



# PETER HEMINGWAY AQUATIC CENTRE / CORONATION POOL

13808 - 111 AVENUE NW

## CITY OF EDMONTON HISTORIC RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Edmonton

### DESCRIPTION OF HISTORICAL PLACE

The Peter Hemingway Aquatic Centre/Coronation Pool building, opened in 1970, is a public recreation facility located within Coronation Park on the north side of 111 Avenue, west of 142 Street NW in the Woodcroft neighbourhood. The building is set well back from 111 Avenue and is one of several buildings located on the larger Coronation Park site. Originally named Coronation Pool, the building features a striking flowing wave design in its roof structure, with cables and contrasting materials such as concrete, glass, steel and heavy timbers, and appears to rise out of the surrounding landscape.

### HERITAGE VALUE

The land on which Edmonton was developed 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 1670, the British Crown gave the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) a charter to trade in Rupert's Land, the enormous area that drained into Hudson Bay and in the late 18th century the company established a trading post along the North Saskatchewan River called Edmonton House or Fort Edmonton. The company sold Rupert's Land to the Dominion of Canada in 1870. 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.

The treaty led to settlement activities. Rural-sized lots that had already been claimed along the river were surveyed, and then began to be subdivided into urban lots as Edmonton's population grew. Beyond the river lots, the Dominion Land Survey divided land into square-mile sections for agricultural

purposes. After a railroad reached Edmonton from Calgary in 1891, railway entrepreneurs began planning for additional lines. One such line was the Edmonton and Slave Lake Railway. Plans for this railway, first filed in 1904 and then legally registered in 1907 after the line's construction in 1906, positioned its right-of-way running northwest from Edmonton towards St. Albert. The right-of-way cut through land (S ½ 12-53-25-W4) that had been acquired by Peter Butchart's Great West Land Company.

At this time, the City Beautiful movement was beginning to influence Edmonton. The City Beautiful was an urban planning philosophy that sought to improve cities through monumental grandeur and architectural harmony. Large public parks were seen as an important instrument of civic beautification. When incorporated as a city in 1904, Edmonton did not have any public parks. City Council, however, soon established a Street and Parks Committee, and in February 1906 land was purchased for two parks: an east end park and a west end park.

*Designated as a Municipal Historic Resource through Bylaw 21368 in January 2026.*





The east end park became the site of the city's exhibition grounds in 1910 and through the development of the adjacent Borden Park, an outdoor pool, amusement park and zoo were established there in the 1920s.

The west end park, approximately 100 acres in size, was purchased from Peter Butchart for \$18,000. It was the smaller, western portion of the land divided by the Edmonton and Slave Lake rail line. Separated from the growing city by the line, it had less development potential than the eastern portion. The park purchase was finalized on February 2, 1906 and on February 16, 1906, Butchart's subdivision of the eastern portion was registered at the Land Titles Office. The subdivision, Westmount, had in part been capitalized by the City's park acquisition.

The park was named Westmount Park in 1916. It remained largely undeveloped for decades. The City of Edmonton located its tree nursery there and leased the property to individual nursery operators. In the 1920s there was a push to lease the land on a long-term basis to a private golf club. The Edmonton Federation of Community League opposed the principle of leasing public parks to private groups and in November 1926, City Council rejected the golf course proposal. Two mink farms operated on the park property in the 1930s. In 1949, the Department of National Defence asked to buy the land to build a major Cold War military depot. After opposition from the Mountglen Home and School Association (a community group in the Westmount area) and the City's Town Planning Commission, however, the federal government located the depot, now called Canadian Forces Base Edmonton, next to the Namao Airport.

After the rail line was removed and as housing expanded towards Westmount Park after the Second World War, the park's boundaries were changed to better align with the arterial roadways that formed the edges of planned neighbourhood units. The park was included in the Woodcroft neighbourhood. Woodcroft had originally been subdivided in 1906, shortly after Westmount, but there had been very little development there and so it was replotted in the early 1950s. As the park was under development, it was officially renamed Coronation Park on June 2, 1953, the day that Queen Elizabeth II was crowned.

The Peter Hemingway Aquatic Centre/Coronation Pool is significant for its association with the development boom in Edmonton after 1945. Immediately following the Second World War, the Edmonton area experienced tremendous growth. Major oil discoveries in the Edmonton region, beginning with the Leduc No. 1 well in 1947, coupled with a baby boom and post-war optimism, spurred significant development in Edmonton and a demand for additional recreational facilities for the increasing population. With the burgeoning population of the west end of the city, Coronation Park began to be more formally developed and additional buildings were introduced. The first was Ross Sheppard High School, constructed in 1958 and located to the immediate east of the future Peter Hemingway Aquatic Centre/Coronation Pool. Ross Sheppard High School is listed on the Inventory of Historic Resources in Edmonton. Following soon after was the Queen Elizabeth II Planetarium, located to the north of the future pool building. Opened in 1960, this was the first public planetarium building in Canada. It was designated as a protected Municipal Historic Resource by the City of Edmonton in 2016. Coronation Pool opened in 1970, and was the first pool building in Alberta to feature an indoor eight-lane, 50 metre length pool. In 1984, the Edmonton Space Sciences Centre, designed by internationally-recognized Indigenous architect Douglas Cardinal, opened to the immediate west of the pool. It has been expanded several times and is now known as the TELUS World of Science Edmonton. Most recently, to the immediate north of the pool is the Coronation Park Sports and Recreation Centre, a large multi-purpose recreation complex that includes the first indoor velodrome in the prairie provinces. The collection of buildings on the site represents an impressive range of architectural styles and eras from the 1950s to today.

