Coo House
135 Archibald Street North



Year Built: 1898
Architect: George Coo, perhaps
Style: Ontario Vernacular
Notable Features: Eclectic collection of jutting turrets
Quarter-wheel windows
Arched entranceway
Designation Date: October 14th, 1981
By-law No.: 317 – 1981
Legal Description: Plan 68 Pt Lot 66 55R3057 Part 1 W/S Archibald
Current Owner: 385628 Ontario Limited

Description:

The house which stands on the corner of Archibald and Miles Street was first owned by Sarah Jane and George Coo. It has been speculated that George designed the building, which has an elegant and eclectic feel. The Coos bought the property site from John McKellar, who was the first mayor of Fort William (from 1892-1898). Construction of the building was completed in 1898 and the Coo family lived there until 1952.

From 1952 until 1983, the Coo House was used variously as a multi-unit family dwelling and for commercial purposes. One of the couples to own to the house had plans to construct an addition to the back and transform the residence into a restaurant. This idea was quashed given the lack of funding as well as the fact that the house had been designated as a Heritage Site in 1981, which protected it from exterior renovations or alterations.

Linda Dziver and Richard Schutte bought the property in 1983 and, upon extensive renovations to the interior, opened a Christmas store called “Coo’s Fine Gifts.” The ‘gingerbread house’ feeling to the home apparently inspired Linda and Richard to

open the business; “we felt it was conducive to it (a Christmas store), it’s so homey and warm.”

Architecture:

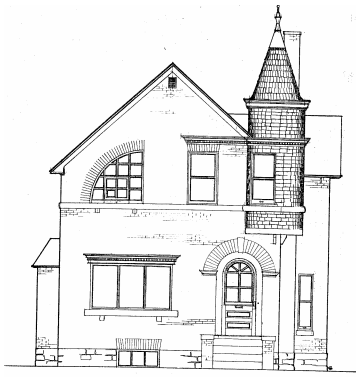
The Coo House doesn’t belong to any one particular architectural style; it is an “ad hoc amalgamation” of parts which seem to be meant for a much larger edifice. The jutting turrets, arched entranceway and quarter-wheel windows seem are all features which one wouldn’t imagine on such a modest-sized structure. The house is characterized by an ostentatious conical turret with faux brickwork façade. The windows are all of varied shapes and sizes, lending themselves to the overall eclecticism of the house. The large window on the main floor has a shelf entablature above it; there is also a large stone sill supported by brackets. Above the double-hung window on the second level is a moulded shelf which begins rather abruptly and continues around the turret. An addition was added in 1909 by George Coo.

As the Coo house occupies a prominent street corner, it has become a recognizable landmark of Thunder Bay. The interior of the house was renovated extensively in 1983, when the property was acquired by Linda Dziver and Richard Schutte. The façade of the building is protected from alterations under the Ontario Heritage Act, as it was designated as a Heritage Site in 1981.

The Coos:

George Coo arrived in Fort William in 1896 and quickly established himself as a valued member of the community. He was the city’s first bandmaster and was secretary to the Board of Education. Formally trained in Toronto as a watchmaker, George Coo worked locally for Robert Strachan who was official timekeeper for the C.P.R. Upon retirement from the jewellry business, he became the clerk for the third division court. George had three children with his wife, Sarah Jane. The entire family was active in religious work at St. Luke’s Anglican school, where George was a Sunday School teacher.

Mrs. Coo holds an interesting place in history, for she was partially responsible for the “grand success” of the first amateur lady minstrel production ever given in Canada.



THE COO HOUSE c. 1898
185 ~~SOUTH~~ ARCHIBALD STREET