

# Elm Street School



<i>Date of Construction</i>	1912
<i>Address</i>	1001 Elm Street SE
<i>Original Owner</i>	Medicine Hat School District #76
<i>Architect</i>	William T. Williams
<i>Contractor</i>	Arthur P. Burns
<i>Neighbourhood</i>	North Flats
<i>Historic Neighbourhood</i>	North Yuill
<i>Legal</i>	481M;4;1-40

## Description of Historic Place

Elm Street School is a monumental Classical Revival brick, H-shaped school located on a full city block in the City of Medicine Hat. The building is well proportioned with symmetrical fenestration and twinned sandstone columns flanking each side of a prominent central entryway. The school, located on the south side of Elm Street in the historic River Flats neighbourhood, is surrounded by mature trees and hedges.

## Heritage Value of Historic Place

Elm Street School, completed by 1912 and opened in 1913, is valued as a highly intact educational complex that illustrates an exquisite example of the Classical Revival style, a popular style in Medicine Hat in the 1910s. The school is further significant for its use of a local architect, trades, and materials. Elm Street School features a sophisticated symmetrical plan, articulated and detailed with locally manufactured red pressed brick and sandstone quoining.

Hallmark features of the Classical Revival style are evident in its massive banks of rectangular window openings, and broad pressed metal cornice. This school displays a purist rendition of the Classical Revival style, evidenced by two twinned giant order Corinthian engaged columns, surmounted by a pediment. This gives a strong vertical emphasis to the building, increasing its presence from the street. Handsomely detailed modillions at the roofline accent the narrow overhanging eaves and a broken pediment supported by decorative brackets adorns the austere front entryway. The building was designed by local architect, William T. Williams, born and architecturally trained in Britain. Williams moved to Medicine Hat in 1905 and was responsible for a number of prominent buildings in the city including several schools, the new Town Hall (1905), and the Cypress Club (1907). The 10-room school with two recreational spaces in the basement was built by local contractor, A.P. Burns for \$102,000. The school illustrates Williams' command of classical British architecture and is an imposing example of the Classical Revival style in Medicine Hat.

Elm Street School is also significant as a symbol of Medicine Hat School District's response and preparation in advance for the city's tremendous growth during the Edwardian boom time in the 1910s. Medicine Hat School District # 76 was established early in the city's history, officially operational by October 1886. The first permanent school, Toronto Street School, was completed by 1889. Medicine Hat's prolific period of growth in the 1910s spurred an ambitious permanent school building program. Elm Street School is one of four major permanent schools constructed between 1909 and 1913 in Medicine Hat including: Alexandra High School (1909), Connaught School (1913) and Elizabeth Street School in 1913. The scale of this school building program was not repeated again until after the Second World War. The cornerstone for the building was laid by Grand Mason, Thomas M. McNabb on April 18, 1912, a common practice for significant public buildings in Canada. The school opened in January 1913 with Mr. Charles Weir as the principal.

Elm Street School is further valued for the school's responsive nature to the changing needs of the River Flats community through time. The River Flats neighbourhood, east of

downtown, developed to support the area's medley of local industries including clay production, mills, and greenhouses, among many others. Propelled by the presence of high quality clay, the exploitation of inexpensive gas and proximity to the CPR, River Flats developed as a working class residential and commercial neighbourhood, spurring the need for educational facilities for the influx of new families into the area in the early 1900s. Elm Street School was built to accommodate the bulge in settlement, and within a year of its opening, a large two-storey addition was added to the south façade of the original school, which opened in 1914. The South Building, also designed by Williams, was accessed by an elevated second-storey bridge and provided an additional six schoolrooms, capable of accommodating 300 more children. The South Building was demolished in 1973 due to the area's rising water table and associated flooding.

Elm Street School is also valued as a local landmark in the River Flats neighbourhood due to its iconic Classical Revival architectural style, its conspicuous massing, and its visibility from major corridors in the area.

Elm Street School shortly after construction.



Nott, Jessop. Esplanade Archives, Medicine Hat, Alberta. 0350.0039.



