

2115 Queen Street - Rossland City Hall/ Fire Hall



Rossland City Hall/ Fire Hall 2019

Heritage Register - Building

- 1) **Historical Name:** Rossland Fire Hall/City Hall
- 2) **Common Name(s):** 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:

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 for the citizens that their interests in 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 key issues behind the push to incorporate the city (1897) and was the most important item of business for the newly elected Council, 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 the city hall (located on the upper floor) and it is valued for having continued to serve both uses in the building until the late 1980s.

This place is valued as a reminder that fire protection in Rossland is one of the key priorities that helped establish the city and gave it its identity since the 1890s. This place is also a reminder of the series of devastating fires that consumed much of the established Downtown; Spokane Street - 1902, Columbia Avenue south side - 1927 and Columbia Avenue north side - 1929, and of the firefighters who fought to ensure more of the city's wood frame buildings weren't lost in each event.

The long-term use of this place as a municipal building for over 80 years is central to its heritage value, and speaks to the enduring qualities that this purpose-built structure possessed allowing it to support its original purpose through many technological and functional changes in both firefighting and public administration throughout the decades.

Additional value lies in the attempt to convert the building into the first Provincial Firefighters' Museum. Driven by the community, the inspiration to create a provincial museum in one of the oldest surviving fire halls in the province resulted in over a decade of advocacy and fundraising and six years of major restoration and rehabilitation work, including the reconstitution of the hose/bell tower, between 1988 and 1993 which prolonged the life of the building and reinforced its position as one of the most significant structures in the city's history.

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 institutional design expressing its institutional and municipal function
- The prominent hose-drying/bell tower on the southeastern façade.
- The presence of the original fire bell in the tower.
- Row of tall windows on upper storey
- Two-storey arched entrance to the former city hall on eastern elevation
- Any surviving original windows and doors.

- Any surviving 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.
- Any surviving 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 City Hall/Fire Hall c. 1901

Historical Information – Chronology

Year	Event
1895	Local newspaper runs ad for a bucket brigade to be established as Rossland’s first fire service. David Stussi, John Edgren, and Alexander Lynch are named as fire wardens. Originally funded through public subscription, the initial volunteer fire brigade started in 1895 as one of the earliest public services.
1896	Volunteer fire brigade is organized. The fire equipment is procured through public subscription; fundraising through events such as the fireman’s ball enable the purchase of the first firefighting equipment.

Year	Event
1897	The City of Rossland is incorporated. Fire protection was a major driver behind the quest for incorporation; without incorporation the community was not eligible for provincial financial support for fire protection.
1898	The large fire bell, nicknamed "Stella" arrived. And electric fire alarm system is installed throughout town.
1899	Donald Guthrie, former fire captain in Montreal, is chosen as fire chief for Rossland.
1900-1901	Fire hall constructed and opened for use. This is the second fire hall location in the city. The location was chosen because it would place the fire hall in a "commanding position" over the whole town.
1902	August 25 th – a major fire starts on Spokane Street and 1 st Avenue, originating at the P. Burns & Co. butchers site. The northeast corner of the block bounded by Columbia and First, and Spokane and Washington Street was impacted. The block to the west and north of the point of origin of the fire was lost. \$75,000 in damage.
1903	Fire destroys the People's Department Store at the corner of Columbia Avenue and Spokane Street.
1913	The shaft of the War Eagle Mine catches fire, and the shaft house is lost.
1914	The Hoffman House and Collins Hotel are impacted by a fire started by an arsonist.
1916	The City's first auto fire truck was purchased.
1917	A small shack on St. Paul Street belonging to "Coal Oil Johnny" burns.
1925	The fire brigade responded to 36 calls this year, with property loss equaling \$18,991.60.
1926	Repairs to the council chambers and city clerk's office are authorized; bids are tendered.
1927	January 21 st – 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. The fire started in Frank Morris' store, in a building owned by W.F. McNeil, and was determined to have been caused by a gasoline blow torch. Legal action was later taken against Mr. McNeil by Mr. Robert Stephen for \$5555 damages.

Year	Event
1929	<p>March 1st – 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 that had been lost to the blaze. The loss was calculated at \$400,000, and fifteen businesses were gutted. The fire chief and mayor were found to have neglected their duties in not enforcing the clauses of the fire marshal’s act when the fire was investigated.</p>
1934	<p>Rossland had its lowest fire loss in years, with losses to buildings at \$2245.</p>
1938	<p>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 conflagrations.</p>
1939	<p>Fire losses at \$928 for the year. Thirty alarms were answered. The annual fire report for the year said that credit was due to a certain extent to the citizens who cooperated with the fire department by practicing the rules of fire prevention and by elimination of fire hazards from their homes.</p>
1954	<p>Four residences destroyed by one fire in February.</p>
1955	<p>July - A.U. Doratti’s dairy barn burns. July - The fire hall tightens its regulations, and begins to inspect all hotels and multiple dwellings in the city. Several are condemned or ordered to make repairs for insufficient compliance with fire regulations. February - Wright’s Meat Market and Claredon Cigar Store and Pool Hall are impacted by fire.</p>
1957	<p>February - John Duggan becomes fire chief, and Arthur Martin becomes assistant fire chief. The previous chief, David Bissen, had passed away on January 17th.</p>
1961	<p>The bell tower and bell were removed, as they were no longer needed. The bell had been replaced by an electronic siren in a structure on the roof. The bell was given to Red Mountain Ski Hill.</p>
1960s	<p>The alarm testing system that sounded twice per day is changed to one test at noon daily.</p>
1970	<p>A new four-wheel drive truck is put into services. Fire call boxes around town replaced by a phone alert system.</p>
1985	<p>A BC Heritage Trust grant of \$15,000 is approved to aid in restoration of the building.</p>

Year	Event
1988	City Hall vacates the subject building, moving to its current location on Columbia Avenue. A proposal to locate a provincial firefighting museum at this location is approved. Restoration work begins to convert the building for its new museum use.
1989	A BC Heritage Trust grant of \$33,500 is approved to aid in further restoration work. "Stella" is returned to the building.
1992	The Kootenay Boundary Regional Fire Service is located in this building. The hose drying tower is reconstructed and replaced on the building. BC Firefighters' Museum officially opens.
1993	Interior restoration work is carried out.
2006	The fire hall is purchased by Zac Gribble and rehabilitated for use as a café, wine bar, and cultural facility. The upper storey is converted to three condominiums.
2012	Building is listed for sale.
2014	Rossland Social Club begins operating in the building.
2019	Mook Thai Cuisine located in commercial space on ground floor.

