



Stephen Ave Historic Architecture Tour

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Alberta Masonry Council

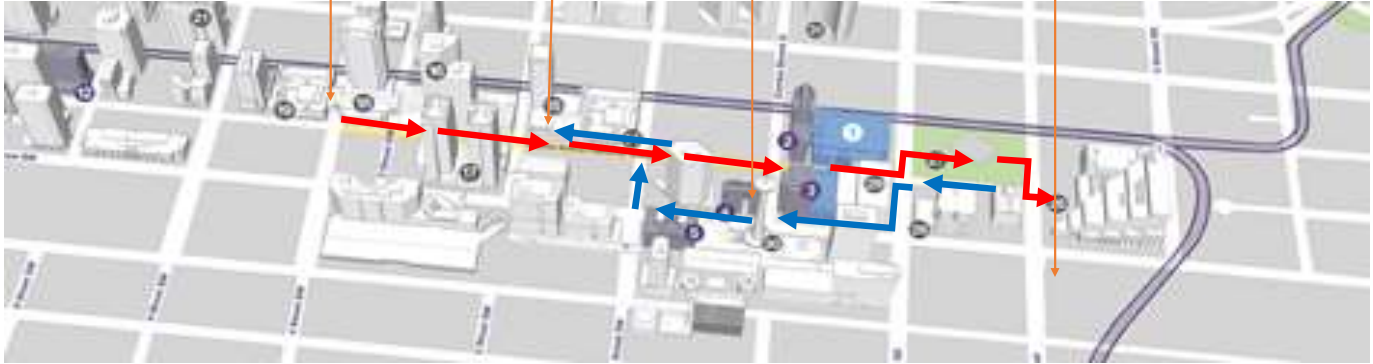
Tour Route

1) Tour starts at gathering point at 4th Sreet and 8th AVE S.W.

5) Tour ends at Palomino

4) Entering the alleyway behind Stephen Ave and 9th Ave

3) Turing around at the end of Stephen Ave at the municipal building. Tour heads back towards 2st Street S.E.



Historic Intro

A Fort on the Frontier

Just over 140 years ago the Calgary area was a total wilderness. Considered unfit for agriculture and too far from markets and waterways to justify large scale trade, it was left to the trappers and native peoples. As part of Rupert's Land, a territory of the Hudson's Bay Company until 1870, the area was nominally part of British North America. To say that the area was "under control" of the company or British Empire would be misleading. Incursions by trappers into Alberta had been few and the vast area of western Canada was an ungovernable expanse.

Whiskey traders from south of the 49th parallel trespassed easily into the territory, setting up forts and trading whiskey with local natives. The American traders obeyed no civil law and unlike the Canadians were not organized by an Imperial company. They shamelessly traded poisonous whiskey and violently suppressed native tribes. This culminated in a massacre at Cypress Hills in 1872 in which American traders killed 30 Assinaboin people. The Canadian government could no longer ignore these incursions onto British sovereignty and in 1874 the North West Mounted Police were created and deployed to southern Alberta.



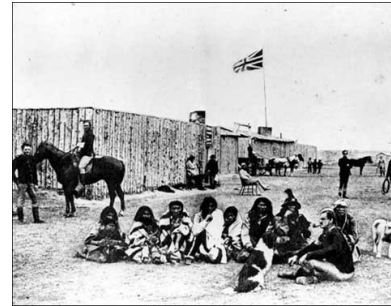
Historic Intro

A Fort on the Frontier

Fort Calgary was completed in 1875, built of wood floated down the river from the mountains. The permanent presence of the N.W.M.P. brought stability to the area, making it a safe haven, which grew into an informal settlement of wooden shakes, tents and teepees. Living conditions in this early town were so extreme that the posted troops mutinied, leaving their Fort because it was not properly heated.

It was not until the arrival of the railroad in 1885 that the Calgary we know started to take shape. Local inhabitants had no say in the location of the railway station which the CPR built on the opposite side of the elbow river from the settlement. The CPR drew up a street grid aligned with its rail line and started selling lots. People from the old settlement took advantage of a tax incentive and physically moved their old structures across the river on the winter ice to put on the lots, in the newly established town of Calgary.

From this point forward Calgary grew into a small prairie city due to the migration brought by the railroad. Calgary's origins as a para-military fort in a hostile wilderness and a town planned by the railway company have left indelible impacts on the physical form and character of the city to this day.



