917			
Jan. 23		4,000.	100.
Mar. 9	10,000.		250.
June 24	10,000.		250.
Oct. 2	<u>15,000.</u>	<u>4,000.</u>	<u>475.</u>
	77,000.	8,000.	4,679.72
Balance unpaid	<u>12,729.</u>	<u>4,600.</u>	<u>436.73</u>
	89,729.	12,600.	5,116.45
Halifax, N. S.,			
February 14, 1918.			

Figure 5: Total Cost for Construction of Alexander McKay School, 1918 (Source: Board of School Commissioners School Sites and Building Committee Records)

Historical or Architectural Importance

Relationship to Important Occasions, Institutions, Personages or Groups

Alexander McKay (1814-1917)

The school was named after Alexander McKay, who served as Supervisor of Halifax Public Schools from 1883 to 1916 (Figure 6 and Figure 7).

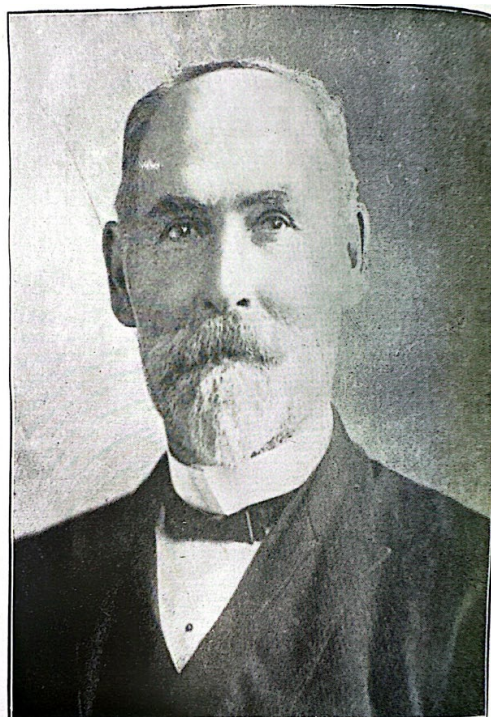
Alexander McKay (1841-1917) was born in Earltown, Nova Scotia in 1841 to Thomas and Mary McKay. He began teaching in Pictou County in 1856, and two years later, graduated from the provincial Normal school in Truro. McKay moved to Dartmouth in 1872 as principal of schools and was appointed teacher of mathematics and physical science at Halifax High School in 1880. In 1883, he resigned from this position to become supervisor of Halifax city schools. As supervisor, McKay advocated for proper heating and ventilation in school buildings, public high schools, manual training and domestic arts, the kindergarten movement, and the need for professionally trained teachers (Dictionary of Canadian Biography 2013). In 1890, he introduced instruction in musical theory, callisthenics and drill. That next year, Halifax became the first city in Canada to establish a full manual training program at the secondary school level.

McKay served as secretary and member of the board of directors at the Victoria School of Art and Design and worked closely with Anna Harriette Leonowens to promote art education for teachers, industrial drawing, and art appreciation. The Local Council of Women, with support from McKay, developed a cookery school for girls, implemented a school-garden program, the city's first supervised playground, and sought female representation on the Halifax Board of School Commissioners (Dictionary of Canadian Biography 2013). In 1907, McKay implemented the first medical and dental inspection service for city schools in the Maritimes, followed by an appointment of school nurses. He collaborated with Frederick Henry Sexton in developing the Halifax Evening Technical School. McKay established the Teachers' Protective Union, superannuation pensions, and formalized training for local teachers.

Despite this progressiveness, McKay supported the wishes of his predecessors and developed segregated schools for Halifax's black students during his tenure as Supervisor (Yorke 1998). As noted by Gordon Pollock (2018), it was the Halifax Board of School Commissioner's (the 'Board') policy to maintain separate schools based on race. During McKay's tenure, the Board passed motions to develop school accommodations for the 'colored' children in the city, and the 'colored' children 'shall attend only such schools so provided for their separate use'. Another motion noted that once these accommodations were provided, no 'colored' children shall be admitted into any other schools'. McKay advised teachers to 'treat colored children the same as others, but to give them seats apart from the white pupils' in a meeting with the Committee on Teachers in 1908 (Pollock 2018). Due to McKay's support for racial segregation of Halifax's schools, staff included his biography here simply to inform the full history of Alexander McKay School. Staff recommend that the historical associations with Alexander McKay not be considered as contributing to the historical value of the property.



