



Suggs - Frank

OLD COURT HOUSE (MARITIME MUSEUM) [1889]

Bastion Square

ARCHITECT: HERMANN OTTO TIEDEMAN

In 1887 the Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works authorized the erection of a new Court House, a brick building on a stone foundation on the site of the old police barracks and the jail. Since 1858 H. O. Tiedeman had been a member of the Surveyor General's department designing such noteworthy public buildings as the first Legislative Buildings, "the Birdcages" in 1859, Fisgard Lighthouse in 1860, and the first court house known as "The Rookery." It was therefore not surprising that the Government asked him to design the new Court House, although he was no longer in their employ. Tiedeman's design was supposedly based on a court building in the architect's native Munich. Local tradition has it that this was the first building in the City to make extensive use of reinforced concrete. The original brick facing has since been stuccoed and grooved to resemble the grouting of huge granite blocks. The contractors were Smith and Clark while S. G. Burris was architect-in-charge. The building was completed in February of 1889 at a total cost of \$35,075.

In its day, it must have presented a massive and impressive spectacle towering over other buildings in the immediate area, and looking out over the harbour. Despite the illusionistic delineation of granite blocks in the cement facing and the continuation of this effect to articulate the ground storey arcades and arches the building looks awkward, if imposing. It is an eclectic assemblage of motifs plundered, it seems, almost at random, from various architectural pattern books: elements of Renaissance Revival in the details, mouldings, and cornices; neo-baroque in the rustication and the portico voussoirs; Richardsonian-Romanesque in the massing, arch-and-window grouping, and turreted roof line.

In 1900-1901, alterations at a cost of \$48,348 saw a thorough remodelling. Steel beams from the Carnegie Foundry were installed to accommodate an ornate open-cage elevator for the convenience of the Honorable Theodore Davie, Chief Justice, who was advised by his doctor not to climb stairs. The elevator remains a high point of the interior and is the oldest operational lift in B. C. Also during the 1900-1901 remodeling many of the windows were altered or filled in. The



View of Law Courts with main entrance on Langley Street.
Lithograph from *West Shore*, 1884.

main arches in the east portico were converted into windows and the interior space utilised as an office while windows in the north-east turret were filled in.

The last hearing was held in February, 1962, just before the courts moved to the new buildings on Courtenay Street. During 1963-1964 the old Court House served as a temporary City Hall while Centennial Square was being developed. In 1965 the Maritime Museum was relocated there.