

Edmonton's Fidelity Trust Tower 1981-83
The Building That Peter Pocklington Never Built
By David Murray, Architect AAA



The proposed Fidelity Trust Tower

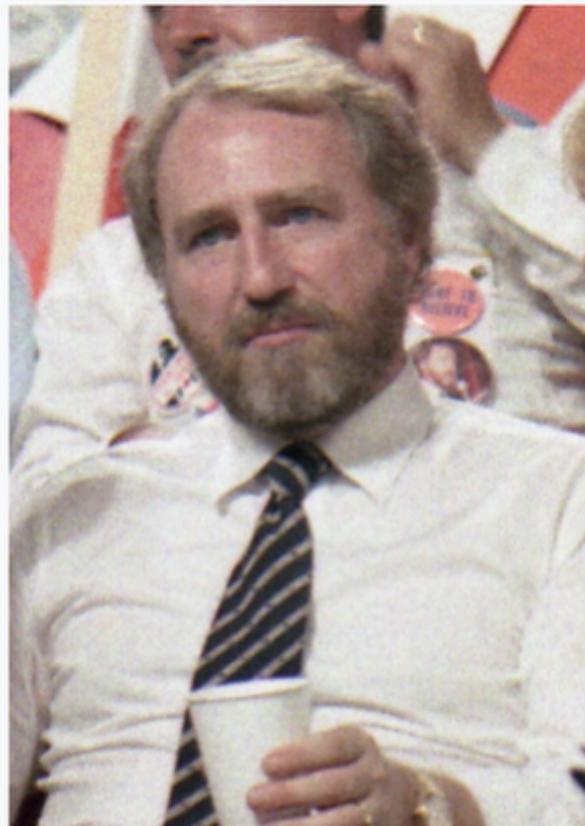
Model Maker: **Michael Mott**

Photographer: **James Dow**

1981

In 1981, I started working as a project architect (I had become a registered architect in 1979) in the office of **Clark James Coupland Architects**. They had recently opened an Edmonton branch of their Calgary office. Our office was in the Sun Life Tower in downtown Edmonton and Peter Pocklington's office suite was in the top of the tower.

Peter Pocklington



Pocklington in 1983

Born	November 18, 1941 (age 84) Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada
Occupation	Entrepreneur
Known for	Owner of the Edmonton Oilers from 1976 to 1998
Spouse	Eva

Wikipedia February 2026

Peter Pocklington was an Alberta entrepreneur at the time and owner of the Edmonton Oilers NHL hockey team, 1976-1998. A subsidiary firm within his empire was **Patrician Land Corporation**, his development arm.

The early 1980s was the height of Alberta's oil resource boom. Peter Pocklington, through the Patrician Land Corporation, had purchased several properties strategically located on prime commercial land located on Jasper Avenue, adjacent to the AGT McCauley Plaza project that had been previously developed in the early 1970s by Edmonton's Oxford Developments, now Oxford Properties Group. The proposed building on this property would be the headquarters for Pocklington's **Fidelity Trust Co.** The site included the historic **Union Bank**. This tower would be the tallest in Edmonton.

Wikipedia reports that: "*Fidelity Trustco was an Edmonton-based trust company owned by entrepreneur Peter Pocklington in the early 1980s, which was involved in takeover negotiations around 1983. It was formerly recognized as Canada's 12th largest trust company. The Alberta Fidelity Trust Company was established earlier, in 1912.*"



1981 – Edmonton Downtown

Photo: Ranson Photographers Ltd. 81.102

The Historic Union Bank

Heritage Value

The Union Bank Building is significant for the role it played in the banking and investment history of Edmonton for over 69 years. As the only remaining bank building of seven built before World War One, it demonstrates the presence of eastern Canadian banks on Jasper Avenue at that time. Its construction in 1910 reflected the expanding needs of the Union Bank's Edmonton branch, during the period of Edmonton's economic boom. The Union Bank Building has shown a remarkable continuity of ownership and occupancy by financial institutions. Purchased in 1928 by Winnipeg's James Richardson and Sons Ltd., it served as an Edmonton base for their grain trading and stock broking business and was then occupied from 1969 by the North-West Trust Company, which owned the building from 1979 to 1982. The Union Bank Building is significant as the location of a variety of businesses that occupied offices in the building over several decades.

