



EDMONTON 1881 SCHOOL

10425 - 99 AVENUE NW

CITY OF EDMONTON HISTORIC RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Edmonton

DESCRIPTION OF HISTORICAL PLACE

The Edmonton 1881 School is a one-storey wood building located on a site shared with the historic McKay Avenue School in downtown Edmonton. The structure is a simple building featuring vertical wood siding with battens, a gable-roofed front porch, and a sign above the entrance reading “EDMONTON SCHOOL 1881.”

HERITAGE VALUE

The heritage value of the Edmonton 1881 School lies in its association with the early establishment of educational institutions in Alberta.

In 1881, the settlement of Edmonton was transitioning from a frontier fur trade post to a bustling agricultural and commercial community. Speculation that the transcontinental railway would pass through the community led to a small population and real estate boom in 1880 and 1881, swelling the ranks of traders, farmers and prospectors. The expanding population influenced several prominent citizens to establish the community’s first public school. A local vote endorsed the idea and Edmonton’s first Public Board School Trustees was created, composed of three members: Malcolm Groat, Matthew McCauley, and William Rowland. Though initially opposed to the creation of the school, the Hudson’s Bay Company agreed to donate four hilltop lots for the construction of the new building. Financing for the construction, and later administration, of the school was initially obtained through public subscriptions. Built by the firm of Oliver and McDonald in 1881, the new school opened in January of 1882. In 1885, the Legislative Council of the North-West Territories formally constituted the School District of Edmonton of the Northwest Territories

as Protestant Public School District No. 7. It was the first public school district in present-day Alberta. The school remained active until 1904, when the McKay Avenue School was constructed on an adjacent lot. Prior to World War One, the school was relocated and converted into a residence; in 1982, roughly one century after its initial construction, the Edmonton 1881 School was returned to its original site. It is the oldest extant public school building in the province, and was designated a Provincial Historic Resource in 1983.

At the time of construction, the Edmonton 1881 School was one of the more high quality buildings in Edmonton. It was the first sawn lumber building in the settlement and boasted six windows fitted with what were at the time the community’s largest panes of glass, each measuring 10 inches by 14 inches. The school featured exterior walls of vertical siding and battens, sawdust insulation, and a roof composed of tar paper covered in shingles. Initially 24 feet by 30 feet, the school was expanded twice over the succeeding years to meet increased demands. Extensive restorations have been made to the school to replicate its original appearance.





CHARACTER DEFINING ELEMENTS

The character-defining elements of the Edmonton 1881 School include such features as:

- + mass, form, and style;
- + front gable roof with brick chimney;
- + vertical board and batten siding;
- + fenestration pattern;
- + original wainscoting, floorboards, and decorative strip near ceiling;
- + original windows, sills, and frames on south wall;
- + original door frame;
- + trap door to crawl space;
- + original artifacts, including water barrel, desks blackboard; and
- + spatial relationship and sightlines to McKay Avenue School also located on the site (but not included in this Designation).

Designated as a Municipal Historic Resource through Bylaw 17130 in April 2015.

Designated as a Provincial Historic Resource in October 1983.

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