

Sons of Abraham Synagogue



Date of Construction	1912
Address	530 - 5 (Ottawa) Street SE
Original Owner	Elijah L. Becker
Architect	Elijah L. Becker
Contractor	Mat Pierd
Neighbourhood	Downtown
Legal	36556;32;16

Description of Historic Place

The Jewish Synagogue is a rectangular two-storey building located on the north side of 5th Street SE, northwest of downtown in the Downtown Southeast Hill neighbourhood in the City of Medicine Hat. Constructed in 1912, the building is distinguished by its sleek Modern-style elements including smooth stucco finish, minimalist detailing, and central entryway with flat awning supported by cast iron columns and combed brick piers. Banks of narrow rectangular window openings are accented with inset glass block, situated symmetrically on both sides of the main entryway. The building is located in a residential area of the city, and is positioned on a highly sloped lot, which provides full-height access at the basement level of the building.

Heritage Value of Historic Place

The Sons of Abraham Synagogue is highly valued as a symbol of the strength and perseverance of the Jewish community who established the first synagogue in the City of

Medicine Hat, and who continued to own it for nearly 70 years. The building was constructed as a garage in 1912, and after a short period of disuse, was purchased by the Jewish Ladies Aid in 1930. Small-scale renovations were undertaken to adapt the building to the Jewish community's needs. In the 1950s, with over 40 Jewish families in the city and pressure to update the former garage, the Sons of Abraham congregation raised approximately \$35,000 to renovate the synagogue. The facility was extensively renovated from 1951 to 1955, and the new building was dedicated on March 27, 1955. New oak flooring was laid in the sanctuary, and a social hall was added with a stage, a kitchen, and a classroom in the basement. The exterior was redesigned in the Modern-style. Sleek white stucco was added over the original brick and hollow clay tile. A central entryway with three glass doors was installed and accented with a flat awning supported by simple cast iron columns and combed brick piers. On either side of the doorway, three narrow vertical windows with recessed glass blocks were installed to add light into the building.

The Sons of Abraham Synagogue is also valued for its role in the development of the Jewish community in Medicine Hat. The Jewish community has had a strong presence in Medicine Hat since the early 1900s when the first immigrants arrived. Well-educated and ambitious, this small group soon established themselves as merchants, wholesalers, and farmers. Medicine Hat's first congregation, the Sons of Abraham, was formed in 1912, and services were held in various locations around the city. By 1914, they had established the first Jewish Cemetery at Finn's Lake, outside of the city limits. The synagogue served as the epicentre of the Jewish community and offered religious services, social events, Hebrew classes, and Shechita services performed by the resident rabbi. By the time the Sons of Abraham Synagogue building was purchased in 1930, there were over 100 people of Jewish faith in the community, most of them working as merchants. The synagogue was sold in 1999 with a declining Jewish population.

The Sons of Abraham Synagogue is further significant for its value as a garage to serve the newly established automobile industry in the City of Medicine Hat. First owner, Elijah Lydon Becker (1860-1940), designed the two-storey garage himself, which was constructed by Mat Pierd in 1912. Built using locally sourced brick and hollow clay tile, the garage was constructed at a cost of \$6,000. The building functioned as Becker Garage until 1917 and continued to operate as a garage until 1927. The building was purpose-built as a garage, providing access to automobiles on the north side of the building and offices and storefront on the upper storey.

The Sons of Abraham Synagogue during its time as a place of worship



Esplanade Archives, Medicine Hat, Alberta.
Weiler Collection of CHAT Material.

Character-Defining Elements - Sons of Abraham Synagogue (530 - 5 Street SE)



- Setting on the north side of 5th Street SE in the Downtown/Southeast Hill neighbourhood



- Close setbacks to the property lines within a residential context



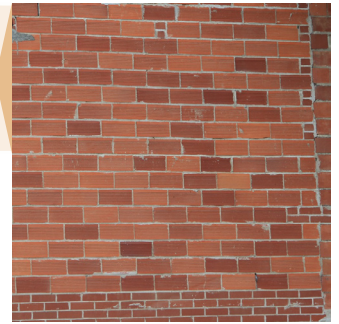
- Associated landscaping elements including: parking lot at rear (north) side of property



- Form, scale, and massing as expressed by its: rectangular box composition; full-height basement accessible at street level from the back parking lot; two-storeys; full-height basement; flat roof with no overhang



- Masonry construction of original building including: brick and hollow clay tile, exposed on rear elevation; concrete foundation



- Modern-style of 1955 renovation including: smooth stucco cladding of front and side facades; prominent horizontal band on front façade; minimalist detailing; central entryway with flat concrete awning supported by narrow cast iron columns and combed brick piers



- Original fenestration including: symmetrical vertical slit window openings with recessed glass block on either side of central entryway; glass block wooden hopper and fixed windows on side and rear elevations; triple aluminum doors with full height lights in central entryway



- Interior elements such as its: original steam heater; oak wooden floors; wooden paneling; intact stage and kitchen in basement

Statement of Integrity - Sons of Abraham Synagogue (530 - 5 Street SE)

Applicable Significance Criteria

This site is significant because...