The Union Bank Building demonstrates the sophisticated vision of its architect, the British-trained Roland Lines (1876 to 1916) who designed several other distinctive Edmonton buildings, including the Alex Taylor School (1908), Strathcona Collegiate Institute (1909), and the nearby Canadian Permanent Building (1910) on Jasper Avenue. The Union Bank Building is significant for its solid imposing street facade with classical elements inspired by the Italian Renaissance, most notably, the rusticated ground floor, giant order pilasters and open-bed pediments with oversize keystones above the second-floor windows. The central entrance represented an innovation in functional design at the time, whereby the bank entrance also served upstairs offices and third floor living quarters for bank employees.



The Union Bank circa 1990s

Photos: James Dow

The Union Bank was not a protected historic resource in 1981. Its significance was eventually publicly recognized as a Municipal Historic Resource in 1996. But we recognized its historical significance at the time when we began the design of the tower. I had become a board member of the Old Strathcona Foundation in 1980, when my career in historic conservation appreciation began. We decided that we must respectfully incorporate the Edwardian style Union Bank façade into the new project.



PFC empire seeks Jasper home base

By BOB GILMOUR

Peter Pocklington wants to build a 38-storey office tower along downtown Jasper Avenue to serve as head office for his Canadian business empire.

Patrician Land Corporation, a Pocklington Financial Corporation (PFC) subsidiary, will apply to the city before Christmas to build a 146-metre-high skyscraper with landscaped rooftop terrace. The estimated \$50-million Fidelity building would sit on the south side of Jasper Avenue between the Imperial Oil and Capitol Square buildings, in the block between 100th and 101st Streets.

It would be the city's tallest office tower (15 centimetres below federal Department of Transport height restrictions due to the Edmonton Municipal Airport), and the first major downtown building with a mainly granite exterior, according to Clark James Coupland architects of Edmonton. The proposed skyscraper would sit on a 30,000-square-foot site now occupied by the current Royal Trust, Northgate, North West Trust and Blue Willow buildings.

However, the city in 1980 rejected a Pocklington bid to build a 32-storey apartment tower, with some office and retail space, on a site only one-half the size at the same location. "The (new) building's unique tower shape breaks from the traditional form of office buildings in Edmonton, allowing optimum sunlight penetration to Jasper Avenue," said project architect David Murray.

The multi-cornered skyscraper, to contain more than 500,000 square feet gross, would be built in the form of two slender offset halves set in reverse.

The penthouse of the eastern half, some six metres or two storeys above the western half, would contain the executive offices of Pocklington Financial Corporation, owned by Mr. Pocklington. Beside them would be an exterior landscaped terrace atop the roof of the western half. The design also calls for saving the front of the North West Trust building (formerly Union Bank building) at 10039 Jasper Ave. The rest of the building behind the historic facade would be demolished and rebuilt — perhaps to serve as the main banking hall for Fidelity Trust, a nationwide trust company headquartered in Edmonton, and also owned by Pocklington Financial.

Richard Melchin, president of Patrician Land, said that given city approval, the firm wants to start construction next June or July and to open the skyscraper in spring, 1984. Total project cost would be \$80 million to \$90 million.

Besides Fidelity Trust, the building is expected to include the offices of other branches of Mr. Pocklington's business empire. These branches include Gainers Foods Ltd., Canada's second largest meat-packing firm; Edmonton Oilers of the National Hockey League, Edmonton Drillers of the North American Soccer League, Patrician Oil Ltd. of Calgary, Patrician Development Corporation of Calgary, Westown Ford of Edmonton and Elgin Ford of Toronto.

A ground floor, sky-lit galleria — three storeys high and extending north-south through the building — is proposed to serve as an extension to the (100A Street) Rice Howard Mall, which will run north of Jasper Avenue to Edmonton Centre.

More TOWER on Page D16

TOWER

(Continued from D15)

An outdoor landscaped plaza between the Fidelity Building and the AGT Building (12 metres lower) to the southeast would accommodate pedestrian connection to neighboring McCauley Plaza and to the River Valley Park.

The Jasper Avenue front of the new skyscraper would have a 4½-metre sloping glass canopy. The basement, ground and second-floor levels would contain some 45,000-50,000 square feet of retail and commercial stores and services — depending upon city approval.

Interior escalators would connect all three levels and glass-enclosed elevators would connect the ground and basement levels to a three-level underground parkade. An interior stairway, beside Jasper Avenue, would allow direct access to the neighboring underground main station of the light rapid transit system. The basement could connect into similar levels of McCauley Plaza and Capitol Square.

The Fidelity Building Responds Well to the Downtown Plan

EDMONTON JOURNAL, Tuesday, December 28, 1982 A7

Strategy to ensure high-quality design

One of the basic strategies of the Downtown Plan is to "Improve the Downtown environment by ensuring high quality architectural and urban design," a theme that is consistent throughout the objectives, guidelines and regulations contained within the plan.

