

THE LEGISLATURE

Educational Resource

March 2020

A Place for People

The Legislature Building is the place where the Assembly assembles, the government governs and decisions are decided that affect all Albertans. This building is also important in its own right as a symbol of Alberta's parliamentary and democratic heritage.

Alberta's Legislature Building was built between 1907 and 1913 in a style that was popular in North America at the time known as Beaux Arts. This architectural style draws inspiration from ancient civilizations and was meant to suggest power and longevity.

Tips for a successful school visit

- Review the Confirmation of Visit to ensure that all information is correct.
- Discuss expectations with students and volunteers. Teachers and parents are asked to turn off their cellphones, model good listening, supervise and remain with the students at all times.
- Ensure the bus driver is aware of the current drop off and pick up location (effective September 2018).

What's Happening at the Legislature in March?

WAR Flowers: A touring art exhibition open all month at the Legislative Assembly [Visitor Centre](#)



Alberta Legislature

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The Legislature Building belongs to all Albertans. It is here that the Members we elect carry out our business. Within the Chamber they decide how our tax dollars will be spent and debate and enact the laws we live by.



The Assembly meets at McKay Avenue School (Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives—NA-2883-20)

Before the Build

On March 15, 1906, Alberta's first Legislature opened its First Session. There was no Legislature Building for Members to meet in, so the opening ceremonies were held at Edmonton's Thistle rink, just north of Jasper Avenue, after which the Assembly moved to the nearby McKay Avenue School.

In these modest surroundings the Members dealt with one of the first items of business for the new province, deciding on a capital. Edmonton had been named the temporary capital by the Dominion government in 1905. Motions to move the capital to Banff, Red Deer and Calgary were not seconded or were defeated in the Assembly, therefore affirming Edmonton as the permanent capital.

Choosing a site for the building was easy. The high-cliffed bank of the North Saskatchewan River was both physically commanding and historically significant. Here was the site of the fifth and last Fort Edmonton, a major fur-trading post of the Hudson's Bay Company, around which the settlement of Edmonton had developed.

A Grand Opening

The foundation for the Legislature Building was laid in 1907, and on September 3, 1912, His Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught, Canada's Governor General, declared the Legislature Building officially open.

The interior's grandeur was obvious from the moment the front doors first opened. The main entrance leads directly into the rotunda, which is encircled by marble columns. Its walls rise from the main rotunda to the vaulted dome, a distance of approximately 33.5 metres or 110 feet. The rotunda connects the east and west wings of the main floor to the great marble staircase that leads to the Assembly Chamber, the domed ceiling of which features stained glass skylights and about 500 light bulbs.

The Legislature Building has undergone many changes since its 1912 opening. Several parts of the building have been restored, including the exterior of the dome, the cork floor in the Library and the marble in the rotunda.



The dome under construction (Courtesy of the Glenbow Archives—NA-NC-6-50)

The Beaux Arts Style

Alberta's Legislature Building was designed by provincial architect Allan Merrick Jeffers, a graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design in the United States. Richard P. Blakey, Jeffers' successor, also contributed to the design of the rotunda and the main staircase leading up to the Chamber.

Jeffers was probably influenced in his design by the state capitol building in Rhode Island, which was in the popular Beaux Arts style. This style is evident in the main entrance, or portico, of Alberta's Legislature Building, which is characterized by Corinthian columns and a dome rising above a spacious rotunda. The symmetric design and layout are also elements of this style.

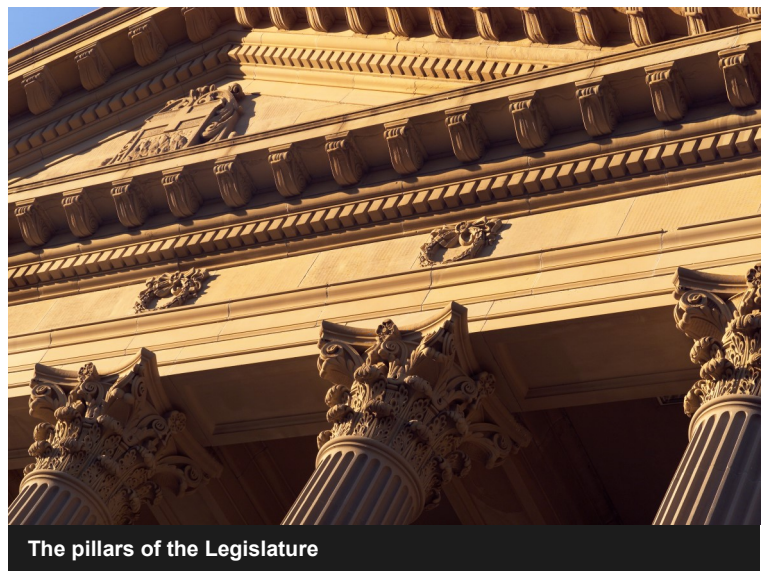
Materials suitable for the building's lofty exterior include grey granodiorite, commonly known as granite, quarried on the islands in the mouth of Jervis Inlet, British Columbia, for the exterior walls of the basement and first storey. The other four storeys were made from a combination of granite, sandstone and Indiana limestone.

