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FEDERAL HERITAGE BUILDINGS REVIEW OFFICE

BUILDING REPORT: 85-01

TITLE: Warehouse D85
Esquimalt Dockyard
Victoria, B.C.

SOURCE: Sally Coutts
Architectural History Division

Warehouse D85 (constructed in 1898) is one of a large number of warehouses constructed at the Esquimalt Naval Base between 1890 and 1903. It is a large two storey brick structure with cement foundations, (Figures 1 and 2) similar in its design to other warehouses at the base.

In his submission to the FHBRO, Colonel D.W. Edgecombe of NDHQ in Ottawa estimates that there are 135 potential heritage buildings at the Dockyard of which 40 have been recognized to have some heritage value by local authorities.¹ Plans for these buildings are not known, although most are still in daily use. To date, none of the other historic structures at CFB Esquimalt have been the subject of any research for the FHBRO thus the extent of alterations to these buildings built during the period of the Royal Navy is not known.

I HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS

Thematic

The Royal Navy established two major stations on Canada's shores, one at Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1749 and the other at Esquimalt, British Columbia in 1848. Warehouse D85 (constructed 1898) is one of many buildings which comprise the Esquimalt Naval Station. Taken together, these buildings are related to the theme of Canada's naval history in the period of both the Royal Navy and the Royal Canadian Navy. However, Warehouse D85 itself only illustrates an internal function of a naval station: that of the storage of materials needed for the daily operation of a fleet of ships.

In 1837, a Pacific station, located at Valparaiso, Chile was established as the first Pacific station of the Royal Navy's British fleet,² but after 1847 Esquimalt became a more popular port of call for the ships of the Royal Navy. Prior to this date, the British fleet had relied upon the South American port cities of Valparaiso, Chile and Callao, Peru to offer shelter to their ships while they were active in the Pacific. However, increasing unrest in South America in the 1840s meant that British ships were not always safe when berthed in South American cities and so they began to go to Esquimalt with increasing frequency as their safety there was virtually guaranteed.³

In 1855 Esquimalt achieved a new prominence because of its proximity to Russia, against whom the British were fighting in the Crimea.⁴ That year, the Commander-in-Chief of the base, "anticipating casualties and battle damage in his squadron in

the impending attack on Kamchatka in Siberia, arranged with Governor Douglas to build some hospital units."⁵ Three buildings were constructed, at a cost of £932.⁶ In the ensuing years, an increasing number of issues relevant to the Pacific colony were dealt with by the men stationed at Esquimalt. These included border disputes with the United States over the Queen Charlotte Islands and San Juan Island in the 1860s and the enforcement of British authority during the Fraser River Gold Rush of 1858.⁷

On 29 June 1865 a British Order-in-Council was passed which formally established Esquimalt as the British fleet's Pacific station.⁸ This Order-in-Council authorized the establishment of a naval dockyard. The 1870s were relatively quiet at Esquimalt and the next major development at the base occurred in the 1880s when the decision was taken to construct a dry dock on the site.⁹ Prior to this date, ships in need of repairs were forced to go to commercial yards in San Francisco, a situation that the British thought undermined their prestige.¹⁰

Between about 1889 and the recall of the British in 1905 a large number of brick buildings were constructed at the dockyard to accommodate the increasing number of functions carried out at the yard (See Map, Figure 3).¹¹

In 1905 the entire British fleet was recalled to England and by 1906 there were no ships remaining at Esquimalt. It stood empty until 1910 when the newly formed Royal Canadian Navy raised their flag at Esquimalt for the first time.¹²

The Esquimalt Naval Station played a vital role in the Pacific during the Second World War. Many new structures were built to

accommodate this burst of war time activity. Because of base's strategic location, ships from other fleets also used it during the war.

In the post-war years, Esquimalt has remained an important part of Canada's defence system. It is still in active use today by the members of the Armed Forces.