It is significant and deliberate that architectural and urban design are linked in this strategy. The architectural form of buildings cannot be evaluated in isolation as sculptural elements but must be considered in terms of their overall impact on the urban environment and in particular, their impact on the comfort and enjoyment of the pedestrian at street level.

This is of paramount concern because the street is the primary focus of public activity in our downtown area. Therefore, the genre of post-modern structures featured in Mr. Thorsell's article entitled "Sadly, we lust, we'll not see their like" (*The Journal*, December 3) would not necessarily be welcome additions to our downtown skyline.

Mr. Thorsell quoted only two of 20 general guidelines pertaining to built form in downtown. He could well have quoted 18.2.9 "That more creative design and siting solutions be encouraged in the high-rise tower portion of new buildings to avoid the monotony of rectangular towers whose faces parallel the grid pattern of the streets," or 18.2.17 "That colonnades, awnings and other forms of weather protection be provided to protect the pedestrian from adverse weather conditions and that these be continuous and of sufficient dimension to be effective." These general guidelines are statements of council's intent in realizing an animated and attractive downtown environment, provided for the convenience of the public (including architects and developers) and the development office in considering proposed developments.

The building form requirements referred to in the article were largely influenced by the recommendations of a report entitled "Considerations for Pedestrian Level Wind Conditions in Downtown Edmonton" (December 1979). It was submitted by a major engineering firm specializing in the amelioration of adverse micro-climatic conditions as part of the Downtown Plan preparation.

Although these requirements may appear overly prescriptive at first glance, a great amount of flexibility becomes apparent when translating them into built form. The plan does not prescribe the form of office buildings in detail for every street in downtown



"The Fidelity Building responds well to the Downtown Plan"

Edmonton as Mr. Thorsell suggests, but rather the various building envelopes define the maximum volume of space with which buildings may be designed and do not dictate the final form of the building. This was clearly demonstrated in a test of the regulations conducted during the preparation of the Plan wherein seven Edmonton architectural firms designed buildings using a sampling

of 14 sites throughout the downtown area. Frankly, the resulting designs were both imaginative and impressive.

The Manulife Building, nearing completion, embodies most of the requirements of the Downtown Plan and resulted from a healthy

on-going series of negotiations between the developers and their architects and the planning department.

The Fidelity Building, to be built on the south side of Jasper Avenue across from Central Station, has also responded well to the Downtown Plan. The historic facade of the Northwest Trust Building (formerly Union Bank) has been incorporated, a generous setback is provided with substantial weather protection, the towers have been arranged to allow maximum sun penetration to the north, and the proposed Rice-Howard Mall has been accommodated through the building to the AGT Plaza and McDougall Park.

We do not consider "developer" or "architect" to be "dirty words." The city to the greatest extent possible encourages a meaningful and constructive dialogue with developers and architects to ensure building design of the highest calibre that meets the objectives of all parties concerned.

Flexibility in evaluating proposed developments against the regulations is recognized in the Plan which states that "the development officer may, at his discretion, approve developments which do not comply with the provisions." Rather than being a situation where "creativity and quality must fight their way into our lives as 'exceptions'" this discretion can be a valuable tool in adapting the regulations to varied situations that occur without compromising the objectives of the Plan. The Bowlen-Carma Building approved for the site along the west side of the Convention Centre on Jasper Avenue represents a dramatic departure from the built form regulations normally applicable to that location in recognition of its unique site constraints and juxtaposition to the Convention Centre.

Council has certainly not ignored the public domain as suggested. The Downtown Plan contains a myriad of public improvements ranging from proposals for new parks, pedestrian malls and sidewalk upgradings to policies to encourage street vendors, to promote outdoor food and beverage facilities, to improve arcaded walkways around construction sites and to set as high priority, standards for cleanliness for downtown streets and sidewalks to eliminate dirt, litter and blowing dust.

The Downtown Plan is a good plan. It provides a strong basis for co-operation between the public and private sectors in managing, not limiting, the tremendous growth we anticipate over the next two decades in the downtown area. The guidelines offer greater certainty to private developers in their planning and for the public sector, it will help avoid the negative costs of unmanaged growth.

