



## The Ranche History

When the original log home from the Government Supply Farm burned down in 1896, Hull built the Bow Valley Ranche House. The Ranche House represented the height of country luxury and grace. The house, like the owner, had a commanding but understated presence. The wrap-around porch and the splendidly landscaped property set the stage for garden parties, tennis matches and other festivities. Hull's home combined the elegance of the city with the country charm of a working ranch. The historical significance of the building lies in its association with the cattle aristocracy that emerged in and around Calgary towards the end of the nineteenth century.

**Design:** Mr. Hull hired James Llewellyn Wilson, Calgary's most prominent architect, to design the house. Wilson's previous commissions included Haultain School (1894), the A.E. Cross residence (1891), the Bank of Montreal (18xx) and the Alberta Hotel (1888) on Stephen Avenue. Although Wilson was accustomed to building with wood and sandstone, he chose brick for Hull's Queen Anne style ranch house. The chosen design was simple, yet elegant and sophisticated. Wilson based it on the T-plan, common at the turn of the century (a two-storey, rectangular main structure with a smaller wing attached perpendicularly at the back). The floor plan, exterior design and landscaping provided front areas of leisure and back areas for labour.

**Exterior:** The architectural style of the main structure was Gothic Revival, highlighted by a gabled hip roof with twin brick patterned chimneys, triangular dormer windows and decorative roof trim. A deep, wide verandah on the east, south and west sides of the structure diminished its sharply vertical appearance. To create a less angular look to the building, Wilson introduced softer artistic details around each dormer window. These details were also added to the small walk out balcony as well as the verandah roofline. The two benches, which sat on the front of the verandah, continued this style with their more detailed lines. Around the bottom of the verandah, Wilson installed a delicate lattice skirt that eliminated all view of the foundation. Similar latticework was used to create a screen at the north end of the verandah to separate the main building from the less attractive working wing. This was intended to display the distinction between the owner and his employees.

**Interior:** The main rectangular structure included the formal rooms of the house and was designed in a symmetrical manner. There was a centre hall, a formal parlor or sitting room to the left as one entered the front door, and a dining room to the right. These

rooms were precisely the same dimensions although the bay window of the parlor was built considerably smaller than the one in the dining room. Each room had a single wood burning fireplace and twin eight-over-two double sash windows on its southern side. There were four rooms upstairs. A master suite with attached dressing room and a walk-in closet was located on the east side with two smaller bedrooms across the hall. A small room, which was later turned into a functional bathroom, was located on the north wall next to the smaller bedrooms.

The north wing of the house was basically a one-story structure with a loft space above. The loft, entered via a steep narrow staircase in the north wing, was left as one large room and served as the permanent ranch hands' sleeping quarters during the winter. A lean-to attached off-centred on the north wing was also built for the ranch hands. When Wilson designed the house, this section was to accommodate the workers' dining room and kitchen. During construction these plans were altered to add space to include a spare room, a wash up room and a bedroom for the house manager and cook Charlie Yuen.

**Landscape:** The site was just beneath the north escarpment of the valley, sheltered from prevailing winds, and on a rise overlooking the broad grassed flats of the creek valley. The landscaping that surrounded the house was designed to enhance the main structure. In the centre of the front yard Wilson placed a large round flowerbed sown with perennials and criss crossed by uncut native sod. On either side of the bed were alternating trees or bushes set in an arc. The effect created by the trees and bushes echoed the curved whale ribs standing on the sides of the verandah entrance. A path lead from the main steps to the gate of the picket fence, which encompassed the front yard. As a finishing touch Wilson also incorporated a tennis court for the Hull's recreation.

In August, 1896 the local newspaper reported that construction on the \$4,000 house was underway. "The dining and sitting rooms, on each side of a fine entrance hall, will be 16 feet by 22 feet. Besides these there will be a men's room, kitchen and several bedrooms. The house will be fitted with open fire places, after the English fashion." The Ranche House has been acknowledged to be the finest country home in the Territories during that era and is a unique piece of architecture.

**Renovations:** In 1945, renovations by the the Burns family necessitated rebuilding the roof which broke the established gable pattern. The windows were changed from double sashed to plated glass. Windows were also installed in the verandah and the east wall of the north wing. Extensive changes took place to the main house in 1957, including the addition of a large family room wing on the west side, consisting of bedrooms and a games room. An in-ground swimming pool and a tennis court were also added at that same time.

**Restoration:** Boarded-up and vacant since 1978, the deteriorated Ranche House was in need of serious repair. Planning for the restoration began in 1995 by The Ranche At Fish Creek Restoration Society. Construction commenced in the fall of 1998 and by the summer of 1999, The Ranche House was restored to its turn of the century grandeur.

During the restoration of The Ranche House it was important to maintain the authenticity and historical accuracy of the interior and exterior of the building. This philosophy presented many challenges, considering that no architectural drawings were available of the original house construction. Before construction began, Carruthers & Associates Architects prepared new architectural drawings representing the existing house structure, incorporating additional details from historical research and design features required to conform to current building standards. Natural wood, the predominant feature inside the house, was stripped of paint and restored to its original finish. The historic restoration included provisions for a commercial restaurant to operate in The Ranche House and in order to preserve the originality, no interior walls were added or modified. Mechanical, plumbing and electrical systems were upgraded and a commercial kitchen was added in the back of the building. All facets of construction were managed by Hurst Construction. The commercial operation opened as **The Ranche Restaurant** in the summer of 1999. Today it is home to one of Calgary's finest and most creative restaurants, as well as a unique setting for corporate meetings and special gatherings. Located in Fish Creek Provincial Park, The Ranche is owned and operated by Canadian Rocky Mountain Resorts. The CRMR family of companies includes Buffalo Mountain Lodge in Banff, Emerald Lake Lodge in Field, B.C., and Deer Lake Lodge in Lake Louise. The company is acclaimed across Canada and throughout the world for its superb alpine accommodations and commitment to exceptional dining experiences.

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