

◆ BUILDING ◆ HERITAGE ◆

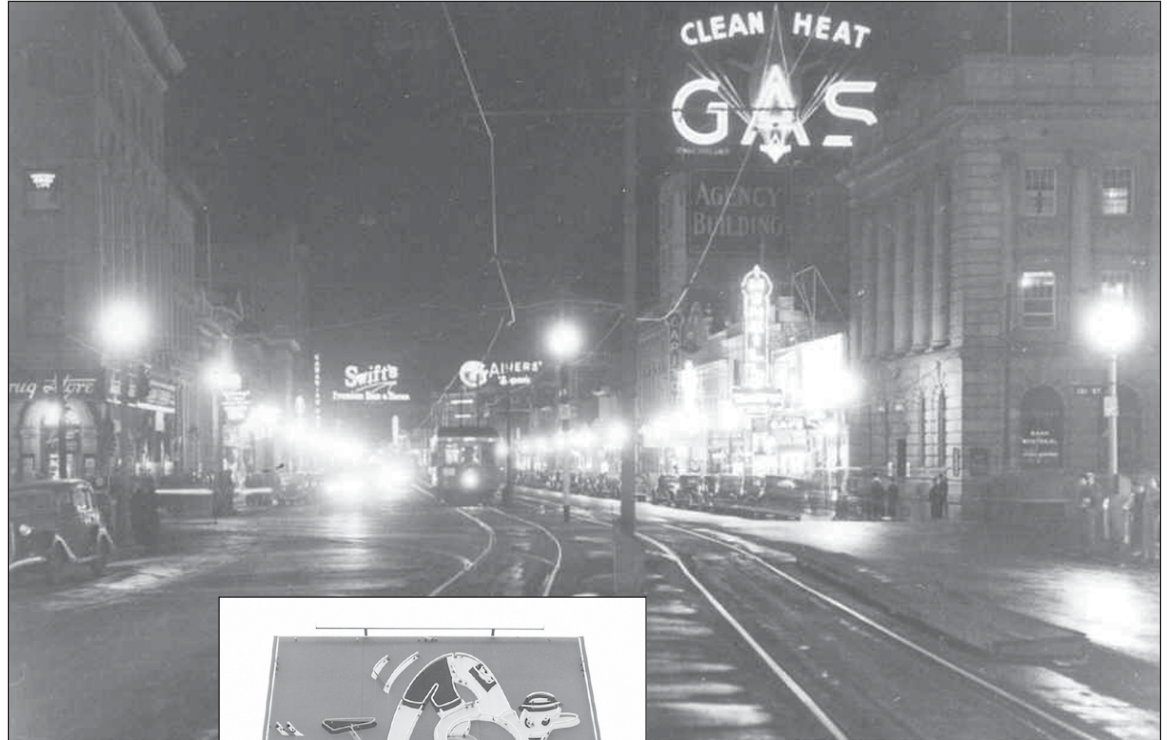
A Newsletter Celebrating the Register of Historic Resources in Edmonton

Signs of the Times

Nothing defines or identifies the period of a streetscape more than the signage painted or pasted on, hanging from, perching atop or jutting out from the buildings. Architectural styles change over time, but buildings naturally outlast their business identifiers or advertising. Signage is a fashion accessory for buildings, reflecting aesthetic trends, technological change and economic conditions. Even if the style of a building is hopelessly out of date, its signage can still be up to the minute.

In the days before radio and television, print media were the only means of mass communication. Newspapers and directories kept people informed, but signs and billboards delivered high impact, very public messages. Indeed, in prime locations, any flat surface was fair game. Period photos show striking design, lettering, and images in painted signage and poster billboards, even in Alberta's smaller centres.

By the early 20th century, the possibilities of electricity were being explored. At first, conventional signs were illuminated, then bulbs were incorporated in the signs themselves. Electricity extended the hours of outdoor advertising, and



(Top) Signage on Jasper Avenue, 1936

Photo credit: City of Edmonton Archives

(Inset) Western Cycle sign, 10429 – 124 Street, May 2003

Photo credit: City of Edmonton Planning and Development

changed Alberta's streets forever. The dynamic capabilities of electrified signs made them particularly attractive to businesses active after dark, such as theatres, hotels, and restaurants. The appeal of electricity reached less expected branches of enter-

prise—the three-storey sign on the New York Dentists' Calgary office spelled out their name in bulbs (1915).

Tubes of glass filled with electrically excited, glowing gases, collectively known by the name of the most common one—neon—made their appearance in Alberta by the 1930s. By mid-century neon was no longer a novelty, but a mainstay of commercial signage that raised the standard of design. Its flexibility and range of colours gave it wide appeal, and positively spectacular signs were the result. Neon was particularly effective against the reflective surfaces popular in the 1940s and '50s: chrome and vitrolite. Or, the night sky itself could be the backdrop for enormous rooftop signs. Edmonton's Jasper Avenue featured several such monsters—meat packers

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Gainers and Swifts competed for attention in the skyline as well as on the shelf and an especially striking behemoth touted the virtues of natural gas.

