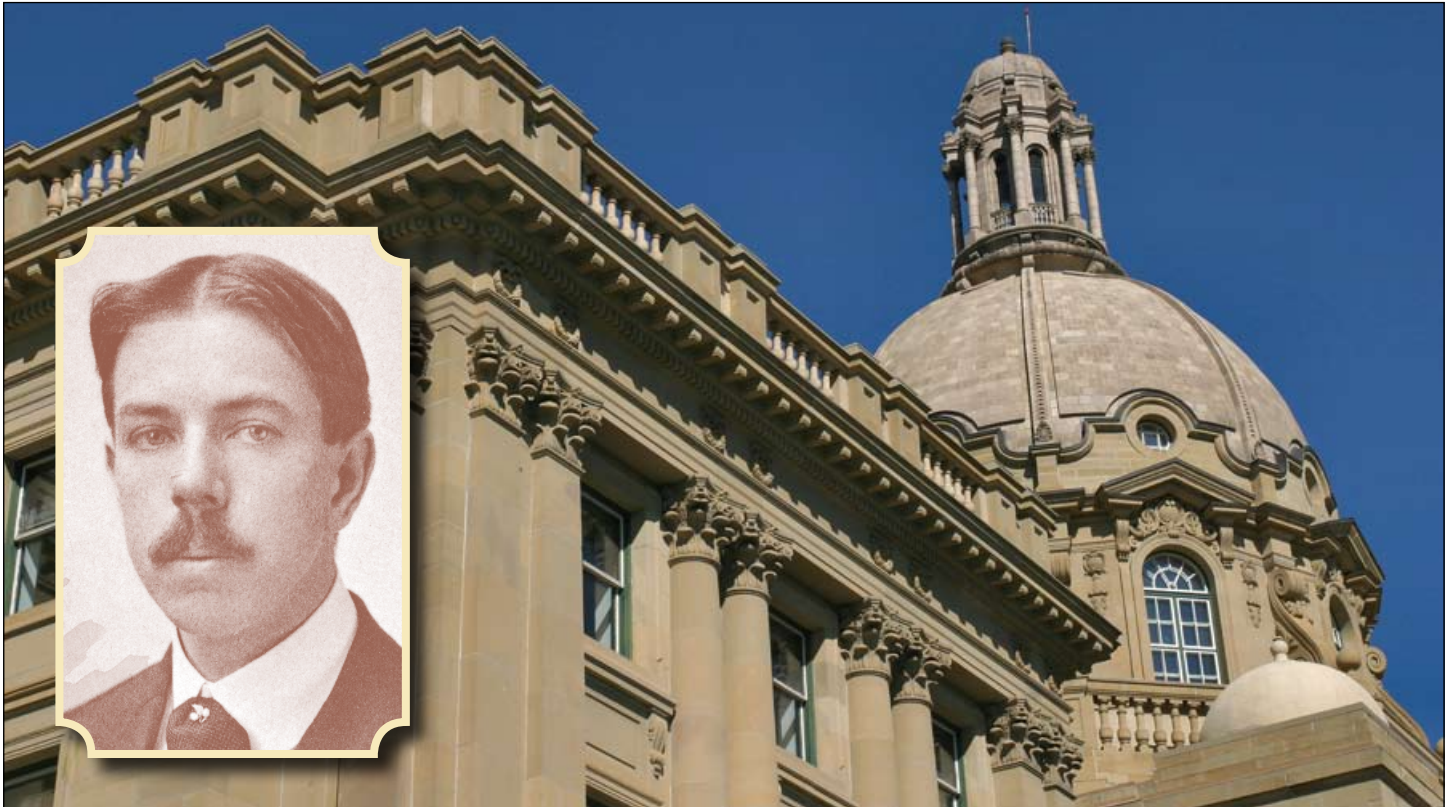


BUILDING HERITAGE

Celebrating the Register and Inventory of Historic Resources in Edmonton



Allan Merrick Jeffers Pioneer Alberta Architect

Allan Merrick Jeffers meteoric rise in the architectural profession in Alberta makes him one of the province's most significant architects. As Provincial Architect between 1907 and 1912, he occupied a crucial position in shaping architecture in Alberta during a period of the most sustained public investment in major building projects. He later filled a very similar pioneering role as City of Edmonton Architect.

The Alberta Legislature (c.1913) is architect Allan Merrick Jeffers most notable building design.

Photo credit: Edmonton Archives (inset photo) and Lawrence Herzog (Alberta Legislature)

As a result, he was directly or indirectly involved in the design and construction of many of Alberta and Edmonton's most recognizable heritage building. However, despite the range of his work, relatively little is known about him and some of what is often reported about his career is misleading or untrue.

