



**BALTA**

**B.C.-Alberta Social Economy Research Alliance**



## **Sheltering The Social Economy**

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# The Flatiron Building, Edmonton, Alberta





- Land purchased in 1913 for \$1 by William Gibson shortly after arriving from Ontario with his family.
- Originally ground floor retail and three floors of office
- Sold in 1914 and becomes a boarding house with retail
- The buildings fortunes followed those of the east side of downtown and by the late 1970s the building was decrepit, empty, and for sale.
- Heritage designation for the building in 1982.

- 1993 the Gibson Block Action Committee formed when no buyer could be found and the building was in danger of demolition.
- The Edmonton City Centre Church Corporation came forward with an interest in housing the Women's Emergency Accommodation Centre.
- \$500,000 dollars was raised and in 18 months restoration was completed.



- The Action Committee tapped into the nostalgia and knowledge of the building.
- A project to uncover and record the history of the building was undertaken
- A grade three activity unit was created for school curriculum based on the buildings history
- Aural history tapes and a collection of letters were presented to the City of Edmonton Archives.

- “The Gibson block is one of the most identifiable buildings in Edmonton, in an unambiguous location, with pretty good public transit service. Now anyone can give directions to a homeless woman”
  - Martin Garber-Conrad, Flatiron Legacy One of Heritage and Help

“Perhaps we could put this building to a social use and preserve it’s historical significance... I thought it would be very exciting to get the community of people that supports arts, heritage, cultural and historical stuff also interested in homeless women. And if ... possible to draw resources for the project not only from the traditional housing sources, but also from the historical and cultural sources.

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Martin Garber-Conrad, Aurora Interview 2008



- “When it comes to the Gibson block, there have been so many buildings in the city that have been taken down, some of which are perhaps better architecturally but few which have such strong, evocative memories... I don’t think you can put a price on that”
  - Barry Johns, Architect, Gibson’s Block Action Committee

- “I was acquainted with the Gibson Block since 1926. The preachers who served [our] church lived in the Gibson block on the top floor, right on that V-shaped floor... I was a teenager at the time who joined the church choir.. We gathered on the top floor in the Gibson Block sometimes twice a week and practiced earnestly”

Elizabeth Iftody

- “The Construction and General Workers Union Local No. 92 provided skilled volunteer workers to help restore the roofing system and erect the scaffolding at the construction site”

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- “Without Edmontonians characteristic willingness to donate time, money and expertise, it would be impossible to preserve this wonderful landmark”

Rod Grey, Vice-Chairperson, Gibson Block Action Committee





# The Old 'Y' Centre: Calgary, Alberta











- In 1907 the newly formed YWCA of Calgary launched the 'dollar campaign'.
- A three-storey brick and sandstone building built in the Georgian Revival style
- By 1911 the building was full – accommodating 62 girls and women.

- The Old Y Centre helped women find employment and offered classes in physical training, swimming, dress making, cooking, millinery, music and Sunday bible classes
- By 1915, 400 women and girls had been taught to swim at the Y, 'debunking the myth that swimming was unladylike'.

- By the late 1970s the building had deteriorated to such a state that the City seriously considered proposals to demolish the building.
- Provincial Heritage designation received in 1982.
- The Old Y Centre society now has thirty-one members rent space and 19 others are non-renting members

- “The reason we were able to help an average of 70 children a year and haven’t had to say no to any child is because we are in this building”

Lesley Gomez, Children’s Wish Foundation







# Haultain Park: Calgary, Alberta







# Memorial Park and Library: Calgary, Alberta







# Victoria Park School: Calgary, Alberta



# The Warehouse District: Calgary, Alberta



## Self-Serving Reasons for Collaboration

- Champions for Built Heritage
- Energy and resource conservation
- Assets for The Not-for-Profit Sector



## Making Common Cause

- Many Dimensions of Authenticity
- Ontological Security
- Concern for more than the bottom line
- Alternative Ways of thinking about our World



- “Most buildings can be understood in terms of power or authority – as efforts to assume, extend, resist or accommodate it”

Camille Wells, social historian of architecture

- Strong sustainability
- Strong conservation
- Strong economy

Protecting built, cultural, aesthetic, ecological and political heritage