8th Street (Stephen Ave) Overview

This street is one block from the CPR rail station, running east-west across the original townsite of Calgary. Along with 9th street one block to the south, this became the de-facto main commercial area of the city. As Calgary changed from a dusty rail stop into a bustling city 8th Ave became the focal point of the city's premier retail activity in the construction boom years between 1890 and 1914. While nearly all of the original buildings on 9th Ave have since been demolished, 8th Ave has alone been preserved and still serves it's function as a shopping street and the main public space of the downtown.

After the birth of the oil industry Calgary's downtown changed dramatically from a tightly packed mixed use low-rise area to a high-rise corporate centre. Most of the original city was obliterated in the scramble to build cheap, large office spaces. Stephen Avenue as we know it today, escaped demolition due to the city's structural downtown plan, which conceived Stephen Ave as a pedestrian haven amidst the dense office buildings and automobile traffic.



5th to 6th Street

The Barron building 1949-1951. 610 9th Ave S.W.

This building marks the beginning of Calgary's dominance as a corporate centre. In 1949 Calgary was still coming out of a prolonged period of stagnation which had lasted from 1915 and through the great depression. Very little had been built in those years and when oil was discovered in Laduc, Alberta finally had an economic asset to exploit. There was no modern office space in Calgary or Edmonton, so Calgary developer J.B. Barron sized the opportunity and built the first corporate building in the province, giving Calgary a competitive edge.

The Barron building's scale and modern Art Deco style set a new standard in Alberta for office construction. Despite being modern for Calgary the Building was quite behind the times as the dominance of Art Deco had ended after the second world war. 1951 was firmly in the modernist period and Calgary would not see another building like it. The façade features polished black marble on the first floor, tyndall stone on the second and third and buff coloured brick. The building has been home to many of Calgary's first oil companies, the Uptown theater and a penthouse in which the developer lived.

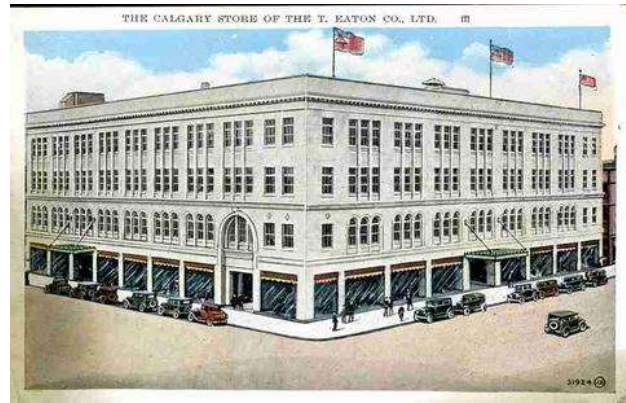


The Eaton's Department Store

1929. 408 8th Ave S.W.

Built on the eve of the great depression and outside the main commercial area, the Eaton's building was a daring development. It was designed by the Ross & McDonald architecture firm which also designed the Montreal Eaton's store. Only a quarter of the intended store was built as the original design would have covered the entire block and been 10 storeys. The building was notable for having the first escalators in Calgary.

The original building was demolished but part of the original façade was reused in the construction of the current building, housing the Brooks Brother's store. Elements Renaissance revival can be seen in this façade's round arched arcade and spiral-wound pilasters. The use of tyndall stone was also used in the new building, making for a seamless transition from the original façade to the modern corners.



The Lancaster Building 1912-1918. 300 8th Ave S.W.

This was the first 10 storey building in downtown Calgary and had a prolonged construction period beginning in 1912 and completed in 1918 due to the out brake of the first world war. The Lancaster, like many of the war period buildings had an imperial British flavor and was built in the Edwardian style. The most eye catching feature is the ornate terracotta cornice. The builder, James Stewart Mackie was a prominent Calgary citizen who established a fur, sporting goods and gun business after moving to the city in 1886 and eventually served as an alderman and mayor in 1910.

The building has a venerable history, housing the Eton's store, grain exchange, the offices of prime minister R.B. Bennett and a radio station.



The Canada Life Assurance Building 1912-1913. 301 8th Ave S.W.