Jeffers was born in Pawtucket, Rhode Island in 1875 and some details of his early life and architectural training have been uncovered. Jeffers took a position in 1892 in the offices of G.W. Cady and Son, a noted Providence, Rhode Is-

land architectural firm. G.W. Cady designed several Rhode Island landmarks including an Opera House, Infantry Hall and several churches and schools

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although his only formal training was as a carpenter and stair-builder. Jeffers later described his training as beginning with work in Cady's office as a draughtsman before he enrolled in courses in Advanced Mechanics, Advanced Architecture and Mechanical Engineering between 1895 and 1902 at the Rhode Island School of Design. Some authors have suggested that he graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1897, although it is not clear if he completed a full course of studies or merely combined practical architectural education in Cady's office with some course work. In 1898, he served briefly with the Rhode Island Militia in the Spanish American War, before running successfully for a seat in the Rhode Island House of Representatives. He remained a state representative until 1902.

From 1902 until he arrived in Alberta, Jeffers worked for a large American engineering and construction firm, Ford, Bacon and Davis. The circumstances of his move to Alberta are unclear, although his daughter, Claire Chase suggested to Historic Sites Service historians that he told family members he was attracted to the challenge of building a new legislature in Alberta. She also suggested the family believed that he had successfully competed in two large design competitions – one of which was for the Alberta Legislature Building. However, no evidence of a competition to design the Alberta Legislature appears in archival records. Instead, Jeffers' role in designing the building seems to have been a product more of chance and being in the right place at the right time than anything else.

Rather than arriving to supervise construction of the new legislature, Jeffers was initially hired as Chief Architectural Draughtsman. His job was to assist the then Provincial Architect, Edward Collis Hopkins with preliminary design work for the proposed Legislature. Hopkins was one of Alberta's most distinguished early architects, known for his design of



Built in 1912, the North Telephone Exchange Building was designed by Allan Merrick Jeffers during his time as City Architect.
Photo credit: Planning and Development

Edmonton buildings such as the Prince of Wales' Armoury, Great West Saddlery Building and the now demolished Pantages Theatre. Hopkins' first proposal for the Legislature project provoked considerable controversy. His plans were for a building very similar to the British Columbia Legislature designed by Francis Rattenbury. In fact, they were so similar that it is hard not to believe they were either published prematurely or that the B.C. plans were somehow presented in error as Hopkins' plans. The public response was swift and sharply negative. Hopkins' did begin work on a new set of plans, but early in 1907 he left the project to resume his private architectural practice.

At the age of 32, with limited architectural training and experience, Jeffers took over from Hopkins as Provincial Architect. A third set of plans for the building were created and these were signed by Jeffers as Provincial Architect in September 1907. Thereafter all plans developed for the building up to 1912 were signed by Jeffers, which makes him the architect of record for the building even if other architects and engineers were consulted on the project. Certainly, Jeffers received assistance other collaborators such as Professor Percy Nobbs and William Fingland, but their specific assistance and role in the ultimate design of the building cannot be fully determined.

Jeffers' plans reversed the direction taken by Hopkins. Jeffers substituted a very traditional "Beaux Arts" design for Hopkins' approach that echoed the

Richardsonian Romanesque style of the British Columbia Legislature. There was some public criticism of this Jeffers' design as well, this time because it resembled several American capitol buildings too closely. The new design, however, matched the optimism of the time. Both Edmonton and Alberta were growing at a stunning rate in this period, and no one was looking for a modest or purely functional design for the new province's main public building.

Jeffers oversaw the project up January 1912 when the exterior of the building was substantially complete and some work on the interior had been started. The final work on the Legislature Building was completed by Jeffers' successor, R. P. Blakey. Blakey oversaw the completion of the interior of the building, including the repair of some significant flaws such as cracking plaster and a redesign of the arches supporting the ceilings outside the legislative chamber. The rotunda area and main staircase were also substantially redesigned, and as a result Blakey is usually credited with the design of these interior architectural features. Work on the interior and some finishing details such as covering the dome continued into 1913. The last major appropriations for initial construction costs occurred that year, and it was officially opened on September 3, 1913 by the Duke of Connaught, Canada's Governor-General.

During his tenure as Provincial Architect, Jeffers also involved in the design and construction of a number of other iconic Alberta buildings such as the McDougall Centre in Calgary and several court houses. In 1912, however, he chose to leave his position as Provincial Architect and take up a similar post as Edmonton's City Architect. In this capacity he designed a number of Edmonton's first public buildings including the Civic Block which served as City Hall until 1956 and several telephone exchanges. He later returned to private practice in Edmonton and secured accredita-



tion to work as an architect in British Columbia.

Jeffers eventually left western Canada in 1923 to return to the United States. It has been speculated by Trevor Boddy and other architectural historians that Jeffers left a near total collapse of building activity in Edmonton and Alberta in the 1920s. This may be correct - although the real estate and development collapse predates World War I in Alberta and Jef-

fers did remain here for about a decade when commissions would have been lean. According to his daughter, he and his family left Edmonton for the more prosaic reason of wanting to return to the United States for family and personal reasons. They moved to Los Angeles, California where they had relatives and friends and where Jeffers found work with a large architectural firm, Allied Architects Association. He worked on

several projects in California, but died in 1926 before he had much chance to make an impression on the profession in his new home.

