Heritage Planner's Statement of Significance

Description of Historic Place
First Presbyterian Church is a large, Late Gothic Revival style building, constructed of red brick and sandstone (actually limestone), and located on six city lots in the heart of downtown Edmonton. A hall is attached to the east side of the building. The church is surrounded by urban development including a neighbouring highrise tower, and stands as a prominent city landmark.

Heritage Value
The heritage value of the First Presbyterian Church lies in its Gothic Revival style architecture and its association with Reverend D.G. McQueen, an important clergyman in the history of the Presbyterian Church in Alberta.

A model Late Gothic Revival church, First Presbyterian Church has stood since its contruction in 1911, as a landmark church in downtown Edmonton. While not the earliest Presbyterian church built in Edmonton, First Presbyterian was certainly the largest, built to seat over twelve hundred people. Significantly, the plan represents an adaptation of the popular Gothic Revival "AkronPlan" of church architecture. By incorporating large Gothic windows, the architectural firm of Wilson and Herrald were able, despite the size of the building, to create a space that was monumental, but not overwhelming. Grand in scale and finely crafted inside and out, the building retains its landmark status as a unique church amidst the urban environment surrounding it.

Reverend David George McQueen was First Presbyterian Church's second and most significant minister. His ministerial tenure of forty-three years, one of the longest recorded in Alberta, helped to establish the Presbyterian presence in Alberta. McQueen came to Edmonton shortly after graduating from Knox College, Toronto. He followed Reverend James Robertson's call to the West, arriving in Edmonton the summer of 1887. He considered work in a foreign mission field, like his classmate Jonathan Goforth, but as the story goes, Robertson put his hand on the young student's shoulder and said, "I want you for Edmonton", a calling too powerful to ignore. Once in Edmonton, he served briefly with Dr. Andrew Baird, who began the work of organizing congregations in the area in 1881. He quickly built upon this foundation and throughout Edmonton and the surrounding area new congregations were formed under his guidance. During McQueen's service as minster of First Presbyterian Church, he helped build, strengthen and maintain a Prebyterian presence in the West. He was elected as Moderator of the General Assembly in 1912 and as Interim Moderator of the General Assembly of the continuing Presbyterian Church in 1924 during the turbulent time of church union. McQueen passed away in 1930.

Source: Alberta Culture and Community Spirit, Historic Resources Management Branch (file: Des.484)

Character Defining Elements
The character defining elements of First Presbyterian Church include such features as:

Exterior
- size, form, scale and massing;
- rusticated limestone base;
- main façade featuring square corner bell tower with crenellated parapet, butresses, triple arched open porch entrance, spandrels surrounding the main entrance;
- pressed brick and cast stone exterior elements such as the cornerstone, stringcourses, and receding Gothic arches;
- irregular fenestration pattern;
- large gothic windows with stone tracery and leaded stained glass;
- hall set perpendicular to the church proper; and
- slightly rounded, shallow and gently raked treatment of the buttresses.

Interior
- gently sloping floor with an amphitheatre-like arrangement of pews and balcony that radiates around the cnetral pulpit;
- two tier classroom spaces set in a semi-circular plan;
- irregular arrangement of ancillary rooms throughout the structure;
- wood strip ceiling complete with exposed wood truss system;
- wood staircases, wainscots, trim, flooring, and decorative elements; and
- casavant pipe organ set in a semi-dome complete with plaster ornamentation and recessed arches springing from cluster columns.