

The downtown experienced a severe depression during the rest of the 1890s. It was at this already low point that the Great Fire in 1898 destroyed all but two buildings in the downtown - only the Burr Block of 1892 and the Guichon Block of 1887 remained. The loss of the new brick commercial buildings was devastating, but the downtown did not die. The merchants were back in business almost immediately in temporary quarters, and in 1899 nearly all the buildings were reconstructed, somewhat more modestly, to their pre-fire state. Many of these structures, often designed by architect George Grant, remain today.

After 1902 an unprecedented boom commenced. One of the first major projects was the completion of the Fraser River Bridge - an auto, wagon and rail link from New Westminster to Surrey. New Westminster also became the centre of the B.C. Electric Railway network serving the Fraser Valley communities. Large new buildings like the Westminster Trust, Dominion Trust and the 1912 Trapp Block are evidence of the expectations of the times.

During following decades the economy swung like a pendulum, with the downtown experiencing periods of prosperity and depression.

Positive factors were the development of the harbour as a deep sea port in 1912-13; a second trans-continental rail link with Canadian Northern in 1914; designation as a world port in 1926 with the opening of Pacific Coast Terminals; and the opening of the Pattullo Bridge in 1937.

During World War II commercial floorspace was restricted, but industrial activity flourished. After World War II, downtown New Westminster regained its stature as an established centre of commerce. Retail sales increased faster than the provincial average; downtown sales per square foot were the highest in the province, and Columbia Street became known as the "Miracle Mile".

By 1954, however, downtown's older stock of freestanding buildings was increasingly at a disadvantage to newer suburban structures with off-street parking. The Downtown Business and Property Owners' Association therefore lobbied the City for the construction of a collective parking facility, the Front Street Parkade, opened in 1959. During the 1960s the downtown was relatively prosperous, but by the beginning of the 1970s new shopping malls in Coquitlam

and Surrey meant a dramatic decline in business.

With the phasing out of Pacific Coast Terminals and the city docks impending, the need for a major urban redevelopment program in the downtown and waterfront became evident. In 1978 the British Columbia Development Corporation (BCDC) and the City of New Westminster formed a cooperative venture in the formation of First Capital City Development Corporation to oversee redevelopment.

Since 1978 there has been a large increase in downtown construction. Major projects include the new Law Courts opened in 1979, Queens Court office building in 1981 and Douglas College in 1982.

In May, 1985, construction of the first housing on Westminster Quay began, and by the end of 1987 close to 800 units had been constructed. The 70,000 square foot Westminster Quay Public Market opened in the summer of 1986 with construction following on the 125-room Inn at Westminster Quay and on the 60,000 square foot office building First Capital Place.

Contributing greatly to New Westminster's revitalized downtown core is the 22 kilometre Skytrain linking the downtown to other regional centres.

Some of the downtown's historic buildings have been and are undergoing restoration and future plans include streetscape improvements to complement the character of Columbia Street.

When embarking on your historic walking tour of the downtown, remember to "look up" for architectural detail.

