

2115 Queen Street - Rossland Fire Hall/ City Hall



Rossland Fire Hall/City Hall 2019

Heritage Register – Building

- 1) **Historical Name:** Rossland FireHall/ City Hall
- 2) **Common Name:** The Old Fire Hall
- 3) **Address:** 2115 Queen Street
- 4) **Date of Construction:** 1900
- 5) **Design, Style, Architecture, Architect:** Edwardian Institutional

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Description:

The Rossland Fire Hall/City Hall is a two-storey, red brick institutional building situated on two city lots, near the northwest corner of Queen Street and First Avenue, in the historic downtown of Rossland, BC. It has three arched bays at street level on its southern façade, and a prominent hose/bell tower on its southeastern corner.

Heritage Value:

The Rossland Fire Hall/City Hall is valued as one of the City's oldest and most important municipal buildings and as one of BC's oldest fire halls. Occupying two city lots on a highly visible, elevated corner in the historic downtown core, the Rossland Fire Hall/City Hall carries major landmark status in the city. The sense of permanence and solidity of this brick building is a testament to its purpose; its construction and large-scale formal design invoked a sense of security that fire protection and other civic operations were being looked after.

As a municipal building, this historic place is a monument to the sense of civic duty and community pride that are central to Rossland's community identity. Fire protection was one of the key issues behind the push to incorporate the city and was the most important item of business for the newly elected Council in April 1897. A vision was expressed for a community-funded, co-located fire hall and city hall, as neither entity existed at the time. This substantial and stately brick building was opened in 1901 for use by both the fire department and city staff until 1988.

The Rossland Fire Hall/ City Hall is a reminder that fire protection in Rossland was key in the establishment and preservation of the city. There were three devastating fires that consumed much of the established downtown; Spokane Street - 1902, Columbia Avenue south side - 1927 and Columbia Avenue north side – 1929.

The use of this space as a municipal building for 80 years is central to its heritage value. It speaks to the enduring qualities this structure possesses, as it continued to be utilized through many technological and functional changes in both firefighting and public administration.

From 1988 to 1993, major restoration and rehabilitation work was done to return this building to its original design. This restoration included the reconstruction of the hose/bell tower in 1992. Heritage value also lies in the aesthetic qualities of this place; its brick material, formal design and large scale are a reflection of the modern and growing city that Rossland was at the turn of the twentieth century. That the city could afford to protect itself with a top-notch fire service is strongly evident in the physical qualities of this place.

Character-Defining Elements:

- Original prominent corner location in Rossland's historic downtown core.
- Institutional and municipal use for over 80 years, from 1900 to 1980s.
- Its situation in the centre of two city lots, with distance from First Avenue on its southern façade to allow for the navigation of fire equipment in and out of the vehicle bays.
- Its two-storey red brick construction, with original window, door, and vehicle bay openings that speak to its use as a fire hall.
- Its grand scale and formal design expressing its institutional and municipal function.
- The prominent hose-drying/bell tower on the southeastern façade.
- The presence of the original fire bell.
- Row of tall windows on upper storey.
- Two-storey arched entrance to the former city hall on eastern elevation.
- Some surviving original windows and doors.

- Evidence of the changing nature of firefighting technology over time, such as remnants of horse-drawn technology, to automotive fire engine use, to the change to an electronic siren alarm system.
- Some evidence of the use of the upper storeys of the building as City Hall, including the vault.
- Signage identifying the building as the fire hall and city hall.



Rossland Fire Hall/City Hall c. 1901

HISTORY

In 1895, there was a newspaper ad for a volunteer bucket brigade to be established. David Stussi, John Edgren, and Alexander Lynch were named as fire wardens and by 1896 the volunteer brigade was organized under the leadership of Chief E.J. Carson and Assistant Chief C. Scully. That same year, the Rossland Water & Light Company installed six fire hydrants in the city of Rossland. Funds were gathered through public subscription, donations and fundraising events such as the Fireman's Ball to buy the camp 500 feet of fire hose and two hose nozzles. This hose was a source of pride for the local firemen, a symbol of their sophisticated equipment and dedication to the safety of Rossland. The *Rossland Miner* article on "Testing the New Fire Hose" on April 4, 1896 underscored that sentiment:

"Rossland now has all the essentials for fighting a fire and there is no good reason why we should longer live in dread of a general conflagration. We should congratulate ourselves that we have come thus far without a disaster."

Hose reel racing became a common pastime for the firefighters and demonstrated the strong camaraderie that existed between members of the volunteer force.

As early as 1898 an electric fire alarm system was installed in Rossland, with 10 alarm boxes installed throughout the town. The town purchased a large fire bell, nicknamed "Stella". Stella was placed in the fire bell tower at the corner of Columbia Avenue and Queen Street, alerting citizens and volunteer firemen alike that a fire had started in the City. Hose carts and fire boxes were strategically placed throughout the City to ensure that the fire could be quickly extinguished.

Between 1898 and 1900, the building at the northeast corner of Columbia Avenue and Queen Street, the Jordan Block, was exempt from taxes because it was the Fire/Hose Hall for Rossland. The building was for storage purposes only as volunteer firemen were never housed there.

By 1900 the fire department owned three horse-drawn carts all equipped with ladders and hoses. With the City's incorporation in 1897, a building was needed to house both the fire department and City staff. The Fire Hall/City Hall construction started in 1900 and was completed in 1901. The building was designed to cater to all of the needs of the fire department, with lodging in the upper levels, stables in the back for horses, and three large arched doorways to allow for the speedy exit of the horse-drawn carts. On the upper floor were the Council chambers and City Clerk's office, which explains the engraving of "City Hall, 1901" on the side of the building.

Over the years, there were three major fires in Rossland, 1902, 1927 and 1929. On August 25, 1902, a fire wiped out the northeast corner of the block bounded by Columbia and First Avenue and Spokane and Washington Street, as well as houses on the Earl Street bluff.

On January 21, 1927, the south side of Columbia Avenue caught fire. The centre of the block between Queen and Washington Streets was destroyed. Frozen water pipes and hydrants prevented the fire department from being able to fight the fire.

On March 1, 1929, the north side of Columbia Avenue caught fire. All of the buildings between the post office and the Bank of Montreal were destroyed. Only the projection booth of Samuel Hackney's Star Theatre remained standing. Some buildings on the other side of Columbia were also impacted, including the loss of the historic Rossland Club. This was a record fire situation considering the extreme winter and hazardous building conditions. The fire was said to have started in a pool room in this block. Firefighting was again hampered by frozen water pipes. This fire was deemed to be the most disastrous in the history of Rossland, and it spurred construction of more fire-resistant buildings to replace the frame structures lost to the blaze.

In 1938 the last of the horse-drawn firefighting equipment was removed from the building; a new high-powered truck was now in place to respond to fires. In 1961, the hose drying tower and bell were removed, as they were no longer needed. Replaced by an electronic siren in a structure on the roof, the bell was given to Red Mountain Ski Hill.

In 1988 a new City Hall was built on the southwest corner of Columbia Avenue and Spokane Street. The requirements of the fire department also outgrew the capabilities of the old fire hall: the arched doorways were too small for modern motor trucks to fit through easily, and the floors were not sturdy enough to support the increasingly heavy vehicles and gear

being used. In 1992, the building was restored to its origins with the reconstruction of the hose drying tower and the return of “Stella” sitting on display on the ground floor.

In 2006 the fire hall was purchased by Zac Gribble and rehabilitated for use as a café and wine bar, and the upper storey was converted to three condominiums. Various businesses have occupied the ground floor over the years. In 2019, Mook Thai Cuisine purchased the ground floor.