Figure 6: Undated photo of Alexander McKay (Source: Nova Scotia Archives)



ALEXANDER McKay, ESQ., M. A.
Supervisor Halifax Public Schools November 15, 1883 to December 31, 1916.

Figure 7: Alexander McKay, Supervisor of Halifax Public Schools from 1883 to 1916 (Source: Board of School Commissioners)

Halifax Public Education System

The mid-19th century to early 20th century was a transformative time for public education in Halifax. The push for change was largely led by the middle-class, who advocated for large, formalized school systems to promote economic development and prevent social disorder. An increase in industrial development, and the establishment of local representative government, also played a role. Prior to this, schools in Halifax were mostly located around Grand Parade and were either large schools conducted by religious and philanthropic organizations, small exclusive academies, or smaller schools located in the schoolmaster's lodgings (Guildford 1990). Funding was provided by parents, religious and charitable organizations, individual donors and the Nova Scotia Assembly. There was not a consistent curriculum or set experience for all students, and was thus determined by wealth, religion and status. The movement for free education was hindered by an attachment to religious education and hesitancy to implement local taxation, and many parents were unable to send their children to school because of distance, weather, or being needed at home (Guildford 1990; Hood 1995).

The Free School Act was finally passed in 1865 after significant advocacy efforts for public school reform, and despite outcry from other orders of government and the media. The Act made schools free and open to all children through local taxation, and generally regulated public schools (e.g., teacher salaries, accommodations). The Board of School Commissioners (hereby the Board) was provided the ability to regulate and plan for the city's public schools (Guildford 1990). In 1883, attendance during regular school hours became compulsory for every boy and girl living in Halifax between the ages of 7 and 14. The Board passed a resolution in 1892 that it would build and maintain all schools within its jurisdiction. This decreased the Board's previous reliance on the Catholic Archdiocese, whom they were leasing several schools from. To mitigate fiscal pressures, the Board implemented a sinking fund in 1901 to assist in the construction and maintenance of new schools. As a result of these changes and the Free School Act, several new schools were built in Halifax at the turn of the century as the population (and subsequently attendance) boomed, and as the structural condition of existing buildings declined (Guildford 1990; Hood 1995).

Alexander McKay School represents the transformative era at the turn of the 20th century of Halifax's public education system. The building continues to be used for educational purposes today as the Shambhala School.

Halifax Explosion

Alexander McKay School has historical associations with the Halifax Explosion, which devastated Halifax on December 6, 1917 (see Figure 3 to Figure 5). Alexander McKay School was heavily damaged, and 55 pupils were killed. The immediate neighbourhood was severely impacted, including St. Joseph's School, St. Mark's Anglican Church and St. Joseph's Church (Figure 8 and Figure 9). The Board of School Commissioner's reported 194 deaths total amongst Alexander McKay (St. Joseph's Boys School), Bloomfield, Protestant Orphanage, Richmond, St. Joseph's Girls' and St. Patrick's Boys' Schools. St. Joseph's Girls School, Bloomfield School and Richmond School buildings were destroyed. All other schools, although standing, were damaged and rendered unsuitable for schooling purposes.

As one of the most severely impacted areas, the Halifax Relief Commission quickly established Alexander McKay School as temporary living quarters for reconstruction workers. They also installed a temporary 'shack' behind the school, initially used as a dining hall for reconstruction

workers and later as classrooms for three schools. The Report of the Chairman of Board of School Commissioners, dated October 31st, 1918, reads:

“The Alexander McKay School, the new one replacing Young Street has not yet been taken over by the Board. The use of this building for school purposes, was the real solution of our school problem in the devastated area...We, however, made arrangements with the Relief Commission which had taken over the work of Relief in Halifax to use this ten room building which they built on the Alexander McKay play grounds. This building adapted by the Board for classes relieved matters considerably. We are hopeful of having the Alexander McKay building completed in a month or so, which will be used to accommodate the various classes of Richmond, St. Joseph’s Boys and Girls Schools until the new buildings are erected”.

