

Statement of Significance
For the “Union Bay Post Office”



**View of the Post Office from the
Back**



**View of the front of the
Post Office**

Statement of Significance

For the

Union Bay Post Office

Location of Historic Site:

5527 Island Highway South

Union Bay, British Columbia

VOR 3B0

Legal Description:

Section 32

Township 1, Nelson Land District

PT FR N1/2 of SW ¼

More Particularly Shown on a Plan Deposited

Under DD 824 OS (Northern BC Archives)

Description of the Historic Site:

The Union Bay Post Office, built in 1913, stands on its original site facing the two lanes of 19A Island Highway. The site fronts the start of a short spur road that serves several properties to the south.

The Union Bay Post Office is a tall, stately three-story wooden structure, approximately 24 feet by 36 feet in size. It has steep rooflines, decorative wood shingles, and has 52 long, narrow wood sash windows that surround every wall on every floor.

In 1991, the Union Bay Historical Society started its long fight to keep the post office building in Union Bay. It took 3 years to obtain the title of the post office. The society had accumulated \$5,000 in 1992 for the downpayment but the paperwork through the federal bureaucracy was slow so the title wasn't acquired

until 1993. Very soon afterwards, the post office was under renovation. The Historical Society was busy installing a cement ramp to enable easy access for all such as strollers, walkers and wheelchairs. The earthquake-proofing was next to be completed and sprinklers were installed after the plumbing was updated. Finally, the floors were refinished and the outside was painted.

The Union Bay Post Office has been given heritage building status after the restoration by Northern BC Archives. (Northern BC Archives)

Heritage Value

The Union Bay Post Office is one of only two old wooden post offices left in Canada. The Post Office is central to the community since it has been an active post office for the past 112 years.

“When the post office opened in 1913, Mr. Fred Brown was not only the postmaster but was also the telegrapher for the telegraph department of the federal government. Mr. Brown had full responsibility of setting up the new post office building in 1913. The telegraph equipment is located on one wall in the main post office, along with the telephone exchange for Denman and Hornby Island. The First World War had started and the telegraph was a means of keeping abreast of troop movements and battles. Mr. Brown readily sorted letters from the war for the anticipating families but he was also the bearer of sad tidings when one of the local men was killed.” (Geidt)

Mildred Simpson, Mr. Brown’s granddaughter said Fred could sit in his office and hear a “toot toot” on the water, and he could tell what tug it was or what boat was out there in the bay. (Simpson)

During WW1, there was a battalion of soldiers stationed at Union Bay, the men lived in tents on the green in front of the post office. The basement of the post office was used as the cookhouse and the reading room in the church next door was taken over and used as headquarters and officers’ mess.

“The new post office was to have a customs office adjoining it but the First World War interrupted the plans. Mrs. Brown gave up her living and dining rooms on the second floor of the post office to the customs men. Finally, in

1935 a customs office was built onto the north end of the post office.”
(Geidt)

The customs office was closed at Union Bay in 1953 due to the decrease in shipping. The office later became the library which still operates today as part of the Vancouver Regional Library.

The post office building was designed by William Henderson, the Resident Architect for the Department of Public Works for British Columbia. (Henderson)
The three-story structure has pronounced rooflines with high peaked gables at each end. The outside is finished with decorative wood shingles. When Mr. Brown arrived in 1913, the interior of the new post office was not finished. The main floor was one big room with no partitions, no equipment and no furniture.

“ Mr. Brown soon installed the equipment and made an oak partition which runs the whole width of the building, dividing the public area from the office. A Dutch door is at one end, with a top which opens to pass parcels through. A narrow counter is installed in front of the brass wicket where all the business is done. A good half of the partition is taken up by the 178 mailboxes which are 2” x 3” with a few larger ones for business. Each box has a tiny brass door with a keyhole and a bevelled glass window. A foot-wide step runs beneath the boxes to enable shorter people to reach the top. A tall, solid oak desk stands against one wall for public use.” (Geidt)

Little has changed since Mr. Brown established the interior of the post office and all furnishings are still the original and still in use.

