BUILDING·HERITAGE

A Newsletter Celebrating the Register of Historic Resources in Edmonton

Edmonton's Historic Schools

Edmonton has a long history of building wonderful schools. At the time the province was formed, and when Edmonton became a city in its own right, much was made of school architecture. In fact there is little to rival the quality of public school buildings from the period. This attests to the pride of this new community in the provision of education for their children. The schools were solid, beautiful, comfortable, light-filled and inspiring. Early Edmontonians wanted the best influences for their children and architecture was chosen as the most visible symbol of this inspiration. There is probably no Western Canadian community that has a more impressive inventory of early school buildings still being used for their original purposes. Although there have been ups and downs in the city's economy over the years, the tradition of thoughtful school architecture has persisted to the present with excellent examples from the post-WWII period, during the 1960s, and again over the past two decades. But perhaps the finest schools, and the still the most inspiring architecture, are from the pre-WWI period when Edmontonians spared no expense to provide wonderful environments for learning. They quickly became landmarks in their communities and continue to be a source of pride for a number of lucky neighbourhoods around the city.

■ **David Murray Architect**

(Above) Old Scona Academic High School
c. 1900
10523-84 Avenue
Photo credit: City of Edmonton Archives

(Left) Queen Alexandra Elementary School
c. 1910
7730-106 Street
Photo credit: City of Edmonton Archives

OLD SCONA SCHOOL

There is nearly 100 years of history etched into the bricks at Old Scona High School; "Tom P. 1909," one reads. "Arnold Weidman Dec. 7, 1944," another proclaims. "Julius Caesar 106 BC," jokes yet another.

Then Premier A.C. Rutherford laid the cornerstone on October 18, 1907 to begin construction of the school at 10523-84 Avenue. The school was designed by renowned Edmonton architect Roland Lines (who died in the First World *Continued on page 2*

War), and built with some of the finest materials of the day.

Alberta bluestone, barged up the river, was used for the foundation. Exterior decorative elements were Kootenay marble and interior wood trim was B.C. fir and cedar. The construction cost was about $100,000 and the *Strathcona Plaindealer* reported that Premier Rutherford called it "the finest school building in the province."

When the school opened it was called Strathcona Collegiate Institute. From 1909 to 1911, the top floor was home to the University of Alberta. In 1913, it was renamed Strathcona High School.
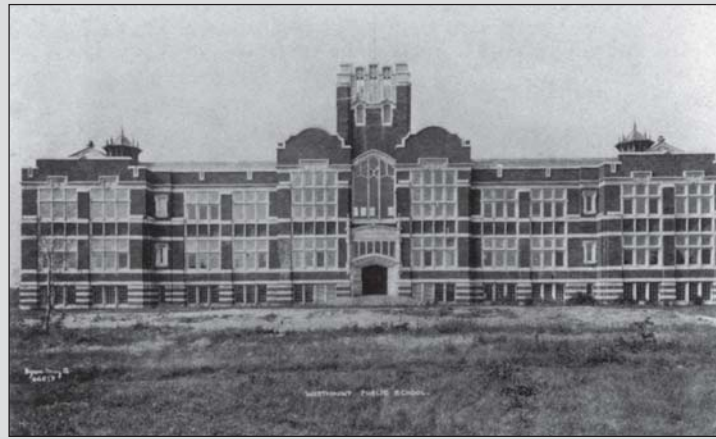
When the new Strathcona Composite opened in 1953, the old facility became known as Old Scona. A $1.5 million restoration in the 1990s included repointing of the bricks by hand, updated mechanical and electrical systems and new sealed windows – all 171 of them – which retained the original glass.

QUEEN ALEXANDRA SCHOOL

This year marks the 100th anniversary of Queen Alexandra School, making it Edmonton's oldest continuously operating school. The venerable building, at 7730-106 Street, opened its doors in 1906 as Duggan Street School. There have been alterations and additions over the years but the spirit of the original structure endures.

Erected on the site of Strathcona's first dairy, the school went up in two sections – a four-room, two-storey part in 1905-1906 and a virtually identical western half in 1912. A charming, ornate building with echoes of a small castle, Queen Alexandra reflects the glorious traditions of English Renaissance Revival style architecture.