Theme / Activity / Cultural Practice / Event ☒ Yes ☐ No

-The Sons of Abraham Synagogue is highly valued as a symbol of the strength and perseverance of the Jewish community to establish the first synagogue in the City of Medicine Hat. The building was constructed as a garage in 1912, and after a short period of disuse was purchased by the Jewish Ladies Aid in 1930 (**Theme Value – Spiritual Life**).

-The Sons of Abraham Synagogue also has community value for its association to the Jewish community in Medicine hat, who spearheaded re-development and owned the synagogue for almost 70 years (**Theme Value – Oasis in the Prairies: Settling Medicine Hat**).

-The Sons of Abraham Synagogue is further significant as a purpose-built garage constructed to serve the burgeoning automobile industry in the City of Medicine Hat (**Theme Value – Transportation and Communication Crossroads**).

Institution / Person ☐ Yes ☒ No

Design / Style / Construction ☐ Yes ☒ No

Information Potential ☐ Yes ☒ No

Landmark / Symbolic Value ☐ Yes ☒ No

Period of Significance

1930-1939 Depression

Chronology of Alterations

1951-55 - Stucco cladding added, interior renovated

Aspects of Integrity

LOCATION ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The location of the building has not been altered.

DESIGN ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The design of the building and detailing has been maintained since it was renovated in the 1950s. An original portion of the brick and hollow clay tile is exposed on the rear (north) façade.

ENVIRONMENT ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The building continues to be situated in a residential neighbourhood outside Medicine Hat's downtown core.

MATERIALS ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The authentic materials of the building have been maintained.

WORKMANSHIP ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The quality of the workmanship of the building is clearly evident.

FEELING ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The building continues to convey a strong historic sense.

ASSOCIATION ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The association of the building has changed. It is now an office building for an engineering firm.

Statement of Integrity continued on next page...

Statement of Integrity - Sons of Abraham Synagogue (530 - 5 Street SE)

Statement of Integrity

Sons of Abraham Synagogue maintains all the aspects of integrity necessary for it to convey its significance / heritage value.

Sons of Abraham is a well-maintained building with some structural issues related to its over 100 year age and its positioning on a highly sloped lot. The building, renovated extensively in the 1950s, has retained its form, scale, and massing and a few of the original window openings on the north façade. There are several large structural cracks on all facades of the building, particularly on the east façade; these should be monitored. The exposed brick at the foundation level on the north elevation is cracking in some locations. The stucco cladding is in fairly good condition, with minor cracks throughout. The building has shifted in some locations and there is evidence of the foundation breaking away from the building on the south/front façade. This has caused deterioration to the concrete base of the brick piers at the front entryway. Some windows on the side elevations were filled in with the 1950s renovation. The garage doors were removed and replaced with brick cladding sometime after the building was purchased in the 1930s. A brick planter, installed in the 1950s renovation, and was removed at some point in the last 10 years.


Additional Images - Sons of Abraham Synagogue

Interior of the Sons of Abraham Synagogue, when it functioned as a place of worship, looking toward the bimah



Dr. Leo Lewis,
Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta,
Calgary, Alberta.
#430.

Heritage Evaluation Form - Sons of Abraham Synagogue (530 - 5 Street SE)

 Medicine Hat The Gas City Heritage Evaluation Form	Site Number	Category B
	Community District Downtown	
	Designation	

Site Name(s): Sons of Abraham Synagogue			
Municipal Address: 530 - 5 Street SE		Date of Construction:	^Y 1912
Consultant(s): Donald Luxton & Associates Inc.		Evaluation Date:	^Y 13 ^M 05 ^D 16
Heritage Committee: Heritage Resource Committee			
Heritage Planner: Chris Reddy			
		Total	
		73	

History (H)	E	VG	G	F	P		(H) SCORE
H.1 Associations/Patterns	X					40	40
H.2 Age		X				10	
Comments: H.1 The Sons of Abraham Synagogue is highly valued as a symbol of the strength and perseverance of the Jewish community to establish the first synagogue in the City of Medicine Hat, and who would continue to own it for nearly 70 years. H.2 Constructed in 1912.							

Architecture (A)	E	VG	G	F	P		(A) SCORE
A.1 Style/Type/Design			X			10	13
A.2 Designer/Builder				X		3	
A.3 Construction Technology				X		3	
A.4 Interior Details				X		2	
A.5 Alterations		X				-5	
Comments: A.1 Exterior envelop reflective of the 1955 Modern-style renovation. A.2 Architect – E.L. Becker, Contractor – Mat Pierd A.3 Masonry construction. A.4 Original interior elements including oak floor, wooden paneling, intact stage and kitchen in basement. A.5 Building exterior fabric and form, scale, and massing intact.							

Urban Context (C)	E	VG	G	F	P		(C) SCORE
C.1 Landmark/Character		X				10	20
C.2 Streetscape/Landscape		X				10	
Comments: C.1 The building is a landmark in primarily residential neighbourhood. C.2 The building's historic aesthetic contributes to the surrounding streetscape.							