

# The Alberta Hotel - Finding Aid

City of Edmonton Archives

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# **THE ALBERTA HOTEL FINDING AID**

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## Brief History of the Alberta Hotel

1883-1887

The Alberta Hotel began life in 1883 as Luke Kelly's saloon and billiard hall, located on the northeast corner of Jasper and Fraser Avenues (later Jasper Avenue and 98<sup>th</sup> Street) in the Edmonton settlement, which had a population at the time of approximately 300. In 1885 Mr. Kelly added a restaurant. In 1887, by which time Edmonton's population had grown to 350, he added a two storey wood frame structure with hotel rooms on the second floor and re-named his establishment the Alberta Hotel.

1887-1898

The Alberta Hotel established itself firmly within the cultural life of the rapidly growing settlement while it was under the ownership of Luke Kelly. Shortly after Edmonton's 1892 incorporation as a town, by which time its population had reached 700, the hotel's management was taken over by Frank Marriaggi, referred to in the *Edmonton Bulletin* on May 18, 1893, as "a man of taste and enterprise". Marriaggi built a greenhouse and a garden on hotel property, the produce from which he used to enhance the quality of the hotel's dining room. In addition to the usual radishes, lettuce, celery, cauliflower, and cabbages, Marriaggi grew melons, chili peppers, cress and tobacco. On August 31<sup>st</sup>, 1893, Marriaggi was reported in the *Bulletin* to be collecting "fine specimens of grains and grasses" along with other agricultural produce for a display in his office, presumably to impress guests from out of town. Donald Ross donated a 28 pound cabbage to the cause. The newspaper advertisement for the hotel on that day suggested that it had been recently enlarged and improved and was "prepared to offer the best accommodation to visitors and the public generally." The table, boasted the ad, was "unsurpassed." Marriaggi left Edmonton for Fort Saskatchewan some time around 1895 and it is not clear whether his successor as manager had the same priorities.

1898-1908

Between 1898 and 1908 Edmonton's population grew from about 1000 to 18,000, which goes some way towards explaining the increasing demand for hotel accommodation.

In 1898 the Alberta Hotel was sold to Alfred E. Jackson and E.D. (Del) Grierson. By 1903, the year it was transformed from a two storey wood frame structure to an imposing four storey brick and sandstone structure with the tall conical cupola that made it so recognizable, the hotel had passed into the sole ownership of Mr. Grierson. In order to build the new hotel, the original wood frame building was moved north to the back of the lot (probably the original site

of Marriaggi's garden and greenhouse), leaving the corner free for the new building.

The new Alberta Hotel was said to have cost \$55,000 to build but it transformed the already respected establishment into a category by itself. It contained 100 guest rooms, 25 of which had private baths. Another 20 rooms were available in the attached annex. The hotel featured telephones, a passenger elevator, bath showers, and a call bell system which allowed guests to contact the front desk from their rooms, all firsts for Edmonton. Common spaces included a large dining room, a spacious and beautifully decorated bar, a billiard room, a card room, a ladies waiting room, and a barber shop.

Sir Wilfrid Laurier, then Prime Minister of Canada, stayed at the Alberta Hotel when he came to Edmonton in 1905 for celebrations to mark Alberta's new status as a province of Canada. Rooms at the time cost \$2.00 per night or \$2.50 with a bath. For \$4.00 it was possible to stay in a more spacious suite. The inauguration day parade passed by the Alberta Hotel as it made its way down Jasper Avenue.

#### 1908-1944

In 1908 the Alberta Hotel was bought by businessmen John A. McDougall and Richard Secord and a year later the title was transferred to their business, McDougall and Secord Ltd. Richard Secord took over sole ownership of the hotel in 1927 and retained it until 1935, when it passed to his estate.

#### 1944-1980

In July 1944 the Alberta Hotel was purchased by Louis Lucas and it remained in the hands of the Lucas family until 1980 when, after much controversy over an application to tear it down, it was purchased by the City of Edmonton from Gordon Lucas. In 1977 Lucas submitted an application to demolish the by-then aging and somewhat shabby Alberta Hotel in order to build a new 230 suite 11-storey hotel estimated at \$11.5 million dollars on the site. The application aroused a storm of controversy. Against the idea were those who believed that, for both architectural and historical reasons, the hotel should be maintained and restored. The City of Edmonton attempted to expropriate the Alberta Hotel but, in January 1980, the Court of Queen's Bench ruled against the city's bid. In the end, the city purchased the property from Mr. Lucas for \$2.2 million and a land swap.

