

Statement of Significance

Mendel Building and Civic Conservatory – 950 Spadina Crescent East

Neighbourhood:	City Park
Date Constructed:	1964
Development Era:	1961 onward
Architectural Style:	Modernist
Architect:	Blankstein, Coop, Gilmour, and Hanna
Builder:	Boychuk Construction Co. Ltd.
Designation:	Municipal
Original Use:	Art Gallery/Conservatory
Current Use:	Museum/Conservatory



Source: City of Saskatoon

Description of the Historic Place

The Mendel Building and Civic Conservatory is a large concrete, masonry, and glass building located at 950 Spadina Crescent East along the banks of the South Saskatchewan River. Built in 1964, the Mendel Building and Civic Conservatory is an excellent example of the Modernist architectural style.

Heritage Value

The design for the Mendel Building and Civic Conservatory was the result of a nationwide design competition. The building was to include an art exhibit with instruction areas, places for outdoor display, gallery areas, and a conservatory. The winning design was submitted by Blankstein, Coop, Gilmour, and Hanna of Winnipeg, Manitoba. The building's architecture exhibits the classic Modernist attributes of light, order, and open space planning. The building features no ornamentation and large pure spatial volumes, and exhibits transparency with the exterior landscape and framed views of the river. The building has a unique sawtooth roof structure, which challenged the roofing technology available at the time.

The main level of the building contains the lobby, conservatory, and future museum space. The lobby and museum section of the building features brick walls, skylights, and a reinforced concrete roof, while the conservatory portion of the building is made entirely of glass with a roof that has six pyramid-shaped glass domes. An addition was completed on the north side of the building in 1975; however, the Mendel Building and Civic Conservatory continues to retain much of its original character.

The heritage value of the Mendel Building and Civic Conservatory also lies in its association with Fred S. Mendel, a local industrialist who was instrumental in establishing the building. Mendel and his family emigrated from Germany to Saskatoon in 1939 as a result of Nazi persecution. Mendel's family had been in the meatpacking business for generations, and upon arriving in Saskatoon, he purchased an abandoned co-operative packing plant and established a company in 1940 called Intercontinental Packers. In the following years, Mendel opened further meat-packing plants in Regina, Red Deer, and Vancouver. By the end of World War II, Intercontinental Packers had plants across Western Canada and Australia, and by 1975, Intercontinental Packers was the fourth largest meat-packing operation in Canada.

Mendel was not only an industrialist, but also an art collector and art enthusiast. In the early 1960s, Mendel donated \$175,000 for the construction of a civic art gallery and conservatory. His contribution was matched by the province, with a suitable site provided by the City of Saskatoon. After much discussion about the location of the art gallery and conservatory, the site along Spadina Crescent, adjacent to the South Saskatchewan River, was chosen. The Mendel Art Gallery and Civic Conservatory officially opened on October 16, 1964. The first curator-director of the gallery was John E. Climer, and in its first year, the gallery saw approximately 300,000 visitors.

The Mendel Building and Civic Conservatory became one of the major collecting art galleries in Saskatchewan. In 1965, Mendel donated 13 paintings to the gallery, including paintings by the Group of Seven, which became the nucleus of the gallery's collection. Over the years, by donation and acquisition, the collection has grown to include many works by Saskatchewan, Canadian, and international artists in a variety of media forms and styles.

To accommodate its ever increasing need for space, the Mendel Art Gallery vacated its existing space in 2015, and will eventually move to the new Rемаi Modern Art Gallery of Saskatchewan. The Mendel Building will continue to be used for the Civic Conservatory, and will become the new location of the Children's Discovery Museum.

Source: City of Saskatoon Built Heritage Database

Character-Defining Elements

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

- The Modernist style of architecture, evident in the exterior brick façade (including the 1975 addition); free-standing masonry walls; sawtooth portion of the roof; interior lobby design with open site lines; staircase; and the louvered ceiling in the former gallery space;
- The elements of the Civic Conservatory's exterior, including the glass façade, pyramid-shaped glass domes, concrete columns, and signage on the south façade; and
- Those elements that relate to the building's cultural significance, including the outdoor garden at the Civic Conservatory, the donor wall, and the siting of the building in relation to the riverbank.