



McKAY AVENUE SCHOOL

10425 - 99 AVENUE NW

CITY OF EDMONTON HISTORIC RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Edmonton

DESCRIPTION OF HISTORICAL PLACE

McKay Avenue School is an early twentieth century, three-storey building situated on roughly 0.61 hectares of land in Edmonton's Downtown. The building embodies the Richardsonian Romanesque architectural style and features a red-brick façade, sandstone trim, round arches over the windows and doors, and Ionic columns flanking the main entrances.

HERITAGE VALUE

The heritage value of McKay Avenue School lies in its association with the inaugural sessions of the Alberta Legislative Assembly, its connection to early educational institutions in Edmonton, and its stately Richardsonian Romanesque architectural style.

Built between 1904 and 1905, McKay Avenue School was completed in the same year that the Province of Alberta was created. With the Legislature building yet to be constructed, the first provincial assembly was forced to find other quarters for their proceedings. The elegant, dignified architecture of the new school and its spacious assembly hall were well-suited for the purpose. In 1906 and 1907, the third floor of McKay Avenue School was rented for the first two working sessions of the Alberta Legislative Assembly. Attended by political luminaries like Premier Alexander Cameron Rutherford, these inaugural assemblies debated issues and crafted legislation to establish the infrastructure of the nascent province. Significant bills passed during these sessions included the confirmation of Edmonton as provincial capital, the founding of the University of Alberta, the establishment of a system of provincial courts, and the provision of charters for several railway companies. The

third floor assembly hall has been restored to reflect its appearance during its use by Alberta's first Legislative Assembly.

At the time that McKay Avenue School was constructed, Edmonton was rapidly transitioning from a frontier settlement to the administrative and political centre of a fledgling province. Significant immigration to Edmonton around the turn of the century had swelled the community's population; in 1904, this growth resulted in Edmonton's incorporation as a city. The burgeoning population and optimistic appraisals of the city's future led local authorities to initiate an ambitious program to expand the community's educational infrastructure. McKay Avenue School was part of this expansion, replacing the original and substantially smaller school erected on the same site in 1881. Built in an impressive style reflecting the city's growing confidence, the school's image was further burnished by its association with significant national and regional figures. Canada's Governor General Lord Minto laid the cornerstone for the new building in 1904. It was named in honour of Dr. William MacKay, a physician for the Hudson's Bay Company (H.B.C.) from 1864 until 1898, and one of the earliest doctors in western Canada. The name of the school (and the avenue on which it sits) was misspelled "McKay"; this spelling, though incorrect, has remained standard.

McKay Avenue School is an impressive example of Richardsonian Romanesque architecture, embodying the enthusiasm of turn-of-the-century Edmonton and its growing sophistication. Designed by Henry Denny Johnson, the school manifests the strong influence of Romanesque Revival ideals in its semi-circular arched





windows and doors, Ionic columns flanking the main entrances, recessed entrance, and rough-faced sandstone stringcoursing. Johnson's design was well-received and became the model for later school buildings in the city. An addition, sympathetic in materials and style, was added to the original building in 1912. In its robust massing and dignified architecture, the school embodies the educational virtues of strength, honesty, and elegance.

CHARACTER DEFINING ELEMENTS

The character-defining elements of McKay Avenue School include such features as:

- + mass, form, and style;
- + red brick façade;
- + rough-faced sandstone sills, lintels, and stringcourses;
- + corbelled chimneys with decorative brickwork;
- + hipped roof;
- + brick pilasters, arcading around windows, decorative coursing and corbelling;
- + decorative stone capitals atop brick pilasters;
- + corbelled brick pediment wall dormers intersecting the roofline and featuring recessed, unadorned friezes;
- + stone inscribed with "1904.", "McKAY AVENUE", "A", "D", "1904", "A", "D", "1912" and "PUBLIC SCHOOL";
- + ionic sandstone columns flanking entryways and supporting stone arch with a keystone;
- + inset decorative stonework on both sides of entrance arches;
- + fenestration pattern and style, including round arched windows on upper level;
- + arrangement and style of doors, including entrance doors topped by semi-circular fanlights;
- + time capsule sealed under the cornerstone;
- + skylights on top floor;
- + original interior elements, including doors and windows, transom windows, masonry arches, stairways (including newel posts and balustrades), wainscoting, fanlights and sidelights, mouldings, trims, decorative grates, flooring, fittings, fixtures, furniture, radiators, columns and capitals;
- + extant original floorplan; and
- + spatial relationship and sightlines to original Edmonton 1881 school.



Designated as a Municipal Historic Resource through Bylaw 17129 in April 2015.

Designated as a Provincial Historic Resource in May 1976.

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