

Rhine Hall



<i>Date of Construction</i>	1942
<i>Address</i>	2055 - 21 Street SE
<i>Alternate Name</i>	POW Drill/Recreation Hall
<i>Original Owner</i>	Department of National Defence
<i>Architect</i>	Department of National Defence
<i>Contractor</i>	Department of National Defence
<i>Neighbourhood</i>	Crestwood
<i>Legal</i>	2659JK;A

Description of Historic Place

Rhine Hall, built during the Second World War, is located in the Medicine Hat Exhibition & Stampede grounds, southeast of downtown Medicine Hat. The building is situated on a large paved lot north of the main administration building and southwest of the Grandstands. The building is a large vernacular wooden frame structure distinguished by its large massing, wide pitched front-gabled roofline, shingle siding and banked multi-sash wooden windows on the front and side elevations.

Heritage Value of Historic Place

Rhine Hall, constructed in 1942, is valued as a rare surviving example of Internment Camp No. 132, one of Canada's largest German Prisoner of War (POW) camps. The building, one of two extant identical halls, is one of the last remaining vestiges of the camp and is highly symbolic of Canada's efforts in the Second World War. The camp, opened January 1, 1943, was built outside of the downtown core, in close proximity to water, sewer and power sources. The camp

was surrounded by barbed wire fencing and protected by 800 guards and held German prisoners mainly from the Afrika Korps and those detained during the invasion of Normandy in 1944. Camp No. 132 was divided into several sections, each of which included living quarters, and kitchen and administration facilities. Rhine Hall was constructed as a drill hall and recreational space for the approximately 12,500 German prisoners at the camp. A second hall, Vistula (Weichsel) Hall, was utilized as a theatre and cinema. The site was also equipped with a dental office, a 125-bed hospital, and community buildings such as a stadium and track. Both halls, each able to hold 3,000 people, functioned as the social incubators at the camp. The camp was used until July 1946 and was the last POW camp to cease operations in the province.

Rhine Hall is further valued for its later role as the Exhibit Hall, a key building in the cultural landscape of the Medicine Hat Exhibition & Stampede. The regional fair was first held in 1887, with livestock and produce displays at the CPR stockyards. The event was formalized as the Medicine Hat Exhibition & Stampede in

1917 with fair grounds located at the current location of Medicine Hat's airport. After the Second World War, City Council was petitioned for the establishment of a permanent stampede location in order to launch the fair as an annual event. The fair was moved to the former POW Internment Camp, officially opening on May 8, 1947. Several of the original POW buildings were demolished in 1947 to facilitate the fair's development. The former Rhine Hall became the main exhibition space for the fair.

Rhine Hall is additionally valued for its role as a community facility that has contributed to Medicine Hat's commercial and cultural realms. As one of the city's primary community spaces from 1947 to the present day, Rhine Hall has been utilized extensively year-round for exhibitions and events.

Rhine Hall is also highly significant as an excellent example of vernacular war-time architecture. As one of only five internment camps in Alberta, the grounds and buildings were constructed using set plans from the Federal Department of National Defence. Both Rhine and Vistula Halls were named after European rivers of the same name. These rivers bordered

German's west and east boundaries and prisoners identified the buildings as the natural boundaries of the camp. Rhine Hall features a functional vernacular design and detailing to maximize the interior space of the structure. The building exhibits large rectangular massing, a low-pitched roof with no overhangs and paired and banked multi-sash wooden windows on the side and front elevations to allow natural filtered light into the building.

Rhine Hall is further valued as the site of the murder of German POW, August Plaszek. Nazi Party Members and the Gestapo instigated the incident on the assumption that he was a traitor to the Third Reich for serving with the French Foreign Legion in Africa in the 1930s. Camp rumours suggested that ex-Legionnaires were secretly meeting and planning a coup. On July 22, 1943, suspicion peaked and August Plaszek was attacked and dragged to the Rhine Hall where he was hung from a rafter. It was not until after the end of the war that charges were laid against three POWs for Plaszek's murder. Of the three charged, one was acquitted, one was sentenced to life in prison, and the third, Werner Schwalb, was sentenced to hang.

