

Post Office (formerly Federal Building)

MAP ID: D-31

DESIGNATION: HERITAGE SITE

ADDRESS: 4902 Franklin Ave. (Lot 11-12, Block 23, Plan 65)

CURRENT OWNER: 6133 NWT Limited

OCCUPANT: Canada Post

CURRENT USE: Commercial

BUILT: 1955-1956

CONSTRUCTION:

Frame on concrete



DESCRIPTIVE HISTORY:

A downtown post office and government office had been planned for Yellowknife for many years, and Lots 11-12 Block 23 had been reserved for this purpose as early as 1950. The need for a “Federal Building” was at the forefront of downtown planning but a lack of funding delayed the project until 1955. C.H. Whitham Ltd. was awarded the contract to build a post office in July 1955 and construction began. The post office opened for business on April 30, 1956 and the grand opening ‘ribbon-cutting ceremony’ was held on July 18, 1956. In 1958, Ivor Johnson was awarded a contract to make alterations to the building, including changes to the post office, and the addition of the small third floor section which sits like a box on the top of the centre of the building. A fire in January 1968 gutted parts of the upstairs which caused fire and flood damage to offices throughout the structure. Postmasters of the new Yellowknife office included Art Umbach (1956-1963), Al Mitchell (1963-1966), Nick Komisar (1967-1971), Doug Fraser (1971-1975), Alan G. Mitchell (1975), Janet Thompson (1975-1979), Edward Sphur (1979-1980), and Norm Achtzener (1981-c.1984). The post office began delivering residential parcels in 1976 and Ed Boxer was the first delivery manager using a fleet of three van trucks. Another proposal in the 1970s was mail carrier delivery, but this did not prove feasible. Most residents had their mail come directly through the post office for pickup using a general delivery system - this also proved unfeasible with a larger city population in the 1980s. Site post office boxes based on uniform street address was begun during 1982-1983, while the old X0E-1H0 postal code was phased out and replaced by X1A prefixes.

Federal government offices and the new court house were located on the second floor. It was the official courthouse for the Northwest Territories for many years, until the new courthouse was completed in June 1978. Some of the government offices located here in the 1960s included the Canadian Wildlife Service (c.1960-1961), the Resident Geologist of INAC (1958-1962), Department of Energy and Mines (c.1968), Canada Manpower Centre (c.1968), and private apartments.

The building was fitted with a coal chimney although the building never had a coal furnace installed. Later the chimney was filled with sand and dirt when the government “finally realized that no coal was coming.” Significant exterior changes and renovations were conducted in the 1990s and the building lost much of its original appearance with the completion of a new façade and windows. In 2010, the Government of Canada sold the building on the open market as part of a national property surplus. 6133 NWT Limited acquired the building. Canada Post continue to lease space in the building and it remains Yellowknife’s primary post office. The building was designated a Heritage Site in Yellowknife during 2010.

NOTES:

REFERENCES:

News of the North, July 15, 1955; April 27, 1956; July 13, 1956; July 20, 1956; September 18, 1958; Dec. 12, 1963; Feb. 1, 1968; December 17, 1975; September 28, 1977; June 23, 1978 The Yellowknifer, July 14, 1982
Sandy Louitit in Yellowknife Tales book, pg. 49
NWT Phone Books