Designed by prominent turn of the century Edmonton architect James E. Wize, it exhibits elements of the classical styling, while incorporating modern conveniences such as proper ventilation and lighting. The school was constructed of

Westmount Junior High School c. 1910
11125-131 Street
Photo credit: City of Edmonton Archives

red brick with sandstone detailing, and has six dormers and two open Italianate towers located at the northeast and northwest corners.

In October 1908, 45 students of the newly established University of Alberta utilized the third floor assembly hall for their first classes. Classes were moved to the Strathcona Collegiate Institute the following year. For a time, the office of Dr. Henry Marshall Tory, the U of A's first president, was also at the school. In 1958 – the university's 50th anniversary – Tory's door, reading "Office of the President," was presented to the U of A as a gift from the school. With the 1912 amalgamation of Edmonton and Strathcona, the property was transferred to Edmonton School District No. 7. That same year, with rapid population growth swelling student numbers, the western addition was built. Like its original sister, it featured numerous square and round arched windows, tall and proud chimney stacks, hipped roof line and 13 and/or 14 foot high ceilings in corridors.

The school's most treasured link to the past is certainly an autographed photo of Queen Alexandra, the consort of King Edward VII. It was acquired in 1910 by Vice-Principal Annie Lyle, the same year the name of the school was officially changed.

WESTMOUNT SCHOOL

Building started in 1913 and opened in 1915, Westmount School has been a

part of the northwest Edmonton educational fabric for four generations. Alumni include musician Tommy Banks, Court of Queen's Bench Justice Tevie Miller, and broadcaster Jerry Forbes. Long serving staff has included Margaret Livingstone, who spent 37 of her 41 teaching years at Westmount, and Marjorie Barker, who taught here for 27 of 42 years with the school board.

When it opened, the *Edmonton Journal* raved Westmount School had "the latest in school planning and exterior design – a free treatment of Gothic which is more or less traditionally associated with collegiate work." Designed along with several others of the day by the school board's Building Commissioner, George E. Turner, the 17-room school, at 11125-131 Street, was erected on a block of land bought from the Norris family in 1909 for $3,200.

The exterior is clad with local brick and Indiana Bedford Stone, embellished with stone crests and carvings. Inside, there are terrazzo mosaic tiles in the entranceways, doors and wall panels of fine oak, leaded glass and high ceilings. Originally heated with coal and converted to natural gas in 1959, it's obvious the designers were not particularly concerned with a pursuit of energy conservation.

When an outbreak of deadly Spanish flu swept the city in 1918, public schools were closed and many, including Westmount, converted to hospitals. A month after the closures took effect, teacher Felicia Graham disappeared. Her family offered a $500 reward for information leading to her whereabouts but she was never seen again. One of the reward posters resides in the school's upstairs library where, it is said, Miss Graham's footsteps are sometimes heard.

■ **Lawrence Herzog**

Lawrence's columns on heritage and city issues have appeared in *Edmonton's Real Estate Weekly* since 1988. Reprinted with permission©2006. www.lawrenceherzog.com

Two Recent Designations

Earlier this year, the City of Edmonton designated two more heritage buildings, the Hotel Grand/ Hagmann Block and the St. Francis of Assisi Friary/St. Anthony's College. Owners of both buildings approached the City heritage planners for designation and rehabilitation incentives to help with restoration costs. Both are scheduled to begin work this summer. It is exciting to include two more wonderful and important heritage buildings to the City of Edmonton's list of designated structures making a total of 67 buildings now protected as Municipal Historic Resources for future generations to enjoy.

■ **Robert Geldart**
Principal Heritage Planner

St. Francis of Assisi Friary/St. Anthony's College c. 1949
6770-129 Avenue
Photo credit: Franciscan's Archives

ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI FRIARY/ST. ANTHONY'S COLLEGE

Built at a time of significant growth in Edmonton's population, the St. Francis of Assisi Friary/St. Anthony's College is notable for its associations with the early history and development of the Franciscan Order in Edmonton and the historic packing plant settlement. At one time this area was known as Packingtown. The Franciscan missionaries moved into the Baldwin neighbourhood in 1909, following the Catholic families that had settled the growing area. A friary was built in the same year and a Catholic church was established two years later. The Franciscan mission had been based in Fort Saskatchewan, even prior to Alberta becoming a province.