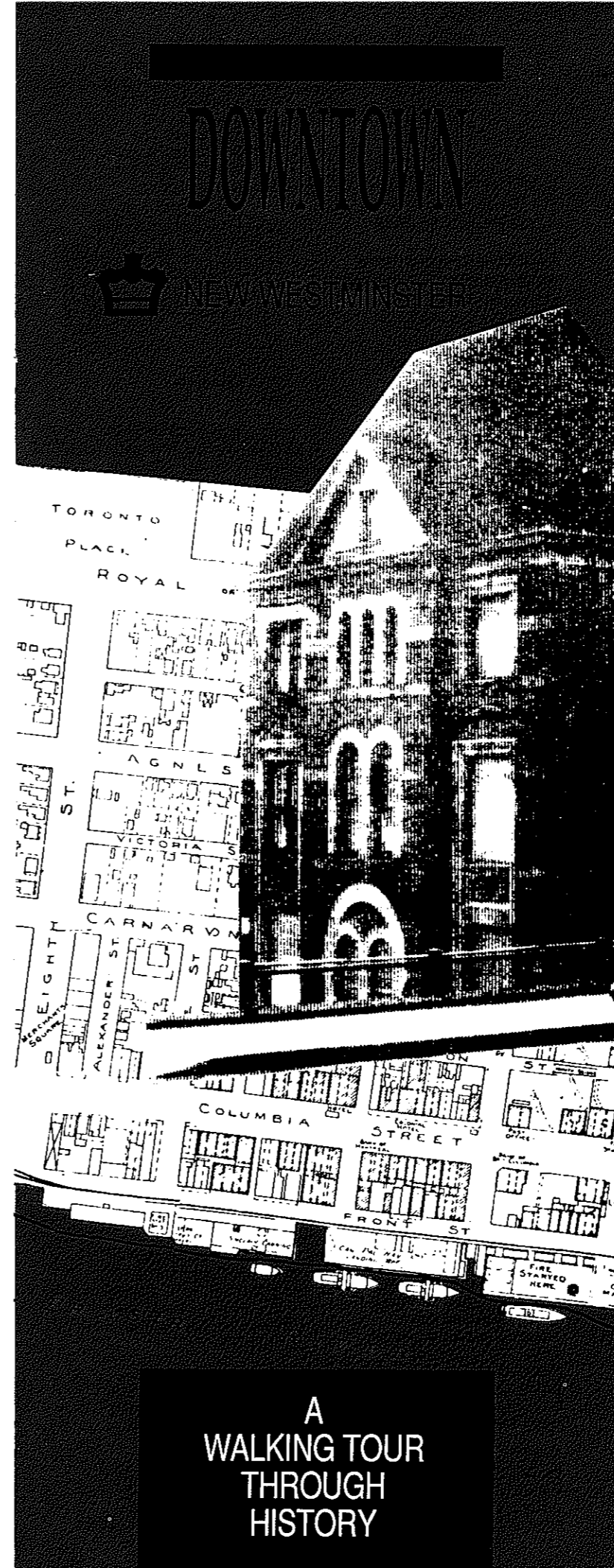
Westminster Quay Wave of The Future

History is still in the making in New Westminster.

Near the site of the arrival of Col. Moody and the Royal Engineers, at the foot of Eighth Street, is Westminster Quay Public Market.

Other landmarks at the site are the Quay clock tower, the M.V. Expo Tugger, the 1908 Simon Fraser monument and the S.S. Samson V. The Samson was the last paddlewheel snag boat to work the Fraser and is now a floating maritime museum.

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DOWNTOWN
NEW WESTMINSTER

A
WALKING TOUR
THROUGH
HISTORY

Downtown is Historic Heart of Royal City

Downtown New Westminster has always been the heart of the Royal City. It is the oldest part of the city and has been most affected by successive waves of development.

When Col. R.C. Moody and the Royal Engineers arrived in 1859 to establish a new capital, they found a hillside covered with dense forest and drained by streams and gullies. The Fraser River covered what is now Front Street, and the area west of Tenth Street was an often flooded marsh.

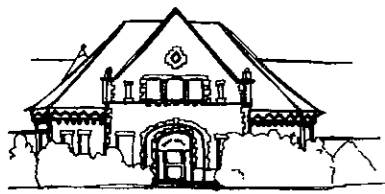
During the first year over a hundred buildings were erected and the new townsite surveyed. In 1860 New Westminster became the first incorporated city in the western provinces. By 1864 the downtown had been cleared of trees and most of the present streets graded. Docks were also built over what is now Front Street.

In 1866 New Westminster became the capital of the United Colony of British Columbia, and the population reached 1,800. But in 1868 the capital was moved to Victoria, and the little city suffered a severe depression.

In the 1870s the downtown began to revive as salmon canneries, lumber mills, a metal works, a woolen mill and grain company were established on the waterfront. Front Street was filled in and the docks extended further into the river.

In the early 1880s construction on the CPR transcontinental rail link through to Vancouver with a branch line to New Westminster brought prosperity and optimism for the future.

