

**Calgary's Heritage Schools**  
**By Cynthia Klaassen**  
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In response to your recent article [Are Canada's Historic Schools our Next Endangered Species?](#) I've put together the following brief outline of the successes that Calgary has had in the ongoing use and adaptive re-use of its inventory of Historic Schools dating from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most of these buildings are examples of Calgary's Sandstone construction era, which lasted roughly from 1887 until the advent of WW1. Thus the demolition of any one of these schools is a loss of Calgary's unique construction heritage, and of a community's focal point.



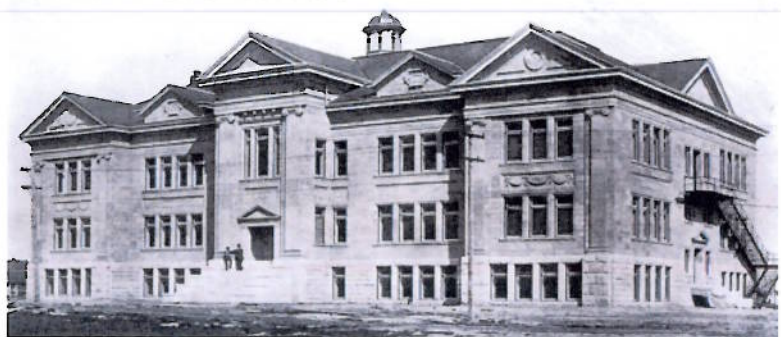
Before the success stories there was a significant loss, which is still a sore spot within the local heritage community. In 2002 St. Mary's school was under demolition threat. Architecturally it was significant since its designer, William Stanley Bates, was also responsible for many of the public buildings erected in Calgary at the turn of the century. Moreover Bates' son, Maxwell Bates, designed St. Mary's Cathedral just a block away. Built in 1909 the school was the first of its kind in the North-West Territory and formed part of a neighbourhood continuum of structures that told the story of early Catholic settlement in Calgary. The school sat in the heart of Rouleauville, a French-Catholic village intended to attract settlers of that heritage to the

west, which remained independent for seven years before it was annexed by Calgary. Rouleauville also included the Cathedral, the Sacred Heart Convent behind the school (you can see part of it in the bottom-left of the photograph), and the Holy Cross Hospital a few blocks to the south. It's discouraging to note that the joint efforts of Calgary's heritage groups was not enough to stop the demolition of the school, which was approved by city council. Today a strange likeness of the original stands on the site as a bitter reminder of the failure of heritage advocates.

Almost ten years later it's a much different story and, in spite of (or perhaps because of) the relentless urban sprawl that attracts young families to the fringes of the city, Calgary has managed to maintain many of its Historic Schools. Some are still in active use as schools, attracting students and parents through innovative programming. Others have found new uses as community centres and offices.

Stanley Jones School, dating from 1913, was built at the height of the sandstone building boom. Almost

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100 years later it retains its original function and the students and parents who work and learn there are proud to be a part of its ongoing legacy. The school is a community focal point for events, and "maximizing the age and beauty of the building" forms part of its chief mandate. In 2010, at the Calgary Heritage Authority's biannual Lion awards, Stanley Jones School was awarded an honourable mention for its "Route to Roots" project. This project combined the greening of the schoolyard with the history of the school and surrounding neighbourhoods.

The oldest continually operating school in Calgary is Connaught School built in 1911. In 2007 it closed for renovations, which have since earned a LEED silver standard. Since reopening in 2009 it is popular with local students and rumour has it, with parents from further afield who are keen to enrol their children in what is now viewed as a trendy inner-city school. Thanks in part to the historically sensitive renovation; this inner-city school has evolved from an undesirable place to one with cachet. The school, and surrounding neighbourhood, is named for the Duke of Connaught who, when he visited Calgary in 1914 as Governor General of Canada, presented the school with portraits of himself and his wife. These portraits are still on display in the school's main foyer.



