

♦ BUILDING ♦ HERITAGE ♦

A Newsletter Celebrating the Register of Historic Resources in Edmonton

Historic Theatres in Edmonton

OLD STRATHCONA'S PRINCESS THEATRE/ CINEMA

Princess Theatre/Cinema is located in the central and very bustling area of historic Old Strathcona. It was constructed from 1914 to 1915 and financed by John W. McKernan, a member of one of the oldest pioneer families in the Edmonton area. The building was the first marble-fronted theatre west of Winnipeg and the only theatre in Edmonton's south side until 1940. At the time, the start of WWI, this edifice contained the largest stage in Western Canada and featured "high class moving pictures," as well as musical vaudeville and concerts. The building is an important part of Edmonton's Heritage as it "was considered as one of the 'most complete and beautiful buildings of its kind in Western Canada'" (Field, 27).

The building contains three stories. The cinema and the stage were and still are located on the ground and second floors, with a capacity for 660 patrons. The third floor contained suites and offices, and a basement was used as the billiards room. Besides the façade that was finished with British

Continued on page 2

The Princess Theatre c. 1915
10337-82 (Whyte) Avenue

Photo credit: City of Edmonton Archives



Columbian marble, the exterior also contained small ceramic mosaics that “adorned twin gables in the parapet above a copper cornice” (Field, 27). A large transom with a stained glass window was built above the main entrance. The entrance contained a vestibule and a lobby adorned in marble and tile. The interior is particularly charming as much of the original décor from this early 20th Century structure has been retained. This includes an arched ceiling that was decorated with plaster of figures and friezes.

The Princess operated as a theatre until 1958. After that, it contained various retail shops but reverted to its original use in 1973. In 1970, the Princess Theatre/Cinema was entirely renovated and in 1975, it was designated as a Registered Historical Resource. It has since been upgraded to the highest level of protection as a Provincial Historic Resource.



ROXY THEATRE

The Roxy Theatre is of interest as a modern building. It is located in the central part of 124 Street, which is now a thriving business district. This area was called the West End in the early 1900s and the Roxy became a vital part of its life over the years. Surprisingly, it was constructed by Suburban Theatres Ltd. in 1938, during the Great Depression. This pre-WWII building was designed by well known architect, William G. Blakey, who is “the longest practicing architect in Alberta’s history”. Blakey also designed the Edmonton Journal Building and Masonic Temple earlier in his career.

The owner of the Roxy, Bill Wilson, promised his wife that he would not follow the footsteps of his father, who ran movie theatres, including Edmonton’s Famous Players. However, when Bill was laid off from his engineering job during these hard years, he made the dramatic move of opening up a theatre. This was based on Bill’s idea that people, even though poor, needed to be entertained during this severe economic period. The idea caught on and Bill had much success. Seeing a movie was a major event at the time. There were long line-ups at the first

screening of “Mad about Music”, as well as the numerous evening shows that followed thereafter, despite the fact that the Roxy did not present first-run movies due to its small, independently-owned status.

The theatre had a capacity of 500 patrons and

was also used for benefit shows and parties with live entertainment.

The Roxy Theatre is a stucco building that was influenced by the Moderne style. For its time, it contained many luxuries, including air conditioning, expanded legroom, and the latest in sound and projection equipment. The structure also had room for a series of pharmacies that occupied the space next to the recessed entrance of the cinema. Those who complain about high movie ticket prices today will not find any comfort in the fact that admission for a movie at the Roxy was 30 cents when it opened. This translates to about four dollars today, still much lower than in the present



The Garneau Theatre c. 1943
8712-109 Street

Photo credit: Provincial Archives

if adjusted for inflation. Even better, admission included a cartoon, newsreel and sport show. In 1941, the Roxy was sold to Odeon Theatres Ltd. Today it is used mainly for theatre plays.

As the Roxy Theatre has undergone some major alterations over the years, its architectural importance is of a lesser value than its historical significance to the “West End” and the city. It was a theatre that touched people’s lives and uplifted them during one of the harshest periods in recent human history. Despite its changes over time, it has retained that same vital purpose in the present. Whatever alterations await it in the future, it will surely continue to uplift and make people’s lives more interesting down the road.