This building embodies the exuberance of the building boom of 1912 with its vertical windows topped by round arches. Bright terracotta covers the entire façade. Other materials include bronze, used in the spandrels that separate the windows and tile which was imported from the prestigious Hatherware ceramics Ltd., in London England. Unlike many on Stephen Ave, this building has kept its original ground floor façade. The interior however, has been altered as it was integrated into the Bankers Hall office space.



The Allen (Palace) Theater 1921. 219 8th Ave S.W.

The Theater was opened by the fleeing Canadian cinema giants Barey Allen and his two sons. The company started in Brantford Ontario and moved to Calgary in 1909. For a time they owned Cinemas in every major Canadian city but were eventually cut out of the market by Paramount pictures which blocked Allen theaters from showing the most popular films. In 1929 Famous players took over the theater. From 1923 to 1927 the building was home to the Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute, headed by Bible Bill (William Abrehart) who made broadcasts from the theater.

The Building was based on another Allen theater in Toronto, with red brick imported to mimic the style of the other theater. This makes the Corinthian columns and entablature stand out.



The Leeson and Lineham Block
1910. 209 8th Ave S.W.



This simple commercial block was built by joint venture, George Leeson and John Lineham. Both men were true western entrepreneurs. Prior to their real estate ventures they had owned stagecoach lines, as well as ranching and logging ventures, which made significant contributions to the development of industry in the Calgary area. This was the last of the two men's joint ventures, as Leeson died in 1910.

The building is unusually simple with its only adornments being the bands of yellow sandstone. The deep Cornice emphasizes the height and stature of the building, making it more imposing than would otherwise be.

Edwardian store Facades
1907-1909
Between Scotia Centre & HBC



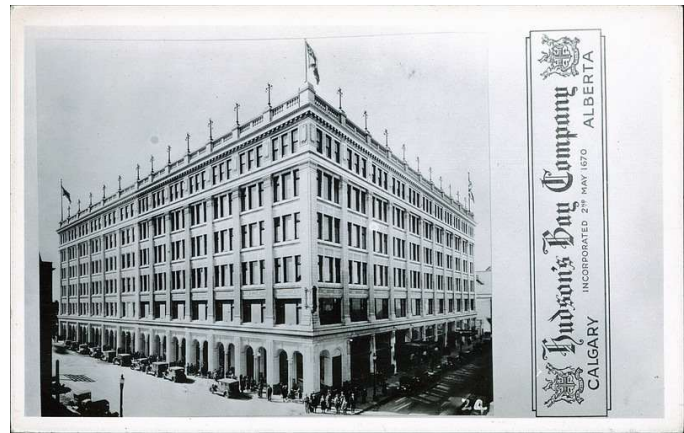
The three modest buildings are exemplary of the vernacular Edwardian commercial buildings in Calgary. Originally housing hardware and furrier businesses, these buildings typify the small entrepreneurs of the pioneer city. The Kraft block is one of the only buildings on Stephen Ave to have kept its original owner, a feature that was ubiquitous when 8th Ave was bustling with pedestrians.

The Hudson's Bay Company Store #4 1911-1913. 200 8th Ave S.W.

Most frontier settlements which grew into cities owe their existence in large part to the Hudson's Bay Company which commissioned much of the exploration of western Canada. In Calgary the first building to show up after the Fort was the Hudson's Bay Company trading post. Trading posts like these were the first point of contact between local aboriginals, settlers and entrepreneurs of the emerging west.

This building is the 4th incarnation of the HBC in Calgary; the first being across the elbow river in the original settlement, and the subsequent stores being elsewhere on 8th Ave. It was built during the renovation of the previous store, which was not big enough to accommodate the growing population of Calgary, which had reached 43,704 in 1911. the department store was a hub of activity with an Elizabethan dining room, rooftop playground, circulating library and hospital. It was a store fit for a city, not a dusty Cowtown. The HBC store was likened to Harrod's in London.

