

19/10/2018

Alan Ramsdan tells the story of how 402 Anderson Street, the site of the old Nelson Museum and Archives came to be:

Alan speaking:

0:00-

I don't have exact numbers, dates, so if you want to put those in you have to find them. I tried finding them the other day, I spent three hours downstairs and I couldn't find anything. That's because how slow it is when you tried to read papers. Even when you think you know when it was.

0:46-

The federal government decided to have a celebration for the 1970 100th anniversary of BC becoming a part of the Confederation of Canada. So they set up a plan with the province of BC that they would share with the community. The community would put up \$10 000 and the province and the federal government would each put up \$10 000, so that was \$30 000. But they also put up some specifications. The City of Nelson appointed a committee to do this project. We had had several other [projects] in the past: Lakeside Park swimming pool, band shell on the lake.

2:00-

One of the things that was required was that any proposed project to be approved for the committee to work on had to have proper plans that is done by a somebody who could plan, an architect hopefully. If it was a building or something of that sort and it had to be accurately priced by some professional who knew how to price a structure. These two were requirements when this Nelson committee came into being, there was a big promotional move amongst a lot of people to build an indoor swimming pool, that was already going on, but there was not that much money raised at that point.

3:23-

So Mr. Bernie Fetterly who was the head of the Museum Association and also sort of the curator and a man of all works for the early, early, museum and I got together. We were personal friends and I had been a member of the museum board maybe a year less than him but about the same amount of time.

4:30-

So I had a friend who used to come to Nelson and was a salesman and I knew him for a number of years. Before that he was a salesman for steel buildings out of Kelowna. And so he came over one day to visit and said "I hear you guys are going to make a proposal for a museum." I said "how did that get out?!" And he said "well I don't know, but I heard that and I thought I'd come and talk to you." So, we talked about it and I said "well if you can hang around and stay for day we can talk to Mr. Fetterly about this." We discovered of course that the City of Nelson would not allow in the residential area steel buildings. Now in the industrial area, steel buildings are obvious because they are fire proof, and that they were easy to put up and/or move or whatever. At that time, the flat down on Cottonwood Creek was where they present[ed] various open-air functions and still are. When we proposed this museum, that's where we saw a perfect place to site it. So we checked the required size, Mr. Fetterly had all of the [information from] North American museums background people [who] had come up with what size a display area would be for a community of our size. We had all these basic figures so we gave them to this fellow, [salesman friend] and he said, "Well I gotta come up with a price for you, constructed." So that was the shape of it, and after we received that plan and the cost of the steel building. Then also, Mr. Fetterly being an outside carpenter and contractor all this time, knew how to do facings. He said, "If we put a brick facing on that building, it'll look perfect." Down there, we can put a sign on the roof and people coming into town would say "Oh boy, there's the museum we know where it is, now we can walk down there. It's alongside that creek and the nice falls coming down and all that."

7:25-

And we had it priced out in Nelson and everything was set. And then years went by. I can't tell about the dates, either '66 or '68 for opening in 1971. Because of the popularity of the idea of an indoor swimming pool, and because the people on the committee were committed to that. **We alone provided a planned location and a price.** About the first week in September, the federal government said "no more projects, that's the end." And the committee knew this. Mr. Federly gets a call from Louis Maglio, who was the mayor at the time, and said "Bernie, the museum has been chosen as the one." And Bernie said, "Oh that's great we've got it all [planned]. And Louis said, "Oh no Bernie, I've been talking to the provincial government and they're going to build a new highway interchange into Nelson and it's going to bury that site. So that site won't be available, you can't put a steel building in the community outside of the industrial area. So you'll have to do is a) get a site and b) get a set of plans and the cost. And you've got two weeks. Unfortunately Bernie, the only place the city can offer you as a site is Gyro Park parking lot."

9:50-

So there we are, we've got two weeks. We'd got no plan they would take and no cost, and no site. Anyway, I don't remember what day it was but I know it was in the afternoon. I lived at 422 1st Street. So I walked up to the corner by the Shell station and across, that was the normal way to walk uptown. So I cross the street, I probably got 30 or 40 feet and I see my old friend George Buttlings, who had been a city assessor, coming down the street. I hadn't seen George since he retired, which had been a few years before. So I said, "Hi George, good to see ya! What are you doing in Nelson? I haven't seen you in two or three years." And he said, "Oh, an old friend from Nelson, she's living in (wherever he was, down there in Vancouver area) and her house is in derelict for some time, kitty corner from the Shell station. The fire department has been authorized to burn it down and then the City will clean it up. So that building will be gone. I guess the homeless were not even using it because it was in such bad shape."