The ten-room building referenced in the excerpt above is the dining hall constructed behind the school. The Alexander McKay School also sustained damage during the explosion and thus would not have been immediately ready for classes until repairs were completed. However, once repairs were completed, the school was used to teach pupils from three other schools.

Alexander McKay School played a pivotal role in the rebuilding of Halifax following the Halifax Explosion.



Figure 8: St. Joseph's School after the Halifax Explosion, with Alexander McKay School visible in the centre and St. Joseph's Church to the right (Source: Saint Mary's Cathedral Basilica Foundation)



Figure 9: St. Joseph's Church after the Halifax Explosion, with Alexander McKay School visible to the right
(Source: Nova Scotia Archives)

Important / Unique Architectural Style or Highly Representative of an Era

Alexander McKay School was constructed in the Edwardian Classicism style. The style was popular in Canada from 1900 to 1930 and presented a simplified but formal design with Classical influence (Blumenson 1990). Edwardian Classicism is characterized by its balanced facades, simplified but large rooflines, smooth brick surfaces and generous fenestration. Short colonettes and brick piers emphasize entryways, and Classical elements such as large plain stone lintels with keystones surround windows. Architect W.J. Busch also designed Chebucto Road School, the Halifax Academy, and Truro Normal School in a similar Classical style.

5450 Russell Street is a rare example of an early 20th century education building in Halifax. There were approximately 25 schools constructed between 1860 to 1920, and of those, only 7 remain. Many were closed in the 1950s to 1970s and subsequently demolished, such as:

- Africville School [Campbell Road]
- Alexandra School [Brunswick Street]
- Bloomfield School
- College Street
- Joseph Howe [Creighton Street]
- LeMarchant
- Morris Street
- Oxford Street
- Quinpool Road
- Richmond [Roome Street]
- St. Joseph [Kaye Street]
- St. Patrick's Girls and Boys Schools [Brunswick Street]
- Young Street [Kaye Street]

Alexander McKay School is one of the oldest remaining schools in Halifax. As such, the school is a rare example of an early 20th century institutional building.

Significance of Architect or Builder

Walter Johannes Busch (1865-1924; Figure 10) was hired by the Board of School Commissioners to design Alexander McKay School.

Walter trained under his father, esteemed architect Henry F. Busch, and worked as his assistant at the office on Bedford Row. Walter became an architect in 1887 and continued to work at his father's firm for the next fifteen years. After Henry passed away in 1902, Walter continued the business under his own name and specialized in educational building design (Rosinski 1994; Hill 2021). He designed ten Halifax schools, including St. Patrick's Girls' High School, Chebucto Road Public School, Tower Road School and Bloomfield School (Rosinski 1994). Both Chebucto Road and Tower Road Schools are municipally registered heritage properties. Walter married Marion (née Whitson) and was a member of several clubs including Lorne Aquatic Club and Mayflower Curling Club.

Most of Walter's work can be found in northwest Halifax, including some private residences, commercial buildings, and three churches: the Lutheran Church at Windsor and Allen Streets;

St. John's Presbyterian (formerly at Willow and Windsor Streets); and the neighbouring St. Mark's Anglican Church at Gottingen and Russell Streets in 1920, after the original church was destroyed in the Explosion (Figure 11; Rosinski 1994:192). Walter passed away in 1924 at his Quinpool Road residence.

PROMINENT LOCAL ARCHITECT DIES

Walter J. Busch Dies at His Residence Following Lengthy Illness.


FOLLOWING an illness of some duration, the death occurred at his residence, 526 Quinpool Road at 7.30 o'clock last evening of Walter J. Busch, well-known Halifax architect. Mr. Busch was 59 years of age and through his long professional career he had established a wide acquaintanship not only in this city, but throughout the entire province, who will receive the news of his demise with a sincere sense of loss.

