

Legg - Frankel

BOARD OF TRADE BUILDING [1892]

Bastion Square

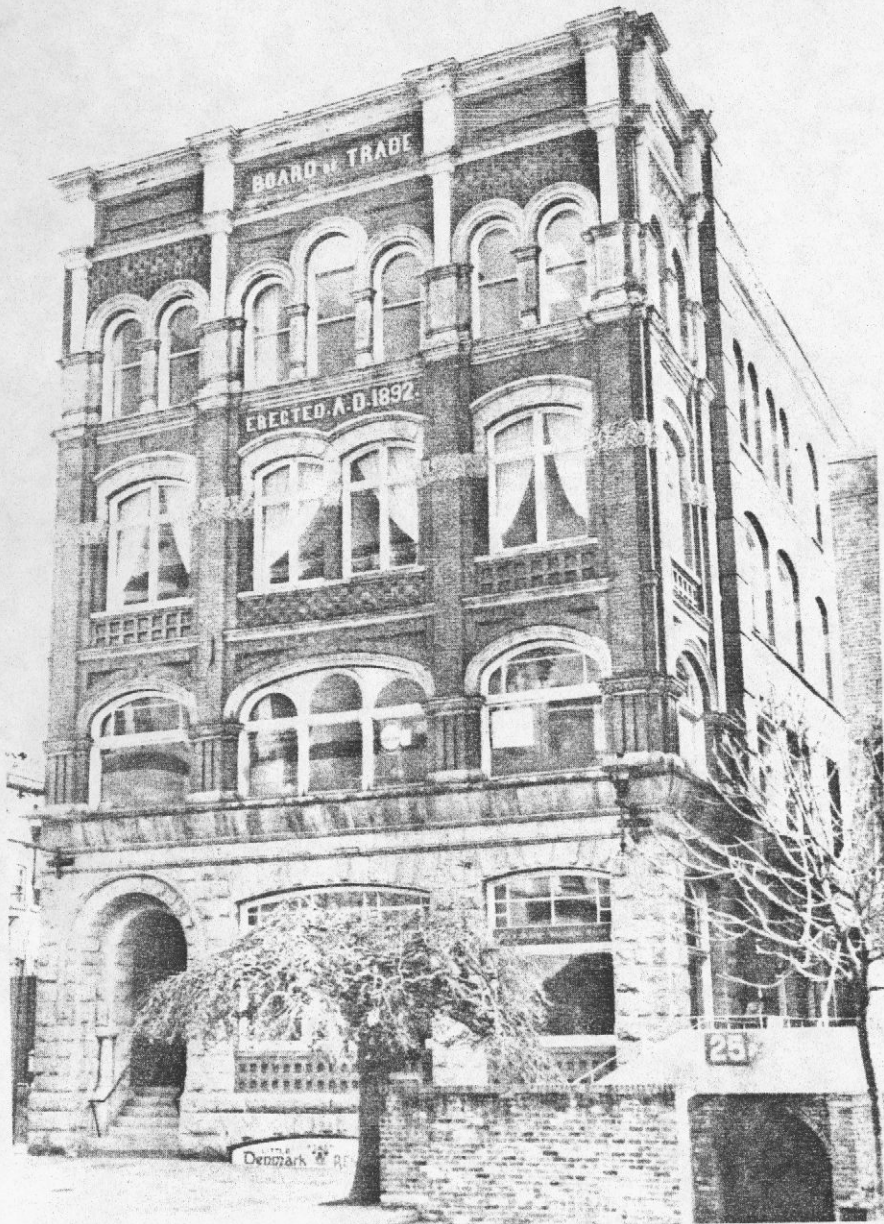
ARCHITECT: A. MAXWELL MUIR

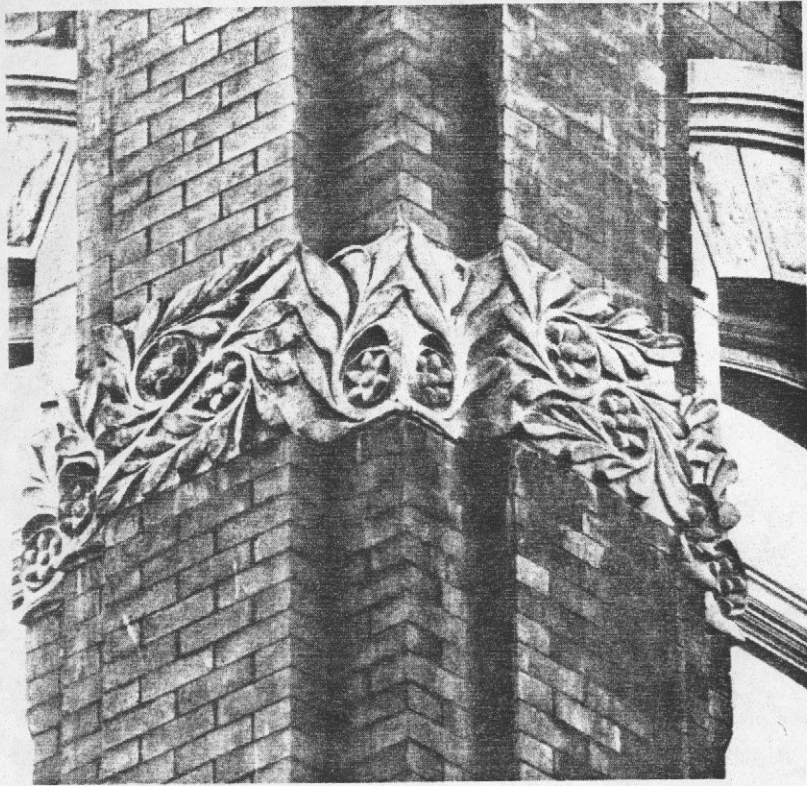
In September of 1861 a group of Victoria businessmen met to discuss formation of a Victoria Chamber of Commerce. It was not until February 9th of 1863, however, that the organization was actually founded, its first duty being to organise an armed escort to accompany gold shipments from the Cariboo. In 1878 the name was changed to the British Columbia Board of Trade, although its interests extended beyond the sphere of business transactions. The Board functioned as a discussion forum for any matter of concern to its 150 members, among whom were leading merchants, manufacturers, bankers, and professional men.

