

Historical Tidbits - Fort Edmonton

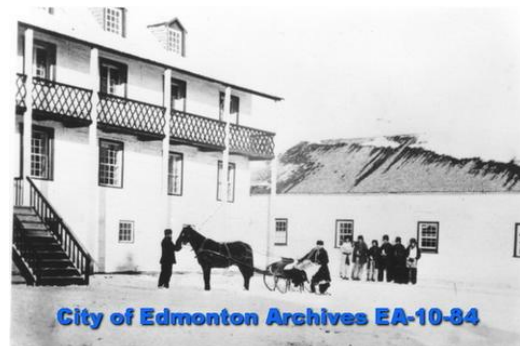
Fort Edmonton

Fort Edmonton itself was not only an important Hudson Bay Post, but it was an administrative centre, warehouse, and storage facility. In addition, it was also a place where goods were manufactured by tradesmen as well as a source of provisions for other posts. Fort Edmonton was a “meat” post: much of the pemmican and dried and fresh buffalo meat consumed by fur traders came from there. Who knew Edmonton had a meat packing facility before Swift, Burns, Canada Packers and Gainers were established there. The Fort also produced the York boats used to transport fur and trade goods to and from Hudson Bay. However, floods in 1825 and 1830 caused damage to the fort so in 1830, the post was relocated a few hundred feet upstream and halfway up the bank. Due to a decline of the fur trade in the 1860s, its use as a fur trading post was phased out, resulting in the abandonment of several buildings in the following decades. Fort Edmonton was eventually dismantled in 1915, after the Legislative building was finished

The Big House - Fort Edmonton repurposed for Golf

Although there are no official records, the original Big House at Fort Edmonton was likely constructed about 1843. Built for the chief factor of the Hudson’s Bay Company, John Rowand, it was a three-storey house in the heart of the fort for the exclusive use of him and his family, both for his comfort and to impress visitors. A replica has been reconstructed on the current Fort Edmonton Park site on the south side of the river. As the largest and most luxurious house in the area, it apparently contained the first glass windows west of Fort Garry in Winnipeg.

His Big House was replaced with a new “Big House”, but located outside the fort’s stockaded walls, in 1873. This one, also known as Hardisty House, after another chief factor, served as the Edmonton Golf clubhouse for several years until it was destroyed by fire in 1906 – deliberately! A smallpox epidemic occurred in Edmonton, causing the Local Health Authority of the day to take over the Big House as an isolation hospital. Although the epidemic was short lived, the golfers refused to return to the premises. In deference to the prevalent health fears, the Big House, after several decades of grandeur, was then torched.



Big house at Fort Edmonton
- about 1880 -1890