The entire base at Esquimalt is a vital part of Canada's naval history during both the period of the Royal Navy and the Royal Canadian Navy. Warehouse D85 has played a part in the base since it was constructed in 1898 but it does not specifically illustrate this theme of Canadian military history.

Person/Event

Esquimalt Dockyard has played a prominent role in Canada's defense system since the construction of the first wooden shacks in 1855. However, Warehouse D85 is not known to have been the site of any major event, nor is it associated with any person of historic note.

Local Development

The entire naval station at Esquimalt, of which Warehouse D85 is a minor component, illustrates the British presence on the west coast of Canada. It is now surrounded by the City of Victoria and doubtless played a role in that city's early history, although this role was probably small as the naval base was fairly self-sufficient. Prior to the arrival of the first ship of the Royal Navy in 1847 the Hudson's Bay Company had a small cluster of buildings here. For much of its early history, the dockyard was made up of a collection of wooden buildings that

created an impression of impermanence. Starting in the late 1880s and continuing until about 1903, a building campaign was undertaken to improve warehouse and workshop facilities at Esquimalt. Warehouse D85 was one of many brick buildings constructed during this busy period.

II ARCHITECTURE

Aesthetic Design

Building D85 is an excellent example of a functional building type: the warehouse. Although it was built to fulfill the very specific and utilitarian purpose of the storage of goods, a certain amount of thought seems to have been expended upon its design and architectural details.

D85 is a well proportioned building that exhibits a classical sense of proportion and symmetry. It is a two storey red brick building with a gable roof which features simple decorations such as slightly raised brick pilasters that divide the west and east façades into bays, an oculus in the gable end of the north and south façades, segmental arch windows and brick corbelling along the eaves (Figure 4). These details reinforce the pleasing symmetry of this handsome structure. No distracting alterations have been carried out since the building's construction.

Functional Design

Warehouse D85 was built in 1898 by the Royal Engineers. It was designed as a storage facility and has served this function since its construction. From the early nineteenth century until the general acceptance of steel frame construction in the early

twentieth century, the design of warehouses remained remarkably constant. It appears that whether they were built by private industry, the army or the navy, features such as large windows and simple details were almost always employed (Figure 5).¹³

Like its predecessors, Warehouse D85 is ideally suited to the storage of goods. The building has a timber frame, supported by wooden trusses that do not divide the building into rooms, thereby allowing easy access to stored goods (Figure 6). The building features evenly spaced segmental arch windows that light the interior. Double doors on each level and in the basement area designed for the easy ingress and egress of goods. The land around the warehouse has recently been filled. It was originally located on the water and the basement doors allowed access to small boats which would row out to the larger ships anchored in the harbour (Figure 7).

Building D85's design, layout and interior wooden support system all contribute to its effectiveness as a warehouse. It shares features such as large windows, an open interior, and double doors on each floor with other storage facilities at Esquimalt. For example, building numbers 75 and 76 (1895), the rum and salt meat storage facilities have similar windows and doors (Figure 8). Building 80 (1902) is almost identical to D85, although each bay has a window here as opposed to every other bay in D85 (Figure 9). Building 83 (1899) is also very similar to both 80 and 85. It was originally used to store paint and oil.

The design of Warehouse D85 is typical of nineteenth century industrial architecture. The functionalism of its design

is enhanced by its simple but nevertheless handsome details. Other waterfront warehouses of similar design, built of stone, wood or brick from the early 1800s to the turn of the century for military or commercial purposes can be found in other Canadian port cities. A wooden warehouse in Halifax, adjacent to the Dominion Public Building, is an example of this common building type (Figure 10).

Designer

Warehouse D85 was built according to plans drawn by the Royal Engineers.¹⁴ The Royal Engineers were responsible for the construction of many buildings at the Esquimalt naval base, particularly in the 1890s, prior to its being signed over to the Canadian government.

The Royal Engineers designed and built military buildings and fortifications at both naval and military bases throughout the British empire. Other Canadian buildings constructed by this famous group of builders include the fortifications at Halifax and the barracks at Fredericton. Trained within the military, the builders of the Royal Engineers consistently produced sturdy, serviceable buildings, well suited to their functions within military and naval compounds around the world.