GARNEAU THEATRE

The Old Strathcona area is rapidly becoming Edmonton’s predominant entertainment district which is reflected by its concentration of theatres. While the Garneau Theatre is not located within the boundaries of historic Old Strathcona, it is right on 109 Street and is considered a part of this famous area as well as the Garneau neighbourhood. The Garneau theatre is on the Register of Historic Resources in Edmonton, but not yet designated as a municipal historic resource.

The Garneau Theatre got its name from Laurent Garneau, a Métis trader and politician that lived nearby in the

area since 1874. Suburban Theatres financed its construction and the building was completed on October 24, 1940. The Garneau Theatre was designed by William G. Blakey, the same architect who constructed the Roxy Theatre two years earlier. While the Roxy has gone through numerous changes, the Garneau remains faithful its original great design. The theatre is especially significant as the “last remaining example of early modernism style in the province” (Herzog, 5).

The outside of the theatre is composed of an entrance located beneath a marquee and brick walls lining its three sides. The entrance is flanked on both sides by commercial spaces, which have housed restaurants and retail businesses. Inside the theatre is highly elegant while remaining faithful to modernist functional principles. The theatre originally contained 780 leather seats and its “Two’s Company” love seats which accommodated couples and embarrassed strangers, set it apart from other theatres in the city. Gumwood was used for the foyer doors and pillars, which along with a wall of bricks that faces the south, created a unique atmosphere. Vintage lighting has recently been installed in the auditorium and lobby. Unlike the Princess, with its balcony above the main auditorium, Garneau’s terrace is located immediately behind it. The auditorium’s walls were decorated with tones of gold and “sea-green and ultramarine strips”. The structure also contained a basement with a boiler, a manager’s suite as well as a penthouse on the top floor. Below the auditorium is a tunnel running to the stage.

The Garneau has another connection to the Roxy, as Bill Wilson managed the Garneau after his successful venture with the Roxy. Originally an independent cinema, the Garneau became



part of the Famous Players chain in 1941. Thus, Bill Wilson did follow in the footsteps of his father by managing a Famous Players Theatre. This allowed it to present first-run movies. The Garneau was closed in the late 1980s for a brief period but was restored in 1996. Currently, the Garneau is used mainly as a theatre for screening independent and foreign movies.

DOWNTOWN'S PARAMOUNT THEATRE

The Paramount Theatre is a prime example of the International style that was so popular when it was completed in 1952. This style emerged from the modernist architecture movement and is characterized by strong vertical and horizontal lines with little ornamentation. A new love of simplicity in modernist structures meant that the Paramount was not built in an intricate style, which sets it apart from Edmonton’s older theatres. Because of its distinctive design and style, the Paramount is significant and deserves to be designated and protected as a modern historic resource in Edmonton. Architectural firm Stanley & Stanley designed the theatre with exposed marble columns, asymmetrical balanced composition, a hint of zigzag design near the entrance and an exposed ladder for the vertical sign. Along with the roof, which contains a canopy and louvers, these elements reveal structural elements

as opposed to hiding them behind façades. Extravagant materials made up the structure, including Tyndall limestone from Manitoba, granite from British Columbia and marble from Italy.

The theatre is located in the heart of downtown Jasper Avenue. It had a capacity for 1250 people, which along with the design made it the largest and “greatest” Famous Players single cinema in the region before the time of multiplexes. The large size of the theatre is reflective of the booming movie industry in the post-

WWII period. The Paramount was part of Famous Players’ expansion across Canada. It showed first-run movies and was also used by Premier Ernest Manning, who broadcast his Sunday morning radio show, “Back to the Bible Hour,” from the auditorium.

