

WATERTON HISTORICAL BUILDINGS

“Community Centre (Old School)”
Cameron Falls Drive & Fountain Avenue

#15 on the History Walking Tour



Parks Canada Collection

Establishing a school was a priority for park officials as early as 1919, but it wasn't until 1927 that a one-room schoolhouse was built. In 1928, the colonnaded portico of field stone was added, designed by W.D. Cromarty of the Park Branch Architectural Division. By 1931, there were two classrooms for the 30 students, and gym was added in the 1940's. But by 1995, there were not enough year-round residents to keep a school going, and the building then took on the role as a community center.

BUILT: 1927, 1929, and additions 1935 and 1940

BUILDER: Harry Cummings was contracted by George Baker for the first school.

OF NOTE: Waterton's first school commenced in September 1925, in a private home. Nineteen students were taught by Florence Keith. Various homes and even the lobby of the now-gone Waterton Lakes Hotel and Chalets were used until the first school was built.

Parks Canada Heritage Character Statement:

Historically the building is significant because it reflects the commitment of the Dominion Parks Branch to establish the village as a year round, and not just a seasonal, community. The first park superintendent, George 'Ace' Bevan, argued for a school as early as 1919 as a necessity for attracting year round residents. In that year there were only four or five permanent residents. By 1931, after the school had been operating for six years and already been enlarged once, the community had grown to include 300 year round residents.

The building was erected in 1925 as a one room school. An addition in 1928 added another room and the colonnaded portico. Both the original design and the 1928 addition exhibit the influence of W.D. Cromarty, chief of the park service architectural division and part time superintendent of Waterton. The use of stucco and field stone as exterior materials and the Tudor motif in the centre gable are hallmarks of Cromarty designed buildings in Waterton. An additional element is the bellcast hip roof which, along with the exposed rafters, adds a picturesque dimension to the design.

The rear gymnasium was added in the 1940s. The classroom windows on the front facade appear to have been modified in the 1960s or 1970s and probably reflect the addition of a dropped ceiling. These additions detract from but do not substantially mar the effect of the exterior design. Materials and repair are good.

The school is the largest non commercial building in the townsite. It dominates a large civic block also taken up by green space, community hall, and churches. As the only school in the community, it has high recognition among the year round residents.

Character Defining Elements

Character defining elements include the stucco and stone cladding, half timber detail on centre gable, exposed rafters and bell cast roof.



Class of 1931