The construction of Coronation Pool was not without controversy. The initial tendering process for construction was delayed twice as City Council reduced the budget for the project, and debated whether the facility should be smaller or not built at all. The facility was not designed with a diving tower, which was disappointing to some in the community. The initial intention was that the pool would be used by students at the adjacent Ross Sheppard High School during the day, with public hours in the evenings and weekends, and all day during the summer.







One alderman referred to the building as a “white elephant” due to its price and lack of a diving tower, and predicted that the building would experience operational issues. Some residents at the time suggested to City Council that the building be named after the recently-deceased Professor Robert Routledge, an Edmonton educator and professor at the University of Alberta who had been instrumental in establishing the Alberta Schools’ Athletic Association in 1956. Mayor Ivor Dent successfully argued that the building would more identifiably be named Coronation Pool given its location in Coronation Park and suggested that Routledge could be honoured elsewhere. This has come to pass through the naming of Routledge Road in the Rhatigan Ridge neighbourhood and an annual award in his name given by the Alberta Schools’ Athletic Association to teachers who promote athletic programs.

The Peter Hemingway Aquatic Centre/Coronation Pool is significant for its high level of architectural design, based on the Expressionist style of the Modern architecture movement. The City of Edmonton commissioned the architectural firm Hemingway and Laubenthal Architects to design the facility as a project to mark Canada’s centennial. The design, largely led by Peter Hemingway, began in 1967, and the building was completed in 1970. The facility was opened by Mayor Ivor Dent on July 3, 1970, and had a final construction cost of \$1.2 million.

The design of the building was an exemplary interpretation of an emerging direction in the Modern architecture movement, referred to as Expressionist design. Expressionist architecture celebrated new possibilities with building design as construction techniques were advancing. Typical design elements included masonry or glass with dramatic curves, large cantilevered elements and the use of wood for major components. This freedom of expression allowed designs to relate and respond to the features of the Canadian landscape. The building includes many design elements common with Modern buildings at that time, including high transparency with extensive curtain wall glazing, the use of exposed concrete elements and heavy timber columns. However, unlike many Modern style buildings designed at the time with a boxy structure, the Coronation Pool design embraced the Expressionist aesthetic and took a significant departure to blend the building into the landscape, departing from a typical rectilinear form. The dramatic, sweeping roofline, reminiscent of a tent structure covering the pool, reflected the transition between the Rocky Mountains, foothills and flatlands of the prairies. It is fully-integrated with the surrounding landscape, reinforced by the strong vertical mullions and embedded concrete piers, which provide a base for the suspension cable system within the building. The expressive architecture reflected significant international designs, including the 1952 Vogelweidplatz Sports and Congress Hall by Finnish architect





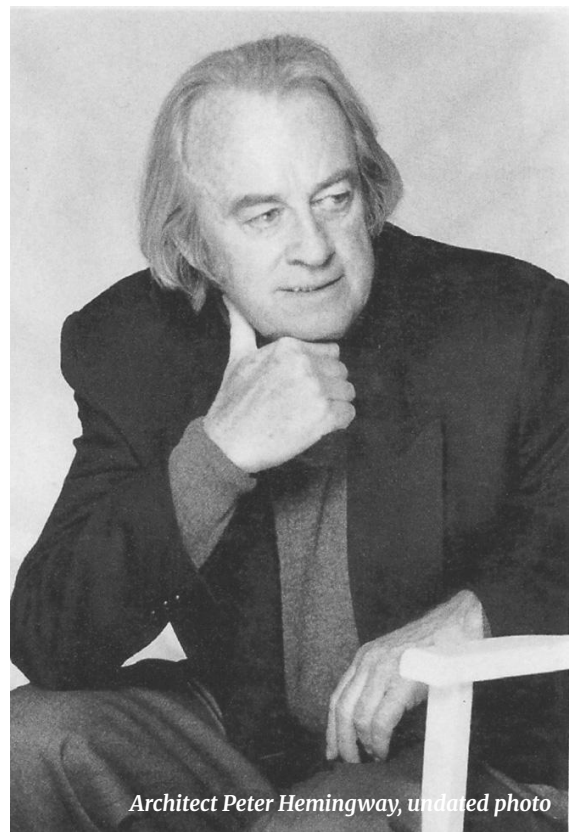
Alvar Aalto (design competition but never constructed) and the Yoyogi National Stadium in Tokyo, Japan, designed by internationally-recognized architect Kenzō Tange in 1964.

