

Cataract House / 607 South Washington

1856, 1912, 1940 / 1891, 1915, 1986, 2003

Although the Cataract House preceded the 607 South Washington building by 35 years, the two buildings co-existed as neighbors on Washington Avenue from 1891 to 1910, the Cataract on the corner, and 607 Washington to its east. The Cataract's successor, Hotel Manx, occupied the Cataract's space until 1940. 607 South Washington continues as a restaurant and condominium, while the Cataract's current iteration is the parking lot at the intersection of Washington and Portland Avenues.



Hennepin County Library

When the three-story brick hotel was built in 1856, the surrounding area was significantly different. Statehood did not occur until 1858, and the city of Minneapolis was not incorporated until 1867.

In 1821, a sawmill was built on the east bank of the Mississippi in the “cataract” of St Anthony Falls. Shortly after, the mill was repurposed to grind flour. The river was becoming a highway for both lumber and

flour.

As development occurred and two cities were created, St. Anthony on the east side of the river and Minneapolis on the west side, the two areas vied to be considered the cultural, governmental, and commercial hub.

In addition, tourists eager to escape the scorching weather of the south were traveling up the Mississippi to vacation in the Minneapolis area. Investors soon realized the potential of the area and began building hotels to house both tourists and mill workers.

On the west bank, a new county courthouse was created on 4th St and Chicago Avenue, and Cataract House was built close by. The Cataract House was touted as among the largest buildings in the area and initially dominated the west bank skyline.



Hennepin County Library

Once Nicollet House was built nearby in 1858, it became the dominant hotel on the west bank. Despite the competition, Cataract House, with its location near the Milwaukee Road Depot, continued to be a viable option for those visiting the area.

As the building aged, it changed its name to the Sixth Avenue Hotel (as shown in the above photograph) and became a transient flop house. On May 27, 1910, when a fire started in a nearby building and spread through the block, the four-story Cataract House was destroyed.



Star Tribune March 11, 1912

In 1912, a new fire-proof hotel, Hotel Manx, replaced the structure. In 1940, that hotel was torn down and the location turned into the parking lot it is today.

The neighboring 607 South Washington Avenue building has occupied its site in various iterations since 1891. For the first twenty-five years, it was a one-story building operating as Reeves Farm Implement Company, surviving fire in 1889 and 1893.

In 1915, construction began on a four-story addition to be used as warehouse space.



Star Tribune February 3, 1918

By 1918, Oliver Chilled Plow Works was a tenant of the building. The Oliver Chilled Plow Company was established in 1853. Its founder, James Oliver, had worked in a foundry.

Cast iron plows had worked well in the Eastern states, but the soil in the Midwest would stick to the plows.

Oliver developed a process that required chilling the molten iron, which resulted in a thicker, harder, longer-lasting surface. By 1910, the Oliver Company was manufacturing a wide variety of farm implements. Minneapolis was one of its distribution points.

Three companies occupied the warehouse in the 1920s. Oliver Chilled Plow Works was joined by Commercial Body & Supply and Graham Paper Company.

A May 20, 1921, a *Minneapolis Star Tribune* advertisement for Commercial Body & Supply Company shows a 607 Washington Avenue South address. Commercial Body & Supply was the Northwest Distributor for Martin-Parry Bodies.



Star Tribune May 15, 1921

The Commercial Body & Supply Company combined Ford Trucks with Martin-Parry bodies which would, “haul more merchandise a longer distance, in less time and at less cost than any other hauling unit.”

Martin-Parry was in existence from 1919 to 1930 following a merger of Martin Truck of York, Pennsylvania and Parry Manufacturing of Indianapolis, Indiana. Both Companies manufactured commercial auto bodies and combined they expected to manufacture 50,000 bodies their first year.

