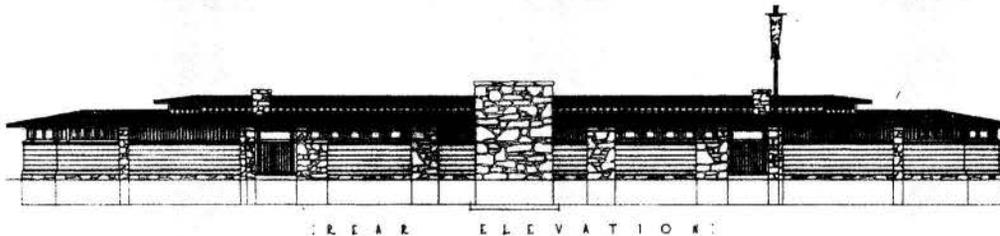


Frank Lloyd Wright's Banff Pavilion

by Arthur Allen

PARK SHELTER BANFF ALTA.
BY FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT AND FRANCIS SULLIVAN
HEAD ASSOCIATE ARCHITECTS: OTTAWA, ONTARIO

DRAWING NO. 6.



REAR ELEVATION

Frank Lloyd Wright and Francis C. Sullivan. "Park Shelter Banff Alta. . . Drawing No. 6" [ca. 1911]. Public Archives of Canada, National Map Collection, Records of Parks Canada, RG 84 M, acc. no. 80103/48, item 7. NMC 15670.

In 1911, Frank Lloyd Wright and Francis C. Sullivan, an Ottawa architect, were commissioned by the Department of Public Works to design a Pavilion Building for Banff National Park. Sullivan was a former student of Wright, and had worked at the Department of Public Works prior to obtaining the commission. The Pavilion was intended for use as a picnic and party shelter, a place for sociable good times for visitors and residents in Banff. Some of Wright's design sketches refer to "Park Shelter for the Canadian Pacific Railway", "Park Shelter" and "Ballroom". His sketches are still stored in the Wright Archives in Taliesin West, Arizona. In 1913, construction was completed in a large meadow, the Old Recreation Grounds, on Cave Avenue, near the Cave and Basin Swimming Pools.

During the First World War the Pavilion was used as a quartermaster store by the Canadian Army, and returned to its intended uses during the 1920's and 1930's. Throughout the 1920's the building enjoyed a short heyday — it was a popular place, well used for picnics and parties. Landscape work around the building included a large wading pool, and a shallow canal apparently connected the Pavilion with the Bow River, allowing access for canoe and picnic parties from the river.

The building was a large, low structure of rough wood and fieldstone, measuring 70m × 20m (200 ft. × 60 ft.). The main space, shown in the interior photograph, contained three huge fireplaces, room for three simultaneous picnics — and opened by a continuous wall of glazed doors to a westward patio with a full view of the wonderful Borgeau Range west of Banff. Ladies and gentlemen's "Retiring Rooms" occupied opposite ends of the building; galley kitchens and lavatories were placed behind each fireplace; and a large canopy provided a covered entry for fitting reception of guests.

The story becomes vague in the 1930's. It is generally agreed that building foundations were not adequate on the soft soil of the meadow, and the building suffered severe movement during spring thaws. River flooding also occurred in the area. Jock McCowan, an original Banff resident (born in Banff about 1901, and now a resident of Tsawwassen, B.C.) advises that the floor heaved drastically each spring, and needed yearly levelling and repair. Parks Canada advise that foundation deterioration and wood rot seriously affected the structure.

One correspondent remembers the building in the 1930's as a dark, ill kept and neglected place, possibly



An exterior view of the Banff Pavilion.

used as a flop-house by railroad hitchhikers of the depression years. In any case the story ends with complete demolition of the building in 1938.

Parks Canada advise that demolition was necessary due to the extent of wood rot and foundation damage (this would seem to be a very valid argument in 1938, but one that would not satisfy heritage activists in 1984). Some colorful rumors persist in Banff and Calgary concerning accidental demolition of the Pavilion. Stories suggest that a mistaken demolition order was issued, or that a demolition crew mistook the object of their work one foggy morning in the meadow. One tale



An interior view of the structure. Photographs courtesy of the Archives of the Rockies, Banff Alberta.

holds that a bulldozer accidentally hit a corner of the building, and the driver was ordered to finish the job. True or not, these ideas add only minor color accents to an otherwise absorbing story. Reconstruction of the building is the theme.

There are some faint memories of protest at the demolition of the building, and in time, some suggestion that it be reconstructed. Eric Arthur, well known architect, author, and teacher at the University of Toronto wrote an editorial in the "Journal" of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada, March 1962, in which he reiterated concern at the demolition of "... the only significant Wright building in Canada..." and suggested its reconstruction under the Canadian Centennial programs of 1967.

In 1980, Arthur and Murray Allen, former Banff residents, and now practicing architecture and landscape architecture in Vancouver and Edmonton, wrote to The Honorable John Roberts, Minister of the Environment, urging that Parks Canada reconstruct the Banff Pavilion. By 1981, the Alberta and Saskatchewan Associations of Architects offered support, and Professor R. D. Gillmor, architect at the University of Calgary, Faculty of Environmental Design, joined the Allen brothers in forming The Banff Pavilion — the committee for the reconstruction of Wright and Sullivan's pavilion in Banff.

Support institutions now include: The Alberta Association of Architects; The Saskatchewan Association of Architects; The Manitoba Association of Architects; The Ontario Association of Architects; The Faculty of Environmental Design, University of Calgary; The School of Architecture, University of Waterloo; The School of Architecture, Technical University of Nova Scotia; The Banff Centre; and The Frank Lloyd Wright Memorial Foundation, Taliesin West, Arizona.

The committee is in contact with The Archives of the Canadian Rockies, Banff and the Glenbow Museum, Calgary, concerning a mutual interest in preservation of early Banff Park buildings. The Archives particularly has been of great assistance in providing photographs of the Pavilion and a photocopy of the original working drawings. The Frank Lloyd Wright Memorial Foundation has prepared a booklet of Mr. Wright's original working sketches of design and construction details.

The Banff Pavilion hopes for eventual support from Heritage Canada, and from the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation. The Committee has restated the original request for reconstruction, asking that Parks Canada rebuild the Pavilion for use during the 1985 Centennial celebrations of Banff National Park.

The Banff Pavilion seeks support from individuals and institutions interested in this project. Former students of Frank Lloyd Wright, heritage enthusiasts, and particularly former residents of Banff and Calgary who once knew and used the building are invited to write:

The Banff Pavilion
6040 Marine Drive
West Vancouver, B.C.
V7W 2S3