

BEGBIE SQUARE



IHP0062

Established 1883
Size 0.52 acres
location Carnarvon & McKenzie Streets

Ammenities

- European design
- Paving lanes
- Tumbling water feature
- Seating



Downtown New Westminster's Begbie Square is an urban park, constructed in 1981 on the McKenzie Street right of way. It was built adjacent to the New Westminster Courthouse on historic Market Square, which was created as part of the original civic plan of 1859.

The park was first developed when City Council constructed a combined Agricultural Hall and Immigrant Shed on Market Square in 1883. A portion of the facility was initially used to house new immigrants until permanent accommodation could be found for them.

The hall proper was officially opened in October 1883 by Premier Smith during the first Provincial Exhibition.

The Exhibition was organized by the New Westminster District Agricultural Society (incorporated 1867). The society reorganized in 1886, becoming the Royal Agricultural and Industrial Society of British Columbia. Their exhibitions were important promotional events featuring the agricultural and industrial wares produced in the region.



IHP0539

When the new Exhibition Hall was built in Queen's Park in 1889, the old Agricultural Hall was renovated as City Hall. The building and its grounds remained an important location for citizen gatherings until it was destroyed by the Great Fire of 1898. Following the fire, Market Square was designated as the site for local businesses to rebuild temporary stores during the reconstruction of Columbia Street.

Market Square eventually became home to the magnificent Carnegie Library, designed by local architect Edwin Sait and built 1902 - 1904. This library building served the city from 1905 to 1958. After its demolition in June, 1960, the square languished as a forlorn parking lot for more than 20 years.

In 1981 the construction of the new Provincial Courthouse provided an opportunity to create a new urban square. With the City as a partner, the adjacent section of McKenzie Street was incorporated into the courthouse project by First Capital City Development Corporation. The design was conceived by architect Roger Hughes with landscape architecture by the Eikos Design Group.

Today, the plaza is a beautiful urban landscape with a dramatic setting, including a waterfall, a sweeping set of steps, seating, trees and a large terrace outside the courthouse doors. A bronze statue of Judge Begbie by sculptor Ellek Imreddy - a commission funded by lawyers and judges associated with the New Westminster Bar Association - is a landmark feature of the plaza. McKenzie Street's heritage was preserved in the design through the use of the original granite paving stones.

Behind the Name...Begbie Square:



Sir Matthew Baillie Begbie (1819 - 1894) arrived in B.C. 1858 in the midst of the Gold Rush. He played a crucial role in the establishment of law and order throughout the Colony. Begbie was Judge of the Supreme Court for the Colony of British Columbia in 1858 until 1871, and the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the new Province of British Columbia until his death.

In the years after his death, Begbie was dubbed the “Hanging Judge.” Given that the death penalty was mandatory in murder cases at this time, this reputation is undeserved. Indeed, on occasion, Begbie recommended clemency and received the government’s approval to spare some condemned men.

During his years on the bench, Begbie administered justice throughout British Columbia on foot, and later on horseback. While he preferred informal garb during his travels, he always wore his judicial robes and wig when court was in session.

Begbie also played a meaningful role drafting government legislation. He spoke several languages and is said to have been able to conduct trials in several aboriginal languages without the use of an interpreter. He was knighted by Queen Victoria at Balmoral Castle in 1875.