

## BAD HEART STRAW CHURCH

Teepee Creek, Alberta, T0H, Canada (Portion of NE 7-75-2-W6)

**Formally Recognized: 2009/03/11**



Front and side facades

Interior

### CONSTRUCTION DATE(S)

1954/01/01

**LISTED ON THE CANADIAN REGISTER: 2009/03/17**

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### DESCRIPTION OF HISTORIC PLACE

The Bad Heart Straw Church is a simple L-shaped building situated roughly 50 kilometres northeast of Grande Prairie on a hilltop overlooking the Bad Heart River. The building features gable roofs, a central steeple, and a bank of windows in the gable end above the main entrance. The exterior is clad in rough stucco and the sides of the church are notably windowless.

### HERITAGE VALUE

The heritage value of Bad Heart Straw Church lies in its status as a pioneering Alberta example of the use of straw as a construction material.

From its formation in the 1920s until the mid-1950s, the community of Bad Heart was without a local church. Surrounded by marginal farmland and cut off from the more heavily settled areas of the Grande Prairie, Bad Heart remained during these decades a small settlement with few amenities. Local residents who wished to attend a church service were compelled to travel to the Teepee Creek district. Father Francis Dales, a Redemptorist priest stationed over 50 kilometres away at Sexsmith, was determined to change that for Bad Heart's Roman Catholic community. A vigorous and highly creative man, Fr. Dales was an experienced architect and beloved pastor. He recognized that the people of Bad Heart possessed only modest resources and seized upon straw bale construction as a practical, economical way to construct a church. First a cement slab was laid down. Salvaged pipes with points welded on the tops were inserted into the slab at three foot intervals. The bales of straw were then pressed down onto the pipes and crowned with metal plates. To simplify the church's design and ensure the stability of the walls and the truss roof, no window openings were included on the sides of the building. Fr. Dales found ways to economize on all aspects of the church's construction. All labour was entirely voluntary. Much of the fabric of the church was salvaged or donated: smashed 7-Up bottles were added to the exterior stucco to provide texture and colour and many of the fixtures and furnishings came from area churches. The Bad Heart Straw Church was completed in 1954 and stands as a remarkable example of ingenuity and civic spirit. It is also a pioneering example of straw bale construction in the province and possibly the only church so constructed in all of Canada.

Source: Alberta Culture and Community Spirit, Historic Resources Management Branch (File: Des. 2156)

### **CHARACTER-DEFINING ELEMENTS**

The character-defining elements of Bad Heart Straw Church include such features as:

- location of the church on a hilltop overlooking the Bad Heart River;
- the L-shaped plan and the gable roof design;
- straw bale construction, including thick walls comprised of straw bales bound with wire and stacked on salvaged pipes;
- elements integral to straw bale design, including cement slab floor, truss roof and windowless side walls, as well as bank of windows in the gable end to allow in natural light;
- elements of the church that express its economical construction, including shards of 7-Up bottles in stucco and fixtures and furnishings salvaged from other churches.