The building's interior primarily features marble from Quebec and Pennsylvania.

Richard P. Blakely, provincial architect until 1924, added the inner dome seen when one looks up from the rotunda. In 1932 palm seeds were planted in pots in the gallery ringing the interior dome; these are now five large trees peering down at the rotunda's fountain.



The Legislature dome



The pillars of the Legislature



The Legislature palm trees

Did You Know?

The main floor has not always looked the way it does today. Originally there was a circular well in the rotunda, where the fountain now sits, enabling people to see down into the first floor below. In 1959, when Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II came to Alberta on her first official visit as Queen of Canada, the central fountain was installed to mark the occasion.

This was the second fountain to be built in this spot, the first being a temporary one constructed in 1939 to commemorate the visit of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth.

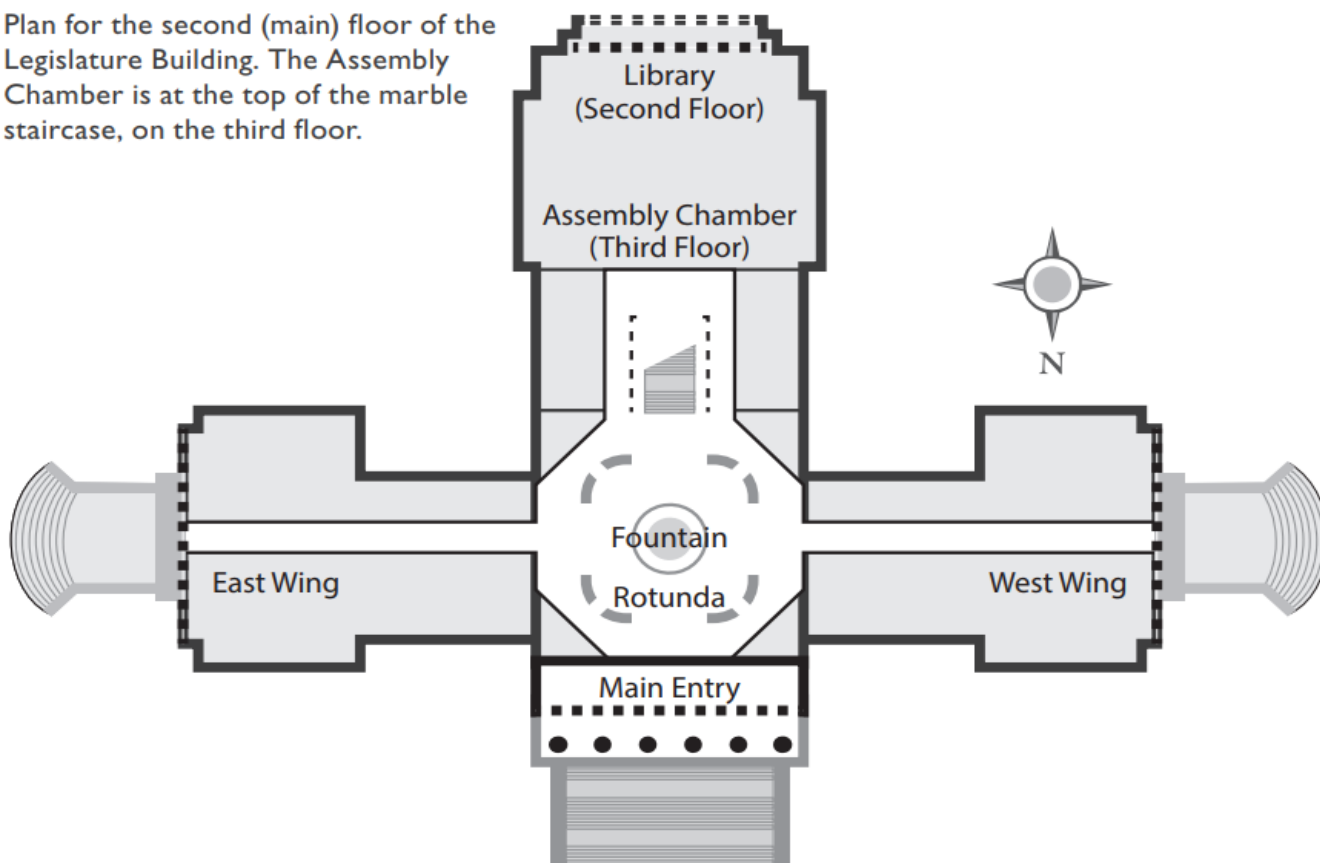
Symbols of History

The building also houses images of our history and political tradition. Inside the rotunda are two bronze statues, one of the Princess Louise Caroline Alberta, the fourth daughter of Queen Victoria after whom the province is named, and one of Chief Crowfoot, a Blackfoot leader whose policy of co-operation led to the peaceful settlement of Alberta.

Portraits of Premiers and Lieutenant Governors adorn the walls of the third floor, and portraits of Alberta's Speakers hang one floor above. Decorative hardwood carvings include coats of arms above the main entrance to the Chamber, above the Speaker's chair in the Chamber and in the Carillon Room on the fifth floor.

The building also contains the office of the Premier, the cabinet and other government Members, the Speaker and the Lieutenant Governor.

Plan for the second (main) floor of the Legislature Building. The Assembly Chamber is at the top of the marble staircase, on the third floor.





Architectural details of the Legislature exterior

Activities

These three suggested activities ask students to explore how architecture can be a symbol of politics and community. Refer to the resource links and videos for more activities and background information.

A New Look?

The Legislature Building is 117 years old and overall, looks very similar to when it first opened. What additions or renovations could be done to the Legislature to make it more contemporary? Is it better for the Legislature to stay looking the way it always has, or are there benefits to making modern changes? Have students reflect on this in writing and then discuss as a class.

Research other Legislatures

