

2070 Columbia Avenue - Steen & Company Wholesale Liquors and Cigars



Steen and Company Wholesale Liquors and Cigars in 2019

Heritage Register - Building

- 1) **Historical Name:** Steen & Company Wholesale Liquors and Cigars
- 2) **Other Name(s):** Kathleen Apartments
- 3) **Address:** 2070 Washington Street
- 4) **Date of Construction:** 1897
- 5) **Design, Style, Architecture, Architect:** Frontier Style

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Description:

Steen & Company Wholesale Liquors and Cigars is a two-and-a half-storey, wood frame, flat-roofed commercial building with two storefronts at street level, dating to 1897. It is part of a grouping of five 1890s buildings located on the eastern side of Washington Street between Columbia Avenue and First Avenue in the historic downtown of Rossland, BC.

Heritage Value:

Steen & Company Wholesale Liquors and Cigars is valued as an integral element of Rossland's oldest intact commercial streetscape. Together with its contiguous neighbours on both sides, it comprises the only surviving group of first-generation commercial buildings in Rossland's historic downtown. It is remarkable that these wood-framed buildings survived a series of devastating fires that essentially decimated all other contemporary buildings of this era in the surrounding blocks prior to 1929.

Significance lies in the original ownership of this place by Olive Steen & Company and Lee Coombs, who operated the Steen and Co. Wholesale Liquors and Cigars business from this place. Purpose-built in 1897 to support this business, it reflects the type of commercial buildings that were erected seemingly overnight in order to support the mining and population boom in Rossland in the 1890s. The original two-storey interior configuration of the building, with high ceilings, impressive storefront, and upper floor with central balcony and decorative cornice as visible in archival photographs, speak to the status of its original owners and the importance of this type of building in the new city. Mr. Coombs also managed the Rossland Warehouse and Transfer Co. out of this location, which further reflects the driving force of supply-based business on the growth of the city at that time.

This historic place also holds heritage value for its longstanding use as the Silver Grill (also known as Sammy's in honour of its proprietor, Sammy Low) Chinese restaurant. The albeit short-term ownership of the building by three persons of Chinese origin in the late 1920s, and its subsequent use as a Chinese restaurant for decades thereafter, speaks to the early and ongoing presence of a Chinese-Canadian community in Rossland throughout its history. The Silver Grill was originally called the Empire Café, another Chinese restaurant run by C.K. Hon in the Bodega Hotel building next door. Sammy Low purchased the restaurant in 1948, and moved it to 2070 Washington Street, further strengthening the interconnectedness of this strip of historic buildings.

Additional significance is attributed to the early use of this place as the first United States Consular Agency in Rossland (c.1898-1900). The presence of such an agency in Rossland in 1898 is a strong illustration of the strategic geographic and economic ties the city had with the United States at that time and particularly during the mining boom period in the area.

The evolution of this commercial building from a warehouse/office to a more diverse range of purposes starting in the early 1900s reflects the changeable nature of the natural resource-based economy on young settlements in the Interior of British Columbia at that time. While unable to sustain its original warehouse-type use for an extended period of time, this building has maintained relevant uses over the decades, contributing to a sense of historical continuity in Rossland – one which is built on a common feeling that the spirit of place in the downtown has changed little since the 1890s.

It is noteworthy that this building was significantly altered in the mid-twentieth century, with a stripped-down façade, stucco cladding, and storefronts aligning with the buildings on either side being added. These changes reflect a desire for a modernization of the city's downtown core that was typical for former boom-towns at that time.

Character-Defining Elements:

- Commercial use since 1897.
- Residential use since at least the 1910s.
- Its situation on its lot, and its relationship to the sidewalk, street, and back alley.
- Its attached relationship to the other buildings within this historic grouping.
- Its two-and-a-half-storey massing, with flat roof, and rectilinear façade.
- Its wood-frame construction.
- Its mixed use, with storefronts at street level and residential units in upper floors.
- Evidence of its early use as a warehouse, including its basement and any surviving relevant interior spatial configurations dating to the time of its construction.
- Evidence of its original design and façade elements, including:
 - High ceilings and remnants of the original storefront.
 - Details of the decorative stepped pediment along the cornice line.
 - Window and door openings.
 - Evidence of the original balcony.
- Association of the place with the Silver Grill Restaurant.



Washington Street, 1900. Note facade with upper balcony, tall storefront, and pediment.