

Nov. 17, 1984

## LANDMARKS

### Early Chamber task was to protect Cariboo gold

Geoffrey Castle

On Wednesday, June 15, 1892, the *Colonist* announced that the land had been cleared to allow construction of Victoria's new Board of Trade building on the south side of Bastion Square. Several old yew trees were removed together with part of Dr. W.H. McNaughton Jones' residence. The well-respected medical doctor was about to take up his new post as head of the quarantine station nearing completion at William Head.

Victoria's Chamber of Commerce (Board of Trade) traces its origin to Feb. 7, 1863, when Robert Burnaby was elected its first president. Burnaby, a former private secretary to Col. R. C. Moody of the Royal Engineers, was later connected with the founding of Burnaby municipality in Greater Vancouver.

Board members included leading merchants, manufacturers, bankers and professional men who, for their \$2 per year membership fee, could meet and discuss any matters of concern. One of the Chamber's earliest tasks was to organize and escort gold shipments from the Cariboo. It was in 1878 that the name was changed to the British Columbia Board of Trade.

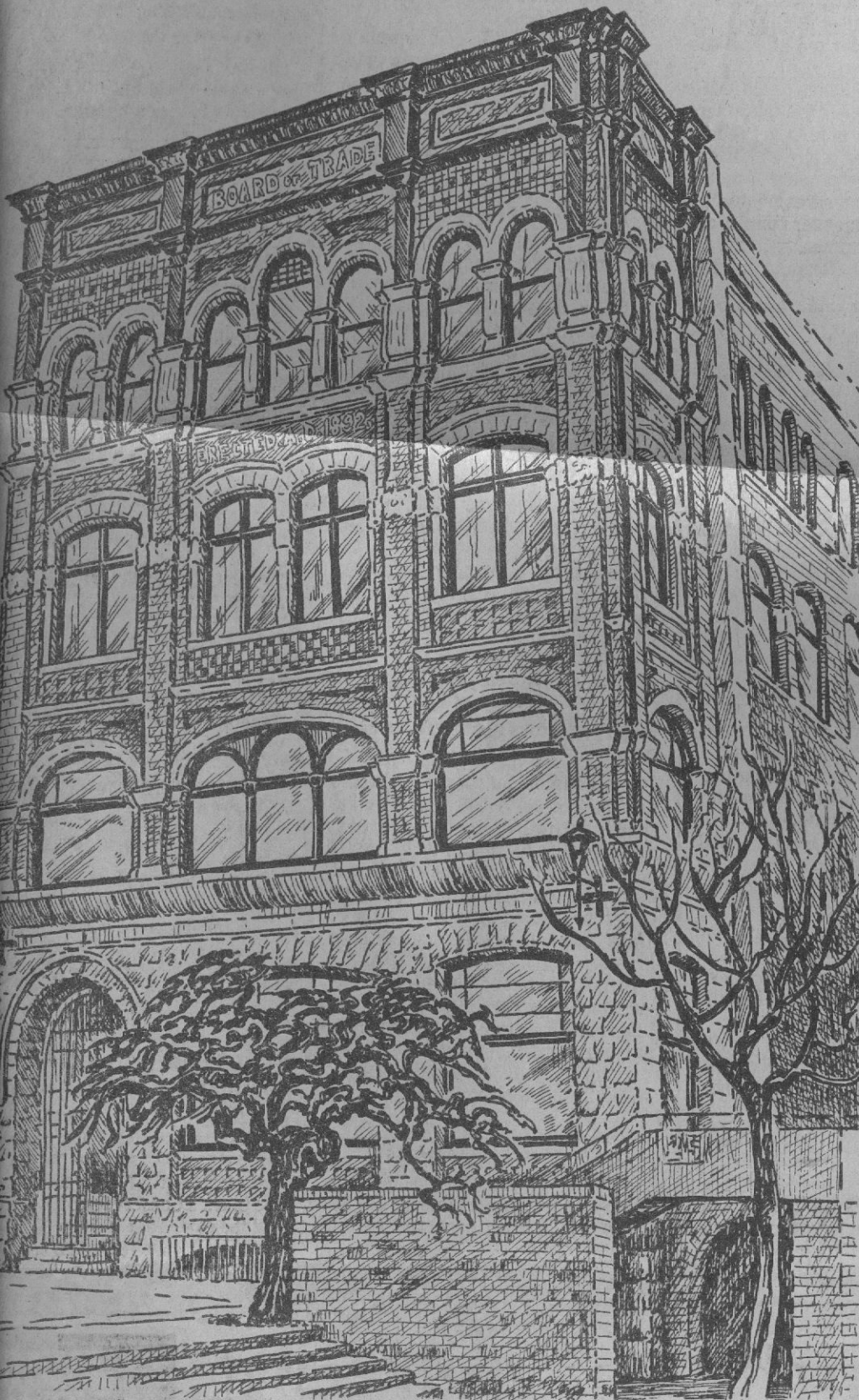
Maxwell Muir, an architect who specialized in brick and stone structures, designed the "free Italian Renaissance" style building, and Dinsdale and Burns were the contractors. The granite in the lower part of the building came from Saturna Island and the facade is of local Baker pressed brick. A lookout tower at the northwest corner was a distinctive feature and when the building was opened in February, 1893, the Board of Trade flew its red flag with its white background and blue border.

In 1894, the Board of Trade was in the news when it intervened and helped settle the post office employees' strike. The workers, earning about \$30 per month, claimed it cost more to live on the West Coast than elsewhere in Canada. In the same year, the board requested that the minister of Trade and Commerce in Ottawa limit the duty charged on opium imports.

The board's longest-term president was Henry Rhodes, who served from 1867 until 1878. In 1920, the name was changed back to the Chamber of Commerce and it was in 1927 that the Junior Chamber of Commerce was formed, with 66 young businessmen and professionals all under the age of 35, thanks to the efforts of Major H. Cuthbert Holmes.

The Victoria Chamber's first woman member was Mrs. H.T. Mallek in 1946, and more recently, the first woman president was Helen Beirnes. The Board of Trade building was remodelled in 1971 for office use. The exterior was left in its original state displaying its unity of varied styling though the lookout tower has long since disappeared.

Geoffrey Castle is a council member of the Victoria section of the B.C. Historical Federation.



Board of Trade Building, Bastion Square

Barry F. King