

**705 Carson Avenue
Fire Bell Tower – 1911 (bell only)**



Northwest Elevation



South Elevation



Southeast Elevation

Description

The Fire Bell Tower is a wooden structure with a domed cupola that houses the large bell used in the early days of fire fighting in Quesnel. The bell tower was relocated to this prominent location at the Quesnel and District Museum and Archives at the foot of Carson Avenue. The historic place is confined to the bell.

Heritage Value

The Fire Bell Tower is located in Downtown Quesnel which is the commercial and administrative center of the city. While not in its original location, the fire bell is a physical reminder of the people and events that shaped the development of Quesnel. The early buildings of Quesnel were often adjoining structures made of wood. When a fire broke out, the outcome was often disastrous. With only a bucket brigade to fight a fire, many buildings and possessions were lost.

Fire fighting began in Quesnel in 1910 with twenty-five members. The men had the latest equipment available at that time, such as neck yokes, oil can water pails, and a brass pump. The 400 pound fire bell, which alerted the town, was purchased from the Timothy Eaton Company in 1911. The bell was first located on Carson Avenue behind the Town Hall.

The fire of 1916 broke out around midnight in the Empress Theatre located in the Cariboo Hotel. Eight buildings were lost including the Cariboo and Occidental Hotels and the Northern Crown Bank. The damages were estimated to cost \$250,000.

On March 23, 1923, 'A Disastrous Fire' was the headline in the Cariboo Observer describing the fire at Cowan's Hardware Store. A stove in the store was heating a bucket of tar which happened to explode. The Cowan Hardware Store, Abbott Building, and telephone exchange were destroyed. Luckily, the switchboard and telephone equipment was saved through the quick actions of shop owners.

The "Chinatown Fire" of June 1925, destroyed all thirteen of the buildings on the north side of Carson Avenue between Front and Reid Streets. Unlike the previous fires of 1916 and 1923, two men lost their lives. They were boarding in the apartment above the Nugget Café and were asleep when the fire occurred.

Character-Defining Elements

The character-defining elements of the Fire Bell Tower include:

- wooden tower with cupola;
- handmade 400 pound bell ordered from Timothy Eaton Company in 1911;
- a publicly visible location at the entrance to Downtown Quesnel at the Quesnel and District Museum and Archives across from the Pacific Great Eastern Railway Station;
- a valuable reminder to the history of fire fighting in Quesnel.