Photo credit: Calgary Board of Education

A few blocks to the east of Connaught School is the Carl Safran School, originally the Calgary Collegiate Institute. It's currently undergoing restoration to its sandstone façade and interior renovations. Once complete it will form a key focal point for the new Calgary Board of Education headquarters and the completed restoration includes a functional historic classroom for use in school field trips.



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A new office tower has been erected immediately adjacent to the sandstone school, and its set-back facade provides an unobstructed view of the original school. Unfortunately the construction and renovation on the site required the demolition of a historic gymnasium to make room for a conference centre.



Alison Jackson Photo Collection, Calgary Public Library

The Victoria Crossing neighbourhood lies directly to the north of the Stampede and for many years now has faced development pressure from the Stampede and developers eager to capitalize on its location close to the heart of the city. In its heyday the neighbourhood had a completely different look and feel as it was comprised of single family homes, warehouses and factories. Victoria school was built in 1903 to serve this community. Due to shifting demographics and loss of local housing the school's use evolved from public to private and was renovated for office use. A Bungalow school was built beside the sandstone one in 1919, attesting to the rapid growth of the community at that time. The Bungalow school, a wooden edifice erected when sandstone was no longer affordable, was recently moved from beside the original school to behind it. Unfortunately, due to the current economic climate, it is currently in need of a new

patron to ensure it too is reintegrated into the Victoria Crossing community.



Cliff Bungalow School: Photo by Kim Munchrath



Holy Angels School:  
Photo by Clint Robertson

Neighbouring schools in the Cliff Bungalow-Mission community are both still in active use. Cliff Bungalow School is home to a community centre and a Montessori school, and beside it the Holy Angels school was renovated and restored by the city in 2010. Today it provides office space for the city's arts and culture staff.

Adjacent to the Cliff Bungalow-Mission neighbourhood is the Western Canada High School, which is also still a thriving High School located on one of Calgary's major urban streets: 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue also known as the "Red Mile." The original school was a private boys college and dates from 1903. Since that time the structure has seen numerous renovations. Today the school boasts new computer labs, an updated library and offers numerous Fine Arts courses. A recent restoration to the building envelope has brought lustre back to the 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue façade, and has highlighted the aesthetic contribution the school brings to the local streetscape.



Haultain School – Calgary's original sandstone school - is seen in the foreground of this image. The large school in the background closed in 1962 and succumbed to fire in 1964.

Haultain School, Calgary's oldest existing Sandstone school, was built in 1893-1894. It was the first school in the city of have running water and electricity and construction was financed by local businessman Thomas Underwood for \$2500. In 1910 a larger sandstone school was built next door in a style similar to Victoria School. Together old and new schools were named for Sir Frederick Haultain who served as premier until Alberta became a province in 1905. The larger school closed in 1962 and a major fire in 1964 led to its demolition.

The original building has had many uses over the ensuing century. It served as the office of school superintendent until 1922 when it was renovated as an annex to the main school. It was declared a registered historic resource in 1979 and purchased by the city in 1980 as the headquarters of Uncles at Large. In the 1990's it was home to the Haultain School of Fine Arts. Today it's the home of the Calgary Parks Foundation, which has renovated and repaired it, and has taken responsibility for revitalizing the former schoolyard as Haultain Park.

The story of King Edward School is waiting for its happy ending. It's another example of Calgary's sandstone schools and sits in the heart of the South Calgary community. In autumn 2010 it was put out to tender by the city for a third time and the heritage community is optimistic that its new owner will appreciate its historic significance and devise a sustainable solution to ensure its future viability.



These are only a sample of some of the ongoing success stories Calgary can boast of its Historic Schools. In spite of the loss of St. Mary's school, or perhaps because of it, today Calgary has a wealth of Historic Schools that are still in active use. They provide examples of solutions for adaptive reuse, and many have successfully maintained their connection to the local community. The demolition of St. Mary's school was a watershed that created greater community awareness of its historic significance and the importance that one structure has on maintaining the fabric of a community.

Please let me know if you're interested in more information on any of these Historic Schools, or other initiatives currently underway in Calgary.

Cheers,  
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