



HARCOURT HOUSE

10215 - 112 STREET NW

CITY OF EDMONTON HISTORIC RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Edmonton

DESCRIPTION OF HISTORICAL PLACE

The Harcourt House is a three-storey office building located midblock on the east side of 112 Street NW, between 102 Avenue NW and 103 Avenue NW in Edmonton's Wîhkwêntôwin neighbourhood. Built in 1964, the building displays many features of the International Style, with strong emphasis on horizontal and vertical elements. The building features buff brick; tall, evenly-spaced windows stacked atop each other; and an offset main entrance. An underpass driveway on the south portion of the building gives it a "floating box" look.

HERITAGE VALUE

The Harcourt House is valued for its associations with northern transportation pioneer Robert Earle Harcourt, architects Freda and Dennis O'Connor, and the Where Edmonton Community Artists Network (W.E.C.A.N.) Society. It is also valued as a strong example of the International Style of architecture.

The land that Edmonton was developed on was used by Indigenous peoples for millennia, as the North Saskatchewan River Valley and ravine systems were a source of shelter, travel, trade, materials, and food. In the fur trading era, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) established a fort on the north side of the river. When the HBC sold its vast Rupert's Land territory to the Dominion of Canada in 1870, it retained reserve lands around its various trading properties, including a 3000 acre reserve around Fort Edmonton that became known as the Hudson's Bay Reserve. In 1876, the Canadian government signed Treaty 6 with Indigenous leaders in what is now Saskatchewan and the following year Indigenous chiefs in the Edmonton region signed adhesions to the treaty. Edmonton is also part of the Métis homeland.

In 1882 the HBC began parcelling off the southern portion of its reserve and as Edmonton began to grow in the early years of the 20th century, the HBC subdivided the area north of Jasper Avenue and west of 109 Street. This area was part of what was initially called the West End. In 1934, the West End Community League changed its name to Oliver in honour of recently deceased colonist and politician Frank Oliver. In 2024, the City renamed the neighbourhood Wîhkwêntôwin, which means "circle of friends" in Cree.

The West End was largely developed by the 1920s. Most of the area was residential but the area between 109 and 112 Street began to take on an industrial and commercial character as a result of the Canadian Pacific Railway yard (CPR) that was established in conjunction with the opening of the High Level Bridge in 1913. When the City of Edmonton adopted its first Zoning Bylaw in 1933, the area east of 112 Street was zoned for industrial land uses. Warehouse / office buildings started being built in the area after World War II.





It was into this context, amidst rapid economic development and a wave of Modern architecture, that Harcourt House was constructed. Built with concrete, steel, and masonry, the Harcourt House building began construction in 1964 and was completed in 1965. The original June 1964 building permit states the building was to be two storeys tall. An October 1964 building permit, however, was issued for an addition that added a third storey as well as an elevator.

Prior to 1964, residential dwellings sat on the lots. The 1913 and 1925 fire insurance plans show a small apartment building, the St. Laurence Apartments, on the site, as well as some other residential units to the south. When Harcourt House was constructed, the three houses to the south were still standing; however, these were demolished for the annex building in the 1970s.

Originally constructed as an office building for Decury Supply Ltd., the Province of Alberta obtained ownership of the property before construction was completed. Upon completion, it was leased to the Edmonton Rehabilitation Society, later known as Goodwill Industries of Alberta. Goodwill moved into a newer building in 1987. The W.E.C.A.N. Society has occupied the building since 1988, operating it as Harcourt House.

Harcourt House is valued for its association Robert Earle Harcourt. Earle was born in 1910 while his father, George Harcourt, was serving as Alberta's first Deputy Minister of Agriculture. Earle played on the Edmonton Eskimos rugby team in the late 1920s and had an adventurous spirit. After silver and other minerals were discovered along the Great Bear Lake, he made dog sled and boat trips to the region to work in the region's mines.

Gold was discovered on the north side of the Great Slave Lake in the mid-1930s. The community of Yellowknife sprang up to supply the mines and house workers, and the need to supply the community and the mines arose. Earle saw the potential for a winter road linking the Peace River district and Great Slave Lake. In 1938 he investigated the potential route by dog team. His trip helped convince the Alberta and Dominion governments to construct a winter road from Grimshaw, Alberta, which was at the northernmost extent of the Northern Alberta Railway, to Hay River

on the Great Slave Lake. The road was established in early 1939 and Earle's newly incorporated Yellowknife Transportation Company made the first delivery of freight to Yellowknife by tractor train in April 1939. This initiative laid the groundwork for the construction of the all-season Mackenzie Highway which opened a large portion of northwestern Alberta to development, reached Hay River in 1948, and was later extended to Yellowknife.