Craftsmanship and Materials

Warehouse D85 appears to be a well crafted building. Its simple architectural details such as the Saturna Island stone door and window surrounds, coping and window sills are not outstanding, but certainly demonstrate a familiarity with the material. Similarly, the English bond walls, punctuated by regularly

spaced, slightly raised brick pilasters exhibit that the bricklayer possessed a good knowledge of his material.

The fact that the building has continued to serve as a warehouse, with no alterations or renovations indicates the solid workmanship that went into its execution.

III ENVIRONMENT

Site

The historical relationship between Warehouse D85 and its surrounding landscape has been undermined by recent changes.

The building is located on the shore of Constance Cove, which is now surrounded by the City of Victoria (See Map, Figure 11). Originally the building was located right on the cove and its design was adapted to the site. It used the rocky shore as part of its foundations. In addition, it had large doors at the water level that opened onto the water to allow access to small boats (Figure 12). Unfortunately, the basin that these doors opened onto has now been filled in (Figure 13).

The Naval Dockyard was traditionally an area with a high concentration of warehouses and stores to serve the ships in port. The buildings in the area immediately surrounding Warehouse D85 have maintained this function, although the older red brick buildings now share the dockyard with newer buildings constructed during the period of expansion that was the result of the increased activity at the base during the Second World War (Figure 14).

Setting

Warehouse D85 has little direct influence on the area with which it is associated (the Esquimalt Naval Dockyard). Rather, it is the whole complex of warehouses within the Dockyard that establishes the character of that area. These buildings are a large homogenous part of the dockyard, the character of which depends upon the impression created by all the warehouses as a group.

Landmark

Warehouse D85 is part of two communities, the naval dockyard and the coast of Victoria. Its simple design, similarity to other structures within the Esquimalt Naval Base, and lack of significant historical connections mean that it has little status as a landmark within either of these communities. However, Warehouse D85 has a certain importance as part of a group of well-known buildings of similar design.

Endnotes

- 1 "Evaluation of Heritage Buildings, Esquimalt Dockyard, Esquimalt, British Columbia." D.W. Edgecombe to Henri Langlois, 27 March 1985.
- 2 F.V. Longstaff. Esquimalt Naval Base, A History of Its Work and Its Defence (Vancouver: Privately Published, 1942), pp. 10-11.
- 3 H.E. Mande, "From the Archives", Journal of Pacific History, Volume 4, 1969, p. 148.

- 4 Barry M. Gough "The Royal Navy's Legacy to the Royal Canadian Navy in the Pacific", The RCN in Retrospect 1910-1968 (Vancouver: The University of British Columbia Press, 1982), p. 5.
- 5 Canada. Department of National Defence, History Division, File: HMC Dockyard, Esquimalt, 1953-1960, "Sketch History of HMC Esquimalt Dockyard."
- 6 F.V. Longstaff, op. cit., p. 20.
- 7 Barry M. Gough, op. cit., p. 5.
- 8 Canada. Department of National Defence, History Division, File: HMC Dockyard, Esquimalt, 1953-1960, "Sketch History of HMC Dockyard, Esquimalt."
- 9 F.V. Longstaff, op. cit., p. 140.
- 10 G.L. Tucker The Naval Service of Canada (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1952), p. 80.
- 11 Of this stage in the Dockyard's development, F.V. Longstaff says "After it (the dockyard) became established with a permanent staff its history was not so exciting. Wooden buildings were added until about 1890...", Longstaffe, op. cit. p. 23. Documents in the Public Archives, RG24, D11, Vol. 11908, File: AE 33-200-20, "RCN Naval Yard, 1930" indicate that between 1889 and the departure of the British ordered in 1905 and completed in 1906, 27 brick buildings including warehouses and repair shops were built.

