



Memorial Park Library

Historical Self-Guided Tour

The Building: Memorial Park Library

- Built: 1910-1912
- Architect: McLean and Wright of Boston, Massachusetts
- Contractor: Richard A. Brocklebank (multi-term Calgary alderman)
- Craftsmen: George Christie (head stonemason) and locally hired Scottish stonecutters
- Construction materials: yellow Paskapoo sandstone quarried at Calgary's Oliver Quarry (Canada Olympic Park is on the site of this old quarry.) Load bearing sandstone walls (smoothly finished) backed with brick. Copper roof. Douglas fir floors, Mahogany and birch trim.
- Original cost:
 - \$100,000 (\$80,000 grant from American industrialist Andrew Carnegie and \$20,000 from the City of Calgary)
- Architectural style
 - Classical with strong influence of Beaux-Arts tradition.
 - Decorative shell motive on roof originally carved in sandstone/
 - Classically inspired portico.
 - Front entrance flanked by Ionic columns and topped by an elaborately carved pediment.
 - Balconies with iron railings off the largest first storey windows.
 - Latticing in the smaller second storey windows.
 - Exterior entrance—granite steps and mahogany doors

The site and construction

- Built on 4.78 acres owned by the city since 1889. Prior to that the land was owned by pioneer settler William Pearce.
- The library site was chosen by plebiscite on August 12, 1908.
- By October 1908 site excavation was done and construction work began.
- February 1910 contractor Brocklebank and architects McLean and Wright visited Attleboro, Massachusetts Public Library which they had also designed. The architectural plans for Attleboro and Calgary were almost identical.
- Calgary was Alberta's first public library and the first library structure in the province financed by wealthy American steel industrialist and philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie. (Carnegie funded 125 libraries in Canada.)
- During a 33 year period Carnegie financed 2,811 libraries world-wide.
- Construction completed in 1911, library officially opened January 12 1912.
- Chief Librarian, Alexander Calhoun described the park as "an unsightly wilderness of sand and scrub."

- Still to be landscaped when the library opened in 1912, it was gradually transformed by city Parks Superintendents, particularly, William Reader, into a beautiful formal park in the late Victorian tradition.
- Park became a civic showcase and a botanical experiment
- In 1928 the park was re-named Memorial Park when the Cenotaph was unveiled on Remembrance Day to commemorate the name change and those who died during the war.

Interior: Main Floor

- On both sides of the terrazzo marble floored foyer, staircases led to the second floor.
- Two main floor fireplaces trimmed with mahogany.
- Moulded plaster columns and ceilings.
- Back walls gracefully curved with an expanse of windows which allowed a view of the park.
- Main floor; circulation desk, reading room, children's room, reference room, stacks and cataloguing room.
- The clock, presented to the library by Miss Margaret Kennedy, the first reference librarian. A Scotswoman, she was responsible for the reference department, which was on the north side of the building, where the fiction is now.

Library History

- Alexander Calhoun was the first City Librarian. He served in this capacity from 1911 to 1945. He is remembered for his vision and commitment to public library service and his unstinting service to the community.
- Opened with 5000 books.
- During the first three months, five thousand Calgarians (city's population was 40,000) became library members.
- First public library facility between Winnipeg and Vancouver
- Central Park Library became the cultural centre of the city. Meeting place for education and arts groups.
 - Calgary Women's Literary Club,
 - Historical Society of Calgary
 - Calgary Natural History Society
 - Calgary Arts Association
- Home to Calgary College 1911-1915 (first attempt at establishing a University of Calgary)



- Building was Calgary's main library until 1963 when the six-story W.R. Castell Library opened on Macleod Trail.
- Memorial Park Branch library maintained in basement 1963-1967.
- 1964-1973 building leased to Glenbow Foundation as an archives and research centre.
- Declared a Provincial History Resource in 1976
- Re-opened October 16, 1977 as Memorial Park Branch Library. Second floor space rented to Muttart Art Gallery.
- Alliance Francaise moved in to second floor in summer 2001, after Muttart Art Gallery had moved to new premises on Stephen Avenue Mall.
- The Alliance Francaise moved to new premises in 2011, and the Calgary Public Library Foundation occupied the second floor until 2016.
- In 2016, Wordfest became a partner and occupant of the second floor space.

Second Floor

- Lecture hall with stage, technical reading room and women's reading room
- Skylight
- Fireplaces

Basement

- Walk-in vault, newspaper room.

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