



QUEEN ELIZABETH II PLANETARIUM

13831 - 114 AVENUE NW

CITY OF EDMONTON HISTORIC RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Edmonton

DESCRIPTION OF HISTORICAL PLACE

The Queen Elizabeth II Planetarium is located at the northeast corner of Coronation Park along a diagonal NE/SW axis “scepter” path to the 142 Street and 111 Avenue intersection. The one-storey structure is distinguished as an early example of Modern Expressionistic style in Canada.

HERITAGE VALUE

The Queen Elizabeth II Planetarium was dedicated in honour of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953, and was officially opened September 23, 1960 by Mayor Elmer E. Roper. The building was Canada’s first planetarium and was the country’s only civic planetarium until the Dow Planetarium of Montreal opened in 1966.

In 1958, a proposal was put before Edmonton City Council to build a permanent civic memorial to mark the visit of Her Royal Highness Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip in July of 1959. Eventually, the Edmonton Centre of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada recommended that a Planetarium be constructed. A committee was struck, consisting of Professor E. S. Keeping, Professor Gads, Franklin Loehde, F. Jersen, D. Rosenfield, and Earl Milton to put together a proposal for submission to City Council. On March 9, 1959, the proposal to construct the planetarium in Coronation Park was approved by City Council for a budget of \$110,000.

The first Director of the Planetarium was Ian McLennan, a member of the Edmonton Centre of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada. He was selected as Director barely a month before the completion of the

building at the age of 23, and served in this position from August 22, 1960, to October 31, 1965. Following his start in Edmonton, Ian McLennan has become a world-recognized expert in strategic planning and management of planetariums and other similar public science projects.

The design of the Planetarium is a unique and early example of the Modern Expressionistic style in Canada. This style rejects the rigidity of the International style with the use of dramatically idiosyncratic shapes, rooted in the European Expressionist movement of the early twentieth century. The Planetarium exhibits common elements from the Modern International design that express lightness, including extensive use of glass in an aluminum curtain wall, framing of the exterior building elements, sophisticated structural expression and the sense that the building is ‘floating.’ The design may also have been influenced by the popular fascination with space age design in the 1950s, with the appearance of a spacecraft hovering off the ground, including the round dome of the theatre space itself.

The Planetarium is associated with Robert Falconer Duke, City Architect, and Walter Telfer, assistant City Architect, both of whom stamped the construction drawings. Duke’s designs included most of the city’s public buildings, excluding schools, from 1950 to 1969. Some of his designs include the 1959 Westwood Bus Barns and the Edmonton Power utility buildings. The design of the building is attributed to Denis Mulvaney. Mulvaney moved his family to Edmonton in the mid 1950s to work in the City Architect’s office. His projects included the Planetarium and the original Storyland Valley Zoo, as well as





numerous substations and other buildings at the time. He later moved to Australia and worked on the Sydney Opera House. The general construction contractor for the Planetarium was R.V. Coombs Construction Ltd.

The building is associated with the Royal visit to Edmonton in July 1959, and was dedicated by Queen Elizabeth II on July 22, 1959. The Queen planted an oak tree in the vicinity of the Planetarium. The Planetarium is also closely associated with the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, established in 1903, as the early proponent of the project.

The exterior art mosaics in the concrete entrance plaza are of significant heritage value, and are included in the designation. The art pieces were conceived and constructed in 1964 by Edmonton artist Heinrich Eichner, who came to Canada with his wife Edith in 1959. The mosaics depict the twelve zodiacal constellations: Leo, Taurus, Sagittarius, Capricornus, Pisces, Virgo, Libra, Aquarius, Scorpio, Gemini, Cancer and Aries. Eichner's favourite subjects were animals, which he sculpted in wood. He had several exhibitions of his work while still in Germany and subsequently had many more in Edmonton. He and his wife often collaborated on each other's art.

Also of significant heritage value is the site planning of Coronation Park in which the Queen Elizabeth II Planetarium is located. The siting of the building is an integral part of the "scepter" path design that is a major distinguishing feature of the park (particularly when viewed from the air) and a symbol of sovereignty.

CHARACTER DEFINING ELEMENTS

The character defining elements of the 1959 Queen Elizabeth II Planetarium include:

Exterior:

- + form, scale and massing;
- + Modern Expressionistic Style elements consisting of the circular plan, the lightness of the structure, the transparency of the public gathering areas, the framing of separate material elements, and the central dome that expresses the primary function of the building as a planetarium;
- + concrete slab construction with structural steel support columns around the perimeter,
- + aluminum curtain and masonry walls;
- + original fenestration that consists of a floor to ceiling gold-coloured anodized aluminum curtain wall with matching entrance doors and special handles;
- + square-shaped punched windows in terrazzo;
- + precast terrazzo "floating" stair treads
- + projecting entrance feature with an expressionistic concrete canopy;
- + expressed concrete floor and ceiling slabs on the exterior with exaggerated concrete frames around the curtain wall windows;
- + ceramic tile covering of all the exterior concrete surfaces;
- + uniquely-designed painted steel guards and handrails; and
- + use of ashlar (irregularly-cut) field stone for solid wall surfaces, both above and below the expressed main floor slab.





Interior:

- + terrazzo floor finish in the Display Room and the Vestibule, with brass radial pattern of divider strips;
- + concrete upstands at the base of the curtain wall in the Display Room, the Vestibule and the north Lecture Room, clad in terrazzo (Vestibule and Display Room) and quarry tile (north Lecture Room), and capped in quarry tile with anodized aluminum ventilation grilles;
- + precast terrazzo “floating” stair treads in the Display Room;
- + mahogany handrails in the Display Room;
- + floor to ceiling light-coloured veneer wood paneling with vertical mahogany muntins in the Display Room, the light lock areas, the public corridors and the Lecture Room;
- + special chalkboard feature in the rear public gathering area, which is partly original, altered to house an electrical panel;
- + custom wood doors with padded panels in the Display Room, the adjacent light lock areas and the public corridors;
- + rough, textured fibrous ceilings in the Display Room and the north Lecture Room;
- + period recessed pot lights with gold-coloured diffusers throughout;
- + polished granite feature wall in the Display Room;
- + cast metal letters on granite feature wall referencing the Royal dedication;
- + ceramic tile ceiling and column cladding around the entrance vestibule in the Display Room; and
- + variety of wall finishes, smooth suspended inner dome ceiling and features in the Planetarium Room associated with the planetarium projection.

Site Features:

- + exterior art mosaics depicting the twelve zodiacal constellations: Leo, Taurus, Sagittarius, Capricornus, Pisces, Virgo, Libra, Aquarius, Scorpio, Gemini, Cancer and Aries; and
- + siting of the building is an integral part of the “scepter” path design that is a major distinguishing feature of the park (particularly when viewed from the air) and a symbol of sovereignty.

Designated as a Municipal Historic Resource through Bylaw 17857 in March 2017.

