



A rendering of how the courtroom will look, once the restoration is complete. The predominant colour is a deep, rich red. Stuart Stark and Associates

Restoration of the Supreme Courtroom, Victoria

Stuart Stark, Stuart Stark, Patterson and Associates

Editor's note: the B.C. Maritime Museum building is owned and managed by BCBC

An exciting restoration project is underway in Victoria. The earliest extant Supreme Courtroom in the province is being returned to its former appearance by the Maritime Museum of B.C.

In the 1860's, the Supreme Court was housed in one of the Colonial Legislative Buildings (or "Birdcages") which were the forerunners of the present Legislature in Victoria.

With the need for larger facilities, a design competition was held for a new courthouse in Bastion Square. Architect H.O. Tiedemann, who had designed the Colonial Legislative Buildings, was selected. Constructed in 1889, the new courthouse was a solid three storey masonry building with massive brick walls and unusual corner turrets.

By 1899, the building was already inadequate, and F.M. Rattenbury, architect of the new Legislative Buildings, was asked to update and renovate the entire building. Rattenbury's extensive work of 1899-1901 added stairways and what is now the oldest operating open-gage elevator in the province, moved walls, and raised floors. Other improvements were also made, and the building served as a courthouse until new facilities were constructed in the early 1960's.

After a brief stint as a temporary City Hall, the old courthouse then became the new home of the Maritime Museum of British Columbia in 1965. The museum has recently embarked on a comprehensive upgrading program, including the restoration of the old Supreme Courtroom, still essentially intact, but much neglected, having been used as a storeroom for many years.

Heritage Consultants Stuart Stark, Patterson and Associates of Victoria, were asked to prepare a plan for the restoration of the room, and it was determined that a date of 1901, after Rattenbury's renovations, would be a suitable period for restoration. Original paint colours have been determined, including six colours in eleven bands for the huge plaster cornice. Original printed burlap wallcovering in dark red and light gold was retrieved for eventual reproduction, and plaster chandelier centres are being replicated. Grained

woodwork is being repaired and reproduction lighting fixtures will be installed.

During research, it was determined that some of the fittings of the courtroom had been moved in 1889 from the older Supreme Court Building, and therefore predated this building. The wood judge's canopy, the jury benches (with some original upholstery), and public benches are all examples of Colonial Furnishings from the 1860's.

After the restoration is completed in 1997, the Maritime Museum plans on using the courtroom for a variety of interpretive programs, as well as a multipurpose, revenue-generating meeting space to support their on-going programs.

Museum Director Guy Mathias adds this note: "Other big changes are happening at the Maritime Museum. A major exhibition re-development program is underway which is nearing completion. The building is magnificent and the new galleries are a delight. Plan a visit on your next trip - you won't be disappointed."