



Magrath Mansion

CITY OF EDMONTON
HISTORIC RESOURCE
MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Edmonton

6240 Ada Boulevard NW

DESCRIPTION OF HISTORICAL PLACE

Magrath Mansion is a two and one half-storey building overlooking the North Saskatchewan River in Edmonton's Highlands neighbourhood. Built between 1912 and 1913, the red-brick mansion is an eclectic construction with a stately design strongly influenced by the Georgian Revival and Neoclassical architectural styles. Prominent features of the Magrath Mansion include the symmetrical front facade, two-storey colonnade supported by robust classical columns, hipped roof with gable dormers, and wraparound porch and balcony.

HERITAGE VALUE

The heritage value of the Magrath Mansion lies in its association with Edmonton's pre-World War One building boom and its excellent representation of the Georgian Revival architectural style.

Among the most significant figures in the city's pre-World War One building boom were Bidwell Holgate and William J. Magrath. Their most ambitious undertaking was the development of the Highlands, a subdivision located on the north side of the North Saskatchewan River. Envisioned as an exclusive preserve of Edmonton's burgeoning entrepreneurial and professional class, both Magrath and Holgate built stately mansions in the area. Designed by Ernest W. Morehouse - the architect also responsible for the Holgate Mansion - Magrath Mansion boasts an imposing exterior and 14 ornately appointed rooms. The Georgian Revival style is evident in the hipped roof with gable dormers, full-facade porch, sidelights and transoms surrounding doors and windows,

and use of quoins, modillions, and dentillated eaves. The impressive two-storey colonnade with robust classical columns crowned by Ionic capitals is a bold expression of the Neoclassical architectural vision. The spacious grounds, panoramic vision of the North Saskatchewan River, and sophisticated design of the Magrath Mansion visually projected the economic clout and social prominence of its owner. The interior was equally ostentatious, graced by a variety of exotic materials - including mahogany, Italian marble, hand-painted silk and linen wallpaper, and Bohemian crystal - as well as ornate furnishings and details like the French chandelier in the reception area, the winding oak staircase to the second floor, the fireplace faced with hammered brass in the library, and the intricately painted, sculptured plaster ceiling in the dining room. The Magrath Mansion was also fitted with a range of luxurious modern conveniences, including an indoor pool in the basement, an electrical switch in the den that controlled all the lights in the home, an elaborate intercom system, a telephone connection in every room, an in-wall vacuum system and a burglar alarm. The extravagant interior is an excellent example of the lavish aesthetic of upper class Edmontonians during this period.





CHARACTER DEFINING ELEMENTS

Key elements that define the heritage character of the Magrath Mansion site include:

- + sightlines to North Saskatchewan River and the spatial relationship between building and surrounding grounds;
- + boundary plantings of deciduous trees on the south and spruce trees on the north; and
- + location within Highlands neighbourhood.

Key elements that define the mansion's stately exterior include:

- + mass, form and scale;
- + sandstone belt course;
- + hipped roof with moulded red clay roof tiles and gabled dormers with returned eaves, a balustraded widow's walk, and corbelled chimneys with decorative masonry work;
- + symmetrical front facade with a wide front staircase, projecting two-storey colonnade supported by classical columns crowned by Ionic capitals, entablature, and wide, projecting, bracketed cornice;
- + ground floor porch and second floor balcony extending the full width of the front facade on a masonry plinth and wrapping around east elevation, terminating at a smaller one-storey circular porch and porte cochere complete with Ionic columns, entablature, and balustrade;
- + pediment-like gable end on north elevation with recessed semi-circular window surmounting a second floor sleeping porch and first floor open porch;
- + original exterior light fixtures and oak doors with leaded glass;
- + fenestration pattern and style;



- + quoins, modillions and bracketed eaves;
- + sidelights and transoms around doors and windows;
- + classical door and window surrounds, columns, and capitals; and
- + projecting window hood moulds.

Key elements that define the mansion's lavish interior include:

- + use of fine and exotic materials like mahogany, Italian marble, hand-painted silk and linen wallpaper, and Bohemian crystal;
- + well-crafted oak elements, including doors, wainscoting, columns, capitals, arches, mouldings, trim, staircase, built-in cabinets with leaded glass doors, and ceiling beams;
- + ornate furnishings, including sculptured plaster ceilings, plaster cornices, inlaid parquet floor, stencilled and hand-painted finishes, leaded glass elements, French chandelier, stained mahogany panelling, hammered brass fireplace mantel, mouldings, trims, door and window surrounds; and
- + remnants of luxurious period conveniences, including intercom units.

Designated as a Municipal Historic Resource through Bylaw 20112 in June 2023.

Designated as a Provincial Historic Resource in September 1975.

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