The current three-storey structure was built in 1925, with additions in 1932 and 1946. The red brick-clad concrete building was originally a modest facility. It grew over time following successful permission to open a Seraphic College for Franciscan Voca-

tions, which operated until June 1970. The friary and college building is significant for its architectural evolution. The 1931 addition is representative of the Collegiate Gothic style, with pointed-arch windows, door openings and blind panels above the entry door, and a statue niche at the top of the tower above the entry. The addition also includes a stepped massed tower that reflects the Art Deco style of the period.

Although most of the original windows in the building have been replaced, the overall relationship to the landscape and urban setting is intact. Part of the character that defines the heritage of the St. Francis of Assisi Friary/St. Anthony's College is its continuous use as a religious educational facility for over a century. Also noteworthy is its ecclesiastical form, scale and massing as expressed by its three-storey height, corner tower and flat roof with raised parapets.

Today, this wonderful historic building is owned by the John Bosco Child and Family Services Foundation who continue to use the building as an educational facility for emotionally troubled children and adolescents.

HOTEL GRAND/ HAGMANN BLOCK

The Hotel Grand/Hagmann Block is representative of the early mixed-use hotel that accommodated the area's seasonal and travelling population during the time of Edmonton's rapid development as a commercial centre in the pre-World War I era. Also known as Hagmann Apartments, it is a four-storey, masonry commercial structure that is situated on a mid-block lot but displaying two primary façades. The structure is located in the McCauley neighbourhood, one of the oldest settled neighbourhoods in Edmonton. The neighbourhood, named after Edmonton's first mayor, originally emerged as a finance and business district, with hotels clustered to the south, a red light district to the northeast and a residential area to the north.

The hotel was built in 1913 as an investment property by John Hagmann, who farmed the land on what is now the Hagmann Estate in northwest Edmonton. The Hotel Grand/Hagmann Block is a fine ex- *Continued on page 4*

ample of Edwardian-era commercial architecture. The structure has deteriorated somewhat over the years but retains most of its architectural features. It displays a classical revival influence illustrated by tan-coloured brick, large and rectangular ground-floor storefronts, pressed metal cornices above the ground floor and at the roof line, and precast neoclassical details.

In 1927, the hotel was converted to the Convent of the Assumption; it was operated as a convent for 45 years until it's closure in 1972. The building appears to have been somewhat peripheral to the commercial activities of the area in 1913 since no other major commercial buildings were constructed nearby. The building sits alone in its historical environment, directly behind the Excel Society building on 97 Street and 107 Avenue.

The Hotel Grand/Hagmann Block will soon be restored and converted into affordable housing units.

■ **Kenan Handzic, Student Planner (BRZ's and Heritage)**

Hotel Grand/Hagmann Block c. 1914
10765-98 Street
Photo credit: Glenbow Archives

Edmonton and Athabaska District Historic Festival • July 22 to July 30, 2006

The Edmonton and District Historical Society is pleased to present its 10th annual Historic Festival. In celebration of our 10th anniversary, we have expanded to northern Alberta and renamed the festival Edmonton and Athabaska District Historic Festival. Special events include tours and activities at museums, historic sites and community events, and showcase rural life, smaller communities, agriculture and cultural heritage. The event brochure will highlight participating communities and encourages you to plan day trips to explore and "Celebrate our Heritage". For more information contact:

Wanda Bornn, Event Coordinator at 439-2797
email: events@historicedmonton.ca or visit www.historicedmonton.ca

Did you know?

That the historic McKay Avenue School served as the site of the first two sessions of the Alberta Legislature? (1906 and 1907). It was in the third floor Assembly Hall that the important decision was made to make Edmonton the capital of Alberta. The school now houses the Edmonton Public School Board Archives and Museum.

Source: http://archives.epsb.net/history.htm

HISTORIC RESOURCES REVIEW PANEL - 2006

- Robert Thirlwell, Chair
- Bud Squair
- Joe Friedel
- Ken Tingley
- David Murray
- Dorothy Field
- Leslee Greenaway
- Johanne Yakula
- Michael Payne
- Kim Christie-Milley
- Robert Geldart/David Holdsworth

This newsletter is produced in partnership with the Edmonton Historical Board and the City of Edmonton Planning and Development Department

WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Please send your responses to:

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or visit our website at: www.edmonton.ca
and go to
Infrastructure and Planning -
Historic Resources

Have a **Great Summer!**