#### 1980 - 2005

If public opinion had dictated that the Alberta Hotel was to be preserved, the City of Edmonton was faced with finding a way to make this happen. Many ideas found their way into newspaper articles but none of them were realized. Finally, the city decided to dismantle the hotel and to store the materials so that

it could be reconstructed at a later date. In March, 1983, the hotel closed its doors to guests forever. By July of that year, the last tenant had been evicted, making way for Woolfenden Group Architects, the firm selected to do the work, to begin.

In July 1983 the Woolfenden Group began its work by putting together a photographic record of the hotel as it then was. Then it set to work to salvage some of the interior fittings before beginning the process of dismantling the exterior. In the spring of 1984 work began to dismantle the exterior of the building, beginning with the cupola and the elevator and proceeding from the top down. When all that could be salvaged had been carefully numbered and stored on pallets, the interior walls were demolished and the site was cleared, making way for the last step in the salvage operation, recovering some of the materials that had been used in the building's foundations.

For more than 20 years, far longer than anyone had expected, the salvaged material from the Alberta Hotel rested in storage at the city's Kennedale Yard and at Fort Edmonton Park.

2005 - 2012

In 2004 the City of Edmonton offered the Alberta Hotel in public tender to the bidder with the best plan to restore it. Although Architect Gene Dub's first bid to rebuild the hotel in Rosedale was refused, his second bid, which was to rebuild it on Jasper Avenue on a vacant site just west of Canada Place, a mere few feet from the original location, was accepted. Dub bought the land from the City for \$500,000 and fell heir to the materials which had been so carefully stored in 1984. His plan, to re-conceive the interior of the building as a boutique hotel, changed in 2010 when, in discussions with the general manager of the local radio station C.K.U.A., Ken Reagan, Dub was persuaded to another possibility. In 2010, while the reconstruction of the building's exterior was underway, Dub signed an agreement to sell the hotel to CKUA for its conversion to a radio station. Dub's plan is to lease back the bar area from CKUA so that it can be restored in a manner approximating the original and be used for something approximating its original purpose.

During the more than 20 years that elapsed between the dismantling and the restoration processes some of the materials had deteriorated and many of the codes, which had been placed by Woolfenden Group Architects on the pallets to facilitate restoration, had disappeared. Nevertheless, Dub estimated that by cutting the original bricks in half approximately 95 % of the stored brick was re-used. In addition to the stone and brick from the Alberta Hotel Dub was able to use brick which had been salvaged from the Rothesay Apartments (formerly located on the west side of 97<sup>th</sup> Avenue south of Jasper Avenue, where Canada Place sits today) in the reconstruction. The original elevator was not re-used in the restored building. Included in the restoration are the original cupola and cornice, some of the window trim, and the steel balconies (which can only be

used decoratively in the restoration because they do not conform to present-day codes).

The restored bar will make use of as many of the original materials as can be salvaged and, will replicate some of what is missing, particularly the moulded plaster ceiling with its highly decorative pattern. The original mirrors and their frames, which may require some restoration, will be re-used. Some of the light fixtures have been saved and will be re-integrated into the new space. A cash register of unknown vintage, found in the bar, will appear in the restored space. And finally, some pieces of stained glass have been retrieved and will find a new home in the restored bar.

## **Design and Building Materials**

The Alberta Hotel was designed by the Architect James Edward Wize. Wize is also known in Edmonton for his design of the Maclean Block, still very much in use on Jasper Avenue and 107<sup>th</sup> Street, and the Wize Block, which he later converted to become the well-known Corona Hotel (now demolished). Wize was born in Ontario in 1862. He moved west as a young man of 20 and settled first in Victoria and then in Vancouver, where he became interested in architecture and where he studied it. He practiced architecture in the Kootenay area of British Columbia before moving to Edmonton in 1902. In addition to practicing architecture, Wize involved himself with the management of the Corona Hotel, a business which was passed on to his son, Leonard Wize.

The Alberta Hotel was a four storey structure constructed of brick and sandstone in what the City of Edmonton Heritage Planners refer to as “the Victorian Romanesque style.” The curved southwest corner of the building, surmounted by a tall conical tower or cupola, made the Alberta Hotel easy to pick out in early photographs. The rusticated stone base gave it a sturdy and grounded appearance. Window detailing was particularly interesting, varying from floor to floor while maintaining the same, symmetrical spacing. Stone string courses and voussoirs add to the visual interest of the west and south facades. Four handsome steel balconies, two on the west façade and two on the south façade, added to the visual interest of the building’s exterior.