Earle Harcourt also established river transportation services on northern waterways linking Alberta and the Beaufort Sea. He was the primary competitor to the government-owned Northern Transportation Company. In 1965, the federal government acquired Earle's companies and consolidated their operations with Northern Transportation Company to further its northern resource and development objectives. At the time that negotiations with the government began, Earle was constructing a headquarters for his company Decury Supply on the east side of 112 Street in Edmonton. No longer needing the building, which became known as Harcourt House, he offered it to the Government of Alberta. It was looking for space for the Edmonton Rehabilitation Society. The society needed more room than the building had been planned to accommodate, so the third floor was added as part of the property sale.

Earle Harcourt died in Edmonton in 2000 at the age of 90. His childhood home, the George Harcourt Residence in the Windsor Park neighbourhood, was designated as a Municipal Historic Resource in 2009.





The Edmonton Rehabilitation Society ran different programs for people with disabilities, including sewing, weaving, and craft programs. These programs helped people gain skills to find work in various industries. Edmonton Rehabilitation Society is now known as Goodwill Industries of Alberta. In 1988, Goodwill received funding to buy a new Edmonton headquarters and moved out of Harcourt House.

Harcourt House is valued for its association with Freda and Dennis O'Connor Architects. Born in Wales in 1926, Freda May Lewis received her architecture degree from King's College, Newcastle upon Tyne (now called Newcastle University) at 19 years of age and started her career in 1947, working with pioneering modernist architect-planner Donald Gibson, who was later knighted for his radical rebuilding of Coventry after the Blitz. Along with one other woman on the team of 100, Freda designed temporary structures to fill the holes left by bombs in downtown Coventry. Freda met her future husband and business partner, Dennis O'Connor (born 1921), in the late 1940s. After Dennis became a registered architect in 1951, he and Freda married. In 1952, the couple moved to Ghana for work. While there, they met Noel Dant, who had recently left his position as City of Edmonton's Town Planner. Partially due to Dant's influence, the O'Connors ended up emigrating to Canada and establishing themselves in Edmonton.

Over the next several years, Dennis & Freda O'Connor designed many buildings in Edmonton and beyond. The couple partnered with Ronald Maltby in the early 1960s and the firm became Dennis and Freda O'Connor and Maltby Architects & Planning Consultants. They were known for their equal partnership and exceptional communication, which enabled them to balance several projects at once between the three of them. The firm designed a myriad of buildings, including churches, 52 schools, award-winning houses, apartment buildings, and commercial buildings. The firm was also involved in development, and financed and built several apartment buildings in the Oliver (now Wihkwentôwin) neighbourhood, such as York House (10030 - 114 Street NW), Lancaster House (10025 - 116 Street NW) and the Albany (10155 - 116 Street NW).

In 1974, Freda was elected president of the Alberta Association of Architects, and thus became the first woman ever elected president of a professional architectural association in Canada.

Freda and Dennis O'Connor retired from their practice in 1982 and moved to Salt Spring Island. Despite her retirement, Freda chaired a panel reviewing development proposals on the island for several years. Freda passed away in 1993, at the age of 67, after suffering from a brain tumor for some months. Dennis continued to live on Salt Spring Island until his passing in 2006 at the age of 85. The successor to their firm was Maltby & Prins Architects, which was still operating in Edmonton as of 2025.

The Harcourt House building is also valued for its association with Where Edmonton Community Artists Network (W.E.C.A.N.) Society, which has operated the Harcourt House arts studios at 10215 - 112 Street NW since 1988. W.E.C.A.N. began after several local artists organized an art auction to benefit victims of the Black Friday tornado that struck east Edmonton on July 31, 1987. Harcourt House comprises the single largest community of visual arts studios in Alberta by providing 44 studio facilities to artists, as well as exhibition and art education facilities. After leasing the building from the Government of Alberta for 37 years, W.E.C.A.N. Society purchased the building in 2025.

