

Statement of Significance

Cumberland Post Office

Jonathan Yardley and Helen Edwards, August 2006

CUMBERLAND POST OFFICE

Building Address: 2739 Dunsmuir Avenue

Description Of historic place

The Cumberland Post Office is a two-storey Edwardian brick structure on the corner of Dunsmuir Avenue and Third Street in the Village of Cumberland.

Heritage Value

The heritage value of the Cumberland Post Office lies in its connection with the growth of the Comox Valley. Although the presence of coal had been reported as early as 852, it was not until 1865 that the first mining occurred. Robert Dunsmuir, who had arrived in the area in 1852 as a Hudson's Bay Company employee, acquired a "Free Miner's Licence" and began to prospect on his own. The Wellington Mines had become so successful by 1880 that he sought other sources. Operations began at Union in 1888 but the site's limitations led to the formation of Cumberland in 1893. With the growth of the mining industry, the town grew rapidly and more permanent buildings were being erected to replace those of the ramshackle "boom town" type.

There is also heritage value in the building as an expression of the confidence of the Canadian government in Cumberland. The Post Office had been located in temporary rental accommodation until the viability of the settlement was confirmed. Its location on the main commercial street and prominent corner siting further enhance its importance. As was common elsewhere (including the capital city of Victoria), the building served as the post office and customs office, reinforcing the federal government presence. It later also housed the telegraph office: a custodian lived on the upper storey. William Henderson, Department of Public Works, was the supervising architect, using a plan similar to federal buildings in other locations but using local materials wherever possible (the sandstone was quarried from an area near the No. 5 Mine) and scaled down to the size of the settlement. The use of brick further enhanced the idea of permanence.

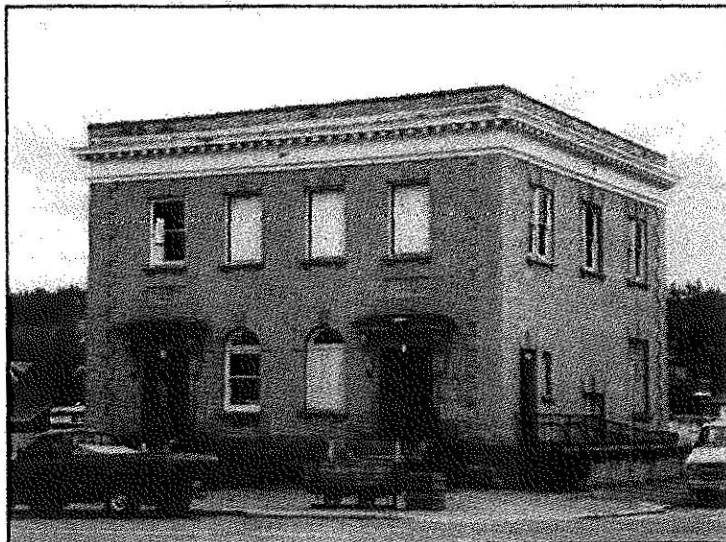
There is also value in the architectural design, which reflects the change in public taste from the highly ornate facades of the high Victorian period to the more refined decoration of the Edwardian era. Its modest size is appropriate to the small town in which it was built.

There is historic value in the benchmark tablet that was affixed to the building to indicate 500 feet above mean sea level by surveyor L.O. R. Dozois of the Geodetic Surveys of Canada in 1930.

Character Defining Elements

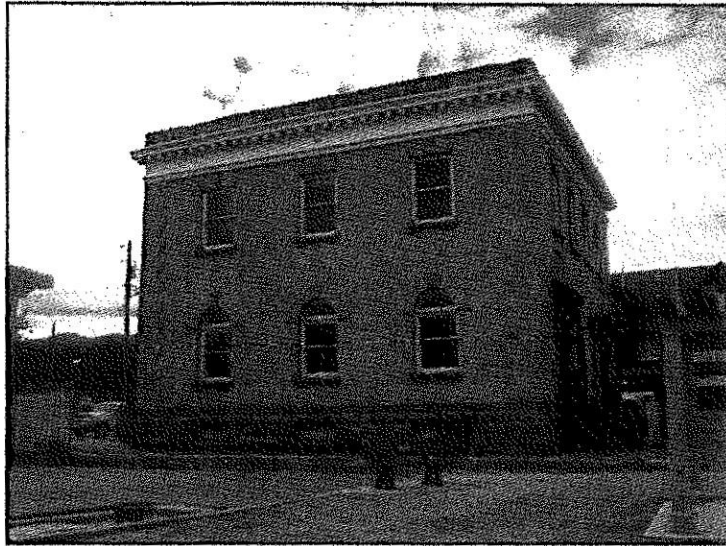
The key elements that define the heritage character of the Cumberland Post Office include:

- siting on property with no setback on the side street - setback from the main street
- corner location
- characteristics of the Edwardian commercial style including balanced symmetrical facade; cornice with dentils; form and pattern of fenestration including round-headed windows on front, rear and east side; brick quoins; sandstone base and trims; and brick construction - bench mark tablet placed by Geodetic Survey
- signage ("Post Office" and "Customs 1907") in inset sandstone blocks over main entrances

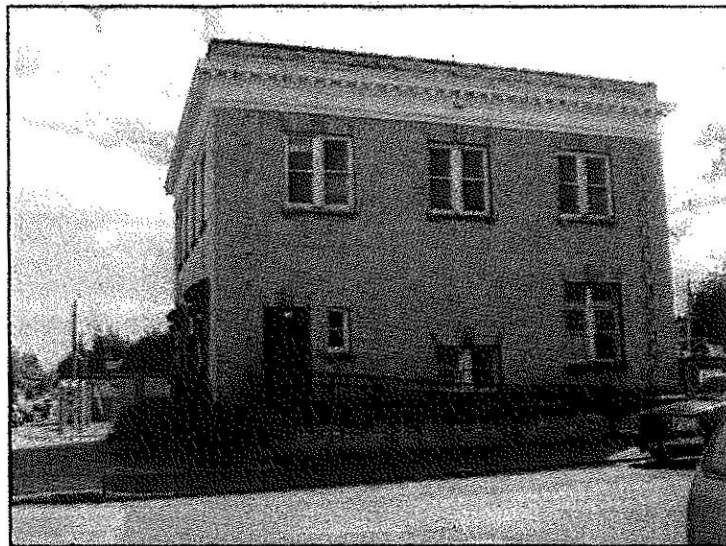


Front elevation, 2006.

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East elevation, 2006.



West elevation, 2006,

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Sources of Information

Barr, Jennifer Nell. Cumberland Heritage: A Selected History Q/People Buildings Institutions and Sites 1888-1950. Cumberland: Corporation of the Village of Cumberland, 1997.

Isenor, D.E., E. G. Stephens, D. E. Watson. One Hundred Spirited Years: A History of Cumberland. Campbell River: Ptarmigan Press, 1990

Site visit.