

**'Back To The Bible' home demolished**

# The cradle

**By Carol Conway***(Herald Staff Writer)*

Where William Aberhart's voice once boomed out against moral and spiritual decay, there's little now but the shouts of demolition workers.

The walls, within which Ernest Manning met and fell in love with Muriel Preston, his future wife, have been sent tumbling down.

The Prophetic Bible Institute, the fountainhead of Social Credit in Alberta, is being demolished.

In fact there is little left to mark the historic spot. Workers have almost completed the annihilation of the brick building which first opened its doors in 1926.

The 75-foot site at 8th Ave. S.W., opposite Penny Lane Mall, with adjoining properties for a total 225 feet is being cleared for development by MEPC Canadian Properties Ltd.

But according to Ted Prete, the company's branch manager in Calgary, the spirit of the Prophetic Bible Institute will live on in the new, as yet undisclosed, development.

"Our architects are working with the department of culture, youth and recreation to come up an appropriate

monument to the site, something that could be incorporated into the over-all development scheme," said Mr. Prete.

**CAIRN CONSIDERED**

Culture Minister Horst Schmid said a cairn or other appropriate marker will be placed in the vicinity to commemorate the historic significance of the institute.

No design has yet been decided upon but this will be achieved by the time work starts on the commercial development next spring.

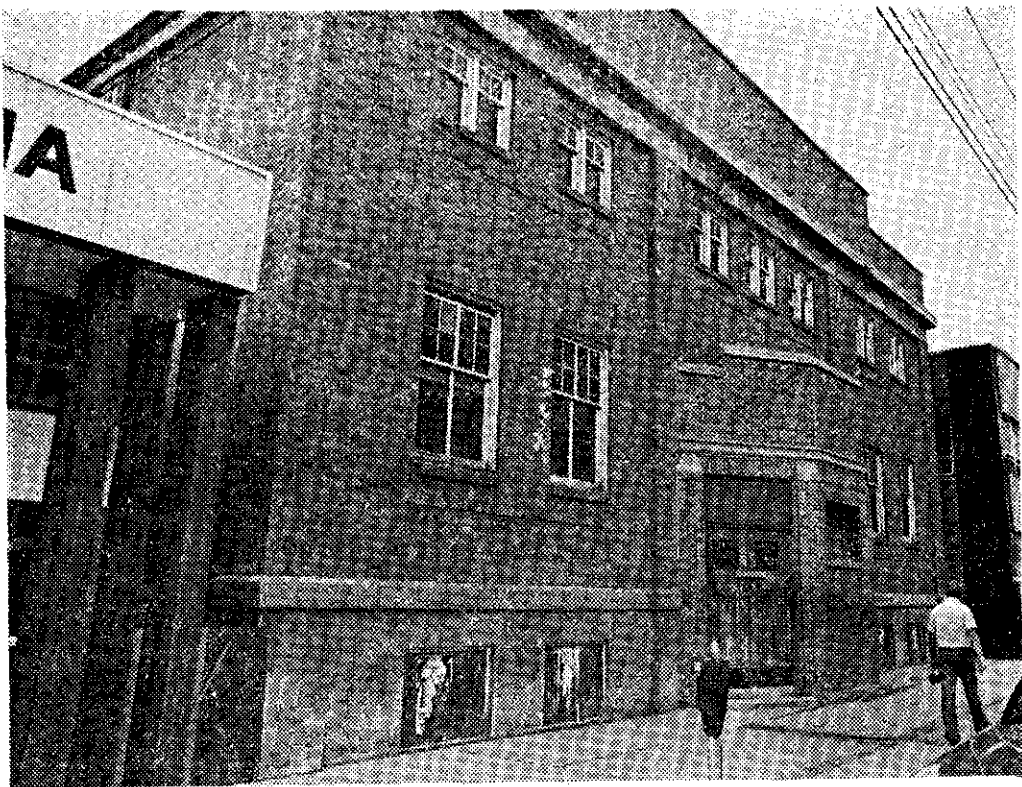
According to a news story of April 25, 1935: "The Bible Institute is an incorporated company and it owns and controls a \$65,000 brick building on Calgary's main street."

Mr. Prete said his company paid "substantially more" than that for the building, although he acknowledges it was the land that the firm wanted.

"We did buy it as a land site, but then we looked at the possibility of restoring the building," he said.

"It was half dilapidated, had been stripped over the years, and we decided it was not a restorable or usable facility."

# of Social Credit is



**THE FORMER PROPHETIC BIBLE INSTITUTE, 8th AVE. S.W.**  
... historic Aberhart radio broadcasts were made from this building

MEPC bought the building from the Great West Life Assurance Co. In 1966 it had been sold by the Social Credit

League, and served as a dance hall for a time. It had been vacant for the past few years.

The Prophetic Bible Institute became famous in the 1920s and 30s as the home of the Back To The Bible Hour,

# in its final hours

which Mr. Aberhart broadcast until his death in 1943.

At that time, Ernest Manning, Alberta's second Social Credit premier, took over as director of the broadcast, eventually moving it from its Calgary location to Edmonton.

The program, which still goes out to 36 stations across Canada was reduced to half an hour in 1970, although Mr. Manning still does the readings, and his wife, the former organist and pianist at the institute, arranges and directs the musical part of the program.