Mr. Busch was born in Halifax and lived his entire life in this city. A member of St. George's Anglican Church, he was always actively connected with church and social work of the community. He was prominently connected with a number of clubs including with a number of ing Club, of which he was one of the founders and for a number of years secretary, and the Lorne Aquatic Club. Deceased was also prominently connected with the Oddfellows.

In 1922 Mr. Busch was a member of the Canadian Curling team which toured Scotland, having been elected to represent the Mayflower Curling Club during the trip.

Deceased is survived by his wife, who before her marriage was Miss Marion B. Whiston, of this city; his mother, Mrs. Mary Busch, of this city, two brothers, Ernest, of Halifax and Henry, of Boston and one sister, Mrs. Fred Whiston, of San Diego, California. Funeral arrangements have not yet been made.

Passes Away



WALTER J. BUSCH

WELL-known Halifax architect, who died at his residence, 526 Quinpool Road, early last evening.

THE CHURCH UNION BILL PASSED THE SENATE YESTERDAY

OTTAWA, July 14.—With a protest from Hon. Dr. Reid that the measure had been "railroaded" through the Senate, tonight

Figure 10: Obituary for Walter Johannes Busch (Source: Private Collection, Ancestry.ca)

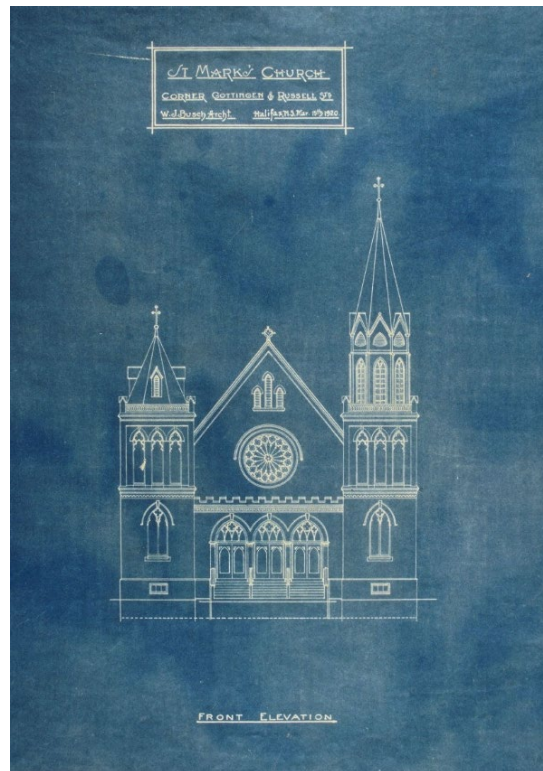


Figure 11: Blueprint for St. Mark's Church by W.J. Busch, 1920 (Source: Nova Scotia Archives)

The contractors of Alexander McKay School were Falconer & McDonald, who had an office in the St. Paul Building on Barrington Street. A partnership between Alexander D. Falconer and Duncan G. McDonald, the firm also built institutional buildings at Dalhousie University (e.g., Macdonald Building, Nova Scotia Technical College) and brick buildings across the province. Heating and ventilation were completed by Farquhar Brothers Ltd., operated by James and J.G. Farquhar (Figure 12). Their work yard was formerly on Hollis Street.



Figure 12: Farquhar Brothers Ltd. Advertisement (Source: McAlpine Directory 1917)

Architectural Merit

Construction Type or Building Technology

The subject property was constructed with concrete framing clad in brick. The brick cladding has since been parged with stucco. There are relatively few brick buildings within the surrounding area of 5450 Russell Street. Brick was generally reserved for larger institutional buildings and are more detectable within the downtown area of Halifax.

It is important to note that although the brick has been parged with stucco, this modification could be reversed in the future.

Style

The institutional building at 5450 Russell Street was constructed in the Edwardian Classicism style (Figure 13 to Figure 22; see Important / Unique Architectural Style or Highly Representative of an Era).