There are many styles of Legislature Buildings around the world. Find a Legislature or government building from another place (in Canada or another country) that looks different from Alberta's. What architectural features does it have? Why might it have been built in that style? Have students gather and document the sources they use to find this information.

Team Design

In groups, have students design and build their own Legislature buildings. Suggestions for materials include LEGO®, cardboard, or recycled items. Have each group present to the rest of the class, explaining their design choices and how the building would be used by the public and the government.

Resource Links

[Citizen's Guide](#)

[Ask an Expert](#)

[Mock Legislature Resources](#)

[The Outdated Architecture of Parliaments Around the World](#)

[The 5 Designs of Legislative Chambers](#)

[Edmonton Historical Board: Alberta Legislature](#)

[Historic and Modern Architecture Come Together](#)

[Canadian Architecture 1867-1914](#)

[Greek Architecture](#)

[Major restoration of Alberta Legislature](#)

Resource Videos

[Speaker's Corner](#)

[Alberta Legislature Building Centennial: the Foundation of a Great Province](#)

[School of the Beaux-Arts](#)

[Inside the Alberta Legislature's \\$22M restoration](#)

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- Understand how knowledge of the history of Alberta, of Canada and of the world, contributes to a better comprehension of contemporary realities (Social Studies, Knowledge and Understanding)
- Apply historical and geographic skills to bring meaning to issues and events (Social Studies, Skills and Processes)
- Use historical and community resources to understand and organize the sequence of historical events (Social Studies, 6.S.2)
- Distinguish geographic features in their own community from other communities by exploring and reflecting upon the following questions for inquiry: What are some familiar landmarks and places in my community? Why are these landmarks and places significant features of the community? (Social Studies, 1.1.5)
- Demonstrate respect for places and objects of historical significance (Social Studies, 4.2.1)
- Special events, such as field trips, visits and festive occasions can be recorded visually (Fine Arts, Level 3, Purpose: Component 10)
- Artworks contain symbolic representations of a subject or theme (Fine Arts, Level 3, Appreciation: Component 3)

Alberta Education Program of Studies

Contact Us

Please let us know if you enjoyed this resource and found it helpful, and if there are any other topics you would like to see covered.

Also, if you tried any of the suggested activities, we would love to see pictures or examples of your students' work!

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Unless indicated otherwise, the included information has been taken directly from the Legislative Assembly Office's *The Citizen's Guide to the Alberta Legislature* (9th edition, 2016) or from the Legislative Assembly Office's Agora Interpretive Centre.