Bad times for the theatre began in the early 1980s as attendance decreased due to the burgeoning home video market. It was renovated in 1985 with a new interior and seating. With its single screen and large auditorium, however, the Paramount could not compete with the multi-screen theatres and it under-performed for some time before closure. Famous Players closed and sold the theatre in 2003, bringing an end to an era in Edmonton’s cinema history. Like other older theatres, such as the Roxy and the Garneau, the Paramount found a new use, it is now home to City Centre Church.

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

SOURCES:

Field, Dorothy, 2000. Strathcona: Historical Walking and Driving Tour. Alberta Community Development Heritage Resource Management. Pp. 26-7.

Herzog, Lawrence, July 19, 2006. Edmonton’s Real Estate Weekly. Edmonton Real Estate Board. Pp. 5 & 7. Originally taken from Historical Buildings of Edmonton, 1990.

Yanish, Lori and Lowe, Shirley, 1970. West Side Story: The History of the Original West End of Edmonton.



Recent Designations

The City of Edmonton designated six more heritage buildings: the Strathcona Hotel, Connaught Armoury, Otto Reher Cottage, William O'Leary Residence, R.G.J. Smith Residence and William Blakey Residence. Owners of these buildings approached the City Heritage Planners for designation and rehabilitation incentives to help with restoration costs. It is very exciting to include these six significant heritage buildings to the City's list of designated structures making it a total of 72 buildings now protected as *Municipal Historic Resources* for future generations to enjoy.

■ Robert Geldart, Principal Heritage Planner



Connaught Armoury 10310-85 Avenue

The Connaught Armoury is militaristic in style with brick and limestone as construction materials, "cannonballs" atop the entry porch, and the suggestion of crenellation in the parapet which makes it appear defensible. Limestone was used for the decorative string courses, entrance details, and basement storey. Designed by the Federal office of the Department of Public Works, which later designed and built the Strathcona Public Building (Post Office) located at 10501 Whyte Avenue, Connaught Armoury is the oldest armoury of this style and type in Alberta.

The Connaught Armoury was named in honour of the third son of Queen Victoria, Prince Arthur, Duke of Connaught, Canada's Governor General from 1911 to 1916. The Armoury housed the drill hall, rifle range and regimental offices of the 19th Alberta Dragoons, one of the oldest mounted regiments, until 1964, when the regiment was disbanded. During WWI the 19th saw extensive service, fighting at such well known engagements as Ypres, the Somme and Vimy Ridge. In addition to its military functions, the Armoury played a part in Strathcona's social life. While awaiting the completion of their church in 1913, the congregation of the Holy Trinity Anglican Church was permitted to use the drill hall for their services. This same hall was also the scene of an annual ball, one of four held in Strathcona each year, hosted by the Regiment.



Strathcona Hotel 10302 Whyte Avenue

The Strathcona Hotel is the oldest wood frame commercial building on Whyte Avenue. It is a typical frontier building, with only a few details to suggest a particular style. Brackets under the eaves, pediments over the windows and doors, and a large hipped roof give the Strathcona Hotel a classical appearance.

The architect for the original hotel built in 1891 at a cost of \$5000 is not known. The structure built to the north, was designed by W.A. Whiddington and was built by Pheasy and Batson at a cost of \$18,000.

The Strathcona Hotel was built as a railroad hotel by the Calgary and

Edmonton Railway Company, across the street from its railway station at the "end of steel". The Strathcona Hotel was the first hotel in South Edmonton (by 1899 it became the Town of Strathcona) and thus served as a stopping point for immigrants seeking to establish homesteads or businesses in the Northwest. From 1891 to 1904 it was the largest hotel in the region with 45 guest rooms. Because it relied heavily on revenue from the tavern located in the west annex, prohibition forced the sale of the hotel. It was purchased by the Presbyterian Church, who used the building to house the Westminster Ladies College from 1918 to 1924. With the end of prohibition the building reverted back to use as a hotel.





Otto Reher Cottage **11845-52 Street**

The Otto Reher (pronounced Ryher) Cottage consists of a modest one storey wood frame residential building on a corner rectangular lot location on a residential street in the Newton neighbourhood.