From 1887 to 1892 many of the frame pioneer buildings were torn down for new brick commercial blocks along Columbia between Fourth and Eighth Streets. The area between Eighth and Tenth Streets developed as Chinatown, while industrial plants were located along the waterfront. In 1891 New Westminster was directly connected to Vancouver by an interurban railway with tracks down the middle of Columbia. Also in 1891 electric lights replaced gas lighting downtown. The 1886 gas plant is a brick building with arched windows visible from the Skytrain near the junction of Third Avenue and Twelfth Street.



A. Canadian Pacific Railroad Station (now the Keg Restaurant) 800 Columbia Street 1899, wings added 1911

The New Westminster station, built in the CPR Chateau style, saw depot receptions for the Duke of Connaught in 1912, Edward, Prince of Wales, in 1919 and Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip in 1951. Adjoining the station is Hyack Square, named for the 1861 Hyack fire brigade. "Hyack" means "quick" in Chinook. Beside the square is the 1911 B.C. Electric Railway station and at Begbie Street the 1899 Windsor Hotel, last of the early frame railway hotels. Both buildings are now covered with later materials. Down Begbie Street is Front Street the city's original river commercial street. Many of the 1899 buildings retain their features and contain antique shops.

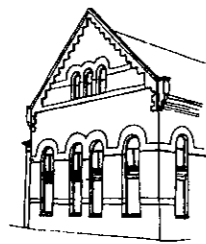


B. Russell Hotel (now College Place Inn) 740 Carnarvon Street Dalton and Eveleigh, architects, 1907

The Russell Hotel was constructed by timber and transportation magnate Capt. E.J. Fader to answer the city's need for a modern hotel. The Classical Revival building in tan brick and stone immediately became the scene of May Day dinners, hockey and lacrosse banquets and other civic functions.

In 1910 G. Alers Hankey of Vernon bought the Russell, "the only first class house in the city", and in 1912 had the Arundel Mansions apartment block constructed behind it. The buildings were joined at the second floor so that residents could comfortably go to dine at the hotel.

Across Carnarvon from the Russell at the Eighth Street corner is the 1909 IOOF lodge. At 711 Carnarvon is the 1912 Hill Block, "the first of the large business structures to be built off Columbia Street."



C. Old Court House Clarkson Street between Lorne and McKenzie Streets G.W. Grant, architect, 1891/99

The Old Court House was opened by Chief Justice Sir Matthew Baillie Begbie on June 3, 1891. It was destroyed in the Great Fire but was rebuilt within the original walls in 1899 by Grant, the city's most prestigious architect of the Victorian era. Adjoining the building is the 1910 Land Registry.

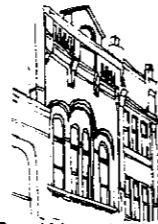
At 628 Carnarvon is the 1906 Fisheries and Indian Affairs building. Beside the new Law Courts building at 653 Carnarvon is Begbie Square, highlighting a bronze statue of the pioneer judge and first chief justice Sir Matthew Baillie Begbie, "... a towering personality with commanding intellectual gifts as well as commanding character," who kept the province "... from being infested with those freebooters, cut-throats and gamblers who frequent all mining centres."



D. Westminster Trust Block 713 Columbia Street Gardiner and Mercer, architects, 1912

This distinguished building, the city's first skyscraper, is a steel frame building supported on forty foot piles and clad in decorative terra cotta and special facing brick. T.J. Trapp, Trust president, came to B.C. from England in 1873.

Across the street from the Trust is the Commercial Hotel, designed in 1913 by Gardiner and Mercer with terra cotta trim on the brick facade. Next door is the 1938 Bank of Nova Scotia in Haddington Island stone with carved plaques representing the bank crest and B.C. fishing and forestry scenes.



E. IOOF and Masonic Blocks 705-701 Columbia Street G.W. Grant, architect, 1899

The IOOF and Masonic Blocks, rebuilt within their 1892 brick and stone walls after the 1898 fire, retain their original Victorian Romanesque architectural features in arched windows, cornice work, and granite foundations.

Beginning at 671 Columbia are three 1899 buildings designed by G.W. Grant, with later renovations over their original brick and stone Italianate exteriors. The three were built for merchant James Armstrong, salmon canner Benjamin Young and druggist and mayor D.S. Curtis.



