

January 6, 2020

Secretary, SPC on Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development & Community Services

Dear Secretary:

Re: Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee – Frances Morrison Central Library Building Heritage Status

The Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee, at its meeting held on November 6, 2019, identified the Frances Morrison Central Library building as an important heritage asset in Saskatoon. This building is not currently listed as a Municipal Heritage Property, or identified in the Saskatoon Register of Historic Places, therefore, the Committee requests for the addition to the register.

1. Description of the Historic Place

The Frances Morrison Central Library is an understated but inviting two-storey building in the late modernist style, constructed in 1966. It was designed by George Forrester of Webster, Forrester, Scott & Associates Architects, one of Saskatchewan's most prolific and successful architectural firms of the mid-twentieth century. The library building features exterior precast concrete wall panels, with an exposed–aggregate finish in warm buff and pink colours. Its principal elevation is extensively glazed, and faces north, towards 23rd Street and Civic Square Park. The interiors are historically intact, and feature teak wall panelling, teak handrails & door pulls, and waffle slab ceilings. The main stair features mural paintings by noted abstract artist William Perehudoff, commissioned specially for the building.

2. Heritage Value

In the early 1960's, Saskatoon's population was booming, and the small, cramped central library building on 23rd Street, constructed in 1928, was no longer adequate. Social changes were also in play, and the potential existed for the mandate and function of a civic library to evolve in response to these changes. Both the vision to see this potential and the determination to realise it came from Frances Morrison, who was named chief librarian in 1961. Morrison was a single mother, forced into the workforce by the unexpected death of her husband. Working as an assistant to the chief librarian, she had become a skilled administrator. Under her new leadership, the library expanded, both in size and mandate. She led the project to design and build a new library building, engaging the architectural firm of Webster, Forrester, Scott & Associates, who completed designs for a modern building three times the size of the existing one (fig. 9). However, central to the conception of the new building design was Morrison's vision for an expanded role for the library as the social and cultural heart of the community. The building program included a lecture theatre, an art gallery, a children's library and a local history room. The new library became an intellectual, artistic and social fulcrum, hosting

public lectures and art exhibitions. 'Pooh Corner', a child-scaled reading nook hosting weekly story-telling sessions, became a formative space for generations of Saskatoon children. In 1981, Morrison founded the Writer in Residence Program, nurturing dozens of talented writers such as Guy Vanderhaeghe, Candace Savage and Yann Martel, and making the library the centre of Saskatoon's world-class literary scene. The library building is a reflection of Morrison's vision and drive, which have shaped Saskatoon profoundly.

The Frances Morrison Library building was designed by accomplished Saskatoon architect George R. Forrester, of the architectural firm Webster, Forrester, Scott & Associates. The firm, in its various iterations, was one of the most long-lived and productive architectural practices in Saskatchewan history. Founded by David Webster in 1908, the practice became Webster and Gilbert in 1930. George Forrester joined the firm as a draftsman in 1946. One of his notable projects during this period was the Broadway Theatre in 1947. He apprenticed with the firm, becoming registered as an architect in 1956, and became a principal in 1957. Under Forrester's leadership, the practice was responsible for hundreds of buildings across the province. Notable projects in Saskatoon included the JS Wood Branch Library (1960), Mount Royal Collegiate (1960), St. Andrew's College Addition (1962), the Sheraton Cavalier Hotel (1964), Emmanuel Chapel (1965-66), the U of S Education Building (1967-70), Walter Murray Collegiate (1969), the University Hospital Expansion (1978), and the Sturdy Stone Centre (1979).

As a work of architecture, the Frances Morrison Library building is notable as an example of late modernism, with many of the features and details typical of that style. In this instance, the design is inflected towards an architectural humanism, emphasising accessibility, openness, human scale, and warmth. The two-storey building is sited to face 23rd street, with its glazed entry opening out onto a wide sidewalk and a views of the greenery of Civic Square. Extensive glazing invites access and provides animation, offering glimpses of the activities inside the building (fig. 11). Precast concrete panels forming the solid elements of the exterior walls are finished in a combination of smooth and rough textures (fig.3). Their exposed stone aggregate is predominantly composed of buff limestone, grey and pink granite, giving an overall impression of warmth (fig. 4). The main stair features large mural paintings mounted on a central elevator shaft and visible from the exterior, by noted abstract artist William Pehudoff (fig. 8). Inside, the circulation desk is accented by oiled teak wall panels, a material that is repeated in various other places; bookcase end panels, handrails and cabinets (fig. 6). Teak door handles with rounded edges are a particularly thoughtful detail, placed at the point of contact between the building and its public users (fig. 7).