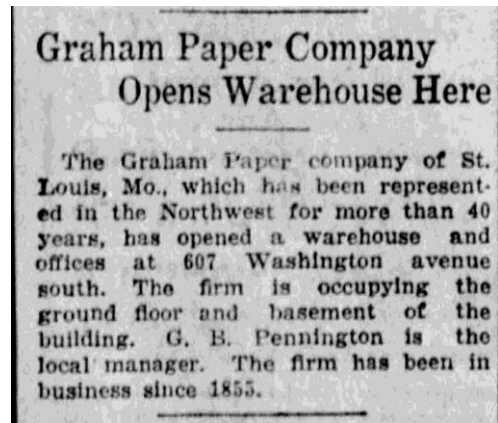


Martin-Parry

Between 1922 and 1925, Washington Avenue South became a Branch Assembly Plant for Martin-Parry and continued in that capacity until Martin-Parry was sold to Chevrolet in 1930.



Graham Paper Company was also an occupant of the building in the 1920s. In September of 1923, it opened a warehouse at 607 Washington Avenue South, occupying two floors.



Star Tribune September 6, 1923

Graham Paper was founded in 1855 and was the oldest paper company in the U.S. west of the Mississippi. At the time, it had 27 distribution sites in the country including Minneapolis. Graham Paper Company sold stationery, newsprint, twine, and specialty papers. Its customers included newspaper companies and book publishers.

In 1886, the *St Paul Globe* reported that the Graham Paper Company experienced a financial setback due to a warehouse fire in St. Paul.

607 South Washington may have been unoccupied during the Depression.

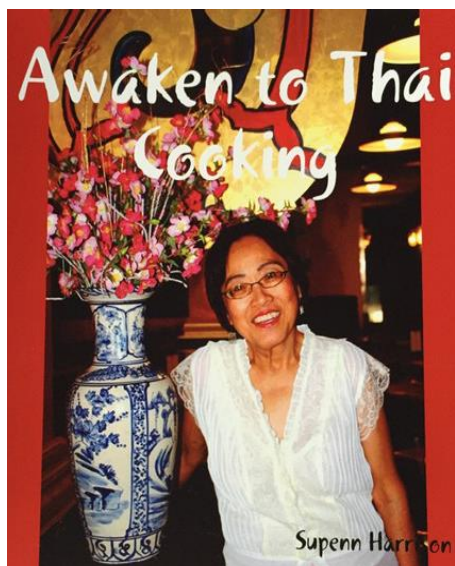
The next known tenant was Sears Roebuck which moved into the building in approximately 1945. The building was used by Sears as a warehouse. In 1863, Richard W. Sears was born in Stewartville, Minnesota. After his father's death in 1879, he became a railroad station agent in Minneapolis. In 1886, after a jeweler refused a shipment of watches, Sears bought the shipment.



Sears established a business selling the watches to other station agents. His business proved successful, and Sears quit his railway job a few months later and established the R.W. Sears Watch Company, a mail-order business in Minneapolis.

In 1887, he moved the company to Chicago, and Sears joined forces with Alvah Roebuck. Later that year, he published his first mail-order catalog limited to watches, diamonds, and jewelry. Sears Roebuck Company became a retail giant as a mail-order business, and regional warehouses were needed. 607 South Washington filled that need. Sears vacated the building in the 1970s.

The building continued to function exclusively as a warehouse until 1986 when Sawatdee Thai Restaurant became the first-floor tenant.



Born near Bangkok, Thailand, the founder of Sawatdee Thai, Supenn Harrison, grew up in a large family and earned a degree in teaching. After college, she came to the U.S., got married, started a family, and created a thriving business.

Supenn Harrison, opened the first Minnesota Thai restaurant, Siam Cafe. In 1983 she opened Sawatdee Thai in St. Paul, and in 1986 opened the Sawatdee Thai restaurant at 607 South Washington. Harrison is the author of several cookbooks.

In the 1990s, when the Rolling Stones tour brought them to Minneapolis, Sawatdee was one of their favorite

restaurants. Other customers have included Prince, who enjoyed the shrimp fried rice, Neil Diamond, Amy Grant, Dave Winfield, and Kurt Russell.

Supenn Harrison has passed daily operations of the restaurant to the next generation, her daughters, Cyndy and Jenny.

In 2003, the upper four stories of 607 Washington Avenue South were converted into The Lofts on Washington, one of the earliest loft conversions in Minneapolis.

The units feature tall ceilings, exposed timber beams and brick, and large industrial style windows. The site of the former Cataract Hotel serves as parking for the condominium residents.