The Otto Reher Cottage has heritage value for its simple craftsman style influenced architecture and for its association as a working man's house typically built by the miners worked in the nearby Beverley coal mines. Built in 1937, the house is valued for its modest cottage style architecture, which is an example of restrained craftsman style. The cottage is of simple timber frame construction, finished in timber lapped siding with wide board edges. It exemplifies the typical development in the area. The design most likely came from a builder's design book package. There are now very few examples left.

This house was built by or for Otto Reher who worked in the Beverly Bush Coal Mine. The Town of Beverley grew out of the coal industry that was based in the area. The Newton area was settled mainly by the working classes at the time, while the professionals and more established lived in the wealthier Highlands neighbourhood.

R.G.J. Smith Residence ► **9824-92 Avenue**

The R.G.J. Smith Residence consists of a one and a half storey side gabled, wood frame residential building located mid-block on a residential street in the historic Strathcona neighbourhood.



This house has heritage value for its modest craftsman style influenced architecture, its association with builder, James Turner, and its location within the historic neighbourhood context of Strathcona.

Built in 1913, the R.G.J. Smith Residence is valued as part of Strathcona/Edmonton's early growth period, in this case the building has some restrained craftsman styling, which was an influential style for smaller houses built between 1910 and 1930. Also notable is the homes symmetrical portions, especially from the street front

It was built by builder James Turner, who built four neighbouring heritage houses on this street during the same time period of frantic building and land speculation that occurred in Edmonton immediately prior to WWI. He is also noted as the builder for three heritage houses on 93 Avenue, the street north of 92 Avenue. The R.G.J. Smith Residence is also significant because of its association with the early residential development pattern of the Strathcona community, one of south Edmonton's oldest settled neighbourhoods dating from the arrival of the railway in 1892, and a separate city until amalgamation with Edmonton in 1912.

William O'Leary Residence **10544-126 Street**

The style of the house is eclectic or a hybrid of several stylistic influences. The roof slope and use of the large bay on the south elevation suggests Arts and Crafts Style. The modest finishes and



lack of exaggerated detailing suggests Craftsman detailing, while the overall size and floor plan suggest a Four Square influence. This house is a good example of house development with a blend of styles built during the 1911 to 1925 era. This 1½ storey house is of typical simple timber frame construction with exterior finishes in timber lapped siding with cedar shingles in the peaks of the gables.

The house has full front verandah with 4 square columns, suggesting ties to the Craftsman Style that was very popular during this time period. The front also has two gables on the upper level giving the appearance of sitting on the sloped roof. Each gable contains a tripartite window which are wood sash (one over one).

The front verandah with its centre pediment and front steps marks the entrance to the house. Projecting beyond the verandah is a large bay on the south elevation and projecting beyond the verandah on the north elevation is a square bay. The front door is off centred, located on the right of the front elevation. The front has three double hung wood windows nicely spaced apart across the front elevation. The third window is actually part of the bay window that wraps around the southeast corner. The bay continues and ends almost at the rear wall.

On the rear elevation of the house at the upper level is a shed dormer with a single square window and a paired set of square windows. The rear elevation is lapped siding except for a wide band of shingles between the upper and lower floors. The lower floor has a paired doubled hung windows and a backdoor to the kitchen.

Continued on page 6





William Blakey Residence 13526-101 Avenue

The William Blakey Residence is an International Style stucco clad house, two storeys in height. It has a front attached one and one half storey garage and studio above.

It is an early representative of the new architectural impulse that was to sweep Alberta after WWII. In the late 1930s, Edmonton architects were starting to embrace theories and practices of modernism. They experimented with

Art Deco, Art Modern and eventually the International Style of architecture for a variety of projects including movie theatres, schools, gas stations, department stores and houses. Across Canada, the modern Movement was taking hold in this period and Edmonton's architects were being recognized nationally.

The William Blakey Residence was designated for its International Style

architecture, typified by the use of a symmetrical composition, flat roofs with broad overhanging eaves that emphasize the horizontal massing, relatively smooth unornamented wall surfaces and corner windows with a horizontal compositional emphasis.

