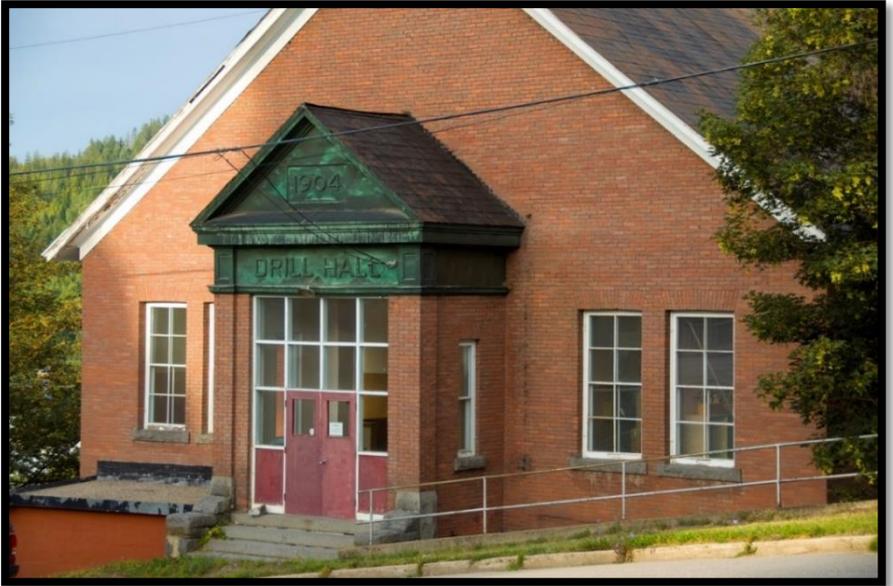


## 2095 MONTE CRISTO STREET – DRILL HALL



### Heritage Register – Building

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

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

#### Description:

The Drill Hall is a large brick building (53 feet by 103 feet) with a pitched roof, on the southwest corner of First Avenue and Monte Cristo Street in upper Rossland. It is located at the top of a steep hill above the stately courthouse which is one block below on Columbia Avenue. A copper plate with the words, “Drill Hall 1904” is above the east portico of the main entrance.

**Heritage Value:**

The Drill Hall is valued as a landmark building in Rossland due to its size, pitched roof and position on a steep hillside. Easily seen from many viewpoints, 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 plus 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 institutional construction of the early 20th century. The Drill Hall was designed by the Chief Dominion Architect, David Ewart. The building materials used were of the highest quality. The floor of the Drill Hall was made of eucalyptus wood, a unique feature in BC at that time. The walls were of pressed brick. The foundation of the building is of locally quarried granite blocks which are twenty-four inches thick. The roof is covered in the 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 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. It was the largest, indoor space available in Rossland for ball sports and social events. It was also the home of the Rossland branch of the Royal Canadian Legion from 1919 to 1945.

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. The Drill Hall was used for educational purposes; as an annex to MacLean School with gym and cafeteria, a site of temporary classrooms, home of the Alternate School, and the Francophone School until 2014.

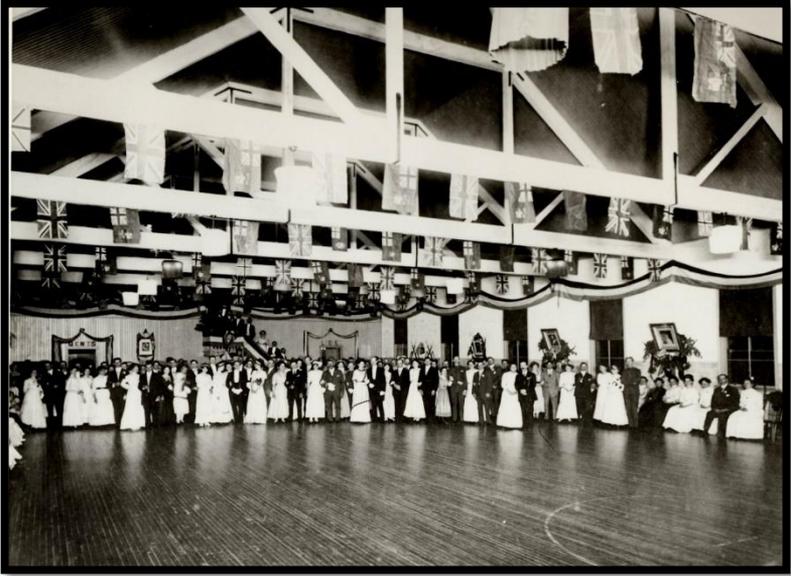
**Character Defining Elements:**

- Size.

- Location.
- Drill Hall signage over front entrance.
- Maple leaf 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-foot 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 was built in 1904 by the Canadian government for military purposes. Money for the construction of the Drill Hall had been appropriated in 1902. Because the city had 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. Kaslo (1901) and Nelson had their own Drill Halls. Undoubtedly, the Boer War (1899-1902) in South Africa had a lot to do with this. Newspaper coverage of the Boer War was extensive. Rossland men enlisted to fight in the Boer War along with British troops. One interesting event in Rossland illustrates 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 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. The entrance and windows on the east side are also symmetrically arranged. The basement windows are barred as befitting artillery storage space. The thick walls of the basement are lined with brick. The roofing tiles are unique with a maple leaf embossed on each one. In 1904, construction costs for the Drill Hall were \$12,500 paid for by the Dominion of Canada. 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. During WWI, 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, MacLean School was built and the classes moved out.

The veterans from WWI returned home and, in 1919, formed the Rossland branch of the Royal Canadian Legion. In the mid-1930s 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 WWII, the legion rented out the Drill Hall for various functions. Most notable was the use of the hall for the Rossland Recreation Club. Organized by the enterprising young Rosslander, Harry Lefevre, the recreation club hosted a high school basketball league, indoor baseball league and badminton games amongst other activities assuring 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 too small. The recreation club was highly successful during the three years it occupied the Drill Hall.

The Rossland legion left the Drill Hall in 1945 after purchasing a building on Washington Street for its new headquarters. In 1946, the Drill Hall was again used as a school 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. In 1958, the Trail Armory 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; the Trail School District bought the building.

Renovations of \$50,000 were needed to convert the Drill Hall into a school annex, complete with a stage, washrooms, changing rooms and a cafeteria in the basement. At that time 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, was responsible for saving a 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. There was enough flooring for two armories in B.C. The rest of the supply was used for railway ties, to see how long the wood would last. When I found out what it was, I kept eight feet of eucalyptus wood on either side of the floor. The blacker strip of wood still in the annex is eucalyptus, and is the only such floor left in B.C. today.*

In 1981 MacLean School burned down and, once again, the Drill Hall provided temporary classrooms for the students. After the new MacLean School was constructed, incorporating its own gym,

the Annex no longer played a significant role in this school's activities. However, the Drill Hall continued to be used as an educational center for the Alternate School and then the home of the Francophone School. In 2014, the building was again vacated when the Francophone School District purchased the MacLean School.