

Ranchers' Hall Moved to Heritage Park by Eugene Blakley



OLD RANCHER'S HALL, built on Joseph Fisher's ranch in the Millarville area in 1895. This picture was taken in 1937 and is courtesy of the Alberta Institute.

Rancher's Hall finds new home

For eighty-one years the old Ranchers' Hall sat on the same spot on the Fisher Ranch at Millarville. Joseph Fisher Sr. had donated the land and the building of the Hall was a real community event. Logs were cut and hauled to the site and almost all the ranchers had a hand in the building of it. Up to that time, 1895, there had been no public building in the district. Until 1950, when a new hall was built four miles east of the old Hall, it was in constant use as a gathering place for dances, church, school

and meetings of all kinds. After the Sheep Creek School was built in 1928, the annual Christmas concert was held in the Hall, so many former students of the school, some still living in the Millarville-Kew districts, and many others who had attended dances in earlier years, had a fondness for the old Hall. This was demonstrated by their attendance at the party given for the opening of the Hall in its new setting in Heritage Park on October 2nd, 1976.

In the early spring of that year, Heritage Park showed an interest in moving the old building into Calgary, to renovate and preserve it. It was rapidly deteriorating, having been used as a storage place for several years. The Fisher family were pleased to know that the Hall could be saved, so gladly gave consent to its removal.

It was quite a job, jacking up the heavy log building, and it was surprising to find most of the logs in fairly good condition. When it was finally loaded on dollies, with the logs well braced and minus the floor, it was taken into Calgary and set down in a section of Heritage Park to be known as Old Town. Close by is the Sam Livingstone house. The Fisher and Livingstone families have been close friends since the two senior members of the families came to the country in pioneer days, so it was appropriate that the two buildings should be situated nearby.

By the end of summer, an amazing change had taken place in the old Hall. A few new logs, windows and doors, a new floor, and an addition built on where in the early years had been a "Ladies' " and a "Gentlemens' " rooms, plus a kitchen. The entire interior had been renewed.

On October 2nd, 1976, the building was ready for the grand opening. Invitations were sent out to all former and present residents of the Millarville and Kew districts. The guests were met at the Park entrance and taken to the Hall in an assortment of horse drawn vehicles. For many, it was the first time in many years they had been behind a team of horses and for many of the younger ones, it was a first experience.

When all the guests had gathered, the ceremonies took place with Archdeacon Cecil Swanson making the dedication. Short speeches were given by members of some of the oldest families of the Millarville-Kew districts, including Joe Fisher, now owner of the land on which the Hall had been built, Nettie Ware, daughter of John Ware, who had helped in the building of the Hall, and Elsie (Millar) Douglass, daughter of the first Millarville postmaster. The daughters of Joseph Waugh, and early pioneer

of the area, presented a picture to be hung in the Hall. Eunice (Shaw) Parker, Priddis, presented a dance program, which had been used many years before at a dance in the Hall. A large framed photograph of Joseph Fisher Sr. was presented and later hung in the Hall.

Tables were set up in the main part of the Hall and in the new addition a long table was centered by a suitably decorated cake and mounds of sandwiches courtesy of the Administration of Heritage Park. A silver tea service, loaned by Mildred (Millar) MacMillan, graced the tea table, which was presided over by two granddaughters of Joseph Fisher, Olive (Piper) Schwarz and Mary (Blakley) White. The lunch was served by many young ladies wearing old fashioned costumes. Some of the guests were also wearing old fashioned clothing, and this gave an old time setting for the event.

Since the opening day, several more pictures have been hung in the Hall, each having to do with the early life of the Millarville-Kew districts. One small picture of the old Hall, drawn by a great-grandson of Joseph Fisher Sr., Stephen Fisher, has been framed and is also on the wall.

The Hall is now used as a tea room and light lunches are also served.