

2127 – 2129 COLUMBIA AVENUE – WEST KOOTENAY POWER & LIGHT BUILDING



Heritage Register – Building

- 1) **Historic Name:** West Kootenay Power & Light Building
- 2) **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 historic downtown. It appears to be two buildings attached to each other; the eastern portion of the building is two-storeys, and the western portion is three-storeys.

Heritage Value:

This location is valued as an early surviving, wood-frame, commercial building on Rossland's main street. This building reflects the first generation of buildings constructed around 1896 to support the rapidly growing population. Commercial buildings were needed to maximize the prosperity associated with the discovery of rich gold-bearing ore. Originally this location was used by an eclectic mixture of mining businesses, trades, lodging rooms, and professional offices. This is 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 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. The dam supplied power to the mines and the community of Rossland in 1898.

The company is remembered for establishing the first hydro-electric project in BC. At that time, it was 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. That WKP&L established its headquarters and substation in Rossland is a reminder of the important administrative, economic, and executive position the city held in the region at the end of the nineteenth century.

Later uses of this building, as residences and a variety of commercial storefronts, are important as a reflection of the changing nature of small natural-resource towns in the latter 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-storey 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 four 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. The Rossland Grocery store has operated in this eastern storefront since 1984. The western storefront continues to accommodate various businesses including, over the years, a tattoo parlor, a children's clothing store and a cannabis store.