The building is a steel, concrete and brick structure, clad in cream terracotta . The scale and grander achieved by its massive presence and ornate classical motifs was unprecedented in this part of Canada. The highlight is It's arcade which unusual for commercial buildings in North America

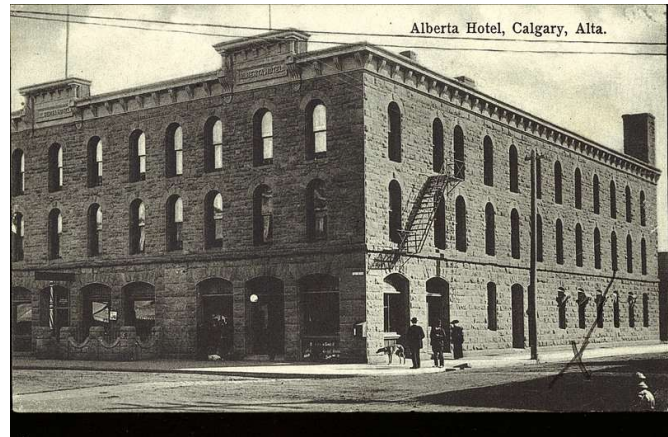


Terracotta like clay brick is a fired clay product similar to brick but typically tile shaped and decorative rather than structural

The Alberta Hotel 1888. 133/139 8th Ave S.W.

The Alberta hotel was the social hub of the city for many years at a time when Calgary had little formal accommodation. It was popular with visiting ranchers and characters throughout the social spectrum. Its "longbar" was famed for being the longest in the west, and saw many scandals of the early town. During the prohibition era this bar was sadly retired.

Architecturally, the building is significant for being one of the first sandstone constructions in Calgary. It was built with roughly cut local Paskapoo sandstone. The rough appearance has been preserved in the façade and the narrow arched windows. The first floor has been altered. Originally it had arched doorways and windows that were not as wide as the store fronts that occupy the first floor today.



Masonry Buildings of this Vintage achieved variety in architecture by the use of arches, quoining (pronounced coining) and corbels within the masonry modern architecture in Calgary tends to simply change materials stucco beside metal panel beside masonry to achieve variety in architecture – changing material is easier and requires less skill - MDH

The Bank of Montreal 1929-1931. 140 8th Ave S.W.

This is the grandest of the classical revival bank buildings in Calgary. It is clad in Manitoba tyndall stone with a granite base. It replaced the previous BMO building which was a 2 storey gabled sandstone building.

It marked a progression of Calgary from the sandstone city to a period of matured, urban development which called for a more elegant style. The prominent pediment gives a strong impression of a classical temple. On closer inspection one can see local motifs. The crest features two native men and a beaver. The building was designed by architect Kenneth G. Rea who had done 61 buildings for BMO and the Montreal Stock Exchange.



The Fire of 1886 and the Sandstone City

Calgary owes its nickname as the sandstone city to a catastrophic fire which broke out on at 5 AM on November 7th 1886. firefighters were unable to douse the flames because the water dugouts which they stored for emergency's were frozen. When the embers settled 18 wooden buildings in the center of town were destroyed with losses estimated at \$103,000. Many of these building housed vital services, which made the fire a major economic setback for the city.

After the fire, the city determined that it was not sensible to rebuild important businesses and services in wooden structures and a bylaw requiring all future commercial and institutional buildings to be constructed of noncombustible materials. Paskapoo sandstone deposits can be found all over Alberta. The first buildings to be rebuilt after the fire made use of this rough but abundant material, earning Calgary it's nickname and giving the city it's unique look. The sandstone period was brief, lasting only from 1886 until the end of the first world war. As building techniques improved and imported stone replaced locally quarried sandstone, this gave way to tyndall stone, brick, terracotta and concrete.



The Pain Block
1885. 131 8th Ave
S.W.

This is the only remaining wooden structure of the first generation of buildings along Stephen Ave. the simple but elegant design was typical of the pre-fire period. Other buildings were more garish, with large boomtown fronts.



Concrete and masonry are mould, insect and fire proof and last hundreds to thousands of years and is why the city of calgary required durable construction.....the pantheon in rome is nearly 2000 years old and is made of concrete and masonry

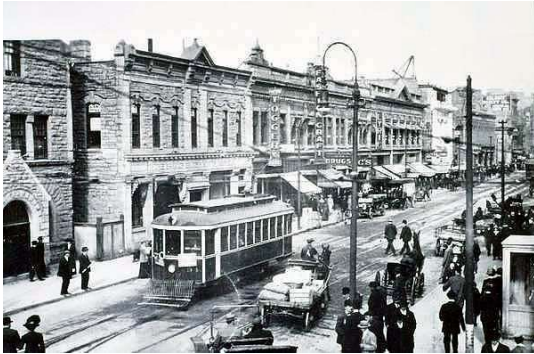
Small Scale Banks and department stores

The Clarence Block

1901. 120/124 8th Ave S.W.

