

## 2095 Monte Christo Street -Drill Hall



Drill Hall 2009

### **Heritage Register - Building**

- 1) **Historical Name:** Drill Hall
- 2) **Common Name:** Armories, Annex
- 3) **Address:** 2095 Monte Christo Street
- 4) **Date of Construction:** 1904
- 5) **Design, Style, Architecture, Architect:**  
David Ewart, Chief Dominion Architect for Ministry of Defense

### **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

#### **Description:**

The Drill Hall is a large brick building (53' X103') with pitched roof, on the southwest corner of First Avenue and Monte Cristo Street in upper Rossland, British Columbia. It is

located at the top of a steep hill, above the stately Court House which is one block below, on Columbia Avenue. A copper plate with the words, "Drill Hall 1904" is above the portico of the main entrance which faces east. The historic place consists of the building on its footprint.

**Heritage Value:**

The Drill Hall is valued as a landmark building in Rossland due to its size and location on a steep hillside which allows an unfettered view of it from many perspectives in the lower part of Rossland.

The Drill Hall is significant because it is a visual reminder of Rossland's past connections to the Canadian military. Constructed in 1904, the Drill Hall had a large training area on the main floor and storage for artillery and a rifle range in the well fortified basement. It exemplifies the strong allegiance to Canada and the British Empire felt by the majority of Rosslanders.

The Drill Hall is valued as an example of noteworthy institutional construction of the early 20th century in Rossland. The Drill Hall was designed by the Chief Dominion Architect, David Ewart and the building materials used were of the highest quality. The floor of the Drill Hall was made of eucalyptus wood - a unique feature in B. C., at that time. The walls were of pressed brick, and the foundation of the building is of locally quarried granite blocks. The roof is covered in the original copper tiles, each embossed with a maple leaf. The basement windows are still barred, reflecting the original use of this space. The exterior is in excellent condition and bears mute testament to the craftsmanship and quality building materials used in its construction.

The Drill Hall is valued because of the significant role it played in the community's social and recreational life, providing the largest indoor space available in Rossland for ball sports and social events for the first half of the 20th century. It was also the home of the Rossland Branch of the Canadian Legion from 1919 to 1945. The cooperative, multi-use of this building demonstrates an important characteristic of this community's cultural development that has continued to this day.

There is a long standing connection between the Drill Hall and education in Rossland. On two occasions, the Drill Hall temporarily housed classes until new schools were built. In 1957 the Drill Hall was sold by the War Assets Branch and purchased by the Trail School District. Since that time the Drill Hall has been used primarily for educational purposes; as an Annex with gym and cafeteria, a site of temporary classrooms, home of the Alternate School, and most recently, the Francophone School.

**Character Defining Elements:**

- Size
- location
- Drill Hall signage over front entrance
- Embossed copper tiles on roof
- Pressed brick walls, foundation of locally quarried granite
- Large windows on the main floor

- Barred windows in basement
- Excellent condition of the exterior
- In the interior - the large, open area on main floor still has an 8' border of the original eucalyptus flooring
- Plaque on exterior identifies the Drill Hall as a significant Rossland heritage building



Drill Hall c. 1910



Interior of Drill Hall c. 1909

## History

The Drill Hall is a substantial brick building, 53X103', situated on the corner of First Avenue and Monte Christo Street, one block above the Court House on Columbia Avenue. Its size, the pitched roof and the fact that the building is located at the top of a steep hillside makes it a landmark building, easily seen from many viewpoints in Rossland. The foundation is of locally quarried granite blocks and is twenty-four inches thick.

The Drill Hall was built in 1904 for military purposes by the Canadian Government. It was a training facility on the main floor and had room for storage of artillery and a rifle range in the basement. The Drill Hall was home to The Kootenay Rifle Company and Company No. 1, Rocky Mountain Rangers who had previously used the top floor of the Miners' Hall for practices. (Money for the construction of the Drill Hall had been appropriated in 1902 but apparently, due to the City having not provided a site for the building, plans did not go forward until two years later when that oversight was corrected.)

