A rare piece of prairie history was picked up and transported out of Hanna this week as the Montefiore Institute, a former synagogue, begins its journey to Heritage Park in Calgary.

Heritage Park is very excited about this,” said Trudy Cowan, the vice president and project supervisor for the Synagogue on the Prairie Project. “It is presently sitting in a temporary location in Calgary where it will be stored and restored until its arrival in the park in 2009, just after Labour Day.

This is a gift to Heritage Park. The other buildings were brought in on Heritage Parks initiative, this is a community initiative,” said Karshenbaum. She also said that the funding for the project was gathered through private government, and corporate donations.

The society was formed in 2006 and began its relentless search for the elusive piece of history immediately. Not content to settle with building a replica, they researched the known synagogue until discovering the one in town.

“This started the project 3-5 years ago,” said Irena Karshenbaum, president of the society, “and then two years ago I decided to expand it.”

The society is run entirely by volunteers, and Karshenbaum is now working on this full-time to ensure the whole process goes as smoothly as possible. “This is actually the first time in the history of Heritage Park that a building has been brought in by a community effort,” said Karshenbaum.

“This is a million-dollar project,” said Karshenbaum, “this really is a unique and amazing piece of history.”

Heritage Park has expressed interest in other old Jewish buildings over the years; in the late 90’s a proposal was put out to move the abandoned House of Jacob building in downtown Calgary to the park.

This proposal was denied though, for what the society claimed as a “good reason,” and the building was demolished like many of the other old Jewish colony and settlement buildings.

Karshenbaum said that Heritage Park gets around 400,000 visitors annually, and that the little building will be used for educating school children and visitors to this important piece of Alberta history.

For more information on the synagogue or the society, they have a website available at www.littlesynagogue.ca.

TECHNICALITIES

Heritage Park on the back of McCann’s house moving rig.