■ **Michael Payne, City Archivist**

DID YOU KNOW?

The 2010 This Old Edmonton House Public Seminar Series is coming. Go to www.edmonton.ca for more info!

Edwardian Architecture in Edmonton

The Edwardian era is named after the reign of King Edward VII, and is technically between the years 1901 – 1910. Stylistically, however, the changes from Victorian to Edwardian decor began in the early 1890's and ended at the beginning of WWI.

Advances in science and technology influenced the Edwardian way of life significantly. Improvements in medicine, and hygiene cut infant mortality rates, and extended life expectancy. Home design changed to incorporate the new building technologies, central heating, plumbing, and electricity. Louis Pasteur's experiments in 1882 proved the connection between germs and contagious disease, and this also affected home design.

Only the well to do could afford architect designed homes. Many were inspired by styles of the past such as medieval or English manor houses and several examples exist. The Arts and Crafts style was reflected in details and materials but the popular bungalow style came later. For the rest of the population, plan books were consulted by contractors and builders. "Four Square" houses, so named because the homes were essentially composed of four square rooms on two levels, were immensely popular. Today, many examples of this style still exist throughout the province.

Although many homes in the early 20th century continued to favour the more private layout of the previous era, Edwardian homes had a more open plan. Central heating negated the need to close off rooms in order to retain warmth. Inefficient fireplaces retained their importance but they became primarily symbols of hearth and home. Dining rooms were no longer separated entirely from the living room. Living rooms or parlours were accessible directly from vestibules or entrances. Edwardian kitchens were small but more efficient as new fixtures, electric appliances and Hoosier cabinets made an appearance.



Molstad Residence, as shown in 2002, is an excellent example of Edwardian architecture. *Photo credit: Planning and Development*

As bathrooms became more common in urban areas efficiency and cleanliness became the gods of fashion. The well appointed bathroom featured heated towel bars, mosaic floors, shower, hip bath, bath tub and separated toilet. Built in medicine cabinets and linen closets became more common.

Electric lights were a status symbol. Early 20th century manufacturers offered the buyer peace of mind by combining both electricity and gas in the same fixture – in case one should fail. A bare bulb hanging

from a nine foot ceiling was said to be hanging "en pendant". Given that the bulb was at maximum 25 watts it is not difficult to understand why shades were unnecessary.

Colours changed to reflect Edwardian preference for light filled interiors. Bathrooms were predominantly white. Millwork was painted white, or cream or ivory. Wallpapers featured softly coloured backgrounds such as ivory, buff, soft rose and pale blue. Greyed colours that were inspired by nature such as terra cotta, sage green, grey-blue, and tan were also in favour.

The discovery that germs caused diseases resulted in many changes. Dark wood cabinets were replaced by white, easy to clean, porcelain fixtures. Heavy, layered window treatments gave way to simple lace or fabric side panels. Wall to wall carpeting was removed and in its place a single, easy to clean, area rug covered maple or oak hardwood or linoleum floors.

For accessories the homeowner chose from any of the revival styles that were popular at that time or she could be avant-garde and choose Arts and Crafts or Art Nouveau styled pieces. Many of these are still available today at auction or antique stores. Combining these authentic pieces with contemporary ones provides today's homeowner with the best of both worlds.

■ **Johanne Yakula, From Times Past**



City of Edmonton Wins the Prestigious Prince of Wales Prize for Heritage



(From left to right)
Principal Heritage Planners
Robert Geldart and
David Holdsworth, His Royal
Highness, the Prince of Wales
and His Worship, Mayor
Stephen Mandel, City of
Edmonton.

*Photo credit: Heritage Canada
Foundation*

The Edmonton and District Historical Society (EDHS) nominated the City of Edmonton for Municipal Heritage Leadership, presented as part of the National Awards Program of the Heritage Canada Foundation. The nomination was successful; in its letter of notification to the City, the Foundation noted that the jury was impressed by the “array of bylaws, incentives and programmes” the City has put in place.

The Prince of Wales Prize, created with support from His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales, is awarded annually to the “...government of a municipality which has demonstrated a strong and sustained commitment to the conservation of its historic places. The local government must have a record of supporting heritage preservation through such means as

regulations, policies, funding and exemplary stewardship.”

The EDHS nomination emphasized the extraordinary steps the City has taken in recent years, including the City’s Art of Living arts and heritage plan, the Planning Development Department’s Historic Resource Management Program and its recently completed Historic Resource Management Plan.

In honour of the 10th anniversary of the Prince of Wales Prize, His Royal Highness Prince Charles was pleased to present the plaque and flag to Mayor Stephen Mandel and heritage planners Robert Geldart and David Holdsworth in Toronto at a private function on November 4, 2009, during his recent visit to Canada.

■ **Tim Marriot, Vice President - EDHS**

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WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Please send your responses to:

The Heritage Planner

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Visit our website at: www.edmonton.ca

*This newsletter is produced in partnership with the
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City of Edmonton
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