Rhine Hall as it appeared in 1946



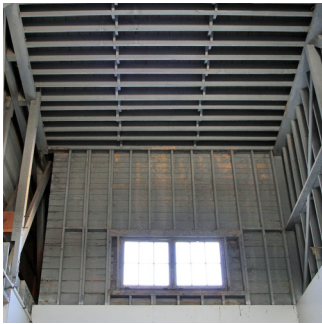
Prisoner-of-war barracks, Medicine Hat, Alberta.
Glenbow Archives, Calgary, Alberta. NA-5012-6.
(Credit: Sir Alexander Galt Museum, Lethbridge, Alberta)

Character-Defining Elements - Rhine Hall (2055 - 21 Street SE)



- Location on the original POW Internment Camp No. 132 site north of the Medicine Hat Exhibition and Stampede administration building and southwest of the Grandstands

- Elements of the original POW camp including: roadways and mature trees lining the street; granite cairn commemoration to POW's murdered at the camp on east side of the building



- Form, scale, and massing as expressed by its: rectangular plan; large one-storey height with wide pitched front-gabled roof; narrow roof overhangs with closed soffits; overhanging gable at front elevation; lower shed roof addition on east elevation

- Construction materials such as: wooden frame construction with cross wood trusses; wooden shingle cladding; board formed concrete foundation



- Vernacular details such as: simple wooden trim; bargeboards; cornerboards; wooden drip moulds over windows

- Original fenestration such as: twin assembly banked windows with multi-paned wooden-sash windows with hopper windows in the upper window and fixed below; original door openings



- Exhibition Hall characteristics such as: oversize overhead entry door, display lighting, multi-functioning fire suppression system; movable modular grandstands

- Additional elements such as: two internal red brick chimneys



- Interior elements such as: concrete floors; board formed concrete walls; wooden columns; exposed wooden trusses and rafters; intact stage; and wood paneled doors



Statement of Integrity - Rhine Hall (2055 - 21 Street SE)

Applicable Significance Criteria

This site is significant because...

Theme / Activity / Cultural Practice / Event ☒ Yes ☐ No

-Rhine Hall, constructed in 1942, is valued as a rare surviving example of Internment Camp No. 132, one of Canada's largest German Prisoner of War (POW) camps (**Theme Value – Centre for Defence, Science, and Technology**).

-Rhine Hall is further valued for its later role as the Exhibit Hall, a key building in the cultural landscape of the Medicine Hat Exhibition & Stampede (**Theme Value – Rocks, Parks, Pucks, and Bucks**).

-Rhine Hall is additionally valued for its role as a community facility that has contributed to Medicine Hat's commercial and cultural realms. As one of the city's primary community spaces from 1947 to the present day (**Theme Value – Managing Growth in Medicine Hat**).

-Rhine Hall is also valued as an excellent example of vernacular war-time architecture. As one of only five internment camps in Alberta, the grounds and buildings were constructed using set plans from the Federal Department of National Defence (**Theme Value – Built in Medicine Hat**).

-Rhine Hall is further valued as the site of the murder of German POW, August Plaszek (**Theme Value – Outpost on the Prairie: Law and Protection in Medicine Hat**).

Institution / Person ☐ Yes ☒ No

Design / Style / Construction ☐ Yes ☒ No

Information Potential ☐ Yes ☒ No

Landmark / Symbolic Value ☐ Yes ☒ No

Period of Significance

1940 to 1945 Second World War

Chronology of Alterations

1942 - Rhine Hall constructed
1967 - Women's washroom added
1989 - Extensive structural repairs

Aspects of Integrity

LOCATION ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The Hall is located on 21 Street SE and has not been relocated.

DESIGN ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The Hall's form has not been significantly altered, except for the infilling of some windows and the installation of an overhead door.

ENVIRONMENT ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The building is situated in the Medicine Hat Exhibition & Stampede grounds, surrounded by a large paved lot near the Grandstands.