12:08-

We had a nice little chat. So George said, "Well, what are you doing?" And I said, "Well, we're in a heck of a spot." He said, "What's that?" And I said, "Well after the last minute, we've got to find a site for a museum and we've got to get the site approved to hold a building, and we have to get the building designed. All of this within the next two week period." And he said, "Wonderful! Well, I'm here to sell that property on the corner, what's it worth?" And I said, "Well I don't know." And he said, "Well, I'll head back up to City Hall and I'll see what I can do. Maybe that will be available."

13:05-

So he [George] went to City Hall. The mayor phoned my friend Fetterly and said, "That site is available, but you'd have to get a set of plans." Bernie [Fetterly] was pretty upset. So I said, "Oh, come on Bernie, if we're ever going to get anywhere, we've done this sort of thing before. Let me phone Dave Fairbanks, he's an old pal of mine, and he'll do the drawings. I'm sure he'll find a way to get them done. He'll also get somebody who he works for commercially to do the pricing. It'll be as simple a building as we can possibly make. So Bernie gave him [Dave Fairbanks] the proportions that were required. And we thought, 'ah, we've got it made!'"

14:03-

I think it was on a Saturday when I saw [George] Buttlings, or maybe it was a Friday, Must've been a Friday because Saturday the City was closed. Anyway, Dave Fairbanks phoned me and said: "Yeah we can do the plans, Bernie dropped off the size, and we can do a simple plan for you. Ron Sawyer, who is my associate, will do all that work for you. So he's going to come and talk to you guys."

Now, the first thing he [Ron] says was, "You know, there's water in that site, so we have to know how stable it is." Bernie said, "Well how do you figure that out at this point in time." So what he [Ron] said was: "Well what you do is get two 16 ft lengths of steel rod and an 8 pound sledgehammer and a 12 ft ladder, and you and Bernie go down on that property and Bernie will climb up the ladder with the 8 pound sledge and you'll put on a hard hat and leather gloves and hold that rod, and when he hammers it down so that it takes 2 pounds to move even an inch, and measure that

distance so you know how far in that was, and you need three of those holes.”

15:51-

So this is on an evening and here Bernie brings his commercial floodlight and here we are at 11:00 at night, Bernie up the ladder and I'm down below holding this damn thing vertical, with a level, you know, to make sure it's vertical. It takes a lot of time to pound that thing down. Then we have to use a jack-all, well we had to jack it back up in order to use it. We weren't going to buy three pieces of steel and leave them there. So it was like 2:30 or 3 in the morning when we finished pounding these things in. The thing is, people were complaining to the police so they came down fast. And I said, "Well you phone the mayor, we have to get this done! Days are going by." So, that's how we began at the corner, at 402 [Anderson].

17:10-

When it came to construction time, they found out that when they dug the big hole, it filled up with water right away. The City had to put pipe in and take the little creek that came down there so it didn't flow into the property. Still it was still in the ground down below but at least it wasn't up in the upper levels. They [the City] pumped the basement hole out because it filled up with water right away. And then we began the construction!

This is what people forget. Now, at this point in time the building [402 Anderson] is supposedly the City's, in the sense that it accumulated city requirements (and also some other things). I'll just point out that first of all, that property was from Nelson Avenue all the way up to Douglas Road. That's a big piece of property.

19:21-

When the construction was begun, it was begun with donations like you wouldn't believe. All kinds of people turned out to help on the physical work. And we got tremendous amounts of support. Kootenay Forest Products provided us with, free, all the lumber. Louis Maglio, who was the mayor, but was not working as a "city man", working as a private [person] who owned a Timber Mark, he provided the concrete blocks at his cost,

which was quite a donation. The cement company provided the concrete free, delivered free. The guy who did the blocks, Renk, donated his time, he didn't charge us anything and he did all that concrete block work. And of course like I said, myself and my two sons wheeled concrete along with a lot of other people (I'm not saying we were the only ones). It was certainly not the kind of work I was used to. I'd never done that scale of work. Pushing concrete wheelbarrows full on a bouncing wooden board was not my idea of a lot of fun, but you know, we all did it because that was in our heart project. That was the beginning of 402.

[2,100 words]

21:30-

When the building was up, and we were beginning to work on it inside, those were the museum people. So a number of ladies who were members of the museum would also show up and we were patching spaces, you know, concrete poured like that quite often there's little gaps. Mr. Fetterly and I would go around and fill the gaps and then the ladies were busy putting on basic coating, kind of like paint, on the concrete. Then we get a phone call from the City, [saying] that: "On this coming Saturday, we're moving you from the old Lake St. Brothel to the Museum. We've assigned two trucks and two crews and they're moving it." Now if you can imagine, nothing was ready for anything and none of the stuff at the museum was tagged properly. We had City guys who were used to hauling rocks and gravel and stuff grabbing items in the museum, walking it out, dropping it in the back of a dump truck trucking it down to the [new] museum, walking it in and then plunking it on the floor and leaving. That's how we got moved. The story of that building is quite fascinating.

23:46 END