The sweeping roof is clad in copper, featuring a high peak at the northwest corner of the building. It is constructed on a rectangular plan, with the long facades on the north and south elevations. The interior structure is supported by a suspension cable system, with the cables mounted on eight large concrete piers on the north and south sides of the building. The east and west elevations feature flowing curtain wall glazing with deep vertical mullion caps providing a strong visual aspect of the building. The south elevation facing 111 Avenue has floor-to-ceiling glazing, allowing southern sunlight to penetrate into the building, particularly in the winter months. The curving roof extends downwards over the glazing, forming a canopy-like structure. The north elevation features similar floor-to-ceiling glazing which opens out onto an outdoor space. The recent development of the Coronation Park Sports and Recreation Centre to the immediate north has extended an at-grade corridor structure that connects the two buildings.

Hemingway was awarded the Massey Medal in Architecture in 1970 for the design, the first Albertan to receive this national award. Massey Medals were awards in Canadian architecture that were presented from 1950 to 1970. In 1950, Vincent Massey announced a "Scheme for the Award of Massey Medals in Architecture by the Massey Foundation" with the goal of recognizing "outstanding examples of Canadian achievement in the fields of architecture and thus to give encouragement to the members of the architectural profession and to promote public interest in their work." The building also received the Le Prix du XXe siècle award in 2012 from the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, which recognizes significant architectural excellence from the 20th century in Canada.

The Peter Hemingway Aquatic Centre/Coronation Pool building is also significant for its association with the noted Edmonton architect, Peter Hemingway. Born in 1929 in Minster, Kent, England, Hemingway completed a technical diploma in

architecture from Rochester Technical College. He was recruited to join the Alberta Department of Public Works and immigrated to Canada in 1955, working there for a period of months before transferring to the Federal Department of Public Works. After becoming a registered architect in Alberta in February 1956, he established his own private practice with fellow architect Charles Laubenthal, and continued the firm after Laubenthal's departure. Hemingway understood how the harsh realities of the prairie landscape posed challenges for architectural design. His designs searched for strong forms and bold shapes that not only blended into the landscape, but also stood out to be recognized. While utilizing the common materials often found in Modernist buildings, such as extensive glazing, concrete, steel and wood, his designs often shifted from the rectilinear and boxy structures that were typical examples of the period and embraced the principles of the Expressionist style.



*Architect Peter Hemingway, undated photo*







For the design process of the original Coronation Pool, Hemingway led the design and collaborated with consulting architect Gilbert Beatson, who had his own architectural practice based in Calgary. A young project architect named Kenneth Morris, who had joined Hemingway's firm in 1967 after recently graduating from architecture school, also worked on the project prior to his registration as a full architect. The final drawings for the building were approved in 1969, after which Morris relocated to Vancouver to work with the celebrated Canadian architect, Arthur Erickson. Construction on the building began in 1969, and was completed in 1970.

Hemingway was also responsible for a number of other significant buildings in Edmonton and the surrounding area, including: the 1968 Stanley Engineering Building (which, like Coronation Pool, also won the Massey Medal for Architecture in 1970); two buildings for the Central Pentecostal Church between 1964 and 1972 (both since demolished); the Royal Canadian Mounted Police detachment in St. Albert between 1974 and 1976; the Muttart Conservatory in 1976; Strathcona County Hall between 1975 and 1976; and Strathcona County Fire Station No. 1 in 1976. He served as the President of the Alberta Association of Architects in 1982.

Hemingway passed away in May 1995. Architects and others in the community, including the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, who had known and worked with him made efforts to have his architectural legacy to Edmonton recognized. In June 2005, Edmonton City Council recognized Hemingway by renaming the Coronation Pool to the Peter Hemingway Fitness and Leisure Centre, which is now known as the Peter Hemingway Aquatic Centre.

## CHARACTER DEFINING ELEMENTS

Key character-defining elements of the Peter Hemingway Aquatic Centre/Coronation Pool include:

- + Form, scale and massing as expressed by its long rectangular form and sweeping rooflines, with the building integrated into the surrounding landscape;
- + Undulating roof clad with copper panels;
- + Projecting eaves and verges, clad with copper flashing;
- + Exposed curtain wall glazing system on east and west elevations, with no horizontal mullions and strong vertical mullion cap elements;
- + Floor-to-ceiling curtain wall glazing system on north and south elevations, with door openings;
- + Structural suspension cable system, with exposed cabling seated into large concrete piers on the north and south elevations;
- + Unenclosed patio-like space on north elevation; and
- + Exposed concrete foundation with drainage channel on east and west elevations, and portions of south elevation.



*West elevation during construction, 1969*

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