

ROSSDALE FLATTENED

*Make room for progress and a new planetarium
— Edmonton's oldest community bites the dust*

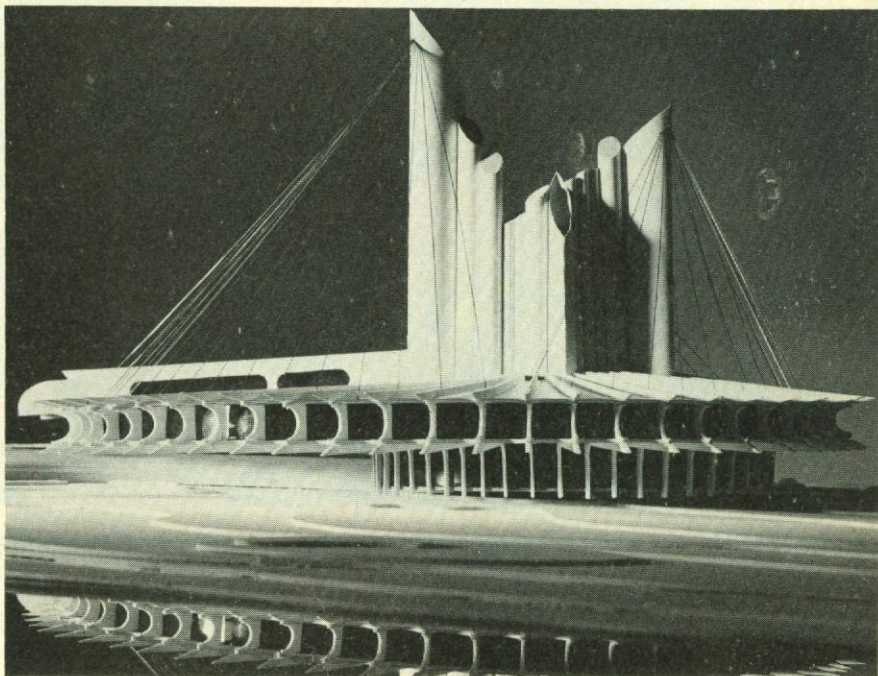
One of the first outraged cries from Rossdale, once it became clear that the valley neighbourhood would be partly demolished to make room for a new planetarium, came from Steven Rivers, the president of the Rossdale Community League: "It's all very nice for the aldermen to build monuments to themselves, but the people they're going to displace don't make very much money—they're poor people!"

So, from the beginning, the struggle for Rossdale has been portrayed as a class struggle. Rich against poor, powerful against powerless. The voting on city council has gone the same way, and Rossdale has become the first issue over which this new arrangement of aldermen has split on ideological grounds. The four URGE aldermen, supported by Percy Wickman and Ed Ewasiuk, have taken a stand (as promised in the election campaign) in support of the rights of a community. Mayor Purves and the other six aldermen have taken a stand that is in the interest of upholding their own power and the aspirations of the privileged class to which they belong.

A planetarium is primarily a tourist attraction. Sure, there are local space fanatics who will enjoy it and hundreds of thousands of children will be educated in it. However, it could easily be built in Coronation Park, home of the current planetarium, and fulfill the same function. In the river valley, it becomes an attraction that the business development branch can brag about along with the Muttart Conservatory, AAA baseball and the fact that Edmonton has more acres of park per capita than Calgary.

Pity Paul Norris, a business booster if there ever was one, when he discovered that his belief that no government should interfere with the right to hold property landed him in the wrong political camp in the Rossdale affair. The action behind the scenes must have been frantic as the mayor and other aldermen convinced Norris to toe the party line, to abandon his principle, and to vote in favour of expropriation in Rossdale.

It is ironic and a little bit sad that this 75th Anniversary project is being used as another nail in the coffin of a neighbourhood that claims to be Edmonton's oldest. However, that kind of consideration hasn't penetrated this coldly manipulative council and the board of commissioners which advises them. Mindful of their objective of eliminating housing in the valley, this council and administration chose a site for the planetarium



that would further that objective.

In a tiny way, the Rossdale incident parallels a different resistance to a different government in a different community in the same river valley—Batoche in 1885. Sir John A., pressed to find money for his transcontinental railway, drummed up a war against the people of the Saskatchewan country. The railway got the money it required to enable troop movement west and the federal government achieved a second objective, that of disowning the Metis people and putting their land to what they considered better use.

Obviously, Rossdale is being taken in a non-violent and more equitable way. Still, it is a clear example of using a worthwhile project (the planetarium) to advance a less worthy cause (assumption of ownership of someone else's home).

It must be terribly offensive to the well-intentioned people in the Edmonton Space Sciences Foundation to have their pet project abused in such a way. They have proposed a beautiful building. More than one person, upon seeing the drawings, suggested that if a building could fly, this one would. At last, a building by Edmonton's most creative architect, Douglas Cardinal, is to be located in this city. That it should be besmirched for all time by the actions of a callous council and an equally callous commission board is a disgrace.

Rossdale is a treat with its old houses, tall trees and its sense of small-town simplicity. In a way it represents the place from which we have come. Unfortunately, too many of those in power have no concern for the road we've taken. They're too obsessed with the road ahead. It is as though they want to deny death by wiping out all evidence of people who were here before them, who lived their lives and made their accomplishments, and died.

This is the intense irony of the accusation, made at the first by community league president Rivers, that aldermen are interested only in building a monument to themselves. If generations to follow take the example being set now, they'll have no regard for the accomplishments of dead men back in the 80s. O

The proposed building of the Edmonton Space Sciences Centre in Rossdale amounts to a class struggle—rich against poor, powerful against powerless. While a new planetarium is certainly a most worthwhile project, its installation in Edmonton's oldest community involves a less-than-worthy cause—the assumption of ownership of other people's homes.

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