## Character-Defining Elements - Elm Street School (1001 Elm Street SE)



- Location on a full city lot in the River Flats neighbourhood in the City of Medicine Hat



- Siting set back from the road in a residential context



- Landscaping such as mature deciduous and coniferous trees throughout property



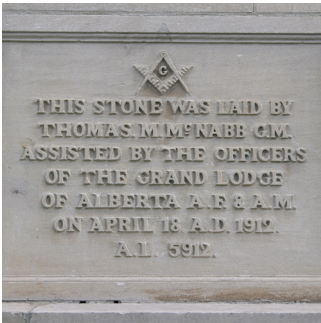
- Form, scale, and massing as expressed by its: two-storey height with full-height basement; H-shaped plan; hipped roof with cedar shingles and narrow overhanging closed eaves; front-gabled projections on east and west façade



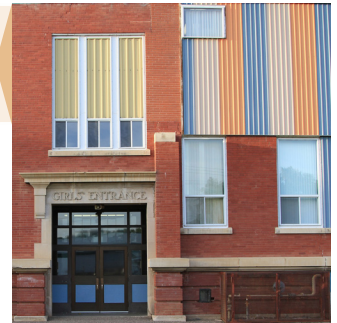
- Masonry construction including: concrete foundation; combed sandstone quoining, watertable, columns and stairway; red pressed brick with flushed red mortar in common bond and brick banding at base of building



- Classical Revival style detailing such as its: symmetrical massing; central entryway with two twinned giant order Corinthian engaged and fluted columns with scroll imagery in the capitals, surmounted by a large pediment; central doorway with sandstone broken pediment supported by decorative scroll brackets with acanthus imagery; quoining at corners of building and surrounding windows; wide pressed metal cornice with modillions under closed eaves



- Fenestration such as: single and double-banked assembly tall, narrow window openings; central entryway with double doors and wooden-sash fanlights above; recessed boys and girls entryways with double doors and multi-paned fanlights



- Additional elements such as: interior red brick chimney with decorative sandstone cap; sandstone cornerstone stating: 'This stone was laid by Thomas. M. McNabb G.M. assisted by the officers of the grand lodge of Alberta A.F. & A.M. on April 18, A.D. 1912. A.L. 5912'; separate boys and girls entryways marked with embossed sandstone signbands stating 'BOYS ENTRANCE' and 'GIRLS ENTRANCE'; '1911' in relief at gable peak in pediment

- Interior elements such as oak trim



## Statement of Integrity - Elm Street School (1001 Elm Street SE)

### Applicable Significance Criteria

*This site is significant because...*

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

-Elm Street School, completed by 1912 and opened in 1913, is valued as a highly intact educational complex that illustrates an exquisite example of the Classical Revival style, a popular style in Medicine Hat in the 1910s (**Theme Value – Built in Medicine Hat**).

-Elm Street School is also significant as a symbol of Medicine Hat School District's response and preparation in advance for the city's tremendous growth during the Edwardian boom time in the 1910s (**Theme Value – Education in Medicine Hat**).

-Elm Street School is further valued for the school's responsive nature to the changing needs of the River Flats community through time. The River Flats neighbourhood, east of downtown, developed to support the area's medley of local industries including clay production, mills, and greenhouses, among many others (**Theme Value – Managing Growth in Medicine Hat**).

**Institution / Person** ☐ Yes ☒ No

**Design / Style / Construction** ☐ Yes ☒ No

**Information Potential** ☐ Yes ☒ No

**Landmark / Symbolic Value** ☒ Yes ☐ No

Elm Street School is also valued as a local landmark in the River Flats neighbourhood due to its iconic Classical Revival architectural style, its conspicuous massing, and its visibility from major corridors in the area.

### Period of Significance

1906 to 1913 Pre-First World War Boom, Age of Optimism

### Chronology of Alterations

1912 - School constructed  
1913 - South building addition  
1973 - 1913 addition demolished

### Aspects of Integrity

**LOCATION** ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The siting of the school on Elm Street SE has not changed.

**DESIGN** ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The overall design of the building has not been altered, except some windows have been replaced or clad over.

**ENVIRONMENT** ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The school is located in a residential neighbourhood, surrounded by a large schoolyard and mature trees and hedges.

**MATERIALS** ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The intact materials exhibit a good degree of integrity.

**WORKMANSHIP** ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The workmanship is of high quality and has been well maintained.

**FEELING** ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The feeling of the building has not changed. It continues to convey a strong scholastic aesthetic.

**ASSOCIATION** ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The association of the building is the same. It continues to operate as an education institution.

Statement of Integrity continued on next page...

