

WATERTON HISTORICAL BUILDINGS

“Waterton Lakes Opera House”
309 Windflower Avenue

#11 on the History Walking Tour



Parks Canada Collection

An excellent example of design by the Park Branch Architectural Division, George Brewerton built this cinema, a function it retains to this day. But the name has changed over the years- from Brewerton's, to Mayfair Theatre, to The Centre, to Alpine Cinema and finally The Waterton Lakes Opera House! The original wooden seats were bolted onto planks, which were pushed to the side during the day to allow roller skating on the flat hardwood floor. The heritage seats now in the theatre were brought in from an old vaudeville theatre in Great Falls in the 1960's, complementing the heritage of the beloved cinema.

BUILT: 1935

BUILDERS: Designed by Parks Architectural Division, built by George Brewerton

OF NOTE: The original 1935 lease was between Brewerton and King Edward VIII, who famously abdicated the British throne.

PARKS CANADA HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT:

The cinema has long been a major component of the social fabric of the community. Known as the Alpine Theatre when it opened in 1936, the building retains the original function to this day. The building is an excellent example of the typical park architecture of the time and has remained relatively unchanged. The massing, materials and architectural detailing contribute to the character of the townsite.

A movie theatre was first proposed for this site in 1931 by a Mr. Brewerton from Cardston, Alberta. This was preceded by other proposals for the site including a grocery store, a hotel and a dance hall. The lot was disposed of in a public auction in 1932 but construction did not begin until 1935.

The movie house was designed by the Parks Branch Architectural Division in a style and design representative of the architecture in the park at that time. The stone base is repeated in many other commercial and residential buildings in the townsite. The upper half of the building displays the stucco and half timbering details that contribute to the character of the park. The west facade of the building, originally plain in design, has been detailed with half-timbering similar to that exhibited on the front facade.

The building is very conspicuous due to its prominent location on a corner site and to its role as an important entertainment facility in the townsite. The building both enhances and strengthens the character of the streetscape.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the building is defined by the symmetry of the front facade, the choice of materials -field stone, stucco, and half timbering-, the exposed rafters, the fenestration patterns, the centre gable and the corner location.

All efforts should be made to retain the materials and design of the existing building. Alterations should only be considered for maintenance purposes and in such cases, new materials should match the existing as closely as possible.



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Street View of Windflower Avenue in the 1930's- the cinema, Delaney's and Glendell Market