

Fairbridge Farm Schoolhouse

Location: 4791 Fairbridge Drive, Cowichan Station, BC

Formally Recognized: 2015/07/08

Other Names: Cowichan Public School, Fairbridge Schoolhouse

Construction Dates: 1885; 1989; 2007



Front View of Schoolhouse



Back View of Schoolhouse

Statement of Significance for Fairbridge Farm Schoolhouse

Historic Place

The Fairbridge Farm Schoolhouse is a one-storey wood frame building, with a full-width covered porch entrance. The schoolhouse is located in the historic Fairbridge Farm park-style subdivision, in Cowichan Station, British Columbia. It is one of two historic buildings located on this large lot. This historic place is specific to the building footprint.

Heritage Value

The Fairbridge Farm Schoolhouse has significant heritage value in its representation of the early development of Cowichan Station. The school building was built, and is currently located on, the first farmstead of Cowichan Station. As such, there is value in the school's association with the early settlers and settlement patterns of the Cowichan Valley.

Built in 1885, the Fairbridge Farm Schoolhouse is one of the oldest buildings in the Cowichan Valley and reported to be the oldest framed building north of the Malahat. As most of the original settler buildings have been torn down, the schoolhouse, at 130 years old, has great significance to the Cowichan Valley. As the oldest framed building north of the Malahat, the schoolhouse can be seen as a symbol of the birth of the development of the entire northern island, from the Cowichan Valley to Port Hardy.

After its closure as a school in 1896, the schoolhouse was used as a residence for farm managers and farm herdsman. The Fairbridge Society, a philanthropic society famous for its emigration scheme, bought the property the schoolhouse was located on in 1935 and continued the building's use as a residence for the farm workers. As the Fairbridge Society only built one farm school in Canada, the schoolhouse's association with the internationally-renowned society is of great historic value on local and national levels.

The Fairbridge Farm Schoolhouse is a notable representation of a significant stage in the development of the Cowichan Valley. As the oldest remaining school in the area, it illustrates the introduction of what was considered 'luxury' services to the Cowichan Valley. At the time this school was built, the community of Cowichan Station was only just beginning to develop.

Character-Defining Elements

Key elements that define the heritage character of the Fairbridge Farm Schoolhouse include:

- The school's location on the first farmstead of Cowichan Station
- The building's simple massing and traditional wood-framed rectangular form
- The building's wood-framed windows and low-hanging roof
- The open surrounding area and visibility of the school building
- Its current use as a community meeting place



Side View of Schoolhouse

Historical Information

Timeline

- 1885. The Cowichan Public School was built on James Mearns Sr. property.
- 1896. The Cowichan Public School was closed.
- 1897. The property became Pemberlea Farm and the schoolhouse became the farm manager's home.
- 1935. The property became Fairbridge Farm and the schoolhouse stayed the farm manger's home.
- 1937. The schoolhouse became the home for the farm herdsman.
- 1950. The schoolhouse was used as housing for British immigrant families by the Canadian Pacific Railway's Department of Immigration and Colonization during the 1950s.
- 1977. The schoolhouse was given to the CVRD for management by Bellamy Properties during a subdivision development.
- 1988. The CVRD gave the schoolhouse to the Fairbridge Chapel Heritage Society.

Important Facts

- James Mearns Sr. arrived in the Cowichan Valley aboard the *H.M.S Hecate* as one of the first European settlers.
- The Cowichan Public School was built by W.J. McMillan.



Original Phone Artifact from Fairbridge Farm



Desk to be used in future schoolhouse use

Current Information

Function

- Used as a community meeting place for the Fairbridge Strata and Fairbridge Chapel Heritage Society
- Can be rented out as a meeting place
- Owned and managed by the Fairbridge Chapel Heritage Society
- For information on the Fairbridge Farm Schoolhouse visit: www.fairbridgechapel.com.

Construction

- New roof in 1989 and 2007
- New floor in 2012

Heritage Status

- Declared a Heritage Conservation Area when the property was a CVRD Regional Park, 1981
- Pending Provincial Recognition



Interior Views of the Fairbridge Farm Schoolhouse