During the '50s and '60s, neon remained the most ubiquitous signage material. Quirky, distinctively period designs abandoned the dignity of earlier days for humour and youth-oriented zaniness. Originating in California, the boomerangs, starbursts, and outer-space motifs of these signs are known in some circles as the Googie style. The more conservative style continued as well. A drugstore with neon drops falling from a test tube or shimmering strips of light announcing the Aurora Motel are typical examples of the period.

In recent years, in Alberta, backlit Plexiglas signs have become pervasive. They are economical, available in a variety of colours, and are easily replaced as needed. New electronic media and art signage add some interest to the overwhelming mass of boxed signs and awnings.

Like so much costume jewelry, most signs are unceremoniously discarded when the winds of fashion change direction. Buildings, like people, look frumpy in ten-year-old couture, no matter how cutting-edge it was when new.

Only rarely do early painted signs remain—usually just ghosts of their former glory. Billboards are routinely stripped of their posters, and their structures rebuilt or removed. It is probably safe to assume that no large-scale billboard posters have survived. The novelty of the light bulb has long since passed and by the 1970s even funky neon signs looked passé. Safety and visual pollution regulations—not to mention expense—spelled the end of large neon signs. Unaltered signage from mid-20th century is very rare.

The importance of buildings as representations of our history is well accepted. Appreciation of historic signs has lagged just far enough behind that most of it has disappeared. Photographs now offer the best opportunity to experience Alberta's streetscapes as they donned their succession of accessories. Nothing evokes a time like its signs.

■ **Dorothy Field, M.Sc.**

Dorothy Field is Head of the Heritage Inventory Program, Heritage Resource Management, Alberta Community Development.

This Old Edmonton House Public Seminar Series



Peter Caron discussing window maintenance and repair

Photo credit: City of Edmonton Planning and Development

This over subscribed series (9 seminars, approx. 25 people per session) indicated that there is a demand for information on how to restore historic properties. As a result, we now hope to run it on an annual basis every spring.

The goal is to provide participants with enough information to ask appropriate questions to contractors who may be bidding to restore or upgrade their homes. Many upgrades are sold on the 'cheapest, newest or maintenance free' basis which may not always equate into the actual best solutions in the long run. They may also ruin the buildings historic character, one of its key attractions. The speakers provided a broad overview of

the subject matters then discussed questions in the informal sessions, enabling specific problems to be dealt with. This gave participants a basic understanding and in many cases a specific option to pursue. The speakers demonstrated that good restoration rather than modernization achieves the same goal.

While the intention of the program is to encourage historic property owners to restore in a sympathetic manner, it has had positive spin off effects. Some of the owners have successfully got their properties added to the Register of Historic Resources in Edmonton (now totalling 476, with 40 Designated) and a few pursuing Designation as well.

We were also very grateful to our key speakers, Peter Caron and Joanne Yakula whose great restoration knowledge enabled the desired perspective to be given. We also thank two NAIT instructors Gerry Theberg and Chris Kato and also Larissa Stetzenko for her tireless effort in coordinating most of the activity. Thank you also to Fort Edmonton, the City Archives and From Times Past for hosting this year's series in their very appropriate settings.

■ **David Holdsworth**
Heritage Planner



The Historic District of Old Strathcona now has a new arch. Designed by the Urban Design Group of the Planning and Development Department, the project was spearheaded by the Old Strathcona Foundation. The new gateway provides an attractive historic looking landmark to welcome people to Edmonton's premier heritage district from Gateway Boulevard.

Photo illustration: City of Edmonton Planning and Development

Two International Style Houses Added to the Register

The Register of Historic Resources in Edmonton contains as many as 470 historic resources up to 1947; however, it does not have many examples of modern architecture. All of that changed when, the Historic Resources Review Panel had the opportunity to review two applications to amend the Register by adding two houses that are good examples of the International Style of architecture.

The William G. Blakey Residence located on 13526-101 Avenue, in the Glenora neighbourhood, was built in 1946. As an architect, William G. Blakey, designed his own International Style home to suit Edmonton's climate. His builder was Lockerbie and Hole. The identifying elements of the International Style include the flat roof, usually without a ledge or coping at the roof line, windows set flush with the outer wall and often placed in corners, smooth unornamented wall surfaces with no decorative detailing at doors or windows. The façade is typically asymmetrical. Blakey had a desire to design efficient spaces - an important aspect of the modern movement. In 1946, he wrote a series of articles for Edmonton Journal expressing his views on modern residential architecture. Blakey endorsed flat roofs and houses without basements, two features he incorporated in his own residence.

William G. Blakey was a significant Alberta architect who designed well over 800 Alberta buildings in his career. He was one of the longest practicing architects in the history of Alberta. In Edmonton he is known for the Masonic Temple, the Roxy Theatre, St. John's Separate School, the Garneau Theatre and St. Anthony's Church.