F. Second Trapp Block 668 Columbia Street Gardiner and Mercer, architects, 1912/13

The Trapp Block is a Classical Revival brick structure covered in ornamental terra cotta tile with delicately patterned windows.

East of the Trapp Block at 660 Columbia is the Holbrook House (now Windjammer) Hotel, built in 1899 by G.W. Grant in brick and stone for Thomas Ovens, a blacksmith and city mayor who had come from England in 1871. The Holbrook Block was named for Henry Holbrook, salmon cannery owner and president of the municipal council in 1862. Ovens is also remembered because in 1871, when the cannons used for firing Queen Victoria's birthday salute were found to be unsafe, he thought of the English custom of exploding gunpowder between anvils. The Ancient and Honourable Hyack Anvil Battery continues this tradition on Victoria Day every year during the Hyack Festival.

Next to the Holbrook Hotel is the 1899 Dupont Block, stretching to McKenzie Street and erected on property originally belonging to Chief

Justice Sir Matthew Baillie Begbie. G.W. Grant designed the block for Major Charles T. Dupont, gentleman and capitalist of Victoria. The Paramount Theatre half of the block began in 1910 as the Edison vaudeville theatre.



G. Crescent Block 630 Columbia Street 1905

The Crescent Block was built for Major Charles T. Dupont of Victoria. Copp's shoe store at the corner is well known for its period interior.

Next to the Crescent Block is the Hamley Block, built in brick and stone in 1899 by Victoria architect J.G. Tiarks. The Hon. W.O. Hamley was sent to the colony as a customs collector in 1862.

Next to the Hamley Block is the Cunningham Block, designed in brick and stone by G.W. Grant in 1899. James Cunningham was born in 1867, a native son of New Westminster, hardware merchant, city mayor and in 1904 chief taxpayer of the city.

At 600 Columbia Street is the Dominion Trust Block designed in 1907 by H.S. Griffith in tan Clayburn brick and recently renovated.



H. Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce 544 Columbia Street Darling and Pearson, architects, Toronto, 1911

This handsome Classical Revival building is built in brick and stone with fluted columns and lavish architectural detail. Bank clerks used to live on the top floor.

Beside the bank at the Sixth Street corner is the 1899 Ellis Block, a brick and stone block designed by J.G. Tiarks for the Bank of B.C.

Beside the Bank of Commerce at 530 Columbia Street is the Columbia Theatre, designed in 1927 by Townley and Matheson.

At 502 Columbia is the 1949 T. Eaton Co. building, now Army and Navy. Eaton's was designed by C.B.K. Van Norman. The store property encompasses Lytton Square, laid out by Col. Moody, the site of the original market and general area of the start of the Great Fire.



I. Federal Building and Post Office 514 Carnarvon Street E.A. Gardiner, architect, 1958

The land on which the Federal Building sits has been the site of government buildings since the founding of New Westminster, including customs, mint, library, land registry offices, city hall and fire hall. The present building is in reinforced concrete with facing of Haddington Island stone.

Across Sixth Street from the Federal Building at the Columbia Street corner is the 1899 brick Ellard Block. James Ellard was a Royal Engineer who operated a dry goods store on this site in the 1880s. At 28 Sixth Street is the 1910 Cliff Block, built for can factory owner R.L. Cliff.

Next to the Federal Building is the 1909 Hall-Lavery Block, in tan brick and stone. Dr. T.S. Hall was a dentist, and A.L. Lavery was proprietor of the City Bakery. At Columbia and Church Streets is the 1947 Bank of Montreal. On this site since 1899, the bank in 1911 was the scene of the then largest vault robbery in North America.



J. Burr Block and Queens Hotel/Guichon Block Columbia Street at Fourth Street, northwest corner G.W. Grant, architect, 1892 and 1887

These two buildings are the only business blocks entirely to survive the 1898 fire. Fire Chief Carlisle stood on the roof of the Burr Block directing his crews, while a thick wall between the Burr and the Begbie Block next door helped to halt the spread of the flames.

The Queens Hotel was the city's premier Victorian hotel and the scene of many lacrosse, lodge and civic banquets. Joe Fortes, beloved as a children's swimming teacher at English Bay, was a bartender here in the early 1890s. In 1899 Laurent Guichon, who had come from France bought the block.

