

Save Bible Bill's old church

LARRY HEATHER

With the ongoing expansion of the Stampede grounds, the future of the historic old Westbourne Baptist Church is uncertain. Those passing by the 436 13th Ave. S.E. site in the scant remains of Victoria Park may see only an old and perhaps outdated white, brick building. The new Stampede Casino now surrounds it to the west. But a rediscovery of the profound history emanating from the 250-person chapel makes it an important link in the history of Alberta.

Established as a mission church of First Baptist in 1905, the present structure was built in 1910 from a grant given from the Westbourne Church in London, England. The British pastor there, Dr. John Clifford, had an active interest in Baptist outreach in Calgary. So the new church was named in honour of its English counterpart, and retained that historic building name over 102 years until the present.

The original Baptist congregation moved out in 1967, eventually to relocate to the new Westbourne Church in northwest Calgary. After several vacant years, the little church revived as a meeting place for the Victory Outreach Centre — which ministered mostly to the poor — for 15 years, until their last service was held at that site in May 2007.

A miniature but distinct example of a gothic revival style, the small mission congregation of modest means was in need of a preacher in the year of 1915. On Dec. 15 of that year, just after the close of the Great War, the increasingly popular and able William Aberhart offered his services as a lay pastor for no remuneration. He would minister to them, while continuing his day employment as a high school principal of the new Crescent Height Collegiate Institute, all the while building a reputation as one of Western's Canada's leading educators. The church grew and prospered under his teaching.

Conversions and discipleship by Aberhart at the Westbourne Church formed crucial leadership associates, who would later be invaluable in the start of new ventures of his influence in the future. Muriel Preston (Manning) and Cyril Hutchinson (later the Prophetic/Berean Bible Principal), were both young people in the congregation at the time.

Thursday evening prophecy classes taught by Aberhart attracted many from other churches and came to be known as the Calgary Prophetic Bible Conference. It quickly outgrew the 250-person capacity at Westbourne Chapel, and eventually settled in the much larger Grand (1,600 seats) and Palace theatres (2,000 seats). It was at the Palace that the radio broadcasts, encouraged by CFCN founder W.W. Grant, began in the fall of 1925. Aberhart's radio preaching grew to an eventual audience of more than 300,000 and provided the original sponsor a brick and rafter campaign to fund the building of the new Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute at 516 8th Ave. W. in 1927.

The first student to sign

up was the Rosetown, Sask., farm-boy, Ernest C. Manning. The Westbourne congregation moved to the Institute



Larry Heather



Bill Aberhart

Auditorium for its services, as well. But in 1929, disagreements over Aberhart's dominant leadership led to a split, with at least half of the people returning to the old church building, the others remaining with

Aberhart at the Independent Bible Institute Baptist Church (later to become Bethel Baptist). Muriel Preston had been drafted at the age of 13 as the Westbourne pianist by Aberhart. She then became music director of the radio ministry.

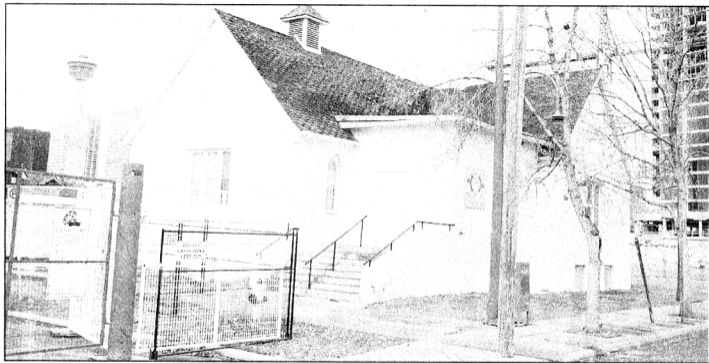
The theories of Social Credit originator Maj. C.H. Douglas, via the writings of Maurice Colbourne, were critical in launching Aberhart's interest in monetary reform in the depths of the Depression. As the Social Credit teaching mixed with Aberhart's radio evangelism, a ready response of hope in the depths of the Depression resonated in the vast radio congregation. The movement first formed as study groups designed to pressure the provincial United Farmers party to monetary reform.