This house is also significant for its association with architect William Blakey, for this was his own residence and studio. William George Blakey (1882-1975) was born in Sunderland, County Durham England, and emi-

grated to Edmonton in 1907 to follow architect brother Richard P. Blakey who became the Provincial Architect in 1912. William completed his apprenticeship in England winning a Gold Medal of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). He was responsible for many notable buildings including:

- Edmonton Journal Building 1920-21
- Inglewood Badminton Club 1931
- R.C.M.P. Administration Building 1934
- T. Eaton Store 1938 (with Manitoba architects Northwood and Chivers)
- Roxy Theatre 1938
- St. John's School 1939
- Garneau Theatre 1940
- Christ Church 1946

William Blakey started to explore principles of modern architecture in the mid-1930s. In 1946, he gave a series of lectures on modern house construction and design, and talked about the need for architects in designing homes as well as the virtues of new methodologies including flat roofs and no basements.



Officially Recognizing our Designated Buildings

Two plaques will soon be installed on all Municipal Historic Resources (MHR) which are designated buildings. The first plaque is interpretive and written by the Edmonton Historical Board, which is typically brown with both written text and a current or historic photograph. The second is a cast bronze plaque that officially recognizes the building as a Municipal Historic Resource. Together these plaques will offer official recognition with a written interpretation as to why our designated historic resources are significant to the City of Edmonton.

■ David Holdsworth,
Heritage Planner



City to Designate Historic Oliver Houses

For over 40 years, the City has owned the Lester Allyn House, the John Lang Apartments and the Dame Chenier Residence which are three historic properties located on 112 Street in the Oliver neighbourhood. They were originally bought at a time when the city was thinking of twinning the nearby High Level Bridge. When this plan never materialized, the houses were rented out. The historic houses on this street form one of the few remaining contiguous streetscapes of older homes in Oliver, along with the adjoining heritage homes from the same era on 99 Avenue. These multifamily and less opulent residences have become relatively rare in the Oliver context and help retain a tie to the original middle-class and working-class roots of the area.

The dwellings on this street were built during the 1904 – 1914 housing boom, also reflecting other events of the day such as land speculators' practice of building three houses on two of the 50 x 100 ft. lots (the Lester Allyn House was part of two lots) or the placement of middle class/workmen's houses and bungalows along the streets, and prestigious homes along the avenues and the river valley edge. At a later date many houses were converted into multi units during housing shortages, and this block on 112 Street, is one of the few remaining examples of a collection of houses that reflect all of the above.

Designation of these historic houses is expected to be completed before the end of the year.

1. Lester Allyn House

This Edwardian brick building is relatively rare in the Edmonton context and is the only one that remains from the original grouping on this street. It is uncertain if the brick work is patterned or has two colours of brick, as it has been painted. The front façade has a two storey bay window with timber sash windows in each plane (two over two – may have been a different ratio originally). The front door and door to the upper



porch sit to the north of the bay (timber panelled doors with glazing). The porch is not original. The gabled roof is clad with timber shingles, some of which are fish scale to create a pattern. A Palladian window configuration sits in the middle (one over one configurations) with wide timber casing and crowning. The eaves have a large plain frieze that frames the gable. A small shingled roof projection separates the gabled area and the 2nd floor below projecting over the front with a boxed in eave and simple frieze below that.

The lower openings have 'stone' lintels and sills. The upper windows have stone sills but their lintels blend into the frieze board.

2. John L. Lang Apartments

This two storey house has a pyramidal/hipped roof with a ridge (probably originally cedar) and is all clad in timber clapboard siding.

The front elevation is symmetrical with the two sides mirroring each other. The most notable feature is the central verandah and raised porch. The front doors are set back from the principal wall by several feet with a decorative bracket and post on either side. It appears that the porch has been rebuilt and is not original in form.

All the lower windows and doors have wide wooden casing with decorative crowns. The upper openings feature the same casing but, at the top portion, merge into the frieze board that sits be-



low the eaves. All doors have transom lights above and the timber doors are panelled (two panels at the lower level with glazing above). The windows at each level all have two double hung timber sash windows with nine over one profile (nine window panes over one large window pane).