In his comprehensive history, *Architecture of Saskatchewan, a Visual Journey 1930-2011*, Bernard Flaman featured the Frances Morrison Library in his chapter on modernist architecture, calling it "a formally quiet but monumental building" in reference to its dignified civic presence.

3. Character Defining Elements

Key elements which contribute to the heritage value of this historic resource include:

- Features identifying the building as an example of late modern architecture, including exposed-aggregate concrete wall panels, glazed elevation and main entry facing 23rd Street, the feature stair, including artwork by William Perehudoff, teak handrails, teak interior wall panels, teak door handles, waffle-slab ceilings.
- Features relating to the historical and cultural value of the building, including its human-scaled form and massing, its transparency and openness towards 23rd Street, and its name, invoking the memory of former chief librarian Frances Morrison.
- Historical architectural fragments of the original central library building, constructed in 1928 and torn down in 1964 to make way for the new central library. These are located along the sidewalk on 23rd Street and are marked with two commemorative plaques.

4. Benefits of Listing

The mandate of the Saskatoon Register of Historic Places is to provide a listing of heritage resources identified as having significant heritage value or interest. The Register includes buildings that have helped shape our community and tell the story of Saskatoon. The Frances Morrison Library building has done both. As a work of architecture, it is of high quality and significance, representative of the late modern period of architecture and considered a high point in the career of Saskatoon architect George Forrester. As a cultural artifact, the building tells the story of the founding and growth of the Saskatoon Public Library system, a critical aspect of the development of Saskatoon as a city, and a prerequisite for its development as an internationally recognised literary centre. Central to the story of both the library and the city is the figure of Frances Morrison, who served as Saskatoon's chief librarian from 1961 until her retirement in 1980, and led the project to design and build a modern central library building. Ms. Morrison is a significant historical figure in Saskatoon, who pioneered the role of women in positions of public leadership.

5. Sources:

Flaman, Bernard (2013). *Architecture of Saskatchewan, a Visual Journey 1930-2011*. Canadian Plains Research Centre Press.

Miller, Ruth (2013). *Turning Back the Pages: 100 Years at the Saskatoon Public Library*. Conteau Books.

Ewing-Weisz, Chris. *Frances Morrison put the Saskatoon Public Library on the Map*. The Globe and Mail, Aug. 28, 2011.

Forrester Scott Bowers Cooper Walls. Promotional brochure, self-published, undated. Retrieved from Local History Room, Frances Morrison Library, Saskatoon. Call number LH-8758.

The Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee, at its meeting on November 6, 2019 resolved:

That a letter be submitted to the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development, and Community Services requesting that the Francis Morrison be added to the Saskatoon Register of Historic Places.

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Included with this letter are two attachments: Appendix A, photographs illustrating the features describes in this letter; and Appendix B, a copy of Frances Morrison's obituary published in the Globe and Mail on August 28 2011, describing her accomplishments in more detail.

The Committee would like to recognize Andrew Wallace, Committee Member, for their contribution within this letter.

The Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee respectfully requests that this recommendation be considered by the Standing Policy Committee on Planning, Development & Community Services.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Lenore Swystun".

Lenore Swystun, Chair
Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee

LS:ht

Attachments:

Appendix A: Photographs

Appendix B: Frances Morrison obituary, the Globe and Mail, August 28, 2011

cc: General Manager, Community Services Department
Heritage and Design Coordinator, Community Services Department
L. Swystun, Chair, Municipal Heritage Advisory Committee

Appendix A: Photographs

Photo credits: Andrew Wallace, unless noted otherwise.



Figure 1: Frances Morrison Library, viewed from the north-east, 2020.



Figure 2: Glazed front entry doors.



Figure 3: Precast concrete wall panel.