Financial considerations were a high priority in the 1891 decision of the Board to construct its own building. A structure which incorporated office rental space with the amenities required by the Board covered the group's own operating expenses and the initial capital was quickly raised by the formation of a joint stock company which issued 500 shares of \$100, redeemable at par as funds became available to each member of the Board.

Maxwell Muir, an architect with considerable experience in engineering large buildings, was chosen to draw up plans for the building. It was to occupy the corner of Helmcken Alley and Bastion Street, at that time a favourable site which overlooked both the city and the Inner Harbour. The corner stone was laid in September of 1892 by President Hall with the assistance of the contractors, Dinsdale and Burns. In February of 1893 the Board of Trade occupied its new premises.

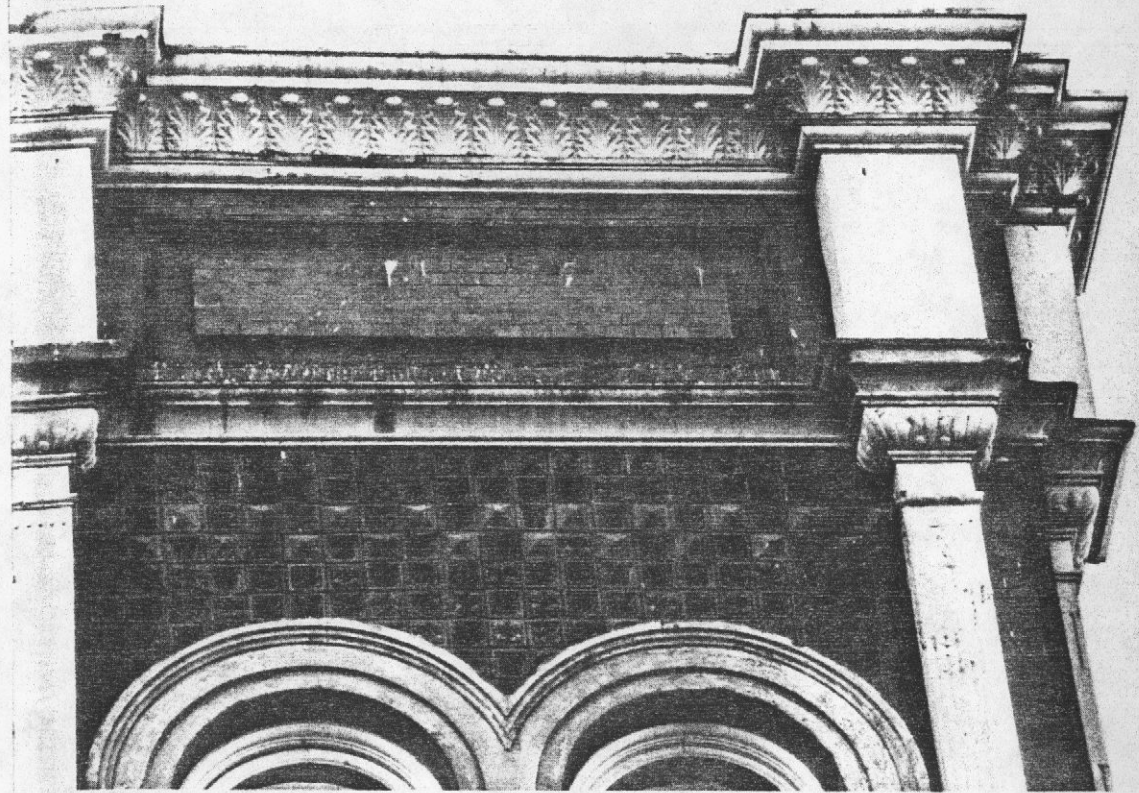
The façade's decorative elements illustrate Muir's familiarity with both the High Victorian eclectic style and Richardsonian Romanesque. It is divided symmetrically into two tighter bays flanking a broad central bay. The bays are defined by four composite pilasters whose verticality is somewhat impeded by a different stylistic treatment at every storey. Similarly the window treatment, like that of the pilasters, differs at each level. Within the rusticated Saturna granite base is housed the basement and first floor. The entrance, let into the left bay by means of a superb Richardsonian-type archway, is flanked by two squat Doric columns and a band of





organic ornament. Another horizontal band of granite floral ornament runs midway across the façade elevation at the third floor. Notice also diaper brickwork in the transoms of the center bay where the brick headers have been cut to a diamond shape. The cornice, a heavier and more elaborate repetition of fourth floor string course, is executed in brick and galvanized iron.

When originally constructed, a lookout tower adorned the roof. An elevator was located on the west side and complemented the spacious stairwell on the east. The ten-foot high basement was used for storage; the ground floor contained the furnace room, kitchen and pantries, a grill room, washrooms, and a wine room, while the front was divided into a suite of offices for the Merchants' Exchange. The third floor contained a 39' x 48' board room and other executive offices.



The building being vacant for several years, plans were drawn up in 1971 by the architectural firm of Peterson and Lester to renovate the building and modernize the interior for reoccupation by commercial businesses. It is a credit to the skill of this firm that this was accomplished without defacing the original façade.