3. Dame Eliza Chenier Residence

This is an excellent example of a larger duplex complex from the period. It is symmetrical in design built in the four-square style and is clad in timber clapboard and features a hipped roof with bellcast features.

The principal feature at the front is the large full length porch at ground level and the smaller porch above with a gabled ended roof. The porches feature simple flared columns supporting a solid entablature and boxed eaves. The lower porch is enclosed on the side portions with timber clapboard and those above have rails. A central dormer on the roof has a hipped roof and double windows with decorative panes and is clad in clapboard with a boxed eave.

The ground floor (one side mirrors the other) has a timber panelled front door with glazing and a smaller window

Continued on page 8

to the side with nine panes. The ground floor has a large double hung timber window as does the upper floor (two over two, which is placed on the corner). The doors onto the upper balcony match those below with a side window on the other side (two over two). All openings feature wide wooden casing with decorative crowns. The upper floor has no timber edging so the clapboards run into each other on the corner and also flare slightly above the corniced belt course that wraps around the building above the ground floor level.

The south elevation matches the north, and both are clad in clapboard with the flare above the corniced belt course separating the two levels. The upper level has three sash windows (one over one) one sitting close to the front corner and the lower level with two sash windows (two over two) and a multi-paned picture window. All openings feature wide wooden casing with decorative crowns.

A flat belt course separates the brick foundation from the main floor level. A timber chimney with corbelled capping projects from the roof line above. The eaves are boxed with a simple frieze board.

■ **Robert Geldart,**
Principal Heritage Planner



Review of City's Heritage Plan

The City is in the process of reviewing its Historic Resources Management Plan. Several visioning exercises have been held with heritage stakeholders in order to develop visions and objectives to determine how the program should evolve in the next 10-20 years, ranging from new incentives to methods of assessing heritage resources.

If you have opinions on how to make the program better or would like to comment, please contact David Holdsworth at 496-5281 or at david.holdsworth@edmonton.ca. A summary can be found on the city website www.edmonton.ca under Infrastructure and Planning/Historic Resources/Other.

Coming Soon – This Old Edmonton House Public Seminar Series 2008

For those who are contemplating restoration or renovation of their old home next year, the City will be offering the “This Old Edmonton House Public Seminar Series” again in spring 2008. The goal of these seminars is to provide home owners, about to do work to their homes, with enough basic information to be able to ask contractors the right questions before finding out too late that a better or cheaper alternative may have existed. We hope to show that good restoration and renovation rather than ‘modernization’ can achieve the same goal.

Speakers will provide a broad overview of the subject matters in informal sessions, and then specific homeowner problems can be addressed in the question and answer sessions. This gives participants a basic understanding of the issues and, in some cases, a specific option to pursue.

The workshops will cover foundations, walls, roofs, mechanical sys-



Guest speaker Johanne Yakula giving a presentation

Photo credit: City of Edmonton Planning and Development Department

tems, plaster work, windows and doors, interior décor, etc. They will run from February into April 2008.

There will be a small fee and participants must register. For those who are interested, please check the City of Edmonton website in the new year and follow this path:

www.edmonton.ca – go to ‘Infrastructure and Planning’ – ‘Historic Resources’ – ‘Other’ where a PDF poster will be displayed. Or phone 496-2925 to register. For information contact:

David Holdsworth at 496-5281
david.holdsworth@edmonton.ca

HISTORIC RESOURCES REVIEW PANEL - 2007

- Joe Friedel, Chair
- Bud Squair
- Lee Smith
- Ken Tingley
- David Murray
- Dorothy Field
- Kathryn Ivany
- 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:

The Heritage Planner

City of Edmonton
Planning and Development Department
8th Floor, 10250-101 Street NW
Edmonton, AB T5J 3P4
Visit our website at: www.edmonton.ca
and go to Infrastructure and Planning -
Historic Resources

