

FHBRO Number 97-07

Vancouver, British Columbia

Seaforth Armoury

1650 Burrard Street

Constructed in 1935-36, the Seaforth Armoury continues to serve its intended function. The uses associated with the Armoury's rooms have changed over the years and, to provide access for persons with disabilities, an elevator shaft was introduced into the building adjacent to the main drill hall entrance. The Department of National Defence is custodian. See FHBRO Building Report 97-07.

Reasons for Designation

The Seaforth Armoury was designated Recognized because of its architectural qualities, its environmental significance and its historical associations.

Designed by the notable Vancouver architecture and structural engineering firm of McCarter and Nairne, the Seaforth Armoury is an example of high quality construction and innovative design employing local materials. McCarter and Nairne were leaders in reinforced concrete design for large-scale buildings. The building successfully combines the traditional architectural imagery of the Seaforth Highlanders Regiment with modern concrete building technology. It represents design ingenuity during the last phase of armoury development in Canada. Its exterior structure remains in excellent structural condition and is one of the firm's best preserved examples of its reinforced concrete expertise.

Distinctive in appearance and occupying approximately one-third of its four acre site in a prominent area of downtown Vancouver, the Seaforth Armoury remains a familiar and conspicuous landmark to the community. The building is rated an "A" level heritage building on the City's heritage registry.

The Seaforth Armoury was one of only three armouries constructed as part of the Public Works Construction Act introduced in 1934, a federal government project to create work during the Great Depression. The structure's construction at this time in history illustrates that militia regiments continued to grow during the interwar years. It was decided to construct an armoury for the Seaforth Highlanders Regiment because the regiment was particularly strong and it had a strategic importance at a time when a threat of military conflict in the Pacific was a concern.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the building resides in its layout, massing, plan, imagery, exterior

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interior features and finishes and setting.

Although the Seaforth Armoury displays many distinctive features, its plan, layout, overall massing and basic stylistic references are associated with traditional armoury design in Canada. Most armouries built in the 1930s follow one of two general plans first introduced in the 19th century. Architects of the Seaforth adopted the 'head house' layout, where the armoury's facilities are located at one end of the drill hall. The building's massing evidently displays this configuration and unifies the design by providing a flat-roofed midsection between the tall head house and the lower and larger drill hall.

Sometimes referred to as "Scots Baronial", the Seaforth Armoury's style combines mediievally-inspired features, often employed in 1930's armouries, with traditional Scottish details reflecting the regiment's Scottish roots. Of particular interest are the roofs, parapetted gable ends and dormers, two circular towers with conical roofs, stepped crenellated flat roofs, massive stepped buttresses, large stepped chimney, cast iron thistle finials, decorative bartizans, mock quoins, string course wall patterns, decorative window surrounds, oriel windows with balconies, the grand main entrance and the heraldic plaques bearing the Cross of St. Andrew. The asymmetrical yet proportional play of basic shapes and openings and the noteworthy scale of the armoury are unusual, but further suggest medieval imagery.

While reinforced concrete was often used for armoury construction in Canada, it was usually limited to providing structural components. At the Seaforth, reinforced concrete technology was exploited for the first time in armoury design by employing the material for all major exterior walls and finishes. The choice of a structural steel trussed roof shows that consideration was given to Vancouver's susceptibility to earthquakes.

The exceptional quality of craftsmanship and materials is also evident within the building's interior. Many original interior features still exist including doors, mouldings, staircase and light fixtures. The north walls of both the messes have large, pre-cast concrete and Welsh tile fireplaces displaying the regimental motto. Spectator galleries are present on the second floor, along the full length of the drill hall space. Painted plaster is the chosen wall finish for most interior rooms. A variety of floor treatments appears in the building from maple wood in the gymnasium and lecture room to linoleum in the corridors and offices. The officer's mess and adjacent ante-room are very elaborate, possessing well-preserved oak floors, cabinets and wall mouldings. The important status of these two rooms is also emphasized by their ceilings, which are clad with inlaid cedar panels, cedar ribs and terminals in the officer's mess and a stencilled checkerboard finish in the ante-room.

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The Seaforth's site is typically functional in character while its urban setting and lengthwise placement along Burrard street distinguish it from most other armouries of its time. An asphalt parade square at the rear of the building is enclosed by a chain link fence. The building's other façades are surrounded by a small lawn which is adorned with a modest assortment of deciduous trees and shrubs and enclosed by a pipe fence. Although the visual prominence of the neighbouring Molson Brewery distracts from the majesty of the armoury when approaching it from Burrard Bridge, the South and West views remain unobstructed.

For further guidance, please refer to the *FHBRO Code of Practice*.

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