Being rebuffed in their efforts, Aberhart launched from the study groups the Alberta Social Credit party. Their victory in the 1935 election propelled Aberhart into the office of premier, and his movement later under Ernest Manning would complete 37 years of administering the government of Alberta. Muriel Preston made the Edmonton migration to marry Ernest a year later.

The Western Baptist Bible College was started at Westbourne in 1934 to 1939, when it was temporarily closed for the wartime involvement of its would-be students. (It is now the Northwest Baptist College & Seminary in Langley, B.C.) In an interesting twist, this second college formed from the old Westbourne has an Aberhart student bursary program from an endowment fund from the Aberhart Radio Ministry.

These major developments all began with the launch of Aberhart's ministry as a lay preacher, in that Old Westbourne Baptist Church. This historic church should be preserved on the Calgary Stampede grounds. Its transformation into an Aberhart legacy museum is the most logical and lasting use for this vital catalyst in Alberta history. A place which memorializes the profound heritage of William Aberhart for future generations of Albertans.

LARRY HEATHER IS DIRECTOR WITH THE WILLIAM ABERHART HISTORICAL FOUNDATION, FOUNDED IN 2000 BY THE LATE SOCRED MLA AND SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE ART DIXON, C.M.



Colleen De Neve, Calgary Herald

The Westbourne Baptist Church at 13th Avenue and Olympic Way S.E. faces an uncertain future.

Launching pad of a preacher, prophetic dean, and premier

Preserving the historic Westbourne Baptist Church

by Larry Heather

With the on-going expansion of the Stampede Grounds, the future of the historic old Westbourne Baptist Church Building is uncertain. Those passing by the old Church at 436 - 13th Ave SE site in Victoria Park, might not realize the profound history emanating from the old 250 person chapel.

A mission church of First Baptist in 1905, the present structure was built in 1910 from a grant of the Westbourne Church in London, England.

The original Baptist congregation moved out in 1967, eventually to relocate under the same name in Northwest Calgary.

A miniature but distinct example of a Gothic Revival style, the congregation of modest means needed a preacher in the year of 1915. The old building was used as the Victory Outreach Centre for 15 years until May of 2007.

William Aberhart offered his services as a lay pastor for no remuneration. He would continue his day employment as Principal of the new Crescent Height Collegiate Institute. The church grew and prospered under his teaching.

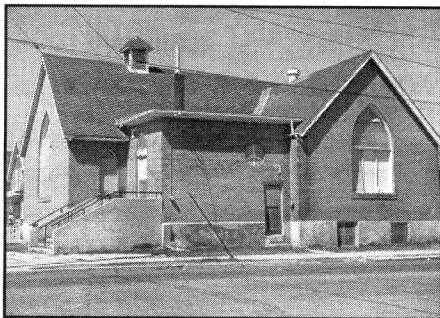
Discipleship by Aberhart at the church developed noted leadership associates such as Mrs. Muriel Preston (Manning) and Cyril Hutchinson (later the Prophetic/Berean Bible Principal). The walls and rooms of the old building echo the past times of bustling services and basement Sunday school lessons.

Thursday evening prophecy classes taught by Aberhart

came to be known as the Calgary Prophetic Bible Conference in 1918.

Growing steadily, the class overflowed to the 2,000 seat Palace Theatre where the CFCN radio broadcasts began in the fall of 1925.

Aberhart's radio preaching grew to an audience of over 300,000, and funded the building of Aberhart's new Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute at 516 - 8th Ave. West in 1927.



The first student to sign up was the Rosetown, Saskatchewan farm-boy, Ernest C. Manning.

In the Depression, Aberhart discovered Social Credit teachings on monetary reform and over the radio shared them in timely Christian compassion. It would lead him to the office of Premier in 1935, the first Social Credit government in the world.

This history all began with the launch of Aberhart's ministry in that old Westbourne Church. Its transformation into an Aberhart legacy museum is the most logical use for this vital catalyst in Alberta History. A place which memorializes the profound heritage of William Aberhart for future generations of Albertans.

A Muriel Manning recording of her time at the Westbourne Church can be heard at www.aberhartfoundation.ca.

Larry Heather is director with the William Aberhart Historical Foundation, founded in 2000 by the late Sacred MLA and Speaker of the House, Art Dixon, C.M.

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