

BUILDING HERITAGE

Celebrating the Register and Inventory of Historic Resources in Edmonton

The Highlands Neighbourhood Celebrates 100 Years

One of Edmonton's historic neighbourhoods, this year commemorating its 100th birthday, is The Highlands. Announced in 1910, Edmonton's newest "high class" subdivision did not start developing until 1912. Originally its boundaries were 55 Street, 64 Street, 118 Avenue and the North Saskatchewan River. Today its boundaries are 50 Street, 68 Street, 118 Avenue and the North Saskatchewan River Valley. The neighbourhood's founders, real-estate partners William Magrath and Bidwell Holgate, chose the name for the subdivision through a city-wide contest, offering fifty dollars in gold for the best name. To ensure the quality of the neighbourhood minimum costs were set at \$2,500 per house. This pricey subdivision regulated development by having buyers request building permits before they could purchase land. As Edmonton's economy boomed and the real estate market expanded, The Highlands sold many lots, but few houses were actually built. The Magrath-Holgate Company constructed twenty-four houses to garner interest plus Mr. Magrath and Mr. Holgate themselves invested their own money to build their grand mansions on Ada Boulevard, which are now designated Provincial Historic Resources.

Today, The Highlands remains a vibrant and unique Edmonton community with the highest number of designated buildings as well as those on the inventory.



(Above) Cars and people outside the Magrath-Holgate office for tours to The Highlands, c. 1910, City of Edmonton Archives EA-160-489.

(Below) The 1912 Buttercup Farmhouse. Photo credit: City of Edmonton.



For years the Highlands Historical Society led walking tours of the neighbourhood, showcasing beautifully restored heritage homes and the interesting people who resided in them. To commemorate The Highland's 100th anniversary, an updated version of The Highlands Edmonton Historical Walking Tour booklet is now

available. Contact the Highlands Historical Society at edmontonhighlands.ca to get your copy, complete with a neighbourhood map, and take a stroll through this beautiful area.

■ Sara Sherman,
Graduate Heritage Planner

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Did They Really Build Them Like They Used To?

A Homeowner's Experience



“They don’t build them like they used to” is a phrase even I’ve uttered a time or two. Or used to, I don’t so much anymore, and here’s a little story to explain why.

Our house was built by the Canadian Agency of England sometime between 1912 and 1913. It was probably started in 1912, but when the Canadian Agency went bankrupt, its Canadian manager, H.M.E Evans, who was later the mayor of Edmonton for a year in 1917, took over the mortgage on it, its neighbour, and his own newly built residence he called Sylvancroft. The bust following the boom of 1912 meant that neither property could be sold; when the war came things got even tighter. I read an interview wherein Mr. Evans recalled letting the places free of charge, and even providing coal to the non-paying tenants so that the homes were heated and the pipes kept from freezing. Our house is called the William O’Leary/Dr. David Dunn residence. I think it’s funny that O’Leary, a grain dealer at the time, has been given a place in history for living in a house he didn’t even have to pay rent on. Mr. Evans actually held the title to the place until he finally sold it to Dr. Dunn in the early 1920s.

The place has housed many families and groups of people. Most have been renters, and few have stayed very long. At almost twelve years, we’re in the running for longest residency. That’s saying something for a house nearly 100 years old! The poor old thing has seen some abuse, and we’re still working on fixing some of the damage time and inattention have committed. In the first year or so, one of the biggest jobs was taking out the lathe and plaster from the exterior walls so that we could strap two by twos to the two by fours and fit insulation between the studs. The wood chips, mostly settled to the bottoms of the walls where they had been added seemingly at random, just didn’t keep the -35 degrees temperature out. I got pretty good at hammering the plaster off the walls, and then removing the lathe with the claw part of the same instrument. There were always three nails holding the full pieces of lathe to the studs.

We have a little office off the front hall that used to house the only fireplace in the building. Perhaps Dr. Dunn had used it to see his patients? I was working in there one day to remove the plaster and loosen those three nails per lathe so they could be removed from the studs. I’d developed a kind of rhythm; I knew what to expect as I came to each piece of lathe. And then it got awkward. The thin pieces of lathe were falling to the ground after I’d only loosened one nail, or two nails. It was especially bad in one corner. I wondered how the plasterer had dealt with the shoddy workmanship of the man sent in to the office to apply the lathes. So much for the “superior” construction of the last century! Once all the detritus had been removed, which included small puddles of “insulating” wood chips, I discovered the reason why the lathes on that wall had been so clumsily fastened. Nestled in a corner between the studs was an empty Hudson’s Bay metal-bottomed whiskey bottle with a hole in the centre of its cork. The lathe guy had been taking more than a few nips while he completed his task. No mandatory drug testing in 1912, and there’s always that one employee who’ll use any opportunity to take advantage. As we look forward to the next building season and are inundated with negative stories of this generation’s labourers, I would like to say, Plus ça change, plus c’est la meme chose! (“The more things change, the more they stay the same!”)

■ **Leslie Chevalier,**

Homeowner/Edmonton Historical Board Member

1912: Edmonton's Other Anniversary

The decade leading up to 1912 saw major events shape the city of Edmonton into the place to be in all of Canada. Edmonton amalgamated with the city across the river, Strathcona. The city’s population exploded and the resulting land and building scramble was like nothing ever before seen in the city. In fact, the real estate market reached its peak in 1912 and promptly crashed in 1913 just before the Great War. Residential lots in up-and-coming neighbourhoods such as The Highlands were left vacant for years following the market collapse. The city retained its 1912 skyline for another 40 years.