A strong connection to things military existed in Kootenay communities in the late 1890s and well into the 21st century. Many towns, like Rossland, had active militia groups and Kaslo (1901) and Nelson had their own Drill Halls. Undoubtedly, the Boar War (1899-1902), fought in South Africa, had a lot to do with this. Newspaper coverage of the Boar War was extensive and we know that Rossland men enlisted to fight in the Boar War along side the British troops. One

interesting event in Rossland speaks to the strong British allegiance felt in the community - a large, wooden flag pole was erected on the peak of Mount Spokane in June of 1900 from which to fly the British Ensign to commemorate the British army entering Pretoria. Mount Spokane was renamed Mt. Roberts by public subscription to honor the Commander of the British troops.

Chief Dominion Architect David Ewart was commissioned to design the building in the Baronial Style. The large, regularly spaced windows on the south and north sides of the building have granite sills and arching brickwork to define them and the entrance and windows on the east side are similarly, symmetrically arranged. The basement windows are barred as befitting artillery storage space and the thick walls of the basement are lined with brick. The roofing tiles are unique with a maple leaf embossed on each one. Construction costs for the Drill Hall were \$12,500 in 1904, and the bill was paid by the Dominion.

During the First World War, the Drill Hall was vacated by the Rocky Mountain Rangers who were serving overseas. In 1917, Rossland's Central School burned down and the Drill Hall was used as temporary quarters for its classes. In 1918 when MacLean School was built, the classes moved out.

The Veterans from WW1 returned home and formed the Rossland branch of the Canadian Legion in 1919 setting up club rooms inside the Drill Hall. In the mid 1930's the Rocky Mountain Rangers reorganized with a membership of approximately one hundred and fifty men. One Rossland old-timer suggests that many of the members had no intention of going to war; rather they joined for social reasons.

“When the Second World War broke, they were all conscripted; many had no idea when they joined that they would be called to fight. I remember seeing some very long faces...”

During WW11, the Legion rented out the Drill Hall for various functions. Most notable of these “functions” was the use of the Hall as a home for the Rossland Recreation Club, organized by an enterprising young Rosslander, Harry Lefevre. He found a coal supply to heat the building,

“Lorne Campbell owned a coal mine in the East Kootenay at that time. He supplied us with a car of coal each year. We did our own firing of course.”

The recreation club hosted a high school basketball league, indoor baseball league and badminton games amongst other activities and the Hall was,

“fully occupied from 5:00 p.m. until midnight every day. We would also put on the odd dance to pick up some money.”

The main floor of the Drill Hall was the only place in Rossland that could be used as an activity center for ball sports. There were no gyms in the Rossland schools and the United Church Annex was much smaller in size. The recreation club was highly successful during the 3 years it occupied the Drill Hall.

In 1946 the Drill Hall was again used for school purposes, mainly due to a noticeable increase in the number of school aged children in Rossland - the "baby boom years". The main floor was divided into four classrooms and two classes occupied the basement level. The Rossland Legion had left the Drill Hall in 1945 when they purchased a building on Washington Street as their new headquarters. In 1958, the Trail Armories was built and the Rossland building was no longer needed for military purposes. The Drill Hall was put up for sale through the War Assets Sales for \$150.00 and the Trail School District quickly purchased the building.

Renovations to the Drill Hall for school purposes included putting in a stage, building washrooms/changing rooms and a cafeteria in the basement. It was at this time that the Drill Hall became known as, "The Annex" to MacLean School, (across the road), providing a gym and amenities the school didn't have.

Harry Lefevre, as a School Trustee, is responsible for saving a rather unique part of the original construction of the Drill Hall - the flooring. When the renovations were being done on the Drill Hall, the main floor needed attention due to the heavy wear over the years. Harry was unable to identify the type of wood used and sent off a sample to U.B.C. for identification.

"I received a letter back and discovered that the wood was eucalyptus that had been imported from Australia in 1904 - enough to floor 2 BC armories and enough to be used for railway ties to see how long the wood would last."

Thus Harry Lefevre is responsible for saving, in situ, an eight foot strip of eucalyptus wood on either side of the main floor of the Drill Hall for posterity - the only such flooring left in B.C. (as of 1985 when this conversation was recorded).

In 1981 MacLean School burned down and once again the Drill Hall provided temporary classrooms for the students. When the new MacLean School was constructed it contained its own gym and the Annex no longer played such a significant role in this school's activities. However, the Drill Hall continued to be used as an educational center for first the Alternate School facilities and more recently the home of the Francophone School. As of early 2014, the building is again vacant with the purchase of MacLean School by the French School District.