

Court Houses

Court has been hosted in a variety of locations in Red Deer over the past 130 years, with three purpose-built facilities: 4836 50 Street, 4909 48 Avenue, and 4810 48 Avenue.



Red Deer Archives, N396

Search terms/key words/parallel names:

- Court House
 - o Courthouse (in captions and minutes)
 - o Justice Centre

History:

The early courts in Red Deer used leased and borrowed buildings. For example, the Red Deer Public School was used to host court when it was built in 1894. With the founding of the province in 1905, a Red Deer court was established in the Wetaskiwin judicial district of Alberta. In 1907, the formation of the Red Deer sub-judicial district court was set up more permanently, with offices in the Johns block on Gaetz Avenue north and court sittings held in the Customs offices over the post office at 4909 Ross Street.

In 1915 Red Deer was made a full judicial district of its own and in 1921 the province signed a 10 year lease for the Gaetz Company Limited building (Gaetz Manufacturing Ltd.) at 4840 51 Street, converting it from a coverall factory to a court house. At the end of the lease, this building was purchased by the Provincial Government for Alberta Provincial Police offices.

In 1931, Red Deer opened its first purpose-built court house at 4836 Ross Street. This was the final court house built in Alberta with classical design features. It was expanded in the 1950s but was still considered too small to manage Red Deer's growth, and some court cases were handled in the old Parson's Clinic and other locations.

By the early 1960s, discussion had started about a new court house for Red Deer. The previous building was dated, dingy, and small. There were many talks about potential locations and types of court houses and in December 1966, the Minister of Public Works Fred C. Colborne finally announced construction of a new court house to be built at the southeast corner of 49 Avenue and 49 Street. This location proved to be very unpopular with the lawyers, who proposed a quieter site on the banks of the Waskasoo Creek instead, and downtown developers who wanted a commercial skyscraper on that site.

In 1978, Red Deer MLA and Attorney-General Jim Foster created the Court of Queen's Bench by merging the District Court and trial division of the Alberta Supreme Court. This expanded the potential locations for Queen's Bench judges beyond Calgary and Edmonton to include Red Deer, Lethbridge, Grande Prairie, and others.

Following this change, and a land swap between The City and The Province, a new provincial court house was built at 4909 48 Avenue and officially opened October 1984. The 1931 Court House became a mixed-use building, housing the Allied Arts Council and various businesses over the years, and the former site at 49 Avenue and 49 Street eventually became Sorensen Station.

With significant population growth in Red Deer and central Alberta, by the mid-1990s there were already widespread complaints that the new courthouse was too small for the community. In April 2014, non-criminal court cases were often moved to a meeting room in the Red Deer Lodge Hotel, to mixed reviews. The former downtown police building and adjacent land was purchased by the province in early 2018 for a new justice centre, and the groundbreaking took place September 2020.

The new Court of King's Bench of Alberta Justice Centre at 4801 49 Street, has 12 courtrooms and the potential to include four more in the future.

Related Buildings

Two historic houses have been located on court house sites. The Charles Snell House was located on the northwest corner of the lot used for the 1984 court house and was demolished in 1985. The Parsons House is located on the northeast corner of the lot used in the Justice Centre. More information about the Parsons family can be found in their fonds, MG 183 Parsons family fonds.

Notable Cases

There were several prominent cases tried in Red Deer over the years.

In November 1922, women served on a jury in Canada for the first time at the court held in the former Gaetz Manufacturing building. Zelma Smith, Jessie Huestis, and Maude Horn joined three men to serve as jurors in a breach of promise and seduction case involving a woman.

In 1959, Robert Raymond Cook was convicted in a Red Deer court room for the murder of his father in Stettler. After several failed appeals and a new trial in Edmonton, Cook was the final person hanged in Alberta in November 1960.

Canada's attention returned to Red Deer after charges were laid against former Eckville teacher Jim Keegstra in January 1984 for "wilfully promoting hatred against an identifiable group." Keegstra was convicted of a hate crime in July 1985 for teaching anti-Semitic propaganda, the first successful conviction under the hate speech provisions of the Criminal Code of Canada. This conviction was appealed, retried, appealed, and then finally upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada in March 1996. Keegstra inspired several documentaries and movies, including a CBC documentary, *Lessons in Hate*, in May 1983 and a movie, *Oakmount High*, in 1986.

History Citations:

- Canadian Press staff. "Foster Introduces bill to merge top courts" *Red Deer Advocate* April 18, 1978, p. 2
- Kossowan, Brenda. "Traffic court move hits bumps" *Red Deer Advocate*, July 23, 2014, p. 1
- Weber, Mark. "Red Deer's Old Court House marks 85 years" *Red Deer Express*, January 6, 2016, p. A3
- Yackulic, George. "Court house brings millions to area" *Red Deer Advocate* June 1, 1983, p. 32

Key dates:

- 1905 Red Deer located in the Wetaskiwin judicial district
 - o Leased buildings
- 1907 formation of the Red Deer sub-judicial district, office in the Johns' block on Gaetz Avenue north and court sittings held in the "present" Customs offices over the post office.
 - o Mr. J.J. Gaetz was the first deputy sheriff
 - o Mr. F.S. Simpson was first deputy clerk
- 1915 Red Deer is made a full judicial district
- 1921 Gaetz Company Limited building (Gaetz Manufacturing Ltd.) 4840 51 Street converted from a coverall factory to a court house under a 10 year lease

- This building was the purchased by the Provincial Government for Alberta Provincial Police offices
- 1931 purpose built provincial court house opened at 4836 Ross Street / 4836 50 Street on March 6, 1931
- 1966 Minister of Public Works Fred C. Colborne (Social Credit) announced construction of a new court house built at 49 Avenue and 49 Street
- 1984 new provincial court house opened at 4909 48 Avenue
 - Different location and design than original proposal in 1966
- 2024 new Court of Kings Bench provincial court house opened at 4810 48 Avenue

Primary Records in Red Deer Archives:

Restrictions: Some records may be restricted due to security concerns.

- Photograph databases
 - Images of past court houses can be found in Preservica, onsite in Inmagic, and in the accession databases (not already digitized)
- Video database
 - Video coverage of topics related to court houses including transformations of the Old Court House, the Snell House, the Keegstra trials, and other trials
- RG 24 Cultural Services section
 - 2009-028: programming at the Old Court House
 - There are other accessions and donors with art openings and programming brochures and advertisements for programming in the Old Court House
- RG 19 Community Services division fonds
 - 2000-167: blueprints for 1930 court house (reproduction)
- Accession 2015-014
 - Agenda and minutes for Red Deer Court House Committee (Dec. 9, 1980)
- Alberta Historic Site Inventory
 - Heritage Site surveys contain information about some sites relating to courts
- Thematic Files:
 - Research paper on Red Deer Court Houses (1907-1931) by John Gilpin

External sources:

- Provincial Archives of Alberta
 - Court records are generally kept at the provincial level. For more information, visit Law & Original Order: <https://provincialarchives.alberta.ca/static/index.html>
 - Records about the court houses may also be kept at the provincial level, either at the Provincial Archives of Alberta or at the Ministry of Infrastructure.
- Legal Archives Society of Alberta
 - To learn more about the study of law and society in Alberta, consult with LASA: <https://legalarchives.ca/services/>