2003 SECOND AVENUE – BELLEVUE HOTEL

Heritage Register – Building

1) **Historical Name:** Bellevue Hotel
2) **Common Name:** Orwell Hotel, The Flying Steamshovel
3) **Address:** 2003 Second Avenue
4) **Date of Construction:** 1897
5) **Design, Style, Architecture, Architect:**

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Description:

The Bellevue Hotel is a substantial, flat-roofed, frame building located on the southeast corner of Second Avenue and Washington Street, marking the northern limits of the downtown commercial area. Viewed from the north, it has a two-storey appearance with no visible basement. From the south and west, due to the steeply sloping lots, the Bellevue Hotel appears to have more than three full floors. The main entrance is on the north side and originally there were exterior, covered stairs leading up to an entrance on the west side of the building.

Heritage Value:

The Bellevue Hotel is valued as the only hotel, built in Rossland during the boom years of the gold mining era, still operating as a hotel today. In the late 1890s hotels were the most common type of building in the downtown. There were over forty of them in the city.

The Bellevue Hotel is valued as a visual reminder of the significant role played by all the hotels in the initial development of the community as, collectively, they offered beds, places to eat and a bar room for drinking and socializing.

The Bellevue Hotel is representative of the "finer" hotels in early Rossland. Its original structure had quality services, fittings and furnishings. The Bellevue Hotel met the Fire Escape Regulations with several staircases between the floors and all the rooms had a window for fresh air. In 1897 a dancing pavilion adjoined the Bellevue Hotel, "offering a place of entertainment and recreation for guests of the house and others seeking an evening's amusement."

The Bellevue Hotel has changed ownership and names over the years. For decades it was called the Orwell Hotel but, since 1992, it has been known as The Flying Steamshovel. Extensive renovations to update the interior were done in 2007.

Character Defining Elements:
- Location atop the Washington Street hill.
- Original size and shape of building.
- The original, repetitive, size and placement of windows on the top floor.
- Signage identifying the building as a hotel.
- A plaque by the entrance identifies the hotel as a significant Rossland heritage building.

HISTORY

In 1897 W. H. Bell purchased the lot from the Nelson and Fort Sheppard Railway, which later became the Great Northern Railway. He erected the hotel and called it the Bellevue. The following article on the Bellevue appeared in the 1897 publication, "*First History of Rossland, B. C.*" – one of four hotels worthy of special mention:

Among Rossland's many excellent hostelries, there is none more worthily popular with the traveling public than the Hotel Bellevue. The Bellevue is most conveniently located at the corner of Washington Street and Second Avenue less than a block and a half from the Red Mountain depot. The site is one of the most elevated occupied by any hotel building in Rossland, and commands an excellent view of the camp and surrounding country.

The Bellevue was built and opened to the public by W. H. Bell, the present owner and proprietor, in the spring of this year (1897). The building is a substantial, two-storey structure, containing besides the office, dining room and bar room, some thirty odd guest rooms. Mr. Bell has spared no expense in furnishing his hotel, and every room is fitted with new and attractive furniture and carpets. There are no inside rooms, all being light and airy, and commanding an unobstructed view from the windows. The house is fitted throughout with modern conveniences, including electric lights, hot and cold baths, electric bells, etc., etc.

Comfort of guests is the first law of the management of the Bellevue. Mr. Bell is his own manager, and conducts his hotel with a view of giving the best accommodations to be had in the city. The dining room is presided over by courteous and attentive waiters, the culinary department is in the hands of an experienced chef and the table is in itself a compliment to the caterer. The bar is one of the best in the city, and over it are served the best drinks and fine imported cigars.

The Bellevue is conducted on both the American and European plans. A free bus meets all incoming and departing trains, baggage, mail and telegrams of guests receive careful attention, rooms are reserved when ordered by telegraph, and every

courtesy and convenience extended to the public by first-class hotels elsewhere is here observed.....

As proprietor of the Bellevue, W. H. Bell has one of the best and most popular hostelries of Rossland, and his house is a resort for mining men, business men and commercial travelers. It is interesting to note that Mr. Bell has just built a dancing pavilion adjoining the hotel, and it will add no little to the popularity of the Bellevue, as offering a place of entertainment and recreation for guests of the house and others seeking an evening's amusement.

The February 2, 1898 report of the license inspector gives the following information about the Bellevue Hotel:

- Size of building – 36' x 100'
- Bar-room – 15'6" x 27', height 11'
- One club room – adjoining bar-room
- Office and sitting area – 16'6" x 27'
- Dining room – 22' x 40' – kitchen adjoining
- 8 bedrooms on the ground (main) floor
- Parlor on the first floor – 12' x 20'
- 19 bedrooms on the second floor

The inspector stated that the bar room was neatly fitted up and clean, the dining room was in use, the bedrooms were well furnished, and in good order. It was also noted that there were two (water) closets on the ground floor and none on the bedroom floor.

In 1898, the city's licensing bylaw stated that to get a hotel license there had to be 30 rooms, an operating dining room and Fire Escape Regulations had to be met. The Bellevue Hotel met these requirements since there were two stairways connecting the ground and second floor. The hotel license cost $100 payable every six months.

Of the 40 hotels in Rossland in 1898, many did not meet the licensing requirements and, instead, paid $300 every six months to operate their bar-rooms, which were called saloons.

In 1899 the hotel's proprietor, James Landis, renamed the hotel the C.P.R. The reason for the name change was to avoid confusion with a saloon on Columbia Avenue which was also called

Bellevue. The name, C.P.R., was borrowed from the C.P.R. Station which operated across the street. In 1901 James Landis seemed to have left the scene, and the owner, W.H. Bell, had the name changed back to the Bellevue Hotel. The saloon, which had shared the Bellevue name, also changed its name and closed shortly after. In 1903, the hotel was sold to Nelson W. MacLeod who renamed it The Orwell.

The hotel enjoyed a favoured location in Rossland, across from the C.P.R. station and one block away from the Red Mountain Railway station. Ed Vipond, a retired C.P.R. employee, remembered after getting off the afternoon train:

> *It is said that some of the regular customers had their personal beer steins on the premises to quicken the time when they would slake their thirst.*

In 1922, Agnes Holmes of Alberta bought the Orwell Hotel. She is remembered for her hospitable nature, known by many as Aunty Holmes. She was assisted with the hotel's operation by a close relative, Joe Grafton, and together they provided a popular destination for diners and drinkers alike.

The most recent and current name for this historic hotel is The Flying Steamshovel. This name reflects the endeavors of a Rossland inventor, Lou Gagnon, who constructed a flying machine with similarities to the modern day helicopter. He staged its first and only trial run from the backlot of a nearby building in 1902.

Mr. Gagnon's machine, a two-engine job, was essentially a helicopter. Its main features were an overhead rotor power-driven from a steam turbine, which lifted the whole contraption skyward from a standing jump. It was intended to go straight up and come straight down. It did just this with modifications. A horizontal push-propeller was geared to a cylinder engine similar to that which powers the average motorboat. A pivot vane was also attached to it and acted as a rudder. Some say that the machine was named for its resemblance to a steamshovel; others say the name came from Gagnon's intention to fly ore off the mountain. For more information, check out the Rossland Museum and Discovery Center website.