

MEPC acquires bible institute for future downtown project

Calgary - Buildings FEB 5 1974

The Prophetic Bible Institute building, the historic fountainhead of Social Credit, has been acquired as part of a land assembly scheme for the northwest corner of 8th Ave. and 4th St. S.W.

Ted Prete, branch manager for MEPC Canadian Properties Ltd., said Monday the company has acquired 225 feet of frontage on the north side of 8th Avenue for future development. There are no immediate plans for the property.

"We are working many angles but no decisions have been made," Mr. Prete said.

He said MEPC's investment was in a "good corner" property whose value will remain high in the future.

It is the second major

downtown land assembly undertaken by MEPC. Some time ago, it completed acquiring the property on the south side of the 8th Avenue. Mall between the Palace Theatre and 2nd St. S.W.

Mr. Prete and a Toronto spokesman for Eaton's department store scotched speculation involving the store in a full block development.

The MEPC property is directly south of Eaton's parking structure.

Several years ago, Eaton's and another developer examined converting the parking property into an apartment tower, but the project fell through.

"We have seen no grand plan that is of interest to us," the Eaton's spokesman said.

The parking property has been the subject of develop-

ment interest in the past, he said.

Mr. Prete said MEPC interest centred on the corner, not the block.

The Prophetic Bible Institute building, which became the sounding board for the Social Credit doctrine as advanced by William Aberhart, was purchased recently by MEPC from Great West Life Assurance Co.

The Social Credit League disposed of the building in 1966. It served as a dance hall for a time, but has been vacant for the last several years.

Several years ago, it was considered as a possible home for Theatre Calgary. But the large cost of renovating it for theatrical purposes and failure to acquire satisfactory leasing agreement dispelled this notion.

Calgary Herald , Jan. 7th, 1979

Calgary Herald
UPDATE: Fast food and fun mall
replaces the home of the True Word

JAN 7 1978
CALGARY HERALD

By Dave Margoshes

(Herald staff writer)

They chomp hamburgers and pizzas and while away the hours at pinball today at the site where Bible Bill Aberhart used to dish out the True Word.

Two bland plaques, two photographs and a pair of chiselled newel posts — all that remains of the Prophetic Bible Institute — are the only visible reminders of a vibrant, exciting past.

Calgary isn't big on old buildings and the brick structure which nurtured Social Credit gave way three years ago to progress. A fast-

food and pastime outlet stands now on 8th Avenue near 4th Street downtown, on the site of the famous old institute, the place where a radical economic theory was married to a conservative, populist politics and a fundamentalist religious view of the world.

But though the old Prophetic Bible Institute has gone the way of all flesh and most mortar, some of its spirit and original purpose lives on.

There is, of course, the Social Credit party, still hanging on as the official opposition in Alberta, still alive though at a low ebb nationally, back in power in British Colum-

ON THIS SITE

WILLIAM ABERHART

PREMIER OF ALBERTA

1935 - 1943

DESIGNED AND ERECTED IN 1927

BY THE PROPHETIC BIBLE INSTITUTE

THIS SITE ORIGINATED
THE FIRST BROADCASTS ON
SOCRED CREDIT THEORY

Herald photo by John Colville

Site of first broadcasts on Socred theory

The old building is gone but some of its spirit and original purpose still live on

bia. There is, however, little but the name and some of the conservatism to link it to the political movement Bill Aberhart and Ernest Manning forged in the early 1930s.

Closer to the source are Canada's national Back to the Bible Hour and the Berean Bible College, both still going strong after half a century. The Bible broadcast, in fact, reaches more people today than it ever did during the institute's heyday, when Aberhart used the airwaves to create a potent province-wide following for his beliefs.

One of the photos in the display case outside the midway food-and-fun mall where the institute once stood shows Aberhart, then at the peak of his powers as premier of Alberta, broadcasting behind a microphone of CFCN, once the flagship of his airwaves crusade. The local station still carries the Back to the Bible Hour — only half an hour since 1970 — along with 45 other stations across Canada and the northeastern United States. The broadcasts by Aberhart himself went out over only three stations.

Listeners who tune in tomorrow (7:30 a.m. on CFCN; 8:30 on CHRB out of High River) will hear a show that has changed little over the years. The gospel music is kept up-to-date, according to Orvis Kennedy of Edmonton, chairman of the board of the corporation that produces the

broadcasts, and the text of the sermon is keyed to current events.