This building was designed by the same architect who designed city hall. Built in the classical revival style, the second Clarence block is more sober than then bank buildings or city hall.

Its simple design features a strong horizontal elements in the pilasters and the separation of the first and second floors. The detailing was done using pressed tin which was an economical alternative to original stonework.



The Bank of Nova Scotia

1930. 125 8th Ave S.W.

This Bank building was designed by a Canadian architect, John Lyle, who was responsible for many great buildings including the Alexandria Theater and the interior of Union Station. The flush façade and plain parapet were less common for bank design than the classical pediment such as is found on the BMO Building, however they fit well into the western streetscape. Symbolism of the local environment and industry can be seen in the art deco detailing.



001-100 8th Ave S.W. Low-rise Edwardian Commercial.

The Calgary Milling Company
1902. 119 8th Ave S.W.

This building is distinguished by its ornate pediment. The building has changed hands many times since its construction as a company headquarters.



Merchants Bank of Calgary
1889, 1903. 121 8th Ave S.W.

The smallest of the bank buildings on Stephen Ave, the Merchant's Bank quickly outgrew its building and had to construct a larger one on the corner of 8th and centre street. It was the first classical revival bank building in Calgary. The large segmental arch sets it apart from the other commercial buildings.

Jacque's Jewelry Stores
1893. 123 8th Ave S.W.

George Jacque came from Ontario in 1881 and moved into a log cabin in the original settlement along the elbow river. When the formal town was established along the CRP rail line they moved into this site and built this shop. It was their business and residence which is reflected in the shop front on the main floor and the gabled window on the second.

Old Rough-cut Sandstone/ The Early Period

The Tribune Block

1892. 118 8th Ave S.W.

Named for its use as the headquarters of the tribune news paper, this building is of the early sandstone period but has an unusual parapet resembling a boomtown front.



Hudson's Bay Store #3
1890-1891, 1895-1905
102 8th Ave S.W.

This Hudson's Bay location tried to accommodate the growing population of Calgary by first constructing the eastern half of the building in 1891 followed by an extension in 1905. when the HBC moved to its fourth location this building was sold to the Royal Bank for \$4'000 per frontage foot, during the peak of the boom. This building survived two fires but has been drastically altered. Only the second floor façade remains as the cornice was removed and the first floor redone.

The Imperial Bank 1886-1909. 102 8th Ave S.E.

This building was actually adapted to serve as a bank but was originally an American supply outfitter, I.G Baker Co. This company was commissioned to build Fort Calgary and was one of the first to set up as a wooden building in the old settlement.

In 1909, the classical revival bank features were put overtop of the rough sandstone, making for a unique combination of style. The new features include the balustrade and the pediment.

Along with the neighboring Lineham Block, the Imperial Bank Building has been incorporated into the Hyatt Hotel which is further integrated with the TELUS Convention Centre.



The Thompson Brothers Block
1893. 112 8th Ave. S.E.

Two brothers from Ontario who had apprenticed at a bookshop set out west and open their own. as they advanced westward They opened bookstores in Portage La Prairie, Moose Jaw and Calgary before making it to the west coast and opening shop in Vancouver. They built this building for their Calgary location.

The building utilizes the same rough sandstone as others of the era but has distinct stylistic elements such as a roman revival arches. Behind the columns and arches there is a variety of textures to the masonry (checkerboard). This is the only building in the area with a rounded parapet.



The Doll Block
1907. 116 8th Ave S.E.

This narrow building was built with great style to be a jewelry shop by Louis Henry Doll. The shop was passed on to an apprentice after the death of Doll's young daughter caused him to withdraw and became disinterested in business. On December 18, 1911 the Doll shop was the victim of the largest diamond heist in city history. A thief brazenly stole \$11,000 worth of diamonds during the noon hour. This turned out to be a minor set back for the apprentice because by 1920 it had amalgamated with Henry Brick & Sons to become the largest watch repair outfit in Canada.

This stylish building was designed by Calgary architects Dowles & Michie. The 3 decorative arches on the second floor consolidate into one and then finally are topped with parapet, creating a narrowing effect and integrating the rounded shapes in deferent ways on each level.



