

MUSIC IN EDMONTON, 1880-1905

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Helmut Kallmann has suggested that the main impression created by a study of musical beginnings in western Canada is that of "amazing speed and variety of development" (Kallmann 1960: 170). Kallmann's account deals chiefly with Victoria, Vancouver, Regina, and Winnipeg, but it will become apparent that most of the factors responsible for this rapid growth were also at work in Edmonton. The presence of well-educated settlers, including many women who had learned to play the piano, the associated need to compensate for the hardships and cultural privation of pioneer life, and the influence of geographical isolation help to explain why musical establishments were, according to Kallmann, so quick to grow in western cities. It will also become clear that the presence of one energetic and talented person was often sufficient to act as a nucleus and catalyst for musical activities once the basic requirements for such activities were present. In addition, Edmonton's early years show how institutions of various kinds can be important in bringing such persons to a community and in providing continuity in times of transition.

Historical background

Edmonton House was first established on the banks of the North Saskatchewan River in 1795 as part of the rivalry between the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company. The two companies were amalgamated in 1821 and under the guidance of John Rowand, Edmonton House quickly became one of the most important fur-trading posts in the Northwest, the depot for expeditions to the Pacific and to the Mackenzie (MacGregor [1967] 1975: 36).

In spite of its importance, it was small. When Paul Kane, the artist whose journal and paintings give us such a vivid record of life on the