The hotel bar, which measured 18 by 30 feet, was an impressive space. Moulded plaster ceilings with highly decorative designs could not be salvaged when the original structure was dismantled but will be replicated as part of the restoration. The walls were decorated with tiles in rich earthen tones and mirrors. Window and door frames were solid wood with a deep mahogany stain.

## **Sources Used**

All the sources used in compiling the brief history of the Alberta Hotel can be found in the City of Edmonton Archives. Information related to the rebuilding and refurbishing of the Alberta Hotel was obtained through conversations with Architect, Gene Dub.

CEA. Clippings File for the Alberta Hotel (This file contains title searches and copies of articles written about the Alberta Hotel, particularly by Alex Mair and Lawrence Herzog.

CEA. Clippings file for James Edward Wize (This file contains photocopied extracts from early histories of Edmonton and a copy of an article by Alex Mair on Wize.

Person, Dennis and Carin Routledge. *Portrait of a City*. Edmonton, 1981.

## **Manuscript Collections**

Three collections in the City of Edmonton Archives contain manuscript material related to the Alberta Hotel. The file lists for these three collections are included below in this finding aid.

1. MS-159 is a small collection consisting of two files. It includes one ribbon advertisement for the hotel, made in approximately 1910, which includes a list of the hotel rules and schedules as well as advertisements. It also includes an envelope with the Alberta Hotel logo and addressed to Alex Cote.
2. MS-400 consists of eight boxes of material created by the Alberta Hotel between 1898 and 1966. It includes hotel registers, license and inspection certificates and account ledgers. It also contains a few memorabilia items.
3. MS-740 consists of one box of material created by Woolfenden Group Architects between 1983 and 1985. It includes documents relating to the dismantling and demolition of the Alberta Hotel along with some material intended to be used in the hotel's reconstruction. Three binders containing a photographic record of the hotel at the time of and during its dismantling were photocopied and reside in this collection. The photographs from the binders have been catalogued and can be found in the photographic collection, EA-788.



## Images

The City of Edmonton Archives has many photographs of the Alberta Hotel. These can be located as follows:

1. Some, but not all, photos in the collection are listed in the card files in the main reference room. Prints of these photos are filed in the reference room for you to see. Several of the photos listed in the card files are there for research only; these belong to collections held by the Provincial Archives of Alberta or the Glenbow Archives. If you want these photos for reproduction in any publication they must be obtained from the institution to which they belong. Especially good photos of the hotel which fall into this category include: EA-398-1 (Treaty Commission leaving Edmonton on May 29, 1899); EA-10-806 (Inauguration Parade, September 1, 1905); EA-157-303 (Jasper Avenue looking west, 1906); and EA-157-112 (Jasper Avenue looking east, 1912). Photos which do not come from the City of Edmonton Archives collections are clearly marked.

Especially good photos which are in collections held by the City of Edmonton Archives include: EA-65-17 (Fire engine on Jasper Avenue in front of the Alberta Hotel, 1904); EA-160-929 (Edmonton Exhibition Parade, 1935, with the Alberta Hotel close by as background); ET-17-84 (The Alberta Hotel in 1967); EA-33-125 (Alberta Hotel in 1972); EA-245-225 (Alberta Hotel in 1976); EA-289-129 (Alberta Hotel in 1978); EA-793-79 (Alberta Hotel ca. 1909).

2. Some, but not all, photos in the collection are recorded in electronic databases. The reference archivist can generate a list of these for you. All of these photos belong to collections held by the City of Edmonton Archives. A couple of photo collections record the process of dismantling the Alberta Hotel in 1983 and 1984. EA-786-1 to EA-786-20 is a short series taken by photographer, Stan Plaisier. EA-788-1 to EA-788-507 is the photo record of the hotel immediately before and throughout the dismantling process. Most of these photos were taken by a member of Woolfenden Group Architects, the firm responsible for the dismantling. However, the collection also includes a series of photos taken by a professional photographer prior to the dismantling process. All these photos can be viewed as photocopies in MS-740.

## **Drawings**

The City of Edmonton Archives contains five items listed in the data base as “Masterplans” which are either drawings or items relating to alterations of the Alberta Hotel. None of these is very substantial. A list of these can be generated by the reference archivist. The dates for these range from 1913 to 1959 not including one set of two undated conceptual drawings which show the Alberta Hotel reconstructed as part of a larger development.

