

Michener Centre

At its peak, Michener Centre covered 360 acres of land in central Red Deer and operated as both a nurses' training school and a care facility. Michener Centre was a notable employer and its existence in Red Deer has deeply shaped the community and the lives of those who lived there.



Senior boys Sunday School, Provincial Training School, 1935. Red Deer Archives, P12058.

Search terms/key words/parallel names:

- Michener Centre
- Person with disability
- Alberta Ladies College
- Soldiers Sanitarium: Also known as: Soldiers' Mental Hospital; Hospital for Returned Soldiers; Soldiers' Convalescence Home; Soldiers' Mental Hospital; Mental Hospital for Returned Soldiers; Soldiers' Sanatorium
- Alberta School Hospital
- Deerhome

History:

Originally constructed in 1913 to accommodate the Alberta Ladies College, a residential school for the education of young women in central Alberta, the Administration Building (43 Michener Bend) underwent various transformations over the years. During and after the First World War, it functioned as a psychiatric hospital for soldiers with mental health issues. In 1923 the province decided to relocate the soldiers and turn the Red Deer institute into a home for “mentally defective children” subsequently named the Provincial Training School.

Provincial Training School and Michener Centre

Initially the institute’s resident population was made up of children with varying levels of physical and mental disabilities, some incredibly severe and others that today would be considered learning or behavioural disorders. Initially the only facility of its kind offering residence and training for the disabled the institute dealt with long wait lists for admission and overcrowding. With the purchase of the 420 acre Gaetz farm in 1939, many of the male residents provided unpaid labour farming the land and providing abundant produce for the facility and community. Demand resulted in expansion and the resident population increased and evolved over time to include disabled adults, and in 1957 Deerhome Institute opened a half a mile northeast of the original site to house the growing populace.

The Provincial Training School of Nursing developed a three-year program to train nurses providing hands on experience with the residents of the institute. The program granted 453 graduates Mental Deficiency Nurse status from 1935 to 1973.

Along with providing housing and care for the residents, the Institute also focused on academics, farming, vocational training, occupational therapy, and recreational activities. To match growing needs, the two institutes physically expanded over the years to include staff accommodations, dormitories, a schoolhouse, a powerhouse, a fire hall, expansive root cellars, a greenhouse, a laundry, an infirmary, a clinical building, and a Superintendent’s home. The Michener Hill curling rink was built in 1964 by the vocational staff and students. In 1985 the Michener Hill Curling Club began leasing it from the provincial government and it continues to be used by the Club today.

The institute retitled from the Provincial Training School to the Alberta School Hospital (1965). In 1977, the site became known as Michener Centre, so named for prominent central Albertan and then current Governor General of Canada, The Right Honorable Roland Michener. Along with the name change came the new public Roland Michener Recreation Centre which included a swimming pool, diving pool, therapeutic pool, gymnasium, theatre, racquetball court, sauna, and weight room. By 1983 Michener Centre had expanded to become a 66-building complex covering 360 acres.

Changes to the buildings and programs throughout the years reflected changing ideas on segregation versus integration for mentally and physically disabled people. Practices shifted from eugenics and segregation to multi-disciplinary staffing teams, individual program planning, and community integration. This led to a steep decline in the resident population. When the provincial government announced the planned closure of the institute in March of 2013, the decision was met with praise and support from the disability advocacy community but strong public and political

opposition, including family members of current residents. By September 2014 it was resolved by the Provincial government that the current residents would be allowed to remain at Michener Centre for the remainder of their life.

Eugenics

The Sexual Sterilization Act was enacted in Alberta on March 21, 1928. It was the first eugenics sterilization law in Canada. Between 1928 and 1972 the Alberta government sterilized 2844 people. Although the surgeries took place in various locations in Alberta, many of the victims were Michener Centre residents such as Leilani Muir who later won litigation against the Province of Alberta for her forced sterilization at the age of fifteen.

History Citations:

- Alberta Social Services and Community Health. *Michener Centre: A History 1923-1983*. Government of Alberta, 1983.
- Ha, Tu Thank. "Leilani Muir made history suing Alberta over forced sterilization." *Globe and Mail*. March 16, 2016, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/alberta/woman-who-made-history-suing-alberta-over-forced-sterilization-dies/article29256421/>.
- Michener Hill Curling Club. <https://michenerhillcurlingclub.ca/about-us-2/> (accessed July 2024)

Key Dates:

- **1913-1916** Alberta Ladies College opens and operates
- **1918-1923** Soldiers' Sanitorium / Hospital for Returned Soldiers treats soldiers returned from World War I
- **1923-1964** Provincial Training School (PTS) opens
- **March 21, 1928** Sexual Sterilization Act passed
- **1957** Deerhome opens half mile northeast of the original complex to house the mentally disabled adult population
- **1965** PTS renamed Alberta School Hospital (ASH)
- **1973** Deerhome and ASH administration amalgamated
- **1977** both sites renamed as Michener Centre, often referred to as Michener north and Michener south
- **1977** Opening of the Roland Michener Recreation Centre
- **Ca. 2000** Michener Services change over
- **June 18, 2003** lightning strike causes fire at South Administration building of Michener Centre causing significant damage to the historical building
- **March 11, 2013** Alberta government announces closure of Michener Centre. **September 2014** decision is reversed.