Next door to the Blakey Residence is the Hyndman Residence located on 10123-136 Street. It's another good example of the International Style. It was designed by architect, George Heath MacDonald of MacDonald and



(Left) The Blakey Residence, September 2002

(Below) The Hyndman Residence, September 2002
Photo credit: City of Edmonton Planning and Development

MacDonald and built by A.V. Carlson in 1946, for Louis D. and Muriel Hyndman, the original owners. The architectural firm of MacDonald and MacDonald was one of two firms that introduced the Modern Movement to Edmonton. It was one of Edmonton's most prominent architectural firms for over 50 years that was responsible for several city landmarks including the Federal Building, the General Hospital, Salvation Army Citadel, Concordia College and part of Alberta College.

The Hyndman Residence like the Blakey Residence is characterized by the International Style including the absence of ornamentation, an asymmetrical balance of parts, thinly proportioned canopies, a flat roof, smooth and uniform wall and window surfaces, exterior stucco with minimum texture and windows that turn the corner of the building.

The Hyndman Family lived here until 2002. Louis D. was a prominent lawyer who also served on the Edmonton School Board, and was the first Chairman of the city's Planning Advisory Commission. He also held the position Master of Chambers of the Alberta Courts, 1969 – 1986. His son, Lou Hyndman, who grew up in the house, was a prominent figure in Alberta provincial politics for many years, representing the Glenora riding. He retired in 1986, at which time he was Provincial Treasurer in the Lougheed government.



Many thanks to: Marianne Fedori & Paul Gemmel, owners of the Blakey Residence and Mary Ann & David Johnson, owners of the Hyndman Residence for recognizing the significance of their houses and for bringing them forward to the City to be added to the Register of Historic Resources in Edmonton.

■ Robert Geldart
Principal Heritage Planner

Did You Know?

The *International Style* was influenced by early European modernism. Starting with the stark elemental designs of Adolf Loos in Austria at the turn of the century, followed by the experimental designs of Germany's Walter Gropius and the Bauhaus School of Design in Dessau, and culminating in the American works of Mies van der Rohe and his followers.

The *Moderne Style* derives its elements from a combination of the more ornate *Art Deco Style* and the more stark *International Style*. The *Moderne Style* was a more sensual and exaggerated version of Internationalism, but not as extreme in its expressionism as the *Art Deco Style*.



The Modern Heritage Resource Inventory

We are pleased to announce that the City of Edmonton's Planning and Development Department recently advertised a request for proposals seeking a consultant(s) to undertake a City-wide survey to identify the City's **modern historic resources**. The purpose of this project is to identify and prepare an inventory of modern historic buildings built from 1930 to 1960. It is expected that a list of the most significant buildings will be prepared and then added to the *Register of Historic Resources in Edmonton*. It will also assist the Heritage Planners in recommending to Council which buildings could merit designation as Municipal Historic Resources

This exciting project is being funded by the Planning and Development Department with a matching \$15,000 grant per year for three years from the Alberta Historic Resources Foundation. The successful consultant is expected to start this summer with the project being phased over three years.

■ **Robert Geldart**
Principal Heritage Planner

Historic Edmonton Week Festival

July 27 to August 3, 2003

Take in special events including horse drawn carriage tours, church and cemetery tours, modern buildings bus tour, walking tours of historical buildings and the river valley, historic food tasting, live music and old fashioned children's games, street car rides, high tea, garden tours, story telling and much more.

For more information call:

Wanda Bornn, HEW Event
Coordinator at 439-9166,
email wbornn@telusplanet.net
or fax 431-1938

Moving the Dr. Robert Wells Residence

10328 Connaught Drive



The Dr. Robert Wells Residence was designated as a Municipal Historic Resource on October 15, 2002. The long process of moving the house proved successful. The house was lifted on steel girders, the existing brick foundation was removed and a new hole in the ground was excavated to make way for a new concrete foundation.

After much debate it was agreed to move the house closer to the property line on the northwest side. This allowed for the protection of the house by a designation bylaw in addition to the subdivision of the large double lot.

(Top) The Dr. Robert Wells Residence on its new foundation
(Inset) The house during the move
Photo credit: City of Edmonton Planning and Development

Owner Kathryn Kozak and her son Nick Kozak are to be commended for undertaking this challenging project to protect a part of Glenora's architectural heritage.

■ **Robert Geldart**
Principal Heritage Planner

HISTORIC RESOURCES REVIEW PANEL - 2003

- Bert Yeudall, Chair
- Catherine Garvey
- Enid Fitzsimonds
- Ken Tingley
- David Murray
- Dorothy Field
- Leslee Greenaway
- Johanne Yakula
- Leslie Latta-Guthrie
- Robert Geldart/David Holdsworth

WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Please send your responses to:

The Heritage Planner

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www.edmonton.ca/planning

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