Sampling of Images of the Dismantling of Alberta Hotel

From EA-788, William Hamilton Architect



City of Edmonton Archives EA-788-1



City of Edmonton Archives EA-788-3





City of Edmonton Archives EA-788-78



City of Edmonton Archives EA-788-79



City of Edmonton Archives EA-788-59



City of Edmonton Archives EA-788-109



City of Edmonton Archives EA-788-135



City of Edmonton Archives EA-788-120



City of Edmonton Archives EA-788-201



City of Edmonton Archives EA-788-161



City of Edmonton Archives EA-788-165





City of Edmonton Archives EA-788-218



City of Edmonton Archives EA-788-212



City of Edmonton Archives EA-788-223



City of Edmonton Archives EA-788-237

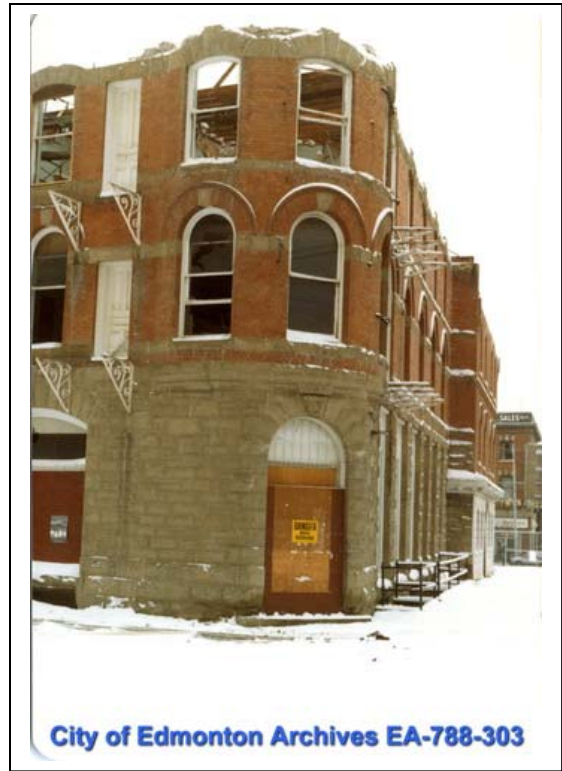


City of Edmonton Archives EA-788-254

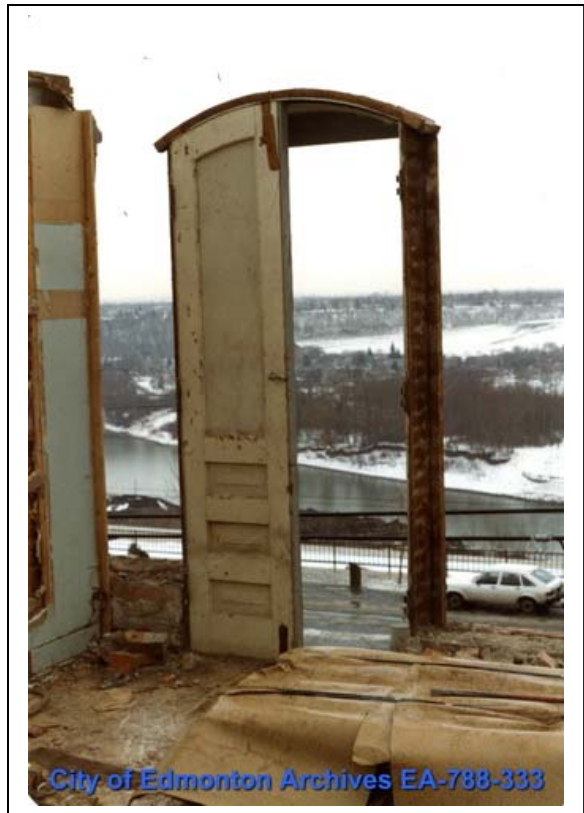




City of Edmonton Archives EA-788-317



City of Edmonton Archives EA-788-303



City of Edmonton Archives EA-788-333



City of Edmonton Archives EA-788-355



City of Edmonton Archives EA-788-377



City of Edmonton Archives EA-788-404



City of Edmonton Archives EA-788-411



City of Edmonton Archives EA-788-415



City of Edmonton Archives EA-788-457



City of Edmonton Archives EA-788-466