Figure 4: Detail of exposed aggregate concrete.



Figure 5: Fragments of the 1928 library building.



Figure 6: Teak wall panelling at circulation desk.



Figure 7: Teak door pull.



Figure 8: Artwork by William Pehudoff.

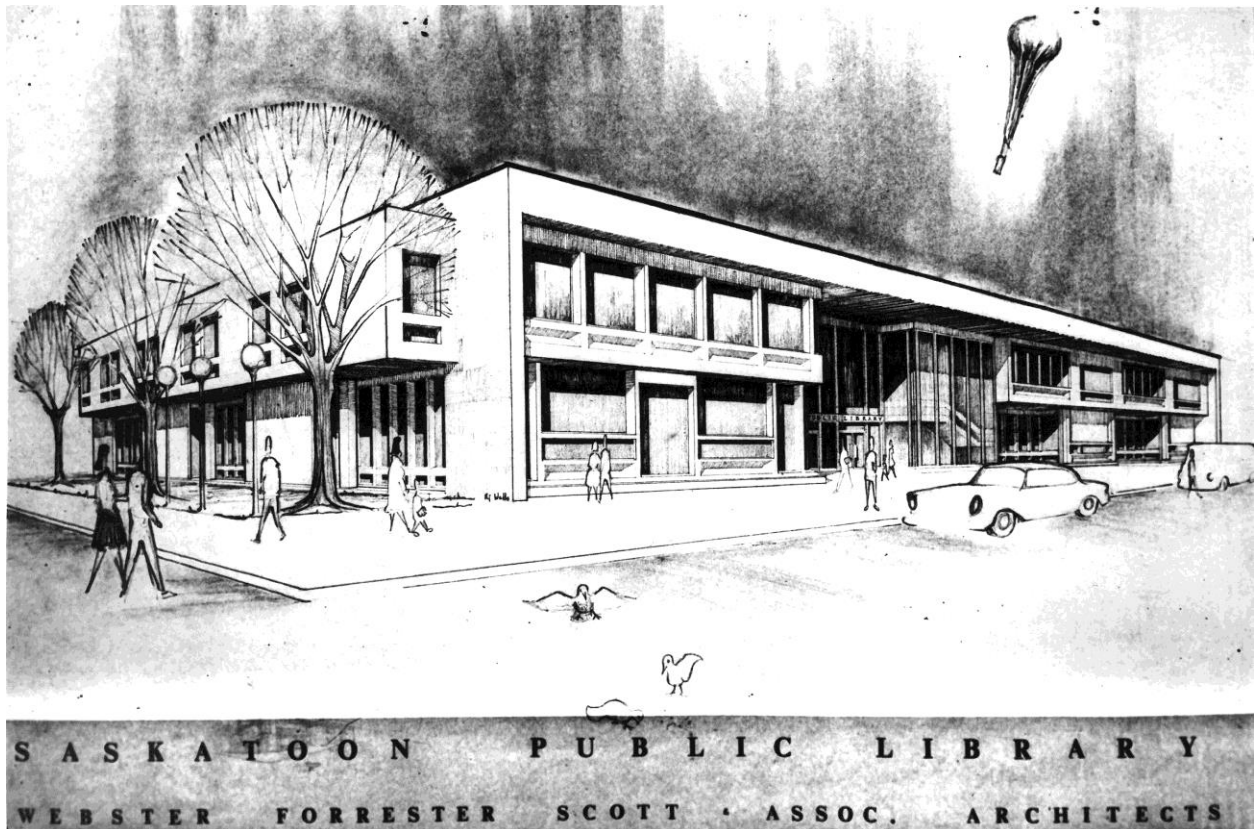


Figure 9: Architect's rendering of Francs Morrison Library building, viewed from the north-east. Drawing credit: Webster, Forrester, Scott Associates, 1965. (SPL Local History Room, LH-1431).



Figure 10: Frances Morrison Library, viewed from the north-east, 1966. Photo credit: Creative Professional Photographers. (SPL Local History Room, CP-5035-10).



Figure 11: Frances Morrison Library, viewed from the south-east at night, 1966. Photo credit: Lumby Productions Ltd. (SPL Local History Room, LH-2505).