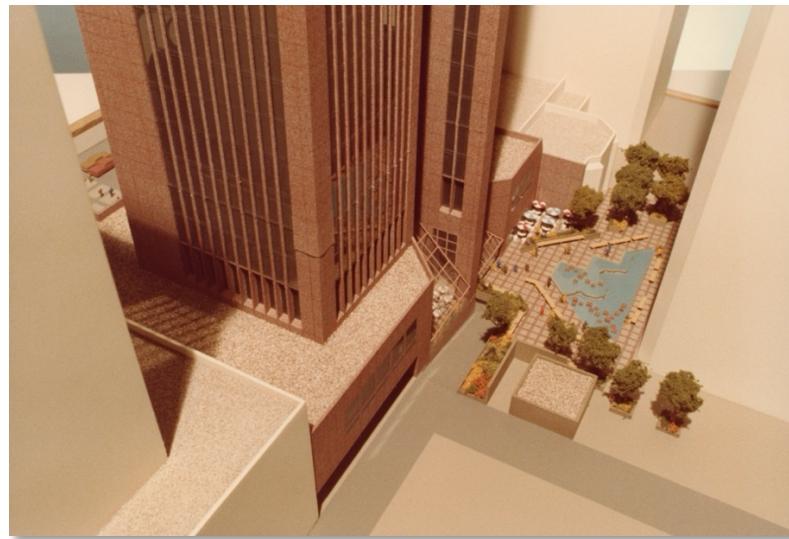
Through its guidelines and incentives, the Downtown Plan recognizes the vital role of downtown as the continuing business, commercial, cultural and entertainment centre of the city. Guided by this plan which focuses on that role, the downtown should indeed remain and grow as the vibrant heart of the city.

D. A. Lychak
General Manager
City of Edmonton Planning
Department

The Enhancement of Jasper Avenue



The Plaza



The model-maker depicted Peter Pocklington and Wayne Gretzky having an indoor lunch adjacent to the plaza.



Chatham-Kent News Network

A Roof-top Terrace

Peter Pocklington's offices in the Sun Life Tower had a penthouse gym. We proposed that the Fidelity Tower would also have a gym on its top floor with a terrace overlooking the North Saskatchewan River valley.



The Consultant Team

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The Fidelity Tower Postscript

The partners of Clark James Coupland arranged a meeting with Peter Pocklington and Patrician Land Corporation to present the design and the model. The meeting was held in Pocklington's Sun Life conference and dining room on the top floor. We were surrounded by the Peter's collection of **Emily Carr** paintings. **Tony James, Murray Wilson** and I were the presenters. In preparation for the meeting, we were told that Peter's attention span to our presentation might be about 15 minutes. We were expected to explain the project very quickly, but that was unrealistic. Our presentation lasted for over an hour. Peter remained actively interested and when the presentation ended, he seemed to contemplate for some time. Finally, he simply said... "**Go for it!**".

Now the hard work began. Unfortunately, our client Patrician Land Corporation, after a thorough examination of the design, decided that the office floor plans needed corner windows. Our design had granite-clad solid building edges. At that point, we were forced into a collaboration with **Skidmore Owings and Merrill Architects** from the SOM Denver office. I traveled with partner Murray Wilson to visit the SOM Denver office to see how they wanted to redesign the building. The results were very discouraging as the design essence of the building, its 'solidity', was being eroded by corner windows.

The Fall of the Alberta Economy

Prospects

THE EDMONTON JOURNAL, Sunday, July 31, 1983 A7

Alberta: suddenly, the bubble burst

Edmonton Journal, February 4, 1983

"The question about OPEC's crisis is not whether world oil prices will fall, but whether that drop will be a wild plunge into an abyss, or a slow and orderly decline. OPEC's recent failure to set individual production quotas for its 13 members has already caused the price to tumble well below the cartel's \$34 (U.S.) a barrel benchmark. No one can predict with any conviction how by much, and how fast, the price will decline further. However, all the signs indicate that there is downward pressure."

"Alberta, once the economic Charles Atlas of Canada, has taken a mighty fall, and for the first time since the boom began in 1973, it is losing residents. Two years ago people were still flocking to Alberta at the rate of more than 45,000 a year and Calgary boasted of being the fastest-growing city on the continent...Almost no one dreams of Alberta ever regaining the hell-bent-for-leather boisterousness it enjoyed until only two years ago. "We will not get back to 1981 levels, and it is probably undesirable to do so", says provincial treasurer Lou Hyndman, who acknowledges that the pre-recession Alberta economy was over-heating. University of Alberta economist Michael Percy agrees: "That was a one-shot event."

Back in February, the Conference Board predicted Alberta's economy would grow this year by 2.6 per cent, leading all other provinces. Only three months later, in May, reflecting the woes of Alberta's faltering oil industry, it came out with a revised, gloomy forecast, startling Albertans by announcing that instead of leading the economic recovery, their province had fallen to last place (except, possibly, for Prince Edward Island)."