"But the message is basically the same."

Manning, the Aberhart disciple who succeeded him as premier and now sits in the Senate, still does the reading — exactly 18 minutes long — and his wife plays the piano. Manning has been conducting the broadcasts since 1943, when Aberhart died.

"He leans toward current events today in terms of Biblical prophecy," Kennedy said in a telephone interview this week.

Kennedy attributes this "up-to-date" quality to the broadcast's continued success, especially with a growing younger audience, although the show's strength continues to lie with middle-aged and older listeners.

"It's rather unique having a man of his qualifications do a show like this."

Preston Manning, the senator's son, has been making appearances on the show in recent years, in an attempt to prepare the audience for a continuity should the elder Manning, who is 69, retire or die.

Although Manning has been the mainspring of the broadcasts for 35 years, "we will likely continue" after he's gone, Kennedy said.

On equally solid footing is the Berean Bible College, heir to the institute's teaching program.

The Rev. Cyril Hutchinson, president of the college at 31st Ave. and 4th St. on the North Hill, was an associate of Aberhart as far back as 1920, when both were involved in Bible classes in the years before the institute was built. "That makes me pretty ancient," he laughed during a telephone interview.

But Hutchinson, who'll be 72 this month, is still going strong, and so is the college. The minister took



Herald photo by John Colville

Plaque and posts mark site of Prophetic Bible Institute

over the Bible school part of the institute in 1935, when Aberhart and his Socreds were swept into political power, and has headed the Berean College since its creation in 1948, the product of a split over policy with the Manning wing of the movement.

He doesn't like to dwell on the rift, other than to describe it as centring on policy, not theology. "The whole thing has been put right and healed over," Hutchinson said.

The college, which has 80 day students and another 65 to 70 attending in the evening, offers a three-year program leading to a

bachelor of religious education degree. Almost half of its graduates "go into full-time Christian work for at least a year," Hutchinson reported, while many others maintain some church connection, as youth leaders or Sunday school teachers, for example. Pastors and missionaries who were trained at the college can be found around the world, he said with pride.

The college is self-sufficient, with student fees covering about 40 per cent of costs, the rest coming through contributions. "It's a faith work," Hutchinson said with a laugh.

LIVING

CALGARY HERALD

Sunday, November 29, 1998

E7

CORNERSTONES

Downtown building was home to Bible belt



Alison Jackson photo collection, W.R. Castell Library

The Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute was built in 1927 and demolished in 1974.

Aberhart's school was also used to broadcast radio show

JENNIFER BOBROVITZ
FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

■ Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute, 516 8th Ave. S.W.

■ Built: 1927

■ Demolished: 1974

■ Contractor: Bennett and White Construction Company Limited.

■ Original cost: \$65,000

■ Original owner: Calgary Prophetic Conference. William Aberhart, President and Dean.

■ Construction materials: "The front of the building, which faces on 8th Avenue, is completed in art buff brick with a projected entrance hall and massive oak doors. The main stairway leads into a large vestibule from which entrance is given to the executive offices and library and also into the main auditorium and galleries."

■ Original interior details: The Calgary Herald of September, 1927, reported, "the main auditorium will accommodate 1,200 people and has a very pleasing appearance. One is at once struck with the beamed ceiling and decorative panel effect of the walls and with the rich grain of the woodwork, which was especially selected for the building. The platform is arranged to accommodate a choir of 50 people, with speaker's platform and pulpit in the front. . . . Immediately above the platform is the Baptistry, with dressing rooms at each side. For the Bible Institute students, a very ingenious arrangement has been designed, whereby four separate classrooms accommodating 300 students can be made in few minutes by pulling down roller partitions. The pews also have writing desks attached to them. In the basement are the assembly halls for the Sunday school departments with accommodation for 500 pupils."

HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS:

■ William Aberhart, high school principal and later Social Credit Premier of Alberta (1935-43) founded the Calgary Bible Institute in 1918.

■ Throughout 1918 Aberhart led evening meetings of the Bible Institute at the Central Library.

