

Village of Cumberland

Statement of Significance

Tarbell Building

2705 Dunsmuir Avenue, Cumberland, BC~1985



Prepared by Eric Pattison, Cumberland Heritage Committee Member :: February 2025



Description

The Tarbell Building is situated on the southwest corner of Dunsmuir Avenue and Second Street on Cumberland's main commercial street. The original two-storey building has a medium-pitched gable roof. In the 1920s and 30s the building was enlarged with side and rear additions culminating with a flat-roofed second storey rear addition. The building is wood-framed-and-clad and sited directly at the north, east and west (partially) property lines. Original main floor retail commercial uses continue. Originally built as a warehouse and workshop, the rear extension currently houses a hostel-style accommodation.

Heritage Values

Constructed in 1895, the building has historic values in its association with the year of Cumberland's founding; the growth of local owner-operated businesses; and to the long community history of the Tarbell family. Having rented part of the building in 1895 for his new tinware business, Charles Henry Tarbell (1856-1930) purchased and fully occupied the building in 1902. The business was renamed C.H. Tarbell & Son in 1920 when son George Armstrong Tarbell (1880-1960) became a partner.

The building has cultural values in its association with 19th century British frontier colonial capitalism and expanding settler entrepreneurship leading to accelerated growth of Cumberland's commercial core and the surrounding rural and farming areas.

The building has social values in its association with the extensive Tarbell family in their support of the social fabric of the town, including: the Masonic Order, the Anglican Church, the Village Council and the General Hospital Board. The building is associated with various fraternal orders in their 19th and early 20th century use of the upper floor as a meeting place.

The building has economic values as a substantial purpose-built hardware store, and its association with other Tarbell enterprises, including providing tinware and other supplies and services to construction projects, and a second store in nearby Courtenay. Employees, local taxes, suppliers, social clubs, trades and service providers all benefited economically from Tarbell family business activity.

The building has aesthetic values as a frontier vernacular building constructed with local materials, and in the additive character of later expansions. It is one of what was once a streetscape of similar buildings—displaying exuberant late-Victorian architectural character—lining Dunsmuir Avenue.

The building has scientific and environmental values for its traditional construction techniques, locally-sourced, affordable, low energy-intensive materials—their quality, durability and reparability—and for the embodied energy (the total energy expended over the building's lifecycle) held in the building. Further, the materials and methods of construction provided a building that could be expediently altered and expanded.

Character-Defining Elements

- Location on Dunsmuir Avenue in the historic commercial core of Cumberland.
- Continuous original use of retail commercial at grade.
- Siting directly at front and side property lines.

- Collection of late 19th and early 20th century commercial vernacular design features, including:
 - Simple overall form and unadorned massing, and including 20th century side and rear additions;
 - False-front wood parapet above storefront of westerly 1-storey portion;
 - Wood-framed storefront windows, including continuous transom windows;
 - Recessed retail entry with glazed, painted wood door and tongue & groove soffit boards;
 - Storefront wood cornice with decorative wood end brackets;
 - Upper north façade wood-framed windows with 1/over/1 sashes and transom lites;
 - Traditional scale, layout and configuration of east façade windows;
 - Recessed side entry for upper floor with traditional glazed, painted wood door and, including wood-framed canopy with decorative end brackets;
 - Various wood claddings including cedar sidewall shingles and original Douglas fir 'drop' siding on the west wall;
 - Collection of wide, flat-stock, wood trims and details, and;
 - Historic period appropriate suspended blade-style business signage.

Appendix A – History Notes

Born in Vermont, USA, Charles Henry Tarbell married Lucy Amanda Armstrong (1857-1939) in Knowlton, PQ; they had four children. With three surviving children (George Armstrong, Ellen Gertrude and Mary Lenore) the family moved to Victoria, BC c.1889; Charles is listed as a ‘tinner’ in the 1891 Victoria directory. In 1895 the family moved to Cumberland where George married Kathleen Winram and Ellen married Jack Bryden, of the prominent Bryden/Dunsmuir family.

Tarbell’s tinware business provided stovepipes, bathtubs, decorative ceilings, signage and other metal products to the booming new town. The 1898 Williams Directory for Cumberland is the first to list the Tarbells; George as a ‘salesman’ and Charles as a ‘tin plate worker’. The business grew to provide paint, hardware, furniture—in an upstairs showroom—and household products.

In 1913 Tarbell & Son built a second store in Courtenay which operated until 1945, according to BC directories, as Tarbell Ltd., J. H. Macintyre, manager.

Charles Tarbell had high community standing through roles as Foreman of the Jury of Inquiry into the Trent River Rail Bridge collapse, Village Alderman, Past Master of the Masonic Lodge, General Hospital Board Director, Provincial Liquor Licence Commissioner and member of the Cumberland Gun Club.

Tarbell purchased land to the west of his store in 1922 for a building addition. The false-front parapet of the original 1895 building was extant in a 1928 advertisement photograph but is not evident thereafter. The storefront transom windows are currently glazed with painted plywood, however, records mention ‘patterned’ glass which may exist beneath.

The Fire Insurance map of the era shows a 1 1/2-storey rear addition—implying the upper floor was built into a pitched roof—and a further 1-storey rear addition, both used as a ‘warehouse’ (probably including a workshop). In 1936 a rear addition with a second floor and flat roof was built by W.A. “Abe” Orr; possibly incorporating the previous smaller additions. A further rear extension was constructed c.1964.

