

LACOMBE BLACKSMITH SHOP

Current Name: Lacombe Blacksmith Museum

Alberta Provincial Historic Resource HS 21530

5020 49 STREET (GLASS STREET)

Date of Construction: 1902-1903

DESCRIPTION OF HISTORIC PLACE

The Lacombe Blacksmith Shop was built by A.F. Weddle sometime between 1902 and 1903 and was assessed for a total property value of \$1325 by the Town of Lacombe in 1903. Located on its original site, the blacksmith shop occupies one lot and is situated mid-block on 49 Street, in what was Lacombe's industrial area at the time of its construction.



The shop is a simple, rectangular, highly utilitarian wood-frame structure with a gable roof. The building's exterior, which is devoid of ornamentation, is clad entirely in corrugated metal sheets, likely as a fire-prevention measure, and has minimal fenestration. Its front facade is dominated by a large boomtown front with a central, double-wide sliding door flanked by a window and a regular doorway. While the exterior is simple, the blacksmith shop's interior is much more complex and features a large open work area.

The shop exhibits a high level of interior integrity and contains numerous original fixtures and blacksmithing artifacts. Like most blacksmith shops, its work floor is divided into separate areas for general metal-working and horseshoeing. The shop's original forge is still present, as well as a large and small triphammer and many original vices, hammers, blocks, dies, anvils and various other tools, machinery and smithing and horseshoeing equipment. Its wooden walls and ceiling beams, most of which are blackened from years of exposure to soot and heat, also feature countless hooks, rings and rails for tools, securing horses and storage of metal. Branding marks and the carved initials of previous blacksmiths and customers also adorn the walls. Work tables and cabinetry, many with handwritten content labels are located around the work floor.

Early in its history, the building went through a rapid succession of owners, but it was in continual use as a blacksmith shop until at least 1939, after which time it saw use as a welding shop and for general metal working trades. In 1991, the Lacombe & District Historical Society purchased the Blacksmith Shop and began to operate it as a Museum. It continues to operate as a museum and houses many tools and artifacts that were traditionally used in the blacksmith trade.

Some alterations have occurred over the course of the Blacksmith Shop's history. Notably, in the mid- 1950s, a large welding shop was added at the structure's rear, more than doubling the square footage of the building. In conjunction with the purchase of the shop by the Lacombe & District Historical Society and the Alberta Historic Resources Foundation's Main Street Program in Lacombe, the Blacksmith Shop received significant maintenance and conservation treatment during the 1990s including; a concrete foundation, insulation in the ceiling and walls, electrical upgrades, a new galvanized steel roof and in kind replacement and repairs to the exterior siding. The front sliding doors were reinstated, after having been sealed and covered at some point. In 2014-2015, a garden was planted on the south side of the building at the entrance of the welding shop featuring wood hitching posts and a wood fence.

HERITAGE VALUE

The heritage value of the Lacombe Blacksmith Shop lies in its representation of early twentieth century industrial development in Lacombe, Alberta. The Lacombe Blacksmith Shop is also significant as the oldest operating Blacksmith Shop in Alberta and as a representation of Lacombe's success as an important local commercial centre in Alberta.

The Blacksmith Shop signifies the need for commercial services during Lacombe's principal period of growth in the early 1900s. Blacksmithing was an essential trade during the settlement period in Alberta, and blacksmith shops were an important industry in small towns like Lacombe. The Town of Lacombe grew around a Calgary & Edmonton Railway siding established in 1891. Following the arrival of the railway, Lacombe emerged as one of central Alberta's predominant commercial and agricultural centres and was located directly in between Calgary and Edmonton along the C&E railway line.

The community grew rapidly and by the turn of the century, distinct zones had begun to develop and an industrial area was established on Glass Street (now 49th Street). This street, which ran north from the main commercial block, was home to a livery stable, a hardware supply store, and a laundry. Between 1902 and 1903, these businesses were joined by this blacksmith shop, Lacombe's third.

Established prior to the 1920s when cars became a common mode of transportation, the Blacksmith Shop was an essential commercial business in the community. Blacksmiths were some of the most important people in the life of early Albertans as they were able to shoe horses and repair metal machinery, wagon wheels, and farm vehicles.

CHARACTER-DEFINING ELEMENTS

Key elements that define the heritage value of the Lacombe Blacksmith Shop include its:

Exterior

- 1902/1903 building is rectangular, 26.11 feet by 44.02 feet;
- mid 1950's addition is rectangular, 39.59 feet by 46.16 feet;
- gable roof;
- large, boom town front on the east facing side;
- exterior walls and roof clad in corrugated metal sheets;
- lack of any ornamentation demonstrating the utilitarian nature of the building;
- location on 49th Street, Lacombe's historic industrial block.

Interior

- large, open floor plan with a clear demarcation between the general work area and the horseshoeing area;
- original forge situated towards the rear of the building on the south side;
- presence of the numerous pieces of original equipment, machinery and tools including two triphammers, anvils, vices and tongs;
- wooden walls and ceiling beams, blackened from exposure to soot and heat;
- interior walls covered mainly with boards of a variety of lengths and widths, patched in places by plywood sheets;
- numerous hooks, rings and rails for tools, tying horses and storing pieces of metal;
- presence of built-in and moveable work tables and cabinetry, many with handwritten content labels;
- presence of initials carved into and branding marks burnt into walls;
- attic space accessible by ladder.

Top To Bottom: Blacksmith Shop, N.D. (LDHS 90.1.894);
Interior of Blacksmith Shop; Blacksmith Shop, N.D. (LDHS)

