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Tissot



Maritime Museum, Bastion Square

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LANDMARKS

Munich flavor to former courthouse building

The Maritime Museum of B.C. building in Bastion Square was Victoria's former courthouse. Completed in February, 1889, this imposing building is a fine example of the work of Hermann Otto Tiedemann, the architect who designed the first legislative buildings or "Birdcages" in 1859.

Tiedemann, trained as a civil engineer, came to Victoria from Germany in 1858 and worked for a while for the colonial government. He designed a number of different types of structures such as Fisgard Lighthouse, the Finlayson Building on Wharf Street, and the old Roller Flour and Rice Mills building on Store Street. He also surveyed the route for Alfred Waddington's ill-fated Homathko River road to the B.C. Interior.

The courthouse was constructed partially on the site of the former police barracks and jailhouse, and apparently resembled a similar building in Munich, Germany. It claims to be the first building in Victoria to make use of reinforced concrete. The original brick facing was later

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changed to its present-day granite block appearance.

Smith and Clark were the contractors and S.G. Burris was the supervising architect. The original \$35,075 cost was surpassed in 1901 when extensive alterations cost a further \$48,348. The last court hearing was held in February, 1962, by which time the new courthouse on Burdett Street was completed.

The museum has occupied the 28,000-square-foot building since 1965, having moved there from two historic buildings at Signal Hill in Esquimalt. They date from 1889 and were used for married quarters. Lieutenant-Governor Clarence Wallace opened the museum April 18, 1955, but the 6,000 square feet of space soon proved inadequate since the curator, Capt. John Symons, often had to refuse valuable donations. Another problem was

that because museums depend so much on the public for support, the location was out of the way although one year some 22,000 visitors managed to find it.

Among the alternative locations considered were HMCS Malahat building (the former Customs House) on Wharf Street, the Begg Building, and Craigdarroch Castle. Esquimalt municipality offered to donate a site at Rock Heights Park but there were no building funds.

The Bastion Square building contains the oldest elevator still operating in this province and its ornate open cage, size and prominent location are impressive. Among the many exhibits is the 30-foot Indian dugout, Tillicum, in which Capt. John Voss sailed around the world in 1904. A variety of ship models supplements the documentation tracing British Columbia's maritime history.

Geoffrey Castle is a council member of the Victoria section of the B.C. Historical Federation and a trustee of CFB Esquimalt Museum.