

The Al Rashid – Canada’s First Mosque

By Richard Awid

In 1938, Edmonton was home to a small number of Muslims, most from the present-day countries of Lebanon and Syria. Many of these early pioneers were storeowners and fur-traders. They would deal not only with fellow Muslims, but also with the non-Muslim population. Fur-traders bought from the indigenous peoples in the northern part of the province and occasionally learned to speak their languages. When they returned to Edmonton to sell their furs the buyers were often Jewish.



Historic Al-Rashid Mosque - Fort Edmonton Park

As Edmonton’s Muslim community began to grow and prosper, they began to feel that their religious life was disappearing. As a result they started to hold meetings and soon came up with the idea that a building was required if their religion was to survive in their new homeland. They concluded that a mosque was urgently needed; this would provide a place to worship and to gather. This small group hired a non-Muslim construction firm to build the Al Rashid Mosque, Canada’s first.

Construction was started in May of 1938, but the Muslim community ran out of money and construction was either slowed down or ground to a halt on two different occasions. But they never gave up on the project. A group of Muslim fundraisers started to seek financial assistance, not only from their own community but also from the Christian and Jewish communities. As a result of their tireless efforts, they were able to collect enough funds, and Canada’s first mosque was finished by the beginning of December, 1938.

The inauguration of the Al Rashid took place on in Edmonton on December 12, 1938. The master of ceremonies was Mr. I.F. Shaker, a Christian Arab and mayor of Hanna, Alberta. Mayor John W. Fry performed the official opening on behalf of the City and the dedication was conducted by Allamah Abdallah Yusuf Ali, a Muslim scholar from India and translator of the Qur’an into the English language. In the early 1990’s, the Canadian Council of Muslim Women succeeded in moving the mosque to Fort Edmonton Park where it is now part of the city’s living history museum.