

2127 – 2129 Columbia Avenue – West Kootenay Power & Light Building



West Kootenay Power & Light Building - 2019

Heritage Register - Building

- 1) **Historic Name:** West Kootenay Power & Light Building
- 2) **Common Name:** Rossland Grocery, Rossland Hostel
- 3) **Address:** 2127 –2129 Columbia Avenue (Block 45, Lots 17 & 18)
- 4) **Date of Construction:** c. 1896
- 5) **Design, Style, Architecture, Architect:** Vernacular Commercial

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Description:

The West Kootenay Power & Light Building is a wood-frame commercial building located on the south side of Columbia Avenue in the eastern portion of Rossland’s historic downtown.

It has the appearance of being two buildings attached to each other; the eastern portion of the building is two storeys, and the western portion is three storeys.

Heritage Value:

2127-2129 Columbia Avenue is valued as an early surviving wood-frame commercial building on Rossland's main street. Constructed c. 1896, this building reflects the first generation of buildings constructed to support the rapidly growing population that was striving to accommodate and maximize the prosperity associated with the discovery of rich gold-bearing ore in the surrounding mountains. Originally the location of an eclectic mixture of mining businesses, trades, lodging rooms, and professional offices, this place holds value as an example of the opportunistic nature of the boomtown era development when investors with money, built places for rent paying occupants.

The association of this place with the West Kootenay Power & Light for over 50 years is a central aspect of its heritage value. The WKP&L was responsible for the construction of the dam on the Kootenay River, and the construction of the 20,000 volt transmission line from the dam to the Substation in Upper Rossland, supplying power to the mines and the community of Rossland in 1898. The company is remembered for establishing the first hydro-electric project in BC, and at that time, the most powerful electrical distribution system in the province and the longest transmission line in the world. This building was the location of the company's headquarters from 1902 until 1930, but continued to be used as WKP&L offices and a sales outlet for electrical appliances until at least 1956. The fact that the WKP&L established its headquarters and substation in Rossland is a reminder of the important administrative, economic, and executive position that Rossland held in the region at the end of the nineteenth century.

The later uses of this building as residences and a variety of commercial storefronts is also important as a reflection of the changing nature of small natural-resource towns in the later part of the twentieth century.

Character-Defining Elements:

- Original location on two commercial lots on the south side of Columbia Avenue in Rossland's historic downtown.
- The relationship of the building to the street and to the back alley.
- The vernacular commercial design of the building, and the flat roof structures of both wings.
- The wood-frame construction of the building and evidence of its wood cladding.
- The appearance of the building as being two structures joined together, with the eastern half being two storeys, and the western half being three storeys.
- Commercial storefronts at street level.
- The central doorway at street level, leading to the upper storeys.
- Original window and door openings on all façades.

HISTORY

The 1897 City Directory showed multiple occupants in this building including stockbrokers, agents for mining companies, doctors, architects, engineers, surveyors, assayers and tailors. In 1898, the West Kootenay Power & Light Company and Rossland Water & Light were both located in the building. In 1902, WKP&L made this their headquarters but continued to share the building with Rossland Water & Light.

No records could be located between 1930 and 1943 but in 1944, there is evidence that there were at least 4 apartments in the upper floors. Rossland Water & Light moved out in the late 1940's and was replaced with various businesses over the years including a furniture store, a flower shop, an arcade and a video store. We know that the Rossland Grocery store was in this eastern storefront by 1984 and continues there to this day. The western storefront continues to accommodate various businesses over the years including a tattoo parlor, a children's clothing store and a cannabis store.