By the end of 1983, it was clear that the ambitious Fidelity Tower project would be cancelled. On March 14, 1984, it was announced that Patrician Land Corporation was sent into receivership. Pocklington's Fidelity Trust Corporation discontinued operations in September 1987. Peter Pocklington's Empire was unravelling.

F12

Business

EDITOR: Bob Bell, 429-5325

THE EDMONTON JOURNAL, Wednesday, March 14, 1984

Pocklington's Patrician in receivership

Journal News Services

The shrinking business empire of Peter Pocklington suffered another blow Tuesday when the real estate arm of his Edmonton-based Fidelity Trust Co. went into receivership.

J. P. Sabourin, chief operating officer of the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation in Ottawa, said Patrician Land Corp., a wholly-owned subsidiary of Fidelity, has been placed in receivership with the Toronto accounting firm of Laventhal and Horwath Ltd.

CDIC asked the court of Queen's Bench in Alberta to name a receiver Monday after it became clear Patrician was unable to repay the \$175 million owed to its parent firm.

The receivers will sell off Patrician's extensive land holdings to pay off as much of the outstanding debt as possible

to Fidelity, whose management Pocklington was forced to relinquish last summer to First City Trust Co.

Fidelity should then be able to repay some of the more than \$175 million it owes CDIC, which has ultimate responsibility for ensuring Fidelity's deposit liabilities are paid in full, Sabourin said.

Lloyd Lavine, a Laventhal and Horwath vice-president, said Tuesday it's too early to tell how much the Patrician holdings are worth or how much money will eventually be paid to Fidelity.

However, he felt that unsecured creditors — those without specific claims on assets — probably won't collect anything after all the properties are sold.

The winding down of Patrician, Lavine said, Edmonton, will probably take several years as the company sells off its

holdings in Alberta, Ontario and several states in the U.S.

Fidelity, 98-per-cent owned by Pocklington through the holding company Fidelity Trustco Ltd., was taken over July 1 by First City of Vancouver.

The management shift occurred after the federal Department of Insurance put Fidelity on probation and ordered Pocklington to either sell it or inject \$20 million of new capital to bring it up to the borrowing base requirements of the Trust Companies Act.

First City is to wind down Fidelity's operations over the next five years and eventually acquire the company's assets.

At the end of the five-year agreement, any proceeds of Fidelity are to be used to first repay CDIC, second preferred shareholders and finally common

shareholders. Sabourin said it is highly unlikely there will be anything left at the end of five years for Pocklington.

At the time of the First City deal, management of Patrician Land was taken over by Laventhal and Horwath.

The CDIC said in a statement that a comprehensive review of the assets and operations of Patrician have shown the company's deficit is so large it no longer can continue to be funded.

Robert Kinasewich, Pocklington's lawyer, said the receivership decision will have no effects on the Edmonton business magnate's other holdings.

"Since last July, Mr. Pocklington has had nothing further to do with Patrician or Fidelity," Kinasewich said.

"Any damage done to the empire of Peter Pocklington took place in the summer of 1983 when First City Trust

was given the reigns of Fidelity and a management agreement was entered into with Laventhal and Horwath," the lawyer said in Edmonton.

Asked how much money Pocklington had lost as a result of the Fidelity and Patrician takeovers, Kinasewich replied: "It's hard to estimate."

However, in a previous interview, Pocklington had said that the loss of the two companies had cost him about \$30 million.

Pocklington, an unsuccessful contender for the federal Progressive Conservative leadership last year, has seen his once-mighty empire dwindle to ownership of Pocklington Financial Corporation, the Edmonton Oilers in the National Hockey League and Gainers Inc. meat-packing operations.

Clark James Coupland Architects

The collapse of the Alberta economy and an impending world-wide recession owing to falling oil prices meant that CJC was forced to close their offices by 1984. I was the last non-partner architect in the Edmonton office and left the firm at the end of 1983 to pursue an independent architectural career starting on January 1, 1984. To their credit, Clark James Coupland never declared bankruptcy owing to the decline of the economy. The partners honorably dispersed and carried on in new practices.

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TONY JAMES
1945 - 2024

A significant part of our firm's recent legacy is Tony James, who joined us as a partner in 1996 and remained an integral part of our team until his passing in October 2024. Tony earned his Bachelor of Architecture from the University of Manitoba and a Master's degree in Urban Planning from the University of British Columbia. As a registered architect and planner, he practiced across western Canada for over 40 years. Tony was deeply committed to the Greater Victoria community, serving as chair of various advisory planning and design committees in several municipalities. We profoundly miss his expertise, sense of humor, and cherished friendship.