Harcourt House is a good example of the International Style, which was popularized in the late 1920s and early 1930s and emphasized a pared-down, unadorned style, with rectilinear forms, flat roofs, and smooth wall surfaces. Like other forms of Modern architecture, the International Style emphasized the function of a building, avoiding any ornamentation that was not essential to the building's use. The International Style emphasized volume over mass, regular patterns over symmetry, and reliance on the materials used to convey style and feeling. New building technologies, such as mass-produced steel, also influenced the International Style.

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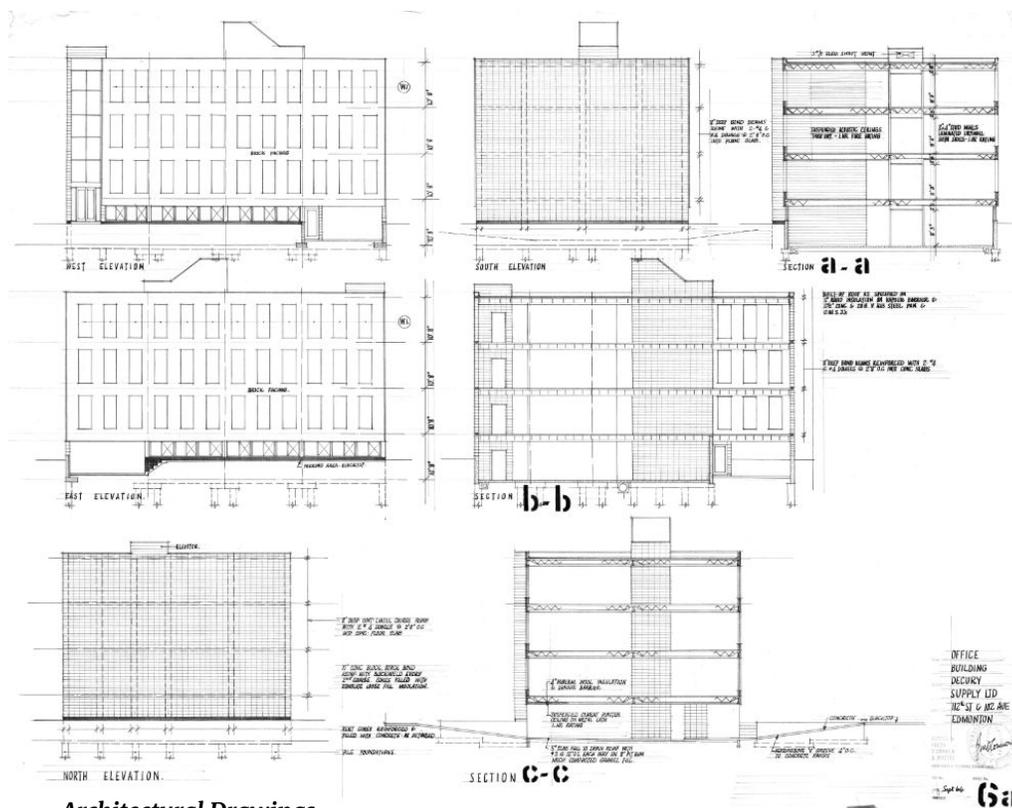
The Harcourt House building displays many features of the International Style, with a minimalist form that emphasizes both vertical and horizontal lines. Harcourt House has a flat roof; tall, evenly-spaced windows stacked atop each other, buff brick facades, and an offset main entrance on the north end of the front facade. An underpass driveway was installed on the south portion of the building to give the building a “floating box” look as viewed from the front and rear. The low, flat, horizontality of the building suggests the prairie landscape and emphasizes the functionality of the structure – first as offices, later on as a space that fosters art and creation.

Designated as a Municipal Historic Resource through Bylaw 21396 in March 2026.

CHARACTER DEFINING ELEMENTS

Key character-defining elements of the 1964 Harcourt House Building include:

- + Form, scale, and massing;
- + Three storeys;
- + Flat roof;
- + Buff brick facade;
- + Grid patterning of tall windows on three floors;
- + Continuous horizontal glazing on basement level;
- + “Floating box” design on a low podium with south driveway underpass;
- + Offset front entrance on north end of west elevation;
- + North stairwell glazing; and
- + Cornerstone with “Harcourt House 1964” inscription.



Architectural Drawings

