



PMO Building, 1532 Esquimalt

Barry F. King

CFB ESQUIMALT NAVAL BASE HISTORY

LANDMARKS

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Lament convinced demolition man to spare building

Canadian Forces Base Esquimalt contains a large number of buildings of historic interest. The last of the three original structures on Duntz Head, constructed in 1855, was demolished just before the Second World War. They marked the establishment of the shore installation at Esquimalt which the two-year war between Britain and Russia made necessary.

As time progressed in a world of empires, it became of paramount importance to adequately service the Pacific Station whose men and ships had to protect the coal supplies needed to fuel the vessels needed to guard the shores and keep the sea lanes open.

In November, 1887, "C" Battery, consisting of Canadian artillery, arrived at Victoria under the command of Major James Peters. It was the first complete unit of troops to travel to the West Coast on the newly-completed Canadian Pacific Railway. Initially, the men were housed in the old agricultural building which used to stand in Beacon Hill Park near Oliphant and Heywood, while the officers and married men were billeted nearby.

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Among the tasks of the force was the construction in 1890 of Work Point Artillery Barracks. Following completion of Fort Macaulay, part of No. 44 Company (Fortress) of the Royal Engineers arrived from Hong Kong, and the 48th Company (Submarine Miners) arrived under the command of Major A. Grant, 1896.

It was around this time that several buildings were constructed at Signal Hill. They included married quarters for privates, a use which lasted until 1950, but it was not until 1938 that the nearby 9.2-inch guns were moved to Albert Head (St. Paul's Church had been moved eastward to its present site some years earlier because of the noise and vibration from gunnery practice.)

The two-storey brick row housing on concrete foundation has several distinctive architectural features, such as shed roof entrance porches, gabled roof dormers and prominent chimney stacks.

In 1954, the quarters were altered and occupied by the Maritime Museum until it moved to

its present location in the former Court House in Bastion Square, in 1965. The vacated premises were sold to a demolition contractor who intended to save the bricks, roofing slate and fireplaces.

Meanwhile, museum director, J.W.D. Symons lamented in the *Colonist* that the "buildings were outstanding examples of craftsmanship and architectural design of the early 1900s." Fortunately, the contractor read this and thought that the building should be saved. Ownership reverted to the Crown and the structure was redeveloped. It became the home of the Signal Hill Creative Arts Centre but is now a rehabilitation centre.

Other buildings on Signal Hill include a two-storey, double-gabled duplex, built as married quarters for the Army Ordnance Corps, and another to serve as a Warrant Officer's residence. The latter was used for the Canadian Women's Army Corps in the Second World War and later as the Archives for the Maritime Museum.

Geoffrey Castle is a former trustee of CFB E. Museum.