Original Douglas fir ‘drop’ siding remains on the westerly addition and was probably the cladding on the entire original building. Cedar sidewall shingle cladding on the north, east and south (partial) elevations was replaced in 2015.

As a family business C.H. Tarbell & Son involved George’s wife Kathleen, sister Mary as bookkeeper and nephew Gerry Bryden. From the early 1950s to 1964 brothers Norman and Jack Tweedhope were partners in the business. With George dying in 1960, Kathleen married Gordon Bell in 1963.

In the 1950s and 60s the Tarbell’s was known for a charming Christmas window display of a model train traversing snowy mountains. After operating in Cumberland for 72 years, the building and business were sold by the family in 1967.

Ending with David Brown in 1991, several owners operated the business as Cumberland Hardware/Cumberland Hardware & Gifts. After 96 years selling hardware, the building was converted by a Mrs. Powell of Vancouver into small ‘vintage-style’ shops and became Cumberland Artisan’s Guild.

In 2003 Dodge City Cycles, Tarbell’s Deli—occupying the westerly addition until 2019—and Riding Fool Hostel—occupying the rear extension and upper floor—all opened for business. Dodge City Cycles has since expanded into the westerly addition.

In 2003 the original Second Street raised loading door was reconstructed into the main entrance of the Riding Fool Hostel; including a wood-framed canopy that replicates the decorative brackets of the front cornice. The vintage—Queen Anne style—wood entry door was repurposed from the 1990s ‘artisans market’ interior works. Also at this time the front storefront windows were reconfigured into three units—from the previous two units; from the original single units—and double-glazed.

Alice and Jeremy Grasby have owned the building since 2017 and operate Riding Fool Accommodation.

Appendix B – Historic Photographs



Photo 1: Charles Tarbell in front of store c.1900. Note original double doors & single plate glass windows. CMA C030-187



Photo 2: 1928. Note false-front parapet, cornice brackets, 'blade' sign & divided plate glass windows.

CDM, Courtenay Free Press, Dec. 20, 1928



Photo 3: 1937. Note suspended neon sign above entry. CMA address file



Photo 4: 1940s. Note 2-storey 1936 rear addition on right.



Photo 5: Photo 5: late 1970s
CMA 2016.006.006



Photo 7: 1995 CMA address file

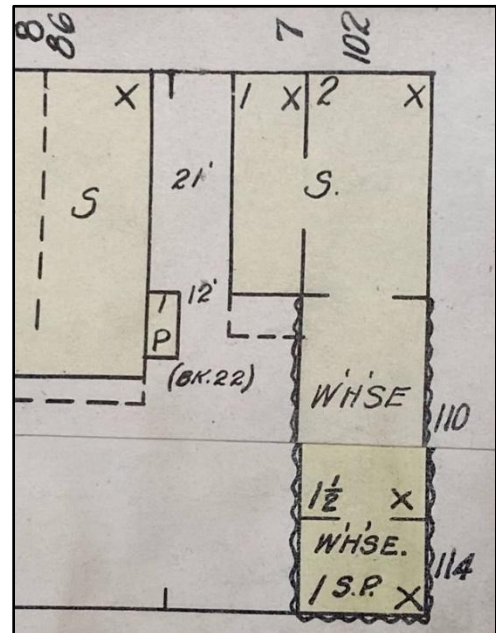


Photo 6: 1921 Fire Insurance Map
with later revisions. Note side/rear

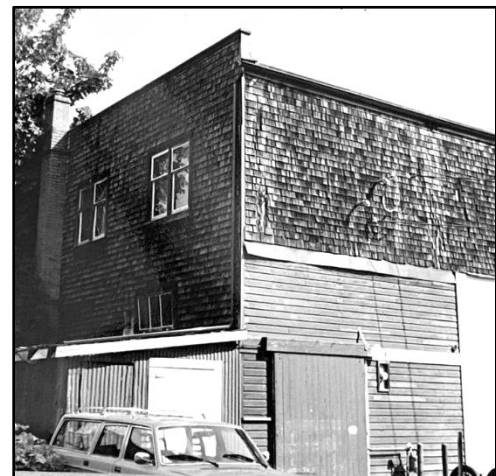


Photo 8: Rear of building, 1980s.
Note mixed claddings & loading
door.
CMA address file

Appendix C – Contemporary Photographs





Research Resources

Barr, Jennifer Nell. Cumberland Heritage: A Selected History of People, Buildings, Institutions & Sites, 1888-1950. Village of Cumberland, 1997.

Courtenay & District Museum (CDM):

- Fire Insurance Map, Cumberland 1921 with later revisions
- Tarbell fonds
- Courtenay Free Press, Christmas Annual, Dec. 20, 1928

Cumberland Museum and Archives (CMA):

- Building address file (2705 Dunsmuir Avenue)
- Historic photograph collection
- J. Barr working notes and research

Interview: Jeremy Grasby, building owner, 20 January 2024

Interview: Lois Harris, 16 January 2024

Official Community Plan. Village of Cumberland, 2011.

Royal BC Museum and Archives, Vital Statistics

University of British Columbia Archives, Historic Newspaper Collection

Vancouver Public Library, BC Directories Collection