

Hudson's Bay Company Store and Warehouse

MAP ID: C-66

DESIGNATION: HERITAGE SITE

ADDRESS: 3501 Wylie Road (Lot 1, Block 2, Plan 68)

CURRENT OWNER: Homes North Limited

OCCUPANT: Homes North Limited (Les Rocher)

CURRENT USE: Storage

BUILT: 1938 (warehouse at back) & 1945 (post)

CONSTRUCTION:

Frame, 50' x 70' main section



DESCRIPTIVE HISTORY:

The Hudson's Bay Company arrived in Yellowknife in 1938 and erected a post and warehouse on Lot 3, Block 2, a short distance up the hill of the current post location. When this post was destroyed by fire in January 1945, the HBC made immediate plans to rebuild a larger post as the community was booming with gold exploration at this time. The original 1938 warehouse, which was not destroyed in the fire, was moved to its new location at the rear of the new post on Lot 1, Block 2. Carpenter Rolf Hellenius built the new warehouse in the summer of 1945. The combined structure was completed and opened for business November 29, 1945 featuring men and ladies wear, groceries, and bush supplies. One of the largest in Yellowknife at that time, the building had 50 feet of street frontage and was two stories. The second floor was originally warehouse space for reserve stock, until August 1947 when a second-storey sales floor opened featuring ladies wear and babies clothing. The post was primarily designed for prospector's bush orders during the gold boom years. With the opening of a new downtown HBC store in 1947, the Old Town post catered almost exclusively to bush orders, fur trappers, and prospector supplies. In 1945, it had a staff of 15 under the direction of Alexander "Sandy" Scott. Richard Garnet was assistant manager until he left town in 1948. Scott left Yellowknife in 1950 and was succeeded as local HBC manager by Dick Howell (1950-1951), Ernest "Scotty" Gall (1951-1966), and Alan Thorburn (1966-1970s).

A small office addition on the southwest side was removed from the structure in the late 1950s and sold to a fellow who moved it to Latham Island. All HBC retail operations were diverted to the expanded downtown store in 1960 and the Old Town store closed on March 31, 1960. It was only to be used as a warehouse after that date. In 1987, the Hudson's Bay Company departed from the NWT and transferred its retail outlets to Northern Stores Inc, meanwhile this warehouse was sold on the open market to Les Rocher. Rocher has used the building as storage space for Homes North Limited and his other business interests. It was re-sided with brown metal siding and other repairs were conducted to stabilize the foundation. The structure was designated a Heritage Site in Yellowknife in 1993.

It has been difficult to find a commercial use for the building due to the lack of servicing and the expense of installing a pump-in and out sewage and water system. Lack of parking availability in the Old Town is also a deterrent to creating new stores. For these reasons, the building has only been used as warehouse space despite intentions of the City and Les Rocher to find a more suitable use for the heritage structure. However the building is often loaned to groups in need of temporary indoor space, for example in the summer of 2009 a local band called 'GiantCon' filmed a music video here making use of the vintage interior to produce a historical reenactment of early Yellowknife.

Certificates of Title (Lot 1, Block 2, Plan 68): Hudson's Bay Company, January 13, 1953 > 155191 Canada Inc., July 20, 1987 > Homes North Ltd., April 13, 1992

NOTES:

REFERENCES:

News of the North, May 8, 1945; November 24, 1945; December 1, 1945; December 8, 1945; August 15, 1947; May 19, 1950; March 3, 1960
GNWT Land Titles
Heritage Building Inventory for Old Town, 1986