

KHC

Kristi's Heritage Corner
Kristi Johnson brings life to
Calgary's Hidden Heritage Gems.

A History of King Edward School 1720 - 30 Avenue SW Part One

Calgary's King Edward School has been a topic of much discussion in the last while. For those that are not familiar with the story, the Calgary Board of Education has sold the school and the area around it to Lake Placid Group for around \$14 million. While the exact plan for the site is not written in stone as yet, Lake Placid Group appears to be quite keen about incorporating the building into their plan. In fact, the CBE made the sale contingent on the preservation of the building.

Having said that, with all the excitement around the future of the building we thought it was as good a time as any to look at its' past. There was no shortage of information on King Edward. So much so, that we will be presenting a history on this school in two stages.

From the late 1800s to early 1900s, Calgary saw a staggering growth in the student population. This population boom caused considerable stress on the few schools that were in existence at the time. In 1899 enrollment had grown to the astounding number of 472, and there was nowhere to house the additional students. An emergency decision was made by the school board trustees to rent out rooms at



King Edward School, Date Unknown

The Alberta Hotel for \$15.00 a month until a more appropriate solution could be made.

Between 1894 and 1914, Calgary built 19 sandstone schools in Calgary. These schools satisfied several goals. They would combat student overcrowding and were built in a grand style which would showcase Calgary's newfound wealth and popularity. King Edward was one of those sandstone schools, and it was completed in 1912.

King Edward was originally a 20 room school built of sandstone which was acquired from the 17th Avenue quarry.

Construction cost of the school was around \$172,000.00. The school proved to be much more to the immediate area than just a place for education. King Edward became a community centre and would host dances, bridge nights and church groups.

With the onset of World War I, many of the stone masons went overseas to fight and construction came to a grinding halt. By the end of the war, many of these men opted to live in Europe, and brick had replaced sandstone as the preferred building material. These factors would end the era of sandstone constructed buildings in Calgary.

King Edward, like most schools during this time, was constantly evolving to meet the ever changing needs of the surrounding community. About 1918, King Edward accepted high school students and was referred to as “South Calgary High”. Once Western Canada College turned public, many of the high school students from King

Edward left to attend Western Canada High School. In 1931, the first junior high school was tested out at King Edward.

This concept proved to be successful, and in 1935 junior high schools were adopted Province wide. From about 1940-1944, the Provincial Government converted King Edward to a Normal School and focused on the training of teachers. During both World Wars, schools often instituted cadet training for the boys. Training exercises for the male students at King Edward in 1932 involved, among other things, rifle training. Often this rifle training would involve live ammunition. Interestingly, it was the rule at King Edward School to use only .22 caliber weapons in the gym. The .303s were segregated to the outdoors.

In the second installment of our history of King Edward School, we will take a look at some of the memories and events that made this school such an important part of the lives of the students and employees that attended King Edward.

Kristi Johnson
Research Committee
Chinook Country Historical Society

Research Material

King Edward School Alumni. *Long live the King. The History of King Edward School.*

Stamp, Robert M. *School Days. A Century of Memories*, 1975

“The Alison Jackson Photo Collection,” Calgary Public Library. http://calgarypubliclibrary.com/calgary/historic_tours/public/pub46.htm

DeBoni, Walt, Photo of Inset Carving, West wall, King Edward School, 2007



Detail of Inset Carving, West wall, King Edward School