



CITY OF EDMONTON HISTORIC RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

Edmonton

ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI FRIARY AND CHURCH

6770 - 129 AVENUE NW

DESCRIPTION OF HISTORICAL PLACE

St. Francis of Assisi Friary, also known as St. Anthony's College, is a collection of connected buildings located on two generously sized lots in the community of Balwin. The complex consists of a three-storey flat roofed brick building erected in 1925 and subsequent additions in 1931, 1934, 1946 and 1961. The 1925 building features Gothic-arched windows on the ground floor and a metal cornice around the roofline.

The St. Francis of Assisi Church is a nearly three-storey building, situated midblock in the Balwin neighborhood. The front entrance is a cast concrete box with six solid oak doors. The front and rear elevations are brick as well as the one-storey rear portion. The side elevations use precast concrete panels between the structural pilasters articulating the bays.

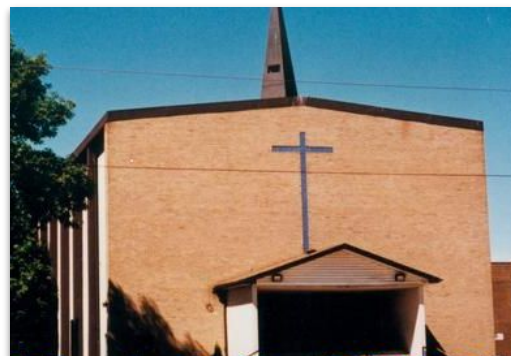
The friary and the church are architecturally unique from each other. The Friary was designated a Municipal Historic Resource in 2007 and the Church was designated in 2012.

HERITAGE VALUE

St Francis of Assisi Friary and Church are historically significant for their associations with the early history and development of the Franciscan Order in Edmonton, the early growth and development of the Balwin neighborhood, and their diverse array of architectural styles.

St. Francis of Assisi Friary is significant for its association with the Franciscan Order in Edmonton. The Franciscans are an 800 year old order associated with the Catholic Church who have a substantial tradition of missionary work and education in Western Canada. The Franciscans arrived at this site in 1909 to minister to the Catholic families working in and around the Village of North Edmonton. St. Francis of Assisi Friary grew over the years into an institutional complex that included the St. Francis of Assisi Church and St. Anthony's Seraphic College.

St Francis Church was part of a complex which included the St. Francis Parish and Friary and St. Anthony's College, and was identified as the head office of the Major Superior of the Ecclesiastical Province of Christ the King of Western Canada, which included the region from the Ontario border to Vancouver Island. The complex served western Canada until 1970, when the College buildings were made over into a private boarding school. After 1970 the Church continued to operate as a Roman Catholic Church, serving the religious needs of the community. The last service was held in the building on June 15, 2005. The John Bosco Child and Family Services Foundation purchased the property and is currently used by community organizations.





St Francis of Assisi Friary and Church exhibit multiple architectural styles on a single site comprised of several connected buildings that were constructed over a nearly 40 year period, and as such is unique in the city of Edmonton. The Seraphic College is the oldest section of the current complex and was built in 1925 as a modest brick institutional structure expressed by the building's symmetry, rectangular massing, flat roof, metal cornice, and pointed arch gothic windows on the main floor, which allude to the building's religious affiliation. The 1931 addition is distinguished by its projecting entryway surmounted by a stepped parapet featuring a niche containing a statue of St. Anthony. The 1934 construction includes the addition of two storeys to the single-storey, east end of the 1931 addition and a new entrance bay attached to the original 1925 building. The 1946 gymnasium is a two-storey high structure with a barrel shaped roof attached to the west side of the complex. The 1961 addition was a simple brick and concrete church on the east side of the site with a low gable roof.

The first St. Francis of Assisi Church on the site was built next to the 1909 friary between 1911 and 1912. The presence of a church meant that area Roman Catholics did not have to travel outside of their parish to attend services. On November 20, 1915 the church was damaged by fire and rebuilt to its original condition. A fire in 1934 burned down the friary, but left the rebuilt church undamaged. Unfortunately, the church suffered another fire set by an arsonist on March 11, 1947 and was burned to the ground. In 1949 a basement church was completed, and services were held there until sufficient funds had been collected to complete the present church in 1961. The St Francis of Assisi Church is a modest modern resource, and is built in the Structuralist style, as it has boxy, modest proportions and uses rectangular bands of windows as the major decorative elements on otherwise restrained facades.

The church features light brown brick cladding on the on front and rear elevations, a ribbon of clerestory windows near the eaves, and six solid oak doors with cross shaped windows at the entrance.



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CHARACTER DEFINING ELEMENTS

Key elements that define the heritage character of St. Francis of Assisi Friary and Church site include its:

Friary

- + prominent corner lot location;
- + continuous use as a religious educational facility at this site for over a century;
- + ecclesiastical form, scale and massing as expressed by its three-storey plus basement height, corner tower and flat roof with raised parapets;
- + masonry construction, including a reinforced concrete structure, with red brick exterior cladding with precast details; and
- + the elements of the Collegiate Gothic style including: pointed-arch windows with keystones, pointed-arch door openings, pointed-arch blind panels above entry door, and statue niche at top of tower above entry.

Church

- + prominent mid block location;
- + continuous use as a religious educational facility at this site for over a century;
- + the 1961 ecclesiastical modern form, scale and massing as expressed by its near three-storey plus basement height with slight pitched roof;
- + masonry construction with light brown brick exterior cladding on front and rear elevations with steel post and beam construction as articulated as pilasters on the side elevations;
- + elements of the Structuralist style including its boxy modest proportions on an otherwise restrained facades; and
- + the church with brick cladding on the front and rear, the cross on the front elevations composed of blue glazed brick; the precast concrete panels with bays articulated by pilasters on the side elevations; the ribbon of clerestory windows near the eaves; the front “box” entrance with flat roofed bay, terrazzo steps, floor lights and the six solid oak doors with cross shaped windows at the entrance.

Designated as a Municipal Historic Resource through Bylaw 14222 in March 2006.

Designated as a Provincial Historic Resource in July 2007.

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