

Community Hall (Community Building)

A German builder nicknamed “Dirty Art”, as it was rumored that he only bathed once a year on Christmas day, helped build the Community Hall in 1933-34. He did not use nails but instead he would bore a hole through the logs and then put in a piece of wood to join the logs together. The building was based on plans from the Architectural Division. Its “Recognized” designation is based mainly on the architectural design and typicality of the building as well as on its environmental setting.

Initially it was intended to be a combined museum and community building and built on a low area near the campground. However the chief engineer decided a less elaborate building would suit the needs. The Minister of the Interior disagreed with both the site and the structure as he wanted the building to be built on a rise overlooking the lake nearer the commercial section thus the Nature Centre was built as a museum in 1935. The Community Hall is situated on Waskesiu Drive in the town of Waskesiu.

It began as a one-room hall with a pediment fieldstone main entrance arch with double doors, a massive fieldstone fireplace, and fieldstone chimney. The stone and logs were obtained locally. The walls are constructed with horizontal T-shaped peeling logs with open truss system. The hip or cottage roof in the main section uses peeled and naturally curved logs. In its use of log and fieldstone as the main building fabric, the design of the Community Hall in Waskesiu is a very good example of the national park image. The fact that it remained intact since its construction attests the quality of its craftsmanship. It projects the typical “rustic” image of national parks buildings of the 1920’s and 30’s. A grouping of three windows feature diamond-paned leaded windows casement style is also popular in other buildings in the park.

The Community Hall was truly a community center as it provided the shacktent community with a focal point of activities that were healthy and a great deal of fun. Harry Houghton, the Activity Director, organized such activities as ping-pong, singing and talent shows, plays and pageants and a most popular the Saturday night sock hop for the teens. There were also free movies on Friday nights featuring the Film board of Canada films shown on an old 8mm projector. Over the years the hall has been host to many weddings, church services, adult dances, family dances, conventions, dinners, pancake breakfasts, flea markets, card games and bingo.

Mona Finlayson, a long-time summer resident of the park has fond memories of the Community Hall. She recalls one of her favorite rainy/cool day activities was playing ping-pong in the Eastern section of the hall. There were two tables set up, usually with the nets on, and the first players there in the morning would get the paddles, and hopefully, an intact ball or two from the wooden cupboards flanking each side of the huge fireplace. Various games would then take place, singles or doubles, depending on the numbers. The best fun was when there were too many kids there for a regular game. Then it was time for ‘run-a-round’! Up to ten or twelve bodies all clustered around the table and the game began. A player on each side of the net had a paddle and one would begin the volley, immediately putting down or handing off the paddle to the next person

in line once the ball went over the net, and hopefully as returned. The object was to keep the ball in play as long as possible. If you 'missed' you were out. The players kept moving around the table, always in a counter-clockwise direction. Interestingly that was the same way everyone roller-skated. The ultimate winner was the one player left, often because of how the volley went and that person ended up having to return his or her own shot. The last kids to leave the hall usually put the paddles and ball back in the cupboard, ready for the next time. Another Waskesiu Heritage Moment is church services being interrupted by the Queen, a boat on the lake that toured tourists, by blaring songs over its speaker system as it passed main beach.

The exterior walls were built with peeled spruce logs and saddle-notched at the corners. These are on a poured concrete foundation that is faced with more fieldstone to provide a rustic look.

In 1936-37 the facility was enlarged. The old section had sunk so it was raised to match the addition. The gable-roofed addition on the end opposite the fireplace included a small stage and washrooms were added behind the stage in 1982.

Friends of the Park commissioned stained glass windows to be made and installed so Mr. Gordon Bowman of Saskatoon created both the mallard duck and the red fox windows in 1988. Mr. Bob Whittaker of Saskatoon created the Grey Owl window in 1991.

Throughout its existence, the Community Hall has served as a visual and social centerpiece for the whole park and continues in this capacity today.