The following year the group met at Westbourne Baptist Church and from there moved to Paget Parish Hall (Anglican Cathedral Church of the Redeemer). In 1920 Aberhart moved Sunday afternoon services to the Lougheed Grand Theatre and finally in 1923 to the Palace Theatre on 8th Avenue where two years later he began a live Sunday afternoon broadcast on CFCN radio called Back to the Bible Hour. During the same period Aberhart was the acting pastor at Victoria Park's Westbourne Baptist Church where he also taught evening bible study classes in the church basement.

■ According to Aberhart biographer David R. Elliot, Aberhart built the Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute in 1927 because he needed a larger facility to house the Bible school and the crowds, which were attracted to his meetings. At the new facility on 8th Avenue Aberhart administered the church and conducted the radio broadcasts

while being employed as the principal of Crescent Heights High School. "In 1929 he founded his own sect, the Bible Institute Baptist Church after most of the Westbourne congregation had split from him."

■ Contributions for the facility that was a combined temple and "fundamental" Bible School, were sent from all parts of Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia and Montana. In May, 1927, the local newspaper reported that three subscriptions had even been sent from Great Britain.

■ The Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute, The Prairie Monument to the Faith, opened on Sunday Oct. 2, 1927, with Three Big Meetings. The topic for the Inaugural services at 11 a.m. was The Hobabs Among God's People or Hitting the Trail to Glory. The afternoon meeting For Heretics and Skeptics spoke to Scholarship and the Scriptures or Is it Easy to Find Mistakes in the Bible?

The topic of the 7:30 p.m. service, a Gathering of the Sincere and Honest Investigators was *The Man Who Shook in His Shoes or Why Do the Devils Tremble?*

■ In fall, 1927, a 19-year-old Saskatchewan farm boy named Ernest Manning enrolled along with 35 other students at the Institute's bible college. For a brief time Manning (who later succeeded Aberhart as Premier) lived in the basement suite of Aberhart's 5th Street S.W. bungalow located on the lower cusp of Calgary's prestigious Mount Royal District.

■ The school syllabus stated that the Institute would "use every legitimate Christian means to combat and resist Modernism, Higher Criticism, Skepticism and Sectarianism in all its forms." Aberhart wrote the texts for the classes, promoting his own personal brand of "evangelical fundamentalism."


■ When Aberhart's Social Credit party won the provincial election in 1935, Cyril Hutchinson became the school's principal. Following Aberhart's death in 1943, Manning became president of the Institute. A falling-out between Manning and Hutchinson resulted in Hutchinson's departure from the Institute in 1948 to found the Berean Bible Institute (later Foothills Christian College). By 1951 the Institute building on 8th Avenue was closed.

■ In 1974, the building which had been home to the Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute was demolished to make way for commercial development. Two years later the Historical Society unveiled a plaque at the Institute's former site.

■ The former site of the Institute is currently occupied by the T. Eaton Company store. Eaton's commemorative window display recognizes the historical significance of the former location of William Aberhart's beloved Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute.

Jennifer Bobrovitz is the local history librarian at Calgary Public Library. Whether you need current consumer real estate information, are investigating the history of your home, or are interested in Calgary's heritage, make Calgary Public Library your first stop, For local history information, call 260-2785.

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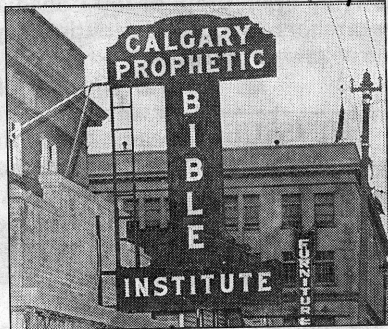
From the Herald archives back to 1883

Sept 29/98

Sept. 29, 1927

THE FILES

Herald file
photo



Bible institute to open doors in fine new home: The new Prophetic Bible Institute on 8th Avenue, west of 4th Street west, which has just been completed by the Bennett and White Construction Company Limited, is a fitting addition to Calgary's fine public buildings and is built to house under one roof the many activities of the Prophetic Bible Conference and the Westbourne Baptist church.

The building was commenced last May on a site secured by the committee. The front of the building, which faces on 8th Avenue, is completed in art buff brick with a projected entrance hall and massive oak doors.

The main stairway leads into a large vestibule from which entrance is given to the executive offices and library and also into the main auditorium and galleries.

COMPILED BY NORMA MARR