The institute had its origins way back in 1913 before Mr. Aberhart ever heard of the doctrines of Social Credit. Then a teacher in the Calgary public school system, he organized a Bible class at Westbourne Baptist church.

He began broadcasting from the institute in 1925, and that fall a young man in Saskatchewan was tinkering with the new three-tube radio he had bought from a Chicago mail-order house. He tuned in on one of Aberhart's evangelical Sunday radio broadcasts from Calgary.

That man was Ernest Manning, who in later years was quoted as saying; "the broadcast changed my whole outlook."

Mr. Manning came to Calgary and when the institute invited students to enrol, he was the first on the list. The young Manning became Mr. Aberhart's right-hand man. He lived with the Aberhart family and began looking after radio correspondence, adult courses and office routine, and when Mr. Aberhart went on holidays, took over the full schedule of Sunday broadcasts.

## MONTHLY DIVIDENDS

In 1932, when principal of Crescent Heights High School, Mr. Aberhart was introduced to some radical monetary doctrines and the Social Credit movement was born.

From then, the pulpit of the Prophectic Bible Institute was used to extol the virtues of a new way of life, an economic change with the promise of abundance and freedom from the Depression.

In those dark days of unemployment and bad harvests, Mr. Aberhart electrified voters with his promise of monthly dividends of \$25 for

every man, woman and child in the province.

The Baptist-turned-evangelist and his fiery Sunday sermons of hellfire and brimstone drove more and more people to the institute's meetings.

A favorite hymn of the institute's members — O God Our Help in Ages Past — became the battle cry of the Social Credit League.

In 1935 a Social Credit government swept into power in the province, and under premiers Aberhart, Manning and Harry Strom stayed there until the 1971 elections.

With the transfer of the Back To The Bible hour to Edmonton, the institute was used for occasional meetings and Bible classes.

When it was put up for sale in 1965, C.R. Pearce, secretary-treasurer of the institute board, said the building had not been in full use for a number of years.

The Bible classes taught there were relocated at the Berean Bible College, Calgary. An old-fashioned pipe organ, went to a Saskatchewan college, while a painting of Mr. Aberhart was taken down and given to his family.

*Albertan*

*AUG 1 1974*

*Calgary Buildings*



**THIS IS THE SHELL** of the building which housed the Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute and the Institute Baptist Church under one roof from 1927 until the mid-50s. Several years ago it was purchased by The Great-West Life

Assurance Company for \$225,000 but the work of the founder, the late Premier William Aberhart, goes marching on through other channels. The x signifies his office.

**Albertan, August 1st, 1974** □

**Note X above the former office of Prophetic Dean** □  
**William Aberhart on lower left window. The Bank Of Nova** □  
**Scotia is located to the left where a car lot once stood.**



William Aberhart founded the Calgary Bible Institute in 1918. Its 8th Avenue home was built in 1927.

Courtesy, Calgary Public Library

**T**hen: Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute, 516 8th Ave. S.W.  
William Aberhart, high school principal and later Social Credit premier of Alberta (1935-43), founded the Calgary Bible Institute in 1918. Meetings and Bible classes were held at locations throughout the city until the construction of the Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute in 1927 provided a permanent home. Aberhart administered the church and conducted the weekly CFCN radio broadcasts, Back to the Bible Hour, from the new 8th Avenue S.W. location. Following Aberhart's death in 1943, Ernest Manning became president of the institute but internal politics led to its demise and, by 1951, the closure of the 8th Avenue building.

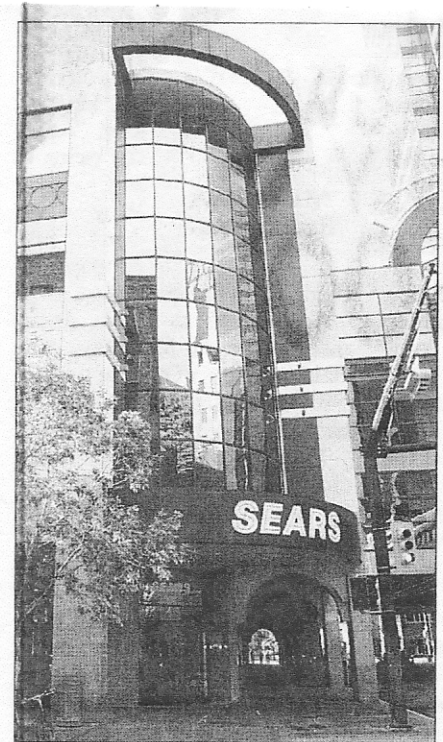
#### Now: Sears

In 1974, the former Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute was demolished to make way for commercial development. Fourteen years later, a new Eaton's store was erected on the site as part of the \$110-million Calgary Eaton Centre. In 1999, Sears Canada Inc. bought the downtown store as part of a \$30-million acquisition of the bankrupt Eaton's company.

## Then & Now

### Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute

516 8th Ave. S.W.



Gillian Waechter, Calgary Herald  
The Sears building is on the former site of the Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute at 8th Avenue S.W.

Calgary Herald, July 30th, 2003

Correction: The 1918 started as the Caglary Prophetic Bible Conference.