Primary Records in Red Deer Archives:

Restrictions:

Due to the nature of these records, many are subject to restrictions under FOIP legislation and copyright and therefore have access restrictions. This often includes the names of the residents. Full file lists with resident names are only available for in person research. Some records will only

be available for in person research, some records may not be able to be reproduced, and some records cannot be viewed at all. **Please contact the Archives to learn more about the records you are seeking to access.**

- *Michener Centre collection on Preservica* -
https://reddeer.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/SO_1051c223-f499-4670-bbaf-6390995a591a/
 - o Contains digitized photographs and records relating to the Michener Centre under all its names and uses
 - Note on Preservica home page key word search “Michener Centre” for all related records <https://reddeer.access.preservica.com/>.
- *MG 368 Doreen Befus fonds*
 - o Resident of Michener Centre from 1933 to 1976. Recorded her experience / fight for freedom in documentary “If I Can Do It”. Records include personal correspondence and clippings, photographs, family history, film, advocacy, travel diaries, personal photographs and scrapbooks.
- *MG 502 Dr. Robert Lampard fonds*
 - o Medical Director of Michener Centre from 1983 to 2010. Records include medical research, articles, photographs, eugenics research, annual reports, publications
- *MG 539 Michener Services Pastoral Care Committee fonds*
 - o Religious leadership provided by Pastoral Care Committee at Michener Centre. Records include photographs, calendars, posters created by Michener Centre residents, committee minutes and materials.
- *MG 610 Alban Elfred James fonds*
 - o Employee of Michener Centre from Michener Centre from 1947 to 1987. Graduate of the Mental Deficiency Nursing program. Records include photographs of Michener Centre grounds, nursing students, staff, and residents, publications and training records relating to nursing program.
- *MG 604 Violet Falk fonds*
 - o Employee of Michener Centre from 1942 to 1943. Records include photographs of Michener Centre grounds, students, staff and residents.
- *MG 384 Alberta Mental Health Deficiency Nurses’ Association fonds*
 - o Alberta Mental Deficiency Nurses Association (AMDNA), 1932-1993; Alberta Association of Habilitative Practitioners (AAHP), 1979-1986; Alberta Association of Rehabilitation Practitioners (AARP), 1986-1993; Rehabilitation Practitioner Committee, 1985. – 1987.
 - o Records include minutes, correspondence, curricula, surveys, publications, and photographs of graduates of the MDN program. The fifth series constitutes a presentation album
- *City of Red Deer records*
 - o *RG 6 Legislative Services fonds*
 - Related records include photographs created by the City of Red Deer relating to Michener Centre; City Council agendas and minutes (accessed via Leg.); ecological report
 - o *RG 7 Assessment and Tax Department fonds*

- Assessment reports, site plans, photographs of Michener group homes, Alberta School Hospital and Deerhome
- *RG 3 Office of the Mayor and City Manager fonds*
 - Plans: technical and architectural
 - Ministers advocacy records
- *RG 22 Parks sections fonds*
 - Lease agreement

Related Books in Reference Library:

- Alberta Social Services and Community Health. *Michener Centre: A History 1923-1983*
- Claudia Malacrida. *A Special Hell: institutional life in Alberta's eugenic years*
- History Book Committee. *History of Alberta Mental Deficiency Nurses*
- Muir, Leilani. *A Whisper Past: Childless after Eugenic Sterilization in Alberta*. 2014

External sources:

- Provincial Archives of Alberta
 - <https://searchprovincialarchives.alberta.ca/>
 - GR1988.0038, GR1990.0163, GR1990.0169, GR1990.0212, GR1990.0214, GR1992.0147, GR1992.0361, GR1993.0174, GR1996.0204, GR1996.0337, GR1996.0517, PR2003.403/5, GR1970.414, GR1972.456, GR1973.042, GR1983.391

Online sources:

- Eugenics Archives: <https://www.eugenicsarchive.ca/>
- Remember Every Name Project: <https://www.remembereveryname.ca/albertas-michener-centre-cant-shake-sordid-history>
- University of Lethbridge: <https://www.ulethbridge.ca/unews/article/story-had-be-told>
- Government of Alberta Michener Centre map : <https://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/PDD/michener-site-map.pdf>
- HeRMIS – Heritage Resources Management Information System
 - <https://hermis.alberta.ca/ARHP/Details.aspx?DeptID=1&ObjectID=4664-0040>
 - <https://hermis.alberta.ca/ARHP/Details.aspx?DeptID=1&ObjectID=4664-0035>
- <https://reddeer.access.preservica.com/michener-centre/>