New Westminster Courthouse

632 Carnarvon Street, New Westminster, British Columbia

Other Name(s)
Old Courthouse, Begbie Court

Links
- New Westminster Designated Heritage Buildings
- New Westminster Architecture
- Exterior oblique view of the New Westminster Courthouse, c. 1910

Image(s)

Statement of Significance

Description of Historic Place
The New Westminster Courthouse is a large three-storey red brick and stone Romanesque Revival building. It occupies a commanding hillside site and is a visually dominating presence on Carnarvon Street.

Heritage Value
The New Westminster Courthouse is symbolic of the administration of justice during the province's early years. As the first capital of British Columbia and a prominent commercial centre, New Westminster was vital in the establishment of order in the colony, and remained an important administrative centre. In 1860, the first court house was erected, a one-storey building with a canvas ceiling. This was replaced by a new structure in Market Square in 1873. In 1890-91, this imposing new brick and stone court house was built, located uphill from the city's commercial centre. In 1891, it was opened at the Spring Assizes with due ceremony by Sir Matthew Baillie Begbie, B.C.'s first judge and first Chief Justice. The interior of the courthouse was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1898 but the building was reconstructed in 1899 to the same general plan.

The New Westminster Courthouse is valued as one of the most significant institutional projects designed by George William Grant (1852-1925), a prolific architect who designed many of the buildings in downtown New Westminster, both before and after the Great Fire in 1898. Grant designed the 1891 Courthouse, and then supervised its reconstruction in 1899.

Additionally, the New Westminster Court House is significant for its contribution to the consistent and distinctive built form of downtown New Westminster, which dates from 1898 to 1913, when the city was the major centre of commercial and industrial output for the booming Fraser Valley area. The Courthouse is an outstanding example of the Romanesque Revival style, the preferred idiom for public and commercial buildings in the late nineteenth century and Grant's signature style at the time. The eclectic nature and picturesque appearance of the design demonstrate the sensibilities of the Late Victorian era. The robust facades, designed to be viewed from different vantage points, were carefully modulated to convey an image of strength and security through contrasting textures and a unity of materials.

Source: Heritage Planning Files, City of New Westminster

http://www.historicplaces.ca/visit-visite/com-ful_e.aspx?id=3540
Character-Defining Elements

Key elements that define the heritage character of the New Westminster Courthouse include its:
- location, as a prominent part of a grouping of late Victorian and Edwardian era commercial buildings in historic downtown New Westminster and adjacent to the Land Registry Office
- form, scale and massing, as expressed by its complex picturesque roofline, symmetrical central block with articulated wings, polygonal tower at rear and long rear gabled extension
- highly articulated roof, with individual steeply pitched hip roofs over separate blocks, joined by lower roofs, and embellished with gable projections;
- original central main entry facing Clarkson Street with rounded arch with keystone
- masonry construction, including: rubble-stone granite foundations; red face brick with flush-struck mortar joints; and mortar parged stringcourses, window surrounds and sculptural panels
- elements of the Romanesque Revival style, including massive masonry construction, picturesque massing and round-arched structural openings
- complex fenestration, with a variety of round-arched and flat window openings, contrasting wide and narrow openings and varied window sizes
- other exterior features such as the highly detailed copper cornice with modillions on the polygonal tower
- site features, including a rubble-stone retaining wall

Location

Province/Territory
British Columbia

Street Address
632 Carnarvon Street

Location
Greater Vancouver Regional District
Burnaby
New Westminster

Recognition

Jurisdiction
British Columbia

Recognition Authority
Local Governments (BC)

Recognition Statute
Local Government Act, s.967

Recognition Type
Heritage Designation

Recognition Date
9/11/1989

Historical Information

Construction Date(s)
1890 to 1891

Theme - Category and Type
Governing Canada
Security and Law

Function - Category and Type
Historic

Current

Architect / Designer
George William Grant

Builder
n/a

Additional Information

Related Listing(s)
n/a

Location of Supporting Documentation
Heritage Planning Files, City of New Westminster

Cross-Reference to Collection
n/a

Fed/Prov/Terr Identifier
DhRr-45

Status
Listed