

WINDERMERE HISTORICAL TOUR

Historical Sites

1. White House
2. Pitts General Store (Pantry)
3. Windermere Hotel
4. Stone Power Plant
5. Government Building
6. J.C. Pitts Home
7. RCMP Barracks
8. Stolen Church
9. Windermere Cemetery
10. The Big House Ranch
(Elkhorn Ranch)

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Windermere began on September 4, 1883 when Gilbert Malcolm Sproat named Lake Windermere, previously known as Lower Columbia Lake, after the same lake in Cumberland, England. To prevent any conflict of interest in his survey position, he made a claim on Lot 8, Windermere town site, in the name of his friend, John Jane.

Settlement was slow due to the lack of transportation but services were built as they were needed. The following buildings highlight the history that is still present.

1. WHITE HOUSE

Sinclair Avenue

The story of the White House begins in the town of Donald, B.C., divisional point for the Canadian Pacific Railway. When the railway moved this point to Revelstoke in 1897, some of the residents chose to move to Windermere. These residents included Mr. and Mrs. Rufus Kimpton who in the summer of 1900 brought their home – The White House – to Windermere. For many years the White House functioned as a home but in 1925 it became a hotel with four or five cabins built north of the main building. When the Kimptons passed away in the 1940's, their son inherited the house and converted it to a beer parlour. Even though the White House has changed hands, it continues to be run as a bar.

2. PITTS GENERAL STORE

1661 Government Street

This location is the second general store in Windermere built in 1912 by Harry Richardson Sr. and Frederick Kimpton. It was run by J.C. Pitts and the store's letterhead described him as a "General Trader". In 1923 Mr. Pitts sold the business after he and his daughter had operated it for eleven years. It changed hands five more times until it was closed as a store in 1979. The building was converted to a home and woodworking shop until it was reopened as a store in 2007.

3. WINDERMERE HOTEL

Sinclair Avenue & Government Street

Considered the oldest structure in Windermere, the Windermere Hotel was first used as a stopping place. The log portion was built by George Starke and Ed Johnston in 1886, with an addition of 20 rooms added in 1899. The business was run by J.A. Stoddart from 1888 to 1945. Early ledgers show that the hotel also operated like a bank by giving loans to residents. A second addition in 1922 improved the room layouts, but not the lack of heat or running water. After 57 years in the Stoddart family, the hotel was sold and a series of owners operated a variety of commercial ventures from the building, and dramatically changed the façade.

4. STONE POWER PLANT

1686 Sinclair Avenue

The Power Plant was built in 1912 for Ed Stoddart by Harry Richardson Sr. and Jack Taynton. It housed the first power plant in Windermere and provided electricity to the Windermere Hotel and Pitts General Store. Edward Parry operated the plant which was run on a Fairbanks-Morse engine that drove the generator. When the engine wasn't running, a back-up system of glass jar batteries was put in use. Around 1936, Lloyd Tegart purchased the plant and operated the generator with diesel power.

5. GOVERNMENT BUILDING

4714 Fairmont Street

The second government building in Windermere was constructed by Mr. Arthur Murray (Bob) Chisholm in the 1930s.

It was used by Mr. Chisholm to carry out his many duties including Government Agent, Mining Recorder, Police Magistrate, Justice of the Peace and fiction writer. Unfortunately not much is known about the later history of this building.

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6. J. C. PITTS HOME

4675 Selkirk Street

The James Carlton Pitts home was built in Donald in 1885, but like other Windermere buildings it was dismantled and rebuilt at its current site in 1900. The property became known for its beautiful lawns, flowers and gardens. An addition was built in 1923 by the Smith family that gave the house the current T-shape but during the 1960s one property owner was unable to keep up the maintenance and the house fell into disrepair. The Beck family bought the home in 1982 and successfully restored it to its former glory.

7. RCMP BARRACKS

1654 Swansea Avenue

These barracks were built in 1886 by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and were the first barracks built in the Rockies. The structure housed the Government Building, Gold Commissioner's Office and Mining Records Office by 1900. The Government office relocated to Wilmer in 1904 and the building became a residence for many families including W.R. (Ray) Ball, Superintendent of Construction for the Banff Windermere Highway in 1913. Mr. Ball left a year later when war broke out, and the building continues to be used as a private residence.

8. STOLEN CHURCH

Victoria Avenue

Officially known as St. Peter's Anglican Church, the building was constructed in 1887 in Donald B.C. When the railroad and residents abandoned the town in 1897 the Kimpton family moved to Windermere where Mrs. Celina Kimpton found she could not live knowing her church was so far away. With much encouragement, her husband Rufus with his bother-in-law, J.C. Pitts, dismantled the church in Donald and "stole" it in 1900. It was shipped by train to Golden then by steamship to Windermere where it was reassembled at its current location.

The 600 pound bell did not make the full journey; while being transferred at Golden it was snatched by St Paul's Anglican Church members to grace their church in Golden.

9. WINDERMERE CEMETERY

Windermere Cemetery Road

The unofficial beginning of the cemetery is recorded with a double funeral. On the way home after digging the grave for James Mahon Rogers in 1893, Robert Thornbury was thrown from his horse, breaking his neck. A survey of the site in 1911 designated three areas for burials: Protestant, Roman Catholic and Other. Despite some

efforts, poor record keeping showed that what were believed to be empty plots were unmarked graves. In 1985 the cemetery was closed to burials except for plots purchased before 1954. The Columbarium Memorial Wall was built in 1996 allowing only memorials.

10. THE BIG HOUSE RANCH

5085 Kootenay Road #3 - 5 km east of town

The Big House Ranch started as two separate properties in the early 1880s. As the land changed owners so did the names of the ranches. One property started as Rogers Ranch and then became the Brighthouse Ranch and ended as the Big House or Big Hoose. The Windermere Experimental Farm came into existence in 1924 when the Dominion Government merged the two ranches with another one in the area. The purpose of the farm was to test growing conditions and weather patterns for various crops in the region. The Experimental Farm continued until 1936, after which the property went through a series of owners before being purchased in 1946 and rebranded as the Elkhorn Dude Ranch. Some of the original buildings still exist on the property today.

