

Old Colonel Baker Home and Lot

1601-1st. St. S. (Baker Park)

1889



Of all homes in Cranbrook, this one can lay claim to being the most “historically” important, as well as the oldest! The Hon. Colonel James Baker was a highly instrumental political figure in the B.C. government during the late 1880’s and 1890’s which led to his manipulation of several forces resulting in:

1. The purchase of the old Indian camping ground called “Joseph’s Prairie”, and the surveying there of a townsite in 1897 to be called Cranbrook
2. The building of the Crowsnest Branch of the C.P. Railway
3. The laying of the railway into Cranbrook instead of the highly-favoured Fort Steele, and thus ensuring Cranbrook’s future as the central city of the area

In 1889 Col. Baker and his son V. Hyde Baker replaced an earlier ranch house that had been built by the Galbraiths on Joseph’s Prairie. The attic became a trading post, and the main floor was the residence of the Bakers.

In 1898, with the defeat of the provincial government then in power, Col. Baker retired from active politics and returned to England where he died in 1906. His son V. Hyde was left in charge of the Cranbrook townsite business.

In 1898, John Sibbald was contracted to renovate the house to make it “one of the most comfortable bachelor residences in the East Kootenay” for the then-single V. Hyde. Sibbald was also given charge of cultivating what was to become the “legendary” gardens surrounding the house. In 1899 V. Hyde married, and in 1909 carried out

major renovations to the house which left it much in the appearance of today. The gardens continued to be a favourite with “young Cranbrook” society.

The Bakers left permanently for England about 1914, and the house changed hands many times. It was, at various times, a residence for the city engineer, a series of apartments, a health unit, and was the home of the Family Courts. The structure was in dire need of a substantial foundation, and a good refurbishing of the exterior. It is one of the earliest buildings in the area, and is one of a handful that remains in its original position. Since its significance lies well beyond the confines of even the East Kootenays, every effort was made to preserve and restore the building as the “Home of the Bakers.”

In 1979, the City of Cranbrook was faced with making a decision about the future of the old home. It was structurally in need of much repair, and had, in fact, been condemned by the building inspector. The Family Courts had to be moved out, and plans were formulated to raze the building.

The Cranbrook and District Arts Council, along with the Cranbrook Archives, Museum and Landmark Foundation, persuaded council to place a moratorium on its demolition while reconstruction and restoration costs along with potential new uses could be worked out. The B.C. Heritage Conservation Branch became involved and helped work out a complete structural and cost analysis.

After restoration, the building was sold and is presently privately owned and houses several offices together with health and chiropractic services

Given Heritage Designation August 1984