- 12 The Naval Service Act that created the Royal Canadian Navy was given royal assent on 4 May 1910.
- 13 Nikolaus Pevsner, A History of Building Types (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 213-225.
- 14 Plans of the building are all signed by the Royal Engineers.

WAREHOUSE D85, ESQUIMALT DOCKYARD, BRITISH COLUMBIA



1. West elevation, Warehouse, D85, Esquimalt Dockyard. (DND, 1985)



2. General view from south-east, Warehouse D85, Esquimalt Dockyard. (DND, 1985)

WAREHOUSE D85, ESQUIMALT DOCKYARD, BRITISH COLUMBIA



4. Details, north elevation of Warehouse D85. (DND)



5. London, St. Katharine Dock, begun 1827. (Nikolaus Pevsner, A History of Building Types [Princeton; Princeton University Press, 1976] p. 213)



6. Ground floor, Warehouse D85. (DND)



7. West elevation, showing door originally designed for access by small boats. (DND)

WAREHOUSE D85, ESQUIMALT DOCKYARD, BRITISH COLUMBIA



8. Rum and salt meat stores, constructed 1896 and 1895, Esquimalt Dockyard, photo: 1970. (CIHB)

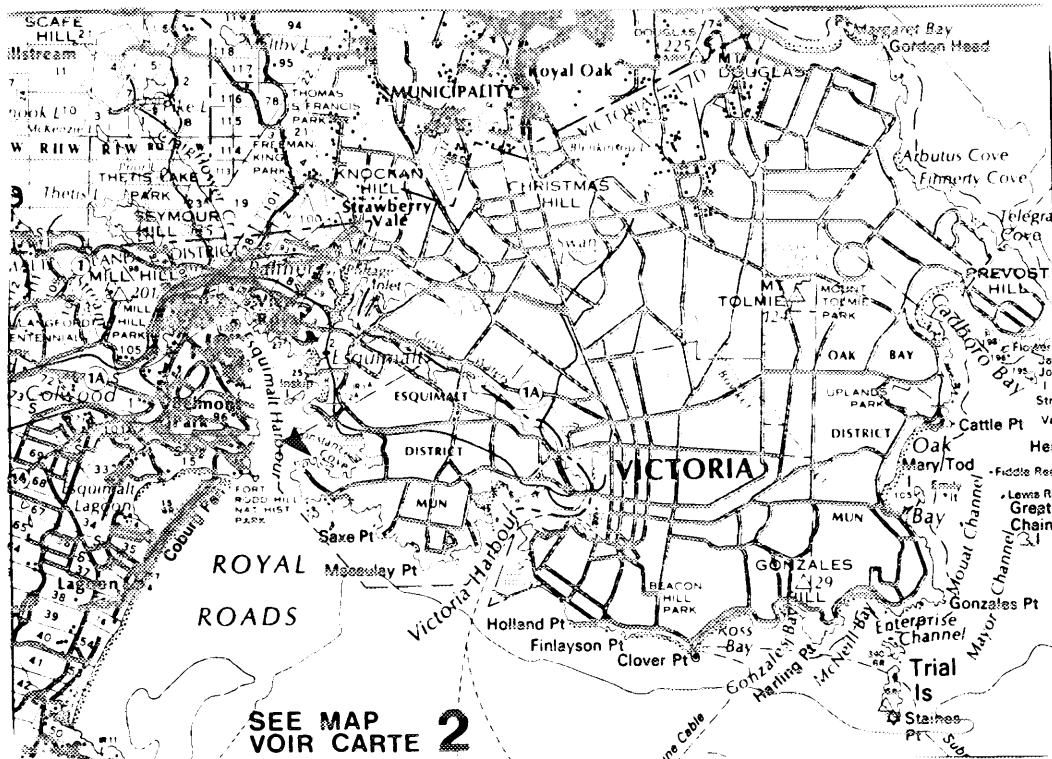


9. Warehouse D80, constructed 1902, photo: 1970. (CIHB)



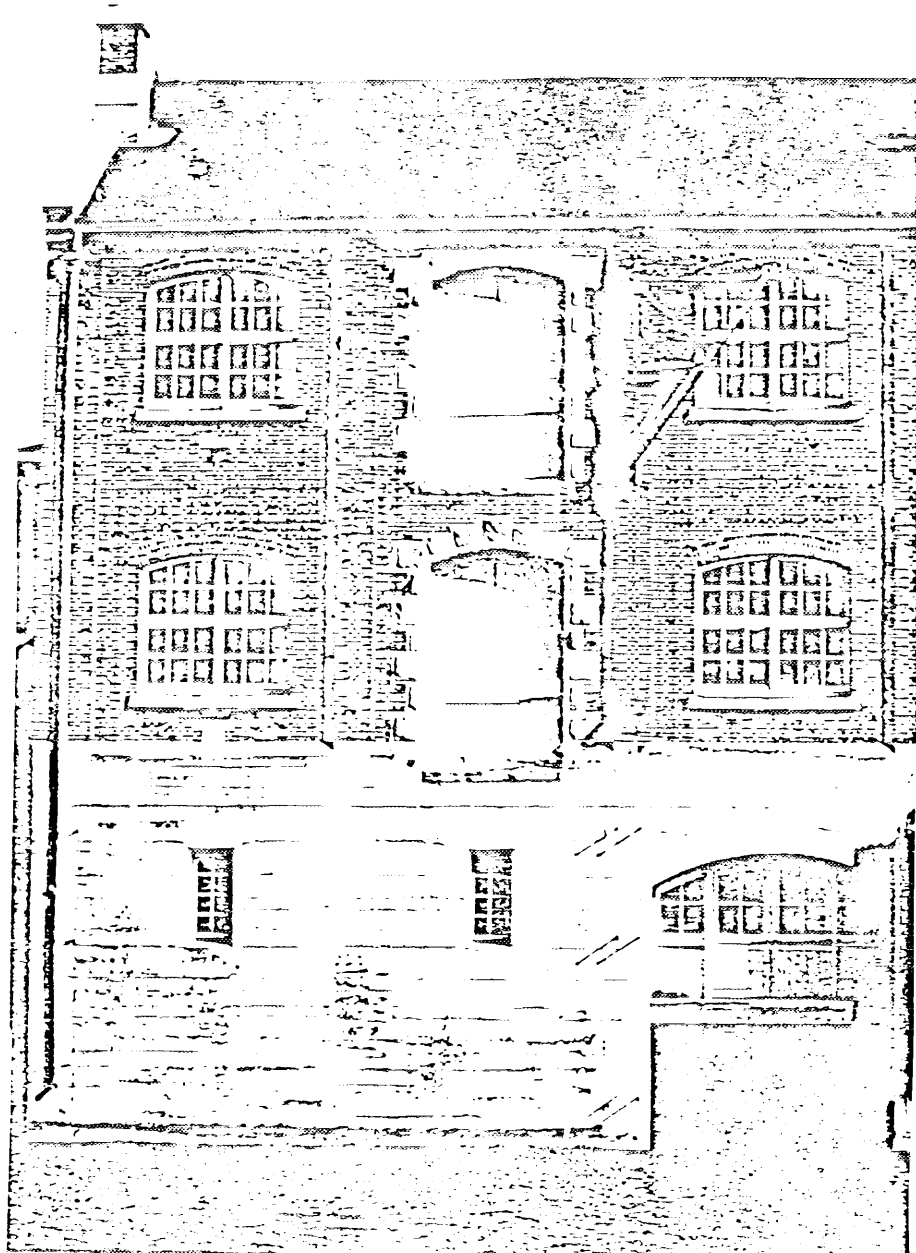
10. Warehouses, Halifax Harbour, Photo: 1935. (PAC, PA 135542)

WAREHOUSE D85, ESQUIMALT DOCKYARD, BRITISH COLUMBIA