Figure 12: Circulation desk, showing teak wall panelling and waffle slab ceiling, 1966. Photo credit: Lumby Productions Ltd. (SPL Local History Room, PH-88 358).

Appendix B: *Frances Morrison put the Saskatoon Public Library on the Map.* Chris Ewing-Weisz, the *Globe and Mail*, Aug. 28, 2011.

Frances Morrison didn't set out to do anything special. But when circumstance obliged her to enter the work force, she ended up supporting not just her family but the city of Saskatoon, making history along the way.

Rising from a lowly post as library assistant to chief librarian – the first woman to head a Saskatoon civic department – Morrison built a simple book-borrowing depot into a true centre of community life, greatly enlarging the library's size, scope, and vision. She died peacefully on Aug. 14 at the age of 92.

She was born Frances Harrington, on Sept., 28, 1918, to a community-minded jeweller's family in Saskatoon. After obtaining a bachelor of home economics at the local university, she married Rev. Harvey Morrison, with whom she had four intensely happy years. His unexpected death in 1943 left her with a young son to support.

She did. That year she joined the staff of the Saskatoon Public Library as an assistant. "She had some very good mentors," son David recalls, who, recognizing her potential, urged her to get professional qualifications. So in 1946 she left her preschooler with his grandparents and went to Toronto for a year to earn her a bachelor of library sciences.

Back in Saskatoon, she served as children's librarian, then head of reference, before becoming assistant chief librarian. Her boss was "a good book man," said David, but not much of a manager, so Frances was effectively the chief operating officer, experience that would stand her in good stead when she was named chief librarian in 1961.

She initially declined to apply for the top job, saying with characteristic humility that she would be happy to carry on as second in command to whoever became chief. However, other women in the library urged her, and the library board asked her to apply. She insisted that there be a competition, but it's unlikely anyone was surprised when the precedent-setting appointment was made.

She approached her new job with energy and grace. Though recognizing hierarchy as a necessity, and able to be firm when occasion required, she preferred to treat her staff as family, and was noted for her ability to delegate, to draw the best out of people, and to mediate conflict.

Under her leadership, the library flourished. Initially a modest operation with only 13 staff, a main building, and two small neighbourhood outlets, it grew over the next two decades to include a magnificent new main library (brought in under budget in 1966), two other new libraries, two neighbourhood branches, and three mobile book trailers, boasting a total of more than 90 staff and 370,000 books.

She also greatly expanded the library's mandate, showing herself to be well ahead of her time. She created audiovisual and fine arts departments (the new main library has a gallery that to this day showcases emerging and established Saskatchewan artists), a local history room and enhanced programming. "We looked for community needs," she explained after retiring, "and then developed programs."

This attention to community needs extended well beyond Saskatoon. Active in the Saskatchewan and Canadian Library Associations (of which she served as president and vice-president), she helped establish a regional library system, and was very proud of the fact that Saskatchewan was the first province where a library card from one community would be recognized at other communities across the province.

Ever her parents' daughter, Morrison also served the public through the Meewasin Valley Authority, the Saskatchewan Arts Board (which she chaired), the Saskatoon Business and Professional Women's Club, the University Women's Club, the YWCA, the Saskatoon Heritage Society, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, and Grosvenor Park United Church. All that, and she raised a son who went on to a distinguished career as a university professor.

Upon her retirement in 1980, to her astonishment, former long-time Library Board chair Carlyle King undertook to have the main library she had built renamed in her honour. She was also awarded the Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal (1977), the Outstanding Service to Librarianship Award of the Canadian Library Association (1981), the Canada 125 Medal (1993), a Saskatchewan Order of Merit (1999) and a Saskatchewan Centennial Leadership Award (2005). In 1989 the YWCA named her Woman of the Year, and two decades later the University of Saskatchewan College of Arts and Science cited her among 100 graduates of influence.

The Saskatchewan Library Association established an Award of Merit in her name in 1982, to recognize individuals who had provided outstanding service to libraries in Saskatchewan. Among the honorees are some of the Library Board members who had helped to realize her vision.

She leaves her son, David, his wife, Alena, four grandchildren, two great-grandchildren and a grateful community.

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