

Dec. 10, 1993

Times Col.



Glenlyon

Barry F. King

LANDMARKS

Rattenbury's rustic house now a school by the sea

Glenlyon School, on Beach Drive in Oak Bay, is the former home of Francis Mawson Rattenbury, who is best remembered as the architect of the Legislative Buildings in Victoria.

Begun in 1898, with additions to 1908, the residence was called "Iechineel," the Indian for "a place where a good thing happened." A curious blend of old world charm, Arts and Crafts architecture, and English rustic beauty is complemented with a fine vista of sea-scapes and mountains.

Behind the ivy-covered walls are marble fireplaces, solid mahogany floors and a marbled kitchen. Throughout the different rooms, decorative plasterwork carries a rosette theme. Other features include thick oak doors with cut-glass knobs, crystal chandeliers, stained glass windows and solid oak panelling in the library.

Geoffrey Castle

The waterfront property originally included Mary Tod Island (now a public park) where Rattenbury constructed a reinforced concrete swimming pool.

Any reference to this architect's work would be incomplete without mentioning the man. Rattenbury was happiest when his creations and life's activities were spectacular. Born in Yorkshire in 1867, the year of Canada's Confederation, he came to British Columbia to find expression for his genius. In 1892, his design for the new Legislative Buildings was chosen from 65 submissions, but his interests were always diversified. He founded the Bennett Lake and Klondike Transportation Company which ran ships to supply

miners in the Yukon gold rush. He invested in an Edmonton brewery, a paint factory, a scheme to ship frozen salmon to Europe and a project involving unitized housing in the Canary Islands. Meantime, Rattenbury designed the Empress Hotel, several bank buildings and court houses as well as residences in B.C. and Alberta.

However, a land speculation venture in the Nechako and Bulkley region, which was tied to the building of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, contained the seeds of virtual financial disaster. The loss of C. M. Hays, the major promoter, aboard the Titanic, and the coming of the First World War were ruinous. Meantime, Rattenbury

became reeve of Oak Bay and was consultant architect to the Uplands developers.

In 1928, the Rattenburys left for an extended tour of Europe and were living in England when, as the innocent victim in a crime of passion, Rattenbury received a fatal blow. This resulted in a landmark murder trial in London.

The Simpsons acquired "Iechineel" in 1935 for their school, but much of the original house is preserved. Rattenbury's youngest son, John, is an architect with the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation in Wisconsin.

Recently, a collection of F. M. Rattenbury's architectural plans was discovered in the school attic and is now in the Provincial Archives.

Geoffrey Castle is a council member of the Victoria section, B.C. Historical Federation.