

Esquimalt, British Columbia
Transformer House (Building no. 11)
Esquimalt Graving Dock
825 Admirals Road

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Esquimalt Graving Dock transformer house was built in 1925 to serve the electrical requirements of the dock. Max Downing and Swinburne A. Kayll, of Vancouver, B.C., were the associate architects on the project. The transformer house has had additions to the north and south elevations. The building is owned by Public Works Canada. See FHBRO Building Report 90-244.

Reasons for Designation

The transformer house was designated Recognized because of its historical association, its architectural and functional design, and its contextual value.

The Esquimalt Graving Dock was built by the dominion government between 1921 and 1926 to serve military purposes as well as commercial ship traffic. The Graving Dock is associated with the shipping industry which has been integrally connected with the development of the Canadian economy. At the time of its completion in 1927, the dry dock was the second largest in the world. Since its construction, the Esquimalt Graving Dock has been in continuous use and is the largest dry dock on the Canadian west coast. The transformer house is an integral part of the operation of the dry dock and an essential component of the dry dock system. It provides the power necessary to effect ship repairs.

The transformer house is of a utilitarian design, exhibiting features characteristic of the Modern Classical style employed during the first half of the 20th century. The building reflects an economic approach to construction typically employed for industrial plants. The interior layout is determined by functional consideration and machinery arrangements.

The transformer house along with the surrounding buildings, form a homogeneous complex where their utilitarian designs in combination with the machinery housed within, contribute to the industrial character of the Graving Dock.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the transformer house resides in the massing, the materials, the Modern Classical style details, and the interior layout and surviving machinery

Transformer House (Building no. 11) (Continued)

which reflect the function of the building. The heritage value also lies in the relationship of the building to the surrounding Graving Dock building complex.

The transformer house is a substantial brick building, approximately three-storeys high resting on a well-defined concrete foundation. The south, east, and west façades are divided into three bays. Modifications to the north elevations render identification of the original façade treatment difficult.

Any future work should respect the configuration of the south, east, and west elevations and consideration should be given to treating the north elevation in a manner compatible with the original building. The additions on the south and north façades detract from the original building. These could be refinished to blend in more with the main building. The design of any future additions should take cues from the original building in terms of materials, predominant horizontal and vertical lines such as the definition of the foundation, string courses, and bays.

Ornamental brick patterning and limestone string courses, characteristic of the Modern Classical style, provide a decorative effect to the façades. Decorative brickwork includes the course of stretchers on edge, the geometric panels with limestone infilling above the piers, the patterning in the bays and on the piers themselves. The use of buff brick and deeply raked black pointing contribute to the overall effect. The masonry is of good quality and it warrants careful maintenance, with the use of appropriate expertise for any repair and repointing.

The layout of the building has been designed to facilitate the efficient operation of the equipment. While the interior has undergone some modifications, it would be appropriate to identify any surviving interior layout and original machinery, and every effort should be made to retain these in future work.

It is important to maintain the relationship of the transformer house to the surrounding industrial buildings of the Graving Dock complex.