For the past 112 years, the Post Office has been at the centre of community life. It is a meeting place where fellow Union Bayers bump into neighbours, see friends and connect with the community news. The Union Bay Historical Society recently asked the community for their opinions on the heritage of the post office. The Historical Society defines heritage as “what can be described as why a historic place is important and how it connects to the people, place and stories.” The community was asked to share their stories and opinions. One person replied to our survey that once when they went into the post office to pick up a parcel, the person who came behind them started speaking loudly and playfully with the postmistress. As a result, they all got involved in the banter, and all three had a few laughs that day. Remembering this day makes them smile. Someone else remembers fondly going to collect the mail and getting their driver’s license with their new married name on it. Someone else commented that they bring their

children to collect the mail from the same boxes as their great-great-grandparents did when Union Bay was an important coal shipping port. In the past, people gathered to hear the latest news via the telegraph. The Union Bay Post Office continues to provide a strong sense of place where people are connected and feel part of the community.

The Union Bay Post Office stands gallantly beside the island highway and is a stunning landmark with its contrasting height compared to the neighbouring structures. A community member commented that every time they walked up the stairs to the second floor, they were connected to all the others who had walked up the stairs before them. She remembered a time with her grandmother, walking up the stairs, smelling the old oak wood, looking out at the ocean, and hearing the waves crash along the shore. The post office has a charm that brings the past to the present time with its prominent angles, multi-roof lines and numerous windows..

The Post Office is one of the remaining structures in Union Bay that links us to our past. There are many economic values attached to the post office since many small businesses utilise the post office. Several community people work for Canada Post and the Vancouver Island Regional Library, which lease the first floor of the post office and the old customs office, respectively. The second story is leased by a small family-run business called "Steady Vessel", and a small room on the third floor is leased by a journalist. Other small businesses in the community require the post office to run their businesses, such as the Comox Kite Repair, which readily needs parcel delivery. The Post Office also serves as a sorting and holding station for the Denman and Hornby Island mail.

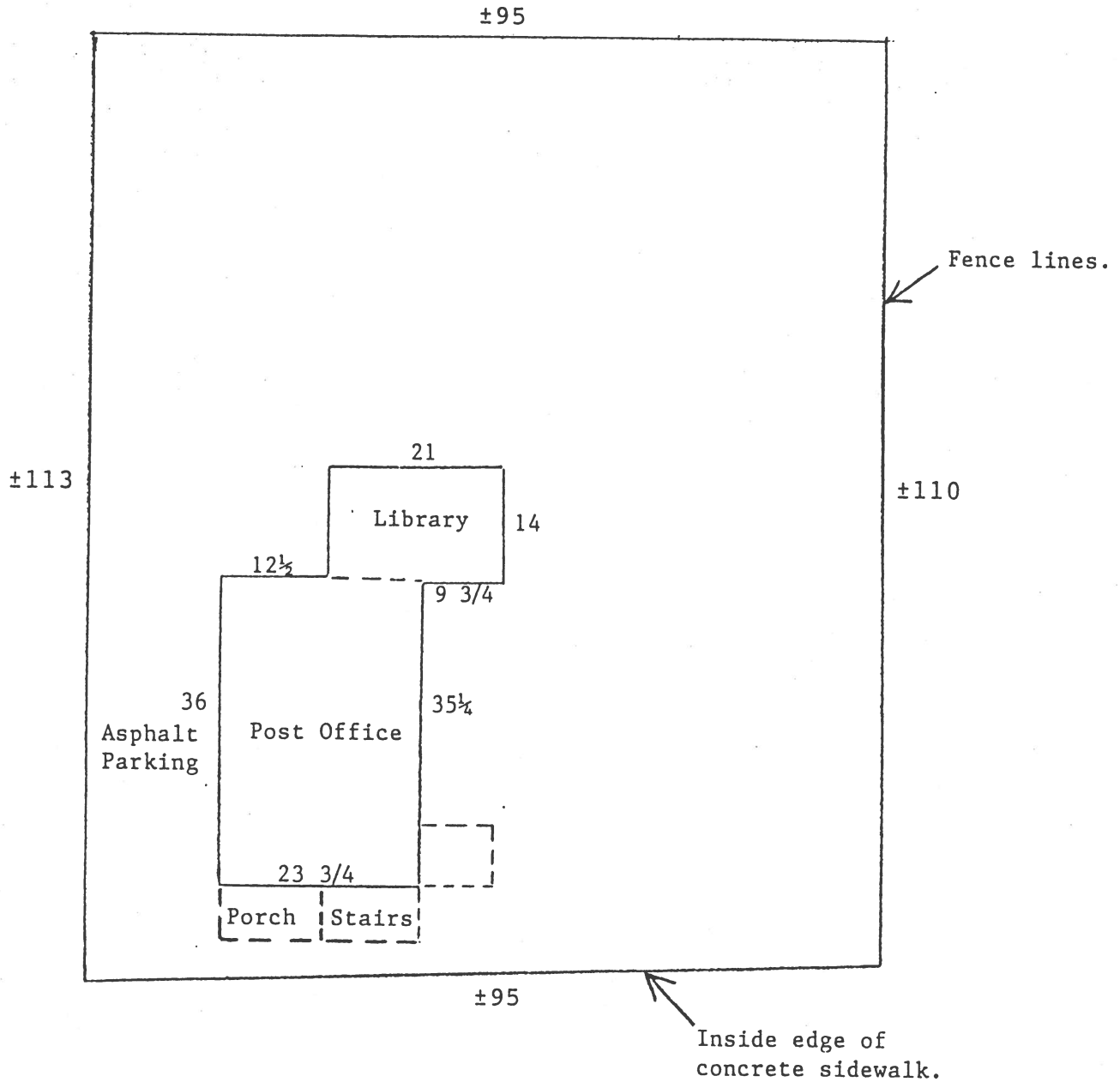
It is not unusual to see tourists stopping to look at the post office and take pictures of the lobby with its original brass and oak furnishings, which reflect perspectives of the past.