1912 was a BIG year for Edmonton. The City of Edmonton’s Register of Municipal Heritage Resources has seventeen designated buildings built in 1912 as well as 109 buildings on its inventory built the same year. Basic wood frame construction was replaced by stone, brick and more ornate architecture, attesting to the increasing wealth of Edmonton’s residents and the improved access to building materials and technology, especially from Ontario. Also in 1912, many schools were built and expanded to accommodate the expanding communities.

■ **Sara Sherman,**

Graduate Heritage Planner





(Above) The 1913 R.G.J. Smith Residence is located at 9824-92 Avenue.

(Left) The 1912 Bard Residence is located at 10544-84 Avenue.

Photo credit: City of Edmonton.

The Tale of Two Cities: Edmonton and Strathcona

On February 1, 1912, the City of Strathcona amalgamated with the City of Edmonton, becoming a suburb of South Edmonton. Strathcona prospered independently in 1891 as the terminus of the Calgary-Edmonton railway, linking Strathcona to the rest of Canada. The town sprouted up around the Canadian Pacific Railway station with buildings such as the Strathcona Hotel and Dominion Hotel built to accommodate travelers and new immigrants. The years between 1891 and 1912 included major real estate booms in the city and to its surrounding farmland. In 1908, Strathcona became home to the University of Alberta, given to the city in exchange for the City of Edmonton being named the provincial capital. Both Strathcona and Edmonton had engaged in a fierce boosting campaign (with other Alberta cities such as Calgary, Red Deer and Medicine Hat) to become the home of the Alberta legislature.

Strathcona's geography limited extensive real estate expansion because the small city was bordered by the North Saskatchewan River and the Mill Creek Ravine. By 1911 Edmonton's population was approximately 25,000, while Strathcona's hovered around 6,000, following the arrival of two transcontinental rail lines from the east and south across the Low Level Bridge. Edmonton's location, and major commercial development that serviced northern Alberta, contributed to its prosperity. Finally in 1912, the City of Strathcona voted 518 to 178 in favour of merging with Edmonton so that they could work together instead of against each other for business. Strathcona became a member of the bigger city of Edmonton and Edmonton inherited the University of Alberta.

Unfortunately Strathcona did not benefit economically from the merger. With the opening of the High Level Bridge, street cars and motorized traffic moved people across the river to better stores located in downtown Edmonton. However, Strathcona's wood and brick commercial buildings were not under the same pressure to redevelop compared

to downtown. Despite the area's increasing neglect, the old buildings were recognized as historic gems in the 1970s, subsequently receiving Provincial and Municipal heritage designations.

The amalgamation allowed Edmonton to make use of an existing infrastructure such as the public building, post office, library, and Fire Hall No. 1. The most prominent heritage building standing in Old Strathcona today is Fire Hall No. 1, renamed Fire Hall No. 6 when Strathcona became a suburb of Edmonton. This past summer, the fire hall received a facelift following its designation as a Municipal Historic Resource. Completed in time for the Fringe Festival in August 2011, the renovations included window restoration, brick re-pointing, repairs to the cornice and lettering, and complete window and doors repainting. The fire hall is home to the Walterdale Theatre and has since undergone minor renovations to the basement and bathrooms for better water drainage and to better accommodate theatre goers.

■ **Sara Sherman,**
Graduate Heritage Planner

Garneau Lamp Relighting



In the fall of 2011, an old street lamp was brought back to light. The Garneau Lamp, which has stood at the south end of the High Level Bridge since 1929, is the only structure of its kind in Edmonton. Standing at approximately 12 feet high, with a stone base holding a post topped with five lamps, the structure was designed and built by sculptor Frank Norbury. Carvings on the upper part of the lamp post appear to be clover-like designs that resemble grapes and olives. On the front, which faces 109 Street, the words "The Garneau" welcome passersby to the neighbourhood.

The lamppost was commissioned by the Garneau Improvement Club in response to concerns about a lack of lighting at the south end of the High Level Bridge. It was originally located in a small park encircled by fieldstones. Garneau residents, including former Alberta premiers Alexan-

der Rutherford and John E. Brownlee, in addition to women's rights activist Emily Murphy, donated money to the project.

Since October of this year, and after reconstruction, rewiring, and a new location, the lamp is now fully functional. It brightens the corner of 109 Street and 88 Avenue in front of the High Level Diner.

The Garneau Community League initiated the lamp's restoration after many years of it not working. The corner experiences regular pedestrian, bicycle and vehicular traffic so that the lamp now serves its original purpose once again.

■ **Sara Sherman,**
Graduate Heritage Planner

The Edmonton Historical Board, January 2012



Standing (left to right): City of Edmonton Heritage Planner Robert Geldart, Laura Nichol, Darlene Fisher, Ann Hall, Jacqueline Harman, Leslie Chevalier, Leslie Holmes, City of Edmonton Archivist Kathryn Ivany. *Sitting (left to right)* Lee Smith, Tim Marriott, Martin Kennedy, Marilyn Assheton-Smith. *Absent:* City of Edmonton Heritage Planner David Holdsworth and David Johnston. Photo credit: City of Edmonton.

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WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Please send your responses to:

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