

TOWN OF HIGH RIVER
IN THE PROVINCE OF ALBERTA

BYLAW 4444/2015

Being a Bylaw of the Town of High River in the Province of Alberta to amend Bylaw 4437/2015, known as the Municipal Historic Resource Designation of the W.O. Mitchell Residence.

WHEREAS The *Historical Resources Act*, R.S.A 2000 c. H-9, as amended, (the 'Act') permits the Council of the Town of High River to designate as a municipal historic resource real property, including land and buildings, features and structures upon the land, whose preservation the Council considers to be in the public interest because of their heritage value; and



WHEREAS The Town of High River, in the Province of Alberta, has passed Bylaw 4437/2015 to designate the Garrett Residence as a Municipal Historical Resource in accordance with the Act; and

WHEREAS The Town of High River now deems it necessary to amend Bylaw 4437/2015;



NOW THEREFORE The Town of High River hereby enacts as follows:

1. That Bylaw 4437/2015, known as the Municipal Historic Resource Designation of the W.O. Mitchell Residence, be amended by the insertion of the "W.O. Mitchell Residence - Statement of Significance" as Schedule "B" to Bylaw 4437/2015, as attached to this bylaw.
2. This bylaw comes into force when it receives third and final reading and is signed by the Mayor and the Chief Administrative Officer or designates.



READ A FIRST TIME THIS 22 DAY OF June A.D. 2015.


MAYOR/DEPUTY MAYOR

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

READ A SECOND TIME THIS 22 DAY OF June A.D. 2015


MAYOR/DEPUTY MAYOR

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

READ A THIRD AND FINAL TIME THIS 22 DAY OF June A.D. 2015


MAYOR/DEPUTY MAYOR

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

BYLAW 4437/2015 - SCHEDULE "B"

W.O. MITCHELL RESIDENCE – STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

W.O. MITCHELL RESIDENCE

514 8TH STREET SW
HIGH RIVER, ALBERTA



Description of Historic Place

The W.O. Mitchell Residence is a one-storey house with a medium-gable roof, and a hip roof over the enclosed offset-right entry. The vertical-plank door has multi-lite sidelights and a transom. The house was moved on to three lots, in a southwest High River residential district in 1945.

Heritage Value

The municipal heritage value of the W.O. Mitchell Residence lies in its association with residential development in High River; in its association with noted Canadian author W.O. Mitchell; in its design and construction; and in its status as a landmark in the community.

The W.O. Mitchell family first moved to High River in 1945. World War II was ending in Europe, but there was uncertainty about the war in the Pacific. There was some optimism in High River, but new home construction was limited. The Mitchells could not find suitable housing, and first lived in the St. George Hotel, and later renting a house next to *The High River Times* newspaper office. Soon after, Mitchell received payment for several articles, and a \$1000 advance from *Atlantic Monthly*, both of which afforded them the decision to buy a house. Mitchell learned of several bungalows for sale in Turner Valley, and purchased one for \$1400. He also purchased three adjacent lots in High River for \$75. The house was transported 40-kilometres to High River, and across the Highwood River, just below the site of the train trestle that was removed in 2014. To save money, Mitchell and his brother Dick hand-dug the basement and, along with Mitchell's wife Merna, poured the foundation. The house was placed onto the foundation in July 1945. Noting the simplicity of quickly obtaining a "new" residence, several other people soon had houses moved to High River.

W.O. Mitchell first visited High River in 1943, to write an article for *Maclean's* magazine on the fall cattle round-up. After meeting with *High River Times* associate editor Hughenia McCorquodale, Mitchell considered moving to High River. The following year he and his wife Merna visited for four days, at which time he received an offer to be an associate editor for *Maclean's*, but chose to move to High River. Mitchell was inspired by the town, the foothills, and the people he encountered. After his first four *Jake and the Kid* stories were accepted by *Maclean's*, the magazine's fiction editor wrote that the characters were real, and the atmosphere is "real Western." Mitchell wrote those stories, and completed his best-selling novel *Who has Seen the Wind* in his office in this house. Many of his magazine articles,

novels, television scripts, stage plays, and *Jake and the Kid* radio plays, were also written in this office. Many of his writings had connections to the people he met, and the experiences he had in High River. His novel *Roses are Difficult Here* was controversial for the ease with which locals could decipher the thin disguises of many High River characters. The Mitchells left High River for a two-year period while he was fiction editor for *Maclean's*. But it wasn't long before Merna was plotting how they could return to High River where she preferred to raise their three children. They returned to their modest house in 1951, where he continued to write, until moving to Calgary in 1967. Merna Mitchell was involved in many community organizations, and sang in the United Church choir. She was instrumental in organizing and fundraising for the town's indoor rink and pool complex. W.O. and Merna Mitchell are buried in the High River Cemetery.

The house is a one-storey, wood-frame bungalow. The main gable roof has a medium-gable roof on a wing to the left of the entry. There are projecting eaves and verges with a plain frieze. The entry is offset to the right and is flanked by multi-lite sidelights with a transom above. The vertical wood-plank entrance door has heavy metal hardware, and a door knocker. There is an exterior brick fireplace chimney on the right side of the building, and brick chimney offset to the left and rear. There are also casement windows with wood shutters. The house is set on three town lots in a southwest high River residential district. The living room addition was designed by Merna, who also helped in the construction of the fireplace. The indoor bathroom and laundry facilities were added in 1951.

The Mitchell Residence was a welcoming place to visitors. These included members of the nearby Stoney First Nations he had befriended on his first visit to the town. While the architecture of the residence is understated, the significance of W.O. Mitchell on the Canadian literary landscape is that of a prairie icon. His work influenced a generation of Canadian writers. He received the Order of Canada, literary awards, and honorary degrees. The W.O. Mitchell Literary Prize is awarded to a writer who, like its namesake, created a substantial body of work, and mentored young writers.

Character-Defining Elements

The key elements that define the heritage character of the W.O. Mitchell Residence include its:

- Mass, scale, and form of the one-storey, wood-frame building;
- Medium-gable roof;
- Medium-gable roofed wing to left of entry;
- Vertical wood-plank door, with heavy metal hardware hinges, and door-knocker;
- Multi-lite sidelights and transom;
- Casement windows with shutters;
- Projecting eaves;
- Projecting verges with plan frieze;
- Exterior right fireplace chimney;
- Brick chimney, offset left and rear;
- Location on three lots in a southwest High River residential district; and
- Setback from the public sidewalk.

Sources:

1. Mitchell, Barbara & Ormond. W.O.: The Life of W.O. Mitchell – Beginnings to Who Has Seen the Wind. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1999.
2. Mitchell, Barbara & Ormond. Mitchell: The Life of W.O. Mitchell – The Years of Fame. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2005.
3. The Canadian Encyclopedia, accessed August 12, 2014. www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/wo-mitchell