The single-detached, two-and-a-half storey institutional building has a rectangular long façade plan with a rear wing. The building is clad in brick which has been parged with stucco, with some repairs done in concrete. There is a partially above-ground basement which from the exterior is stucco with granite boulder foundation. The roof is flat with a plain cornice. There are granite string courses along projecting façades and separating the first storey from the basement. Windows are mostly flat with five-panes and granite lug sills. There are several double width (ten-paned) windows, and some of these have an arched opening. The basement windows are one-over-one. A few windows have been blinded on the north and west elevations. A few windows on the south elevation have been replaced by three-pane windows.

The two-leaf wood and glazed entrance on the north elevation features a granite step and granite columns with plinths. The entrance is surrounded by a wood entablature with dentil trim and topped by a multiple light flat transom and a shaped single-light transom above. Above the entrance along the arched roofline is a curved inscription stone which reads: *Alexander McKay School A.D. 1916*. The entrance on the west elevation is flanked by granite piers and plain pediment, flat single-light transom, and an arched six-pane window above. There is another double-leaf wood entrance on the east elevation with a blinded transom.

The rear wing has a square plan and is also clad in stucco with metal cornice. Windows are multiple-paned, and a larger entrance with three-pane transom has been blinded in and replaced with a single-leaf door on the east elevation. The rear wing is connected to the original building through a two-storey passageway, which has a metal double panel entrance on the ground level.

Character Defining Elements

The character defining elements of 5450 Russell Street include, but are not limited to:

- Two-and-a-half storey, Edwardian Classicism style institutional building with rectangular long façade;
- Proud central bay on front (north) elevation, topped by parapet and segmental arch inscription stone reading '*Alexander McKay School A.D. 1916*';

- Proud flanking bays on side (west and east) elevations, with flat roofline;
- Masonry cladding;
- Above-ground granite cut stone and rubblestone foundation;
- Granite string courses and lug sills;
- Flat and segmental arch windows;
- Two-leaf wood glazed entrance on the north elevation with tall multiple-light flat transom and arched transom;
- North elevation entablature surrounding the entrance with dentil trim, flanked by granite columns and step;
- Double-leaf entrance on the east elevation with blinded transom; and
- Double-leaf wood entrance on the west elevation with transom and surrounded by granite piers and step.



Figure 13: North elevation of the original portion of 5450 Russell Street (May 1, 2024)



Figure 14: West elevation of the original portion of 5450 Russell Street (May 1, 2024)



Figure 15: South elevation of the original portion of 5450 Russell Street, and west elevation of rear wing (May 1, 2024)



Figure 16: East elevation of original portion of 5450 Russell Street and north elevation of rear wing (May 1, 2024)



Figure 17: North and east elevation of the rear addition (May 1, 2024)



Figure 18: Stucco cladding and granite and rubblestone foundation (May 1, 2024)



Figure 19: Inscription Stone as visible from the north elevation of original building (May 1, 2024)



Figure 20: Double-leaf, wood and glazed entrance on the north elevation with multiple-light flat transom and shaped transom above, and granite columns with plinths (May 1, 2024)



Figure 21: West Elevation double-leaf wood entrance with flat transom and granite piers (May 1, 2024)



Figure 22: Double-leaf wood entrance with blinded transom on the east elevation (May 1, 2024)

Architectural Integrity

The institutional building at 5450 Russell Street has a moderate level of integrity. Based on visual inspection and original architectural blueprints by W.J. Busch (Figure 23 to Figure 25Figure 4), the following modifications have been made to the building since its initial construction in 1916:

- Red brick has been parged with stucco;
- A rear addition was constructed circa 1958
- Changes to the transom above the north elevation entrance;
- Removal of dentil trim separating the first and second storey and brick piers at the north elevation;
- Windows have been replaced with five pane;
- Decorative cornice with brackets has been removed;
- Decorative brick detailing along some portions of the above-ground foundation have been removed;
- Voussoirs with keystones have been removed from first-storey windows;
- Entablature surrounding the west elevation has been removed; and,
- Some doors and windows have been blinded.