## Statement of Integrity - Elm Street School (1001 Elm Street SE)

### Statement of Integrity

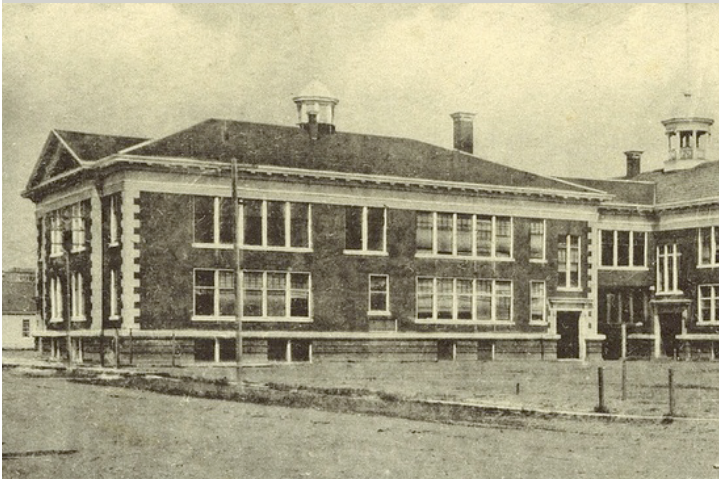
*Elm Street School maintains all the aspects of integrity necessary for it to convey its significance / heritage value.*

Elm Street School has good overall historic integrity. The school is in its original location and form, scale and massing are intact. The original materials, including red pressed brick and sandstone, for the most part are in good condition, with areas of cracking, spalling and graffiti carved into the sandstone. The original 6-over-1 single-hung windows have been removed and replaced with aluminum-sash windows in the early 1980s. Portions of the banked windows have been replaced with coloured corrugated metal panels to control light. These panels do not conform to the original design of the building and alternative forms of light control should be explored. The original wooden double doors and fanlights in all door openings were replaced as well, with unadorned wooden doors. A large addition to the south façade in 1913 was demolished in 1973 due to flooding hazard associated with the rising watertable. Although the portion where the building was attached has been repaired with similar brick, there is evidence of major cracking and structural damage, which should be addressed. The original wooden cupola was removed in 1962 after concerns over its stability in windstorms. The substantial pressed metal cornice is unpainted. It should be painted in a light colour as per historical images to protect the metal from further damage. A small modern addition, built in 1956, connects to the east façade of the building. A new wood shingle roof, which replaced an asphalt roof, was added some time in the last few years.

## Additional Images - Elm Street School

View of Elm Street School, circa 1920. The structure on the right is the original 1912 school, while the building on the left is the 1914 addition, which was demolished in 1973

The Heliotype Co. Ltd.  
Elm Street School, Medicine Hat, Alta.  
Peel's Prairie Province's  
Prairie Postcard Collection. PC004359.




Donald Luxton & Associates  
September 2012

Rear (south) facade of Elm Street School



## Heritage Evaluation Form - Elm Street School (1001 Elm Street SE)

 <b>Medicine Hat</b> <b>The Gas City</b> <b>Heritage Evaluation Form</b>	Site Number	Category A
	Community District River Flats	
	Designation	

<b>Site Name(s):</b> Elm Street School			
<b>Municipal Address:</b> 1001 Elm Street SE		Date of Construction:	Y 1912
<b>Consultant(s):</b> Donald Luxton & Associates Inc.		Evaluation Date:	Y 12 M 09 D 05
<b>Heritage Committee:</b> Heritage Resource Committee			
<b>Heritage Planner:</b> Jeanie Gartly			
		<b>Total</b>	
		85	

History (H)	E	VG	G	F	P		(H) SCORE
H.1 Associations/Patterns	X					40	40
H.2 Age		X				10	
<b>Comments:</b> H.1 Constructed in preparation of the city's Edwardian boom, the school served the burgeoning industrial worker population of River Flats and continues to serve the community. H.2 Constructed 1912.							

Architecture (A)	E	VG	G	F	P		(A) SCORE
A.1 Style/Type/Design		X				20	25
A.2 Designer/Builder		X				10	
A.3 Construction Technology				X		3	
A.4 Interior Details				X		2	
A.5 Alterations			X			-10	
<b>Comments:</b> A.1 The design is influenced by the Classical Revival style. A.2 Architect – William T. Williams. Contractor – Arthur P. Burns. A.3 The building is a fair representation of construction practices of the period. A.4 Oak trim. A.5 1913 – South building addition. 1973 – Demolition of 1913 south building addition.							

Urban Context (C)	E	VG	G	F	P		(C) SCORE
C.1 Landmark/Character		X				10	20
C.2 Streetscape/Landscape	X					15	
<b>Comments:</b> C.1 The school is a component of a school building program and served then, as it does now, the River Flats community. C.2 The notable structure maintains a dominant character on the streetscape.							