The doll block has a recessed brick arches on the 3rd similar to those found in European cathedrals
the semi elliptical middle arch on the second floor is the most efficient way of constructing arches as parabolic and elliptical arches are the mirror image of a hanging rope and are the natural shape of rope or vines, etc take when hanging...i.e. parabola/ellipses are natures way of "hanging out" so flipping this shape upside down creates an arch shape with the most efficient weight management....a cable hangs in pure tension, a parabolic arch supports weight with pure thrust – semi-circular arches although aesthetically pleasing have less capacity as bending forces are exaggerated at certain locations in the arch by the circular shape

The Neilson Block 1903-1910. 118th Ave S.E.

The Nelson Block (Nelson Furniture Company) we see today is the product of additions which were made over the years. First in 1903 the first three storeys were built using rough-hewn stone in the roman revival style. The fourth and fifth storeys utilized more modern technology to cut the stone, which is evident in their smooth surfaces. Higher up, the elements of classical revival, such as the balustrade are present.



The Calgary Public Building 1929-1931. 205 8th Ave S.E.

This is another one of Calgary's infamously stalled construction projects. An old post office was demolished to make way for a larger building for the same use in 1914 and was not completed until 1931. the original plan called for a grand post office with three storey Ionic columns. Instead the excavated ground lay empty for 15 years. When the great depression caused the government to allocate money to public projects in 1929, construction finally began.

The style is institutional classical revival. The material use, like in many building of the time was tyndall lime-stone.



The Burns Building 1911-1912. 237 8th Ave S.E.

Senator Patrick Burns was the Calgary based rancher, who between 1890 and 1920 grew a meat packing empire that spanned the continent and beyond. He was the first meat packer to export product to the east, making him a leader in the industry. He was also one of the "big four" ranchers who sponsored the first Calgary Stampede in 1912.

His building was one of the first "highrises" in Calgary. It was not adventurous in design, following conventional design as a terracotta classical revival building. One unique feature, which survives to this day is the glass canopy on the main floor. The building was nearly demolished in the 1980s but was saved by a single council vote.



Civic Space

Old City Hall

Calgary's city hall is without a doubt the star of the sandstone era. With a total cost of \$500,000 it was a controversial undertaking in a fiscally conservative city. This led to delays when council had to ask taxpayers to approve more spending on the project than was initially estimated.

The building reflects the colonial aspirations of the this far flung outpost of the British Empire to mimic the motherland, evident in the tall spired tower which resembles the British Houses of Parliament and many other government buildings in the colonies. In contrast, the use of local materials indicates the financial constraints on the production of a grand building in a small prairie city.

Among the passing adornments were cannons which were placed at the base and palm trees which were bizarrely planted around it in 1912. Needless to say they did not make it through the winter.



The Municipal Building

The building we have today was the winning design by Christopher Ballyn in an open architectural competition. In contrast with city hall is it non-traditional and asymmetrical.

It falls mostly into the style of postmodernism, meaning it departs with the modernist aesthetic of intentional utilitarianism/functionality. Despite being monumental the building is a bit unconventional with its bright blue exterior, its asymmetrical shape and stepdown profile. At the time, Civic and corporate architects were trying to reintroduce visually stimulating shapes and colours to buildings, following the long dominance of the modernism/internationalism style and ideology.

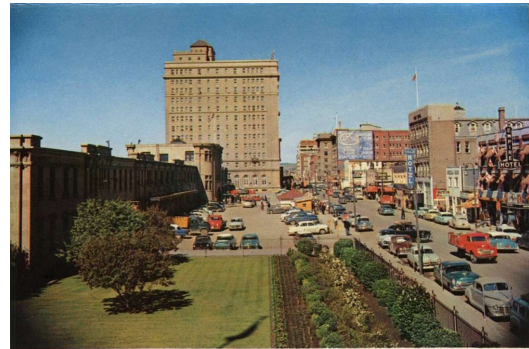
one of the consequences of constructing this building was that it cut off the east part of Stephen Ave from the Downtown and Stephen Ave pedestrian street. Some of the entries in the design competition allowed for a passage through to the east side of 8th Ave. In the 1980s, when Calgary was cleaning up its civic image in preparation for the Olympics the downtown east village was a derelict, unsightly area. Conveniently this eyesore could be sealed off from the downtown. Today the issue inaccessibility to the east village has resurfaced as a problem for the city to deal with and demolition of the municipal building is being considered for the future.

