

Victoria, British Columbia
Bay Street Armoury

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

The Bay Street Armoury was built in 1912-1914, to plans prepared by W.R. Wilson, the Department of Public Works' district architect in Victoria. The building was designated as a National Historic Site by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. The custodian of the building is the Department of National Defence. See FHBRO Building Report 90-220.

Reasons for Designation

The Bay Street Armoury was designated Recognized because of its historical association, its architectural significance, its structural design, and its contextual value.

The Armoury was built during the militia building campaign of 1896-1918, in which more than 100 drill halls and armouries were erected across the country. These buildings played a significant part in the militia reform by functioning as both training and recruitment centres.

In its architectural design, the Bay Street Armoury makes reference to medieval military architecture, the Tudor Revival style. Structurally, the Victoria Armoury exhibits the most integrated use of new structural materials available in the early 20th century. Structural materials consisted of steel and iron encased with fireproof materials and reinforced concrete used together with wood, stone and brick.

The building is prominently sited within a mixed urban environment and it has a positive effect on its immediate neighbourhood.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of the Bay Street Armoury is defined by its form, the richness of its exterior elevations, in its structural design, those aspects of the interior substantive of its military function, and by its relationship with the site.

The armoury's articulated form and detailing conjure up the image of a fortress. To simulate features typical of medieval military construction certain elements are used: a low prominent tower announces the entrance, the main entrance is reminiscent of a fortified gate, crenellated turrets flank the main entrance way, crenellated parapet walls crown the building, and masonry pilasters on the exterior elevations are formed like medieval buttresses. It is important to maintain the integrity of these expressive components.

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Bay Street Armoury (Continued)

The façades are symmetrically organized with windows of various shape - rectangular

on the first floor and semi-circular on the second floor-arranged to create balanced compositions. The division of all windows into multi-panes, adds texture to the walls. The pattern and design of openings should be maintained.

Craftsmanship is evident in the choice and the high quality of the building materials, as well as in the competent handling of the masonry work. The walls are enlivened by patterned brick work. Stone work is used to accentuate openings and horizontal lines. The masonry work warrants careful maintenance, with the use of appropriate expertise for any repair and repointing.

The structural elements also contribute to the heritage character. Reinforced concrete is used for the basement walls and the basement floor. The walls are self-supporting, steel frame supports the floors and arched steel trusses which support the roof are held in place by concrete walls faced in brick. Any new work should respect the original structural design and load distribution.

The interior was designed to accommodate a variety of military functions. Of special interest is the voluminous two-storey drill hall with its floor space totally unobstructed. Armouries, store rooms, lecture rooms and mess rooms are organized around the principal drill hall. The significance of other interior features should be evaluated as a preliminary to any proposed intervention. Modifications should respect important spatial characteristics and historic fabric.

The relationship of the building to its site should be maintained.

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