

# The Alberta Provincial Parliament at McKay Avenue School

by Mike Kostek, Archivist, EPS Archives & Museum

On February 21, 1904, Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier announced the formation of two new provinces: Alberta and Saskatchewan. Each new province was to comprise an area of approximately 500,000 square miles.<sup>1</sup>

The formal inauguration of the new province of Alberta was set for September 1, 1905. Edmonton was named the provisional capital.

Much speculation concerning the appointment of an interim premier of the new province preceded the inaugural ceremonies. NWT Premier Frederick Haultain was the "people's choice," but his candidacy was never seriously considered because of his Conservative leanings. Other contenders for the honour included Frank Oliver and Peter Talbot who represented Edmonton and Strathcona respectively, in the House of Commons.

But the interim Premier of Alberta was to be Alexander Cameron Rutherford, a member of the NWT Legislature. Rutherford, a Strathcona lawyer, was Secretary Treasurer of the Strathcona School District and town at the time of his appointment. He was also leader of the Alberta Liberal Party. Premier Rutherford became Minister of Education and Provincial Treasurer in the interim cabinet.

The Empire Block, owned by John McDougall and pioneer teacher Richard Secord, became government headquarters for the new cabinet. Among the many immediate responsibilities of the cabinet was the creation of a constituency map in preparation for the province's first election, slated for November 9, 1905.

On that occasion, only male British subjects, resident in the Northwest Territories for a year and in their electoral



*First Legislative Assembly of Alberta in the Legislative Chamber of 1906  
This photograph was taken on May 9, 1906, the last day of the first session of the Assembly.*

Photo credit: Glenbow Archives, Calgary, Canada NA-2883-20

---

*And it all happened at McKay Avenue School where parliamentary history now comes alive in the living-history program entitled, "Mr. Puffer Goes to Parliament," conducted in part in the Restored Legislative Chamber of 1906.*

---

district for three months, were eligible to vote. Election procedures at the time required voters to mark an "X" on a blank ballot using a coloured pencil. In most constituencies only two candidates ran for office; one would be associated with a blue pencil and the other a red pencil. A third candidate would be associated with a yellow pencil. Approximately 25,000 male Albertans cast votes resulting in the election of twenty-three Liberals and two

Conservatives to Alberta's first Provincial Parliament.

On March 15, 1906, residents of the new province were invited to the Thistle Rink in downtown Edmonton where Lieutenant Governor George Hedley Vicars Bulyea read the Speech from the Throne. The rink, once situated just north of Jasper Avenue on 102 Street, was a gift to Edmonton from Richard Secord.

*continued...*

### The Alberta Provincial Parliament at McKay Avenue School

*continued...*

Four days later, the members of Alberta's Provincial Parliament met in the third floor assembly hall of McKay Avenue School, where the orderly transition from territorial to provincial status took place. School board coffers were enriched by \$400 for the rental charge.

Among prominent members who took part in debate in the assembly hall was Matthew McCauley. Considered the "father of Edmonton Public Schools," he represented the Vermilion electoral district at the time. McCauley served for only a year before resigning to accept the position of warden of the new federal penitentiary in Edmonton. His appointment was criticized in some quarters as being the first patronage appointment in Alberta.

Legislation enacted during the first session of the Alberta Provincial Parliament (March 15 to May 9, 1906) included the establishment of a system of provincial courts, the chartering of six railways, the establishment of the University of Alberta and the incorporation of 140 school districts.

An act was also passed to limit the speed of motor vehicles to 20 m.p.h.,<sup>2</sup> "except when passing or meeting horse-drawn conveyances," when the speed could not exceed 10 and 5 m.p.h. respectively. Official approval was also given for the construction of long distance telephone lines between Edmonton and Calgary.

The most dramatic activity during the 1906 session was the debating of a motion proposing that Calgary become the permanent capital of Alberta. The Calgary motion was defeated by a sixteen to eight vote, and although Banff and Red Deer were also proposed for the capital site, no real support for these centres materialized. Nor was there support for Athabasca Landing or Vegreville, which were proposed by lobby groups.

On April 25, 1906, the City of Edmonton was confirmed as the permanent capital of Alberta. This occurred after a long, interesting—and at times, bitter—debate, which some historians observe as the beginning of the rivalry between our fair city and its southern "sister."

And it all happened at McKay Avenue School where parliamentary history now comes alive in the living-history program entitled, "Mr. Puffer Goes to Parliament," conducted in part in the Restored Legislative Chamber of 1906.

William Puffer, incidentally, was the influential MPP for Lacombe, and the grandfather of retired Edmonton school principal Hu Puffer. Indeed, had it not been for W. Puffer's support for the Edmonton site, the capital of Alberta might well now be the city of Calgary.

The second session of the Alberta Provincial Parliament (January 24 to March 15, 1907) was also held in the assembly hall of McKay Avenue School.

<sup>1</sup> 500,000 square miles is approximately equal to 1,300,000 square kilometers

<sup>2</sup> 20 m.p.h. is approximately equal to 32 km/h

# The Alberta Provincial Parliament at McKay Avenue School