The CPR Rail Line and Station

The CPR laid down not only the track but the street grid and lots for the city. The area wedged between the Bow River and the CPR tracks was the first area of the town proper to be developed and remains the central business district today. 9th Ave which runs along the CPR line was a busy commercial street like 8th Ave, with hotels, offices and shops. Today 9th Ave is a high volume artery which move cars in and out of the Downtown and almost nothing remains of the former street. This is the result of the rise of private automobile transportation within the city and the planning paradigm which accommodated it. It also speaks to the demise of the railroad from being the determining factor in city development to obsolescence and eventually becoming an impediment to city development.

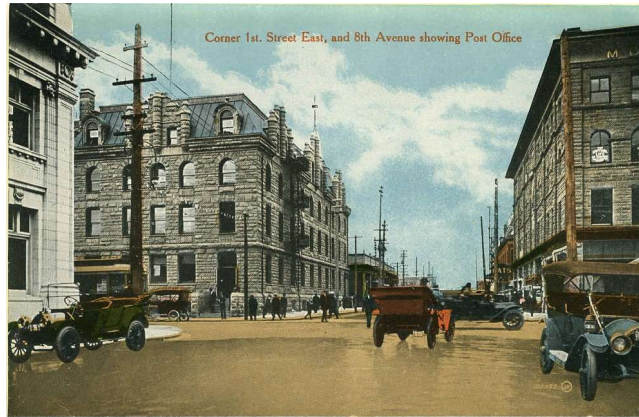
The presence of the rail line through the city centre now poses a problem as an obstacle to movement between the Beltline and Downtown. The city has recently tried to remedy this by improving the pedestrian underpasses under the tracks and hiding the tracks from public view.

The original CPR station, which was the origin point of modern Calgary has been demolished. In its place the Husky Tower, now the Calgary was constructed for Canada's centennial anniversary in 1967. The passenger station was moved underground and has been in steady decline ever since. Now there is no regular passenger service to Calgary except for the Rocky Mountaineer tour train.



8th Ave Alley

The Alley running parallel, south of Stephen Ave offers a glimpse into the unmodified construction of the historic buildings. The blackfacing walls have not been altered since the early days of the street, evident in the signage, narrow windows and doorways and rough original masonry. Of particular interest is the back wall of the Alberta Hotel which is a great example of the early Paskapoo stone blocks.



The Palliser Hotel

1911-1914. 133 9th Ave S.W.

The Palliser was built by the CPR to accommodate an increasing number of business and leisure travellers heading west to Banff. This marked a change in the accommodations offered in Calgary. The Palliser was the first, truly luxurious hotel to be built in the city and remains one of the premier hotels, which hosts visiting dignitaries and royalty.

Construction began May 1911 and lasted until June 1914. Then, in 1929 three floors were added making it the tallest building in Calgary until the 1950s. The design of the hotel broke with the pattern of CPR hotels. Unlike the châteaux style which was predominant at the time, this hotel had an urban look and feel. It resembled hotels in New York or Chicago with its flat roof, three vertical sections and heavy cornice. Neoclassical features include the Ionic columns at the entrance and voussoir arches. Like the urban American hotels, the Palliser's glass entrance canopy extends over the entire sidewalk.



The Grain Exchange Building 1910. 815 1st Street S.W.

This groundbreaking building was the first in Calgary to use reinforced concrete, to achieve a height of six storeys. It was built at the epoch of the property boom in Calgary. Property values on 8th Ave had increased %1000 over the previous three decades as Calgary rose out of the prairie dust. Built 4 years before the crash of the property market, this building was one of the last successful speculative ventures to occur.

The building was only briefly home to the grain exchange which moved to the Lancaster Building in 1919. It was more the real estate venture of William Roper Hull, a true Alberta pioneer. He was the first in this arid province to use irrigation in farming, ranched extensively and had many property dealings in the city and rural areas.

This building, clad in rough-hewn sandstone is of unusual height for that style. It was one of the first tall buildings built in the city and so its aesthetics are reminiscent of the modest sandstone buildings built in previous decades. It features a heavy cornice and baluster, distinguishing it as an important building of business.



End Tour at the Palomino

- Question and comment?