Although Busch's architectural blueprints are labelled 'St. Joseph's Boys School', the massing, design and form matches the existing school on the subject site and historical photographs of the school. Further, the date correlates with the construction of Alexander McKay School (St. Joseph's School was built in 1904), and the school was named for Alexander McKay posthumously, after the school was built.

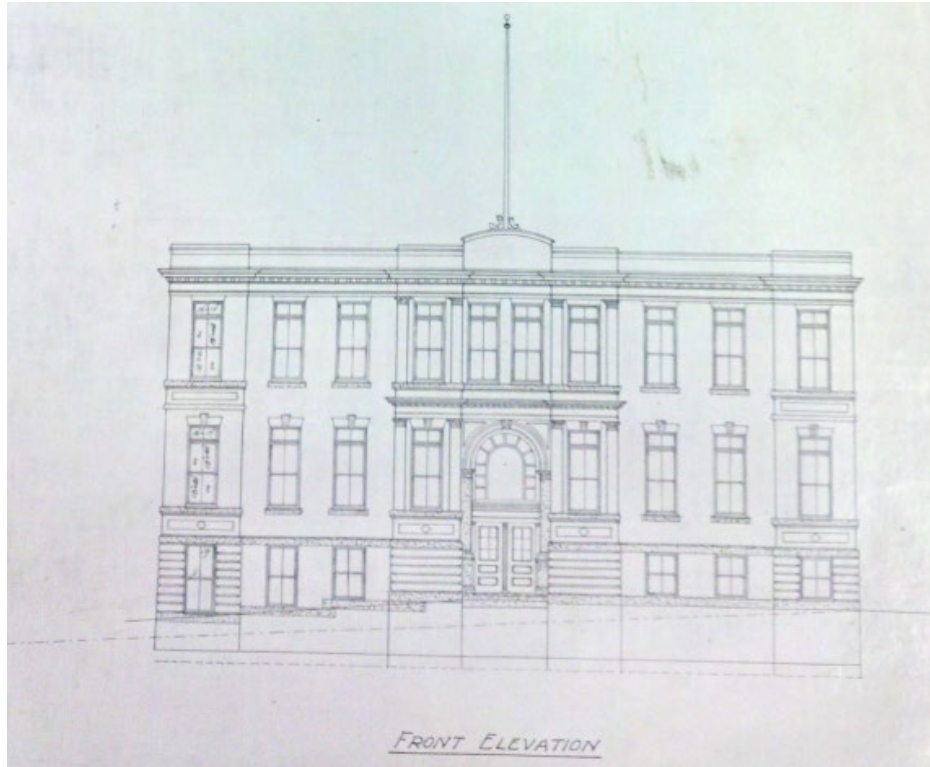


Figure 23: Original Blueprints by W.J. Busch depicting front elevation (Source: Nova Scotia Archives)



Figure 24: Original Blueprints by W.J. Busch depicting rear elevation (Source: Nova Scotia Archives)



Figure 25: Original Blueprints by W.J. Busch depicting side elevation (Source: Nova Scotia Archives)

Relationship to Surrounding Area

The institutional building at 5450 Russell Street has physical, historical and visual relationships with the surrounding area (Figure 26 to Figure 29). It serves as a landmark as one of the few historical masonry buildings in the area and is surrounded by institutional uses in an otherwise predominately residential area (i.e., St. Joseph’s School (once rebuilt), St. Mark’s Church, United Memorial Church). The school also has physical, historical and visual relationships with St. Mark’s Church, as another W.J. Busch designed institutional building of a similar era.



Figure 26: View near Russell Street and Gottingen Street intersection facing south, with 5450 Russell Street visible to the left (May 1, 2024)



Figure 27: View of Russell Street facing east from Gottingen Street, with 5450 Russell Street visible to the right (May 1, 2024)



Figure 28: View at Russell Street and Gottingen Street intersection facing west (May 1, 2024)



Figure 29: View from north elevation of 5450 Russell Street of St. Mark's Church (May 1, 2024)

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