The Burr Block, built for investor W.H. Burr, is particularly noted for its fine round Romanesque windows with red terra cotta tile trim. Grant used a temporary office here for his work in rebuilding many of the blocks he had designed before the 1898 fire.



K. Holy Trinity Cathedral 514 Carnarvon Street G.W. Grant, architect, 1899

Col. R.C. Moody chose the Anglican cathedral's site "as an ornamental feature" in the centre of Victoria Gardens in 1860. The church incorporates the remaining stone walls of the 1865 church, burned in 1898, within the 1899 concrete structure. In 1899, "This fine old stone church has been rebuilt on enlarged and improved lines ... presenting, from Columbia Street, a church edifice unexcelled for beauty of outline." The stained glass altar windows are by James Bloomfield and Sons, founded in the city in 1890, and the province's premier stained glass firm.



L. Emmanuel Pentecostal Church 321 Carnarvon Street G.W. Grant, architect, 1889

This lovely red brick Gothic church, built as St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, has been restored to its original appearance. Adjacent is the small, 1863 wooden church, the first Presbyterian church in mainland B.C.

At 508 Agnes is the 1911 Masonic Lodge by architects Gardiner and Mercer.



M. Irving House Historic Centre 302 Royal Avenue

Irving House was built in 1862-4 by members of the Royal Engineers for Capt. William Irving, early paddlewheel steamer captain on the Fraser River. An 1865 newspaper article refers to his home as "... the best and most home-like house of which British Columbia can yet boast." It is built in the Gothic style of California redwood shipped up from San Francisco.

Irving House was purchased by the city through the efforts of the Native Sons and Native Daughters of B.C., Post No. 4. As the city's historic centre, it is open to the public Tuesday-Sunday, 11 to 5, May 1 to mid-September, and Saturday and Sunday, 1 to 5, mid-September to April 30.

Capt. Irving's home was originally part of the city's first residential area, which extended up the hill from the downtown. That Victorian community is largely gone, but several historic churches, clusters of homes and Prospect Park and Albert Crescent, laid out by Col. R.C. Moody in the city's original plan, offer reminders of that early period.

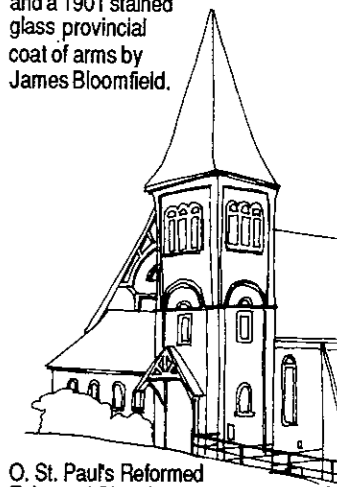


N. St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church Royal Avenue at Fourth Street

St. Peter's is a 1937 Art Deco landmark in the city, built after a violent storm wrecked the

1880s church in 1934. It was built by Fr. W. Loftus and his congregation during hard economic times, when he "... asked those who had any money to make a real sacrifice and those who had none, to donate their labour." Concrete was poured in three shifts, 24 hours a day, to complete the church.

Across Royal Avenue from St. Peter's is Friendship Gardens, created in 1963 to honour Moriguchi, Japan, New Westminster's sister city. West of the park is the 1952 City Hall, the cenotaph by sculptor A. Fabri and a plaque to John Robson, B.C. premier 1889 to 1892. Inside City Hall are commemorative displays on the Royal Westminster Regiment, the Royal Engineers, city mayors and a 1901 stained glass provincial coat of arms by James Bloomfield.



O. St. Paul's Reformed Episcopal Church 628 Royal Avenue C.H. Clow, architect, 1899

St. Paul's, rebuilt after the 1898 fire in front of its original site, was dedicated by Bishop Edward Cridge in 1899. Bishop Cridge was a Hudson's Bay Co. chaplain and first dean of the Victoria cathedral. The fine altar windows are the work of Henry Bloomfield and Sons, who lived on Royal Avenue by the church in the 1890s. Next to St. Paul's at 700 Royal Avenue is Douglas College built in 1982. The centerpiece of the college is a stunning glass atrium.