MATERIALS ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The original materials of the building have not been altered, except for the infilling of some windows and installation of an overhead door.

WORKMANSHIP ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The high quality of the workmanship is conveyed through buildings detailing and condition.

FEELING ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The feeling of the building remains unchanged. Rhine Hall maintains a strong aesthetic and historical identity.

ASSOCIATION ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not Applicable

The association of the Hall has not changed; however, it now functions as an events and exhibit space.

Statement of Integrity continued on next page...

Statement of Integrity - Rhine Hall (2055 - 21 Street SE)

Statement of Integrity

The Rhine Hall maintains all the aspects of integrity necessary for it to convey its significance / heritage value.

The Rhine Hall building is in near original condition with its location and form, scale and massing intact. The wooden shingle siding and trim are in good condition. Paint is failing on many areas and the building requires repainting. Consideration could be made to colour test and repaint the building in its original colour scheme. The multi-paned wooden-sash windows are in good condition and the upper hoppers are functioning for the majority of the windows. The windows below the hoppers have been covered in plywood to control light into the building and the original multi-light doors have been replaced with plain wooden doors. In 1967, a women's washroom was added to the building and a shed roof addition was extended to surround the east and north elevations. The building was extensively restored and repaired in 1989. The wood trusses were reinforced with steel and a new metal overhead door increasing the size of the original double-door opening on the south elevation was installed. A new tar and gravel roof was added some time in the last few years. The interior remains much the same as it was when it was constructed. Pony walls were added to the exposed studs to improve insulation and building performance.

Additional Images - Rhine Hall

The Rhine Hall amongst the activities of the 2012 Medicine Hat Stampede (centre, foreground). The Vistula Hall, the Rhine Hall's twin POW structure, can be seen on the opposite side of the racetrack (centre, background)




Image courtesy of the Medicine Hat Exhibition & Stampede Co.



The rear (north facade) of the Rhine Hall

Donald Luxton & Associates
September 2012

Heritage Evaluation Form - Rhine Hall (2055 - 21 Street SE)

 Medicine Hat The Gas City Heritage Evaluation Form	Site Number	Category A
	Community District Crestwood	
	Designation	

Site Name(s): Rhine Hall			
Municipal Address: 2055 - 21 Street SE		Date of Construction:	Y 1942
Consultant(s): Donald Luxton & Associates Inc.		Evaluation Date:	Y 12 M 09 D 06
Heritage Committee: Heritage Resource Committee			
Heritage Planner: Jeanie Gartly			
		Total	
		85	

History (H)	E	VG	G	F	P		(H) SCORE
H.1 Associations/Patterns	X					40	30
H.2 Age				X		3	
Comments: H.1 Rhine Hall is representative of a Second World War Internment Camp and was one of the largest in Canada. Used to house German prisoners of war, Internment Camp No. 132 operated from January 1, 1943 to July 1946. It is now a component of the Medicine Hat Exhibition & Stampede grounds. H.2 Built 1942. Women's washrooms added 1967. Extensive structural repairs 1989.							

Architecture (A)	E	VG	G	F	P		(A) SCORE
A.1 Style/Type/Design	X					40	40
A.2 Designer/Builder				X		3	
A.3 Construction Technology	X					20	
A.4 Interior Details		X				8	
A.5 Alterations			X			-10	
Comments: A.1 Rhine Hall is a rare example of vernacular war-time architecture. A.2 Architect – Department of National Defence A.3 Excellent example, representing one of only internment camps in Alberta. A.4 Exposed wooden trusses and rafters, intact stage. A.5 Women's washroom added in 1967 and structural repairs in 1989.							

Urban Context (C)	E	VG	G	F	P		(C) SCORE
C.1 Landmark/Character	X					15	15
C.2 Streetscape/Landscape					X	0	
Comments: C.1 Landmark as the last vestige of Internment Camp No. 132. C.2 The Hall maintains a dominant presence on the streetscape and grounds.							