

Visitors to Fort Steele in Canada get transported back in time.

Narrator: You may think it's the twenty-first century, but in Fort Steele Heritage Town, it's still the 1890s. Fort Steele is a living museum. Here, visitors can transport themselves back in time to see how people in a Canadian frontier town lived.

Noel Ratch,

Program Manager: We really try to keep an atmosphere of what it was like in the 1890s here on the site. Uh, we want to give people a full experience of what it was like to live back then.

Narrator: Fort Steele is located in Canada's westernmost province of British Columbia, in the heart of the Rocky Mountains and just north of the U.S.-Canadian border. So, what was it like in Canada during the nineteenth century? The late 1800s were a period of westward expansion and development in Canada. Some people were moving west, seeking their fortunes in the gold fields. Others came to claim land for farms and ranches. The shopkeepers and tradesmen came soon after, offering goods and services to the new settlers. New frontier towns were born. Fort Steele was a typical town of that period. It began as a ferry crossing over the Kootenay River, providing a way for miners to reach the gold fields. Then, in 1898, the Canadian Pacific Railway located their new rail line through the neighboring town of Cranbrook. Within a few years, the population of Fort Steele was reduced to a couple of hundred. For more than fifty years, the town was deserted. Then some local citizens decided they wanted to restore this fascinating piece of local history.

Martin Ross,

General Manager: Fort Steele Heritage Town was started in 1961, largely through the efforts of interested community members who wanted to preserve this . . . uh . . . significant historic site. Now we have over sixty . . . uh . . . restored historic buildings, including a theater, restaurant, bakery, and lots of other attractions.

Narrator: One of those attractions is the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Post. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police were Canada's answer to keeping law and order in frontier settlements.

Jim Robinson,
Mountie

Interpreter: They came as peacemakers. There was never a shot fired. There was never anything like that done here. They solved all of their problems through words rather than violence.

.

Jim Robinson: *(to group of children)* Do you understand this, Constables?

Children: Yes, sir, Sergeant Major Sauer, sir!

Narrator: Today, those up to the challenge can experience what life was like for the mounties, the ordinary enlisted men (called constables), and the officers like Superintendent Sam Steele, for whom the town was eventually named. Through other displays and interpreters, visitors can learn what it was like to live without electricity, running water, and many of the twenty-first-century comforts we take for granted.

Stephanie Pfeiffer,
Lambi House

Interpreter: In the 1890s, families didn't have any running hot or cold water. Instead, they would have to use a pump to get their water. . . . And for any hot water they wanted, they would have to heat it on the stove.

Narrator: At Fort Steele, visitors can also see how tradesmen performed their work and learn about the vital roles they played in the frontier community.

Paul Reimer,

Blacksmith: The blacksmith was a very important person in any . . . uh . . . pioneer community. They kept the horses . . . um . . . with shoes on their feet, which kept them from damaging their hooves. They also made wagons . . . and wheels . . . and all kinds of tools that a farmer

would have used, would have been fixed or repaired or built by a blacksmith.

Narrator: Those who wonder what school was like in the 1890s can attend Miss Bailey's class at Fort Steele School.

**Wynne Royer
as Teacher,**

"Miss Bailey": Good afternoon, boys and girls.

Students: Good afternoon, Miss Bailey.

Wynne Royer: Excellent. It is like music to my ears. Boys and girls, . . .

Narrator: Wynne Royer plays the role of Miss Bailey, the teacher who taught at Fort Steele School in the 1890s.

Wynne Royer: This would be a typical classroom. This is actually . . . uh . . . quite a nice school, being as it has two classrooms. There's a second one right next door. Within these two classrooms, she would have taught grades one through eight. . . . *(to a student)* Good for you, dear. You remembered that you are meant to raise your hand.

Narrator: As you walk through the streets, you may encounter other characters from Fort Steele's past who will make life in the 1890s come alive.

Mule Owner: I'm a short-distance hauler. Well, actually, Angelica here does the hauling, and I just lead her around.

Narrator: If you're hungry, stop for lunch at the International Hotel or try some coffee and pastries at Fort Steele's bakery. And what does the future hold for this historic town?

Martin Ross: Canadians are becoming more and more interested in history, so over the next few years, we predict that, uh, more and more visitors will be coming to Fort Steele. So we like to add new attractions each year. Our old-time trades like our blacksmith, tinsmith, and harness maker have been very popular, so I think that we'll be adding maybe a boot maker or hatmaker in the future.

Store Clerk: OK. There you go.

Customer: Thank you.

Narrator: So if you need a break from the hectic pace of the twenty-first century, or if you are just curious about what life was like in a nineteenth-century Canadian frontier town, come visit Fort Steele Heritage Town – alive and booming once again.