

Old courthouse could return to its glory days

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By Patrick Murphy
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A major restoration project in the Maritime Museum of B.C. will return the third-floor courtroom to its former glory if funds can be found, says architect Stuart Stark.

The courthouse in Bastion Square that houses the museum is the oldest government building outside the legislative precinct, dating back to colonial days.

It also has the handiwork of some of the most famous architects in British Columbia.

Designed by Herman Otto Tiedemann in 1889, it was repaired by Thomas Sorby in 1896 and altered again by Francis Rattenbury in 1900.

Tiedemann, who built the original legislative Bird Cages buildings, had S.G. Burns as supervising architect.

The last court was held in the building in 1862 and it has been a warehouse for the past 25 years.

Museum Executive Director Guy Mathias said the initial phase of restoration will cost \$100,000 to figure out what has to be done.

The courtroom will be cleaned up and open to the public in the new year. Full



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Stuart Stark shows the judge's bench that has been undergoing restoration

restoration will start when capital project money becomes available.

Volunteer Ron Coward did the bulk of

research in the archives to find the history of the courtroom while Stark concentrated on the details of what was where

28 Bastion Square
when it operated as a court.

An animated Stark said he needs photographic evidence of what the court looked like in its various stages in order to restore it. The only photo available now is from the 1940s after extensive renovations.

"We are doing investigations into the findings and will discuss its use as a public room or room for lectures," he said.

"It could also be used for filming period pieces."

One thing he has found so far is the entire floor of the courtroom has been raised by nearly 13 centimetres with the original flooring used as shims for the sub-floor.

The original judge's bench and jury box are still in the room as are the outlines of the prisoner's box and rail for the public gallery.

The museum has been renovating the old building floor by floor with a new gift shop and refurbished galleries.

The restoration of the courtroom will be the largest project to date.