Character-Defining Elements

Key elements which define the heritage character of the Union Bay Post Office include:

- The site location of the building is on its original site as recorded in 1913 when Union Bay was an important coal shipping port.
- The three-story wooden structure has its original pronounced rooflines with steeply pitched gables, and the exterior is covered with decorative wooden shingles.
- The Union Bay Post Office is one of only two old wooden post offices left in Canada, the only one still operating as a post office continuously
- Been an active post office for the past 112 years.
- Originally a post office and telegraph department for the federal government
- During WW1, the basement of the post office was utilised as a cookhouse for the soldiers posted in Union Bay.
- After WW1, a customs department was added to the north end of the post office, but after 1953, the Vancouver Regional Library took over this space
- Original furnishings and an oak partition with 178 mailboxes with tiny, brass doors and bevelled glass windows are still used today,
- The original brass wicket and oak desk are used in the public area.
- There is a strong community attachment to the post office.

LOT SKETCH



*If exact lot dimensions are required, then a surveyor should be contacted.

BRITISH COLUMBIA LAND SURVEYOR'S
CERTIFICATE OF LOCATION COVERING :

PART OF THE FRACTIONAL NORTH 1/2 OF THE
SOUTHWEST 1/4 OF SECTION 32, TOWNSHIP 1,
NELSON DISTRICT, MORE PARTICULARLY SHOWN
ON A PLAN DEPOSITED UNDER DD 824 O.S.

SCALE 1: 250

ALL DISTANCES ARE SHOWN IN METRES

THIS PLAN HAS BEEN APPROVED
FOR SITING AND USE UNDER THE
ZONING BY-LAW.
PERMIT NO. 94-10-4007
SIGNED: *Shirley Campbell*
DATE: *Sept 30/93*

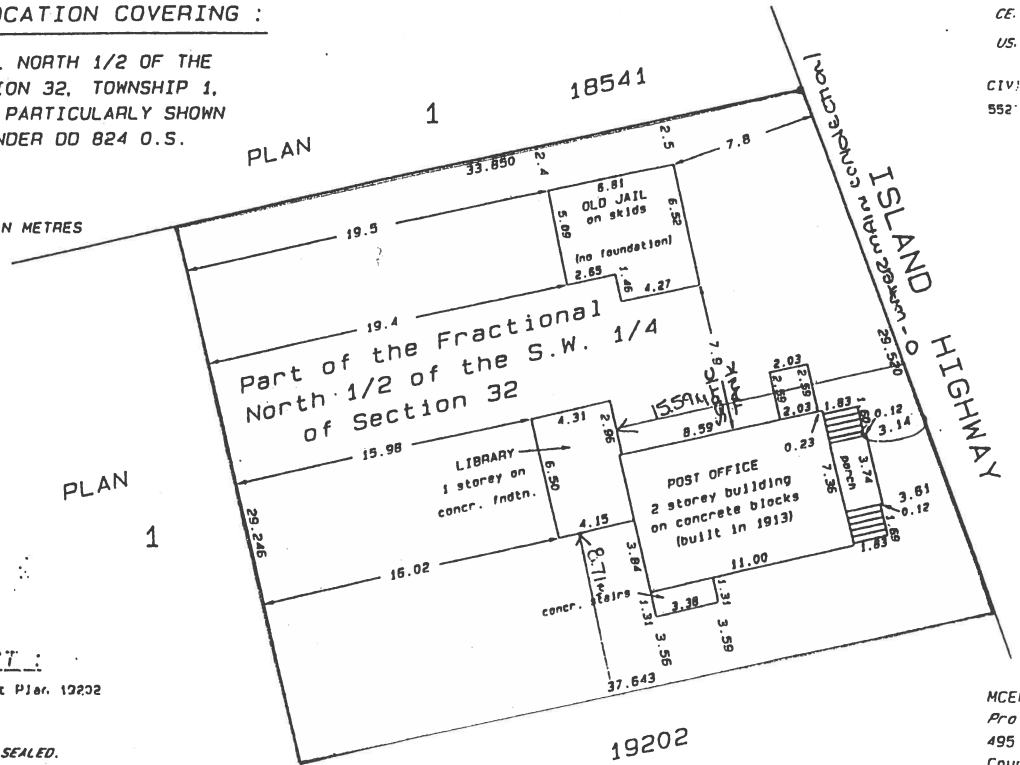
CERTIFIED CORRECT :

According to Land Title Office Plan 19202
and survey evidence as shown.

THIS DOCUMENT IS NOT VALID
UNLESS ORIGINALLY SIGNED AND SEALED.

© *Colin Burnidge* B.C.L.S.

Dated this 25th day of October, 1993.



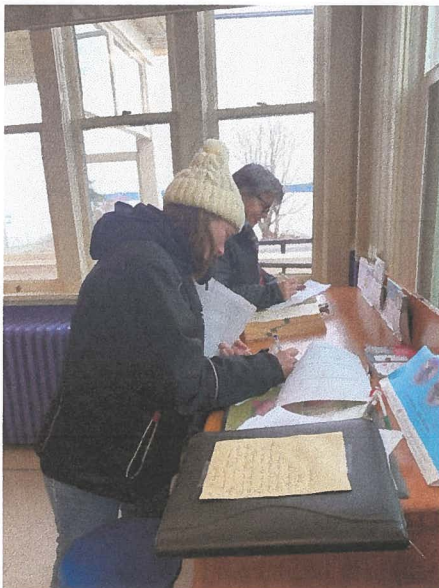
17-1
CE:
US:
CIV:
552

MCEI
Pro
495
Cour
Tel
Fll
NHA

Pictures of Interior of Post Office



Post Office Boxes with bevelled glass windows



Old oak desk in public area

Bibliography

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Survey

Union Bay Historical Society Survey

Union Bay Historical Society is eager to ask the community their opinions on the heritage of the Post Office. We feel that Union Bay's heritage is found everywhere. Our definition of heritage is "what can be described as why a historic place is important and how it connects to the people, place and stories."

The Historical Society would like to know your opinions on these questions:

[Sign in to Google](#) to save your progress. [Learn more](#)

1.) How is the Union Bay Post Office important to our community?

Your answer

2.) What specifically makes the Post Office a valuable part of our community? (choose all that apply)

Economic value

Historical value

Architectural value

Structural /physical attributes

Aesthetic value

Social /cultural value

3.) How important is it to preserve cultural heritage? (circle one)

Very important

Somewhat important

Not very important

Not important

4.) What does cultural heritage mean to you?

Your answer

5.) Describe a memorable experience or story that you have had with the post office?

Your answer

6.) Are you aware of the ongoing projects to restore or conserve the Post Office? (circle one)

Yes

No

Unsure

7.) How likely are you to support initiatives aimed at preserving the Post Office? (circle one)

Very likely

Somewhat likely

Not very likely

Not likely at all

8.) Which factors or elements do you consider when describing the post office? (circle all that apply)

Historical significance

Architectural beauty

Cultural/Social events

Economic importance

Natural surroundings

Other

9.) Have you ever volunteered for a cultural heritage preservation organization? (circle one)

Yes

No

10.) How does the Post Office contribute to the uniqueness of Union Bay?

Your answer

Would you consider joining the Union Bay Historical Society

Yes

No

Already a member

Name (optional)