

2096 COLUMBIA AVENUE – POST OFFICE



Heritage Register – Building

- 1) **Historical Name:** Post Office
- 2) **Common Name:**
- 3) **Address:** 2096 Columbia Avenue
- 4) **Date of Construction:** 1903
- 5) **Design, Style, Architecture, Architect:** Thomas Bradbury

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Description:

The Rossland Post Office is a substantial two-storey building located downtown, on the northwest corner of Columbia Avenue and Queen Street. The building is set back from Columbia Avenue, approximately 15 feet, with stairs leading from the sidewalk up to the main entrance. The stairs are covered by a granite portico and the words, "POST OFFICE," are engraved above. The exterior walls of the top floor are constructed of brick and the walls of the main floor are of granite stone. The exterior entrance to the second floor of the building is on Queen Street.

Heritage Value:

The building has been in continual use as Rossland's Post Office since its construction in 1903. There were four previous locations for postal services, the first in 1894, but they all became inadequate in size to meet the needs of a rapidly growing population.

The Federal Government of Canada funded the construction of the building to be used as both a Customs House and Post Office. The materials used, the distinctive architecture, the size of the building and the final costs, all speak to the national recognition of Rossland as an important business hub of the West Kootenay region at the turn of the century.

The original 1903, three-storey Gothic-style architecture of the Post Office was dramatically altered by the fire of 1929 which burned down all the buildings in the block between the Bank of Montreal and the Post Office. The Post Office lost its third floor and roof but the main and second floors were saved due to the stone and brick construction.

Character Defining Elements

- Original location and building footprint.
- Original 1st and 2nd floor facades — construction material, windows and doorways.
- Oriel window on 2nd floor facing Queen Street.
- "Post Office" engraved on Columbia Avenue portico.
- Heritage plaque beside the main entrance identifying this building as one of Rossland's significant heritage buildings.



Post Office c.1912

HISTORY

The first Rossland Post Office was in David Stussi's small grocery store at the western end of Columbia Avenue. This was the first log commercial building in Rossland and perhaps the second building after Ross Thompson's log home. The year was 1894 and the traffic of prospectors and miners in and out of the mining camp was starting to grow. It is said that the mail was packed in and out in a cheese box kept behind the door and people sorted out their own mail.

In the spring of 1885, Stussi built the Stussi Block across the street, on the south side of Columbia Avenue. The major portion of the main floor was rented for Mr. Wallace's Book and Stationary Store, and a small area, 40 feet by 10 feet, was set aside for Post Master Stussi and the mail. This space was only utilized for six months before it became too small to handle the volume of business. In Rossland's early days there were as many Americans as Canadians but no reference has been found as to how the international mail was handled.

On October 1, 1885, W. Wadds was appointed Post Master and he relocated the third designated Post Office to a more commodious space in another commercial building/store. Chas.

E. Barrett, the Deputy Postmaster, is quoted in the March 30, 1902 issue of the *Rossland Miner* as saying:

"Then the boom started and in the spring of '96, the present (fourth) quarters were leased. The number of lock boxes was small and the bulk of the mail was delivered through general delivery. Many can remember the crowds that waited delayed mails, the people extending in long lines in both directions on Columbia Avenue, sometimes paying for a place in line to be one of the first to be served."

On February 14, 1900, a telegram from Ottawa stated that Parliament voted an appropriation of \$20,000 to be allotted to the building of a new Rossland Post Office. The site selected was the corner of Columbia Avenue and Queen Street (previously Lincoln). Construction commenced under the direction of contractor Thomas Bradbury in March, 1901.

The new Post Office was an impressive, substantial building in a gothic style of architecture. Granite for the first floor was quarried locally and sandstone from Calgary was used for the pressed brick. Oriel (bay) windows graced both the south and east facades and a granite portico enclosed the steps leading up to the entrance. The words, "Post Office," were etched in the granite above the entrance. The main or first floor was used for the Post Office with the Customs Office and the Inland Revenue Offices on the second floor. Generous and luxurious quarters on third floor housed the caretaker. There were six living rooms, a spacious reception hall, lavatories and a bathroom with hot and cold water. The boilers and other heating material were found in the basement.

In the September 29, 1903 issue of the *Rossland Miner* in an article titled "*In new Quarters*" we read,

"quarter oak partitions, ornamented brass fittings, frosted glass, oak counters, and 750 locked boxes, which were finished in brass. The building cost the Dominion \$80,000 in hard cash."

While construction was going on, there were local efforts to see that the mail service itself was improved. A Class II service level was given to the Rossland Post Office which ensured secure, full-

time staff. Ways to improve the integration of American and Canadian mail services were also discussed. An example of this was having a special U.S. Mail car arrive in Northport where Rossland clerks would meet it and usher it into Rossland, using the one-hour trip to sort the mail.

The fire of March 1, 1929 burned down all the buildings on the north side of Columbia Avenue between the Bank of Montreal and the Post Office. The Post Office lost its top floor but the rest of the building was saved due to its construction of granite and brick. Since then, the two-storey building has lost its Gothic appearance.

In 1962, the Post Office received an internal upgrade with new floors, woodwork, counters, aluminum lock boxes installed and steam radiators removed. In 1968, Rossland was declared a postal station of Trail, BC.



Post Office after 1929 Fire