

## 567 Reid Street Keen House – 1915



Front Elevation



South Elevation



Front and North Elevation

### Description

Keen House is a single storey wood frame house built in 1915 located on the west side of Reid Street in North Quesnel, BC. The historic place includes the building and the parcel of land it occupies.

### Heritage Value

Keen House is located in North Quesnel which is an older residential neighbourhood in the city. While not in its original form, the house is a physical reminder of the people who shaped the development of Quesnel. This house has had many owners including A. Harry Drinkrow who purchased the lot in 1910. Harry was the road superintendent for Quesnel who moved into this house with his family in 1915. Unfortunately Harry drowned in the Fraser River in 1918.

The house is named for Bill and Angeline Keen who lived here in the 1920s and 1930s. Bill was the son of pioneer, Wah Lee who arrived in Canada in 1869. Wah Lee purchased land in Quesnel and opened the Wah Lee Company which provided supplies to Chinese miners. The family owned warehouses, a livery barn, a restaurant, and a general store that was unfortunately destroyed in the fire of 1916. The fire broke out around midnight in the Empress Theatre located in the Cariboo Hotel. Eight buildings were lost including the Cariboo and Occidental Hotels and the Northern Crown Bank. Bill Keen was named after his father's friend Billy Lamb, a local barber. During WWII, Bill served overseas as a paratrooper. He was an avid hockey player and is honoured with a lifetime seat in the Quesnel arena. The Keen family have played an important role in the development of Quesnel's business sector and community organizations.

Norman and Alice (Higdon) Palmer also lived in this house. Norman was from Ontario and came to Quesnel to work at the Department of Public Works until he operated the light plant at the Cariboo Hotel. When he finished working at the light plant he returned to the Department of Public Works for seven years. Alice was the daughter of pioneers, David and Amy Higdon, who came to Quesnel in 1909 by steamboat. Alice and Norman were married in Quesnel in 1927.

Norman had many employment experiences. When he finished working at the Department of Public Works, he did some mining along the Quesnel River, hauled diesel to the Gold Quartz Mine in Wells, and was a mechanic for McNaughton and McMann. In WWII, Norman served overseas from 1940 to 1945. When he returned to Quesnel, Norman went back to work at the garage as shop foreman until his retirement in 1967. The Palmer and Higdon families are recognized for their contribution to the development of the community with streets named in their honour.

### **Character-Defining Elements**

The character-defining elements of Keen House include:

- the original L-shape form is still evident even though some materials are new;
- a single storey wood frame house that has been updated;
- the open porch which is substantially intact;
- an excellent representation of small houses built in Quesnel in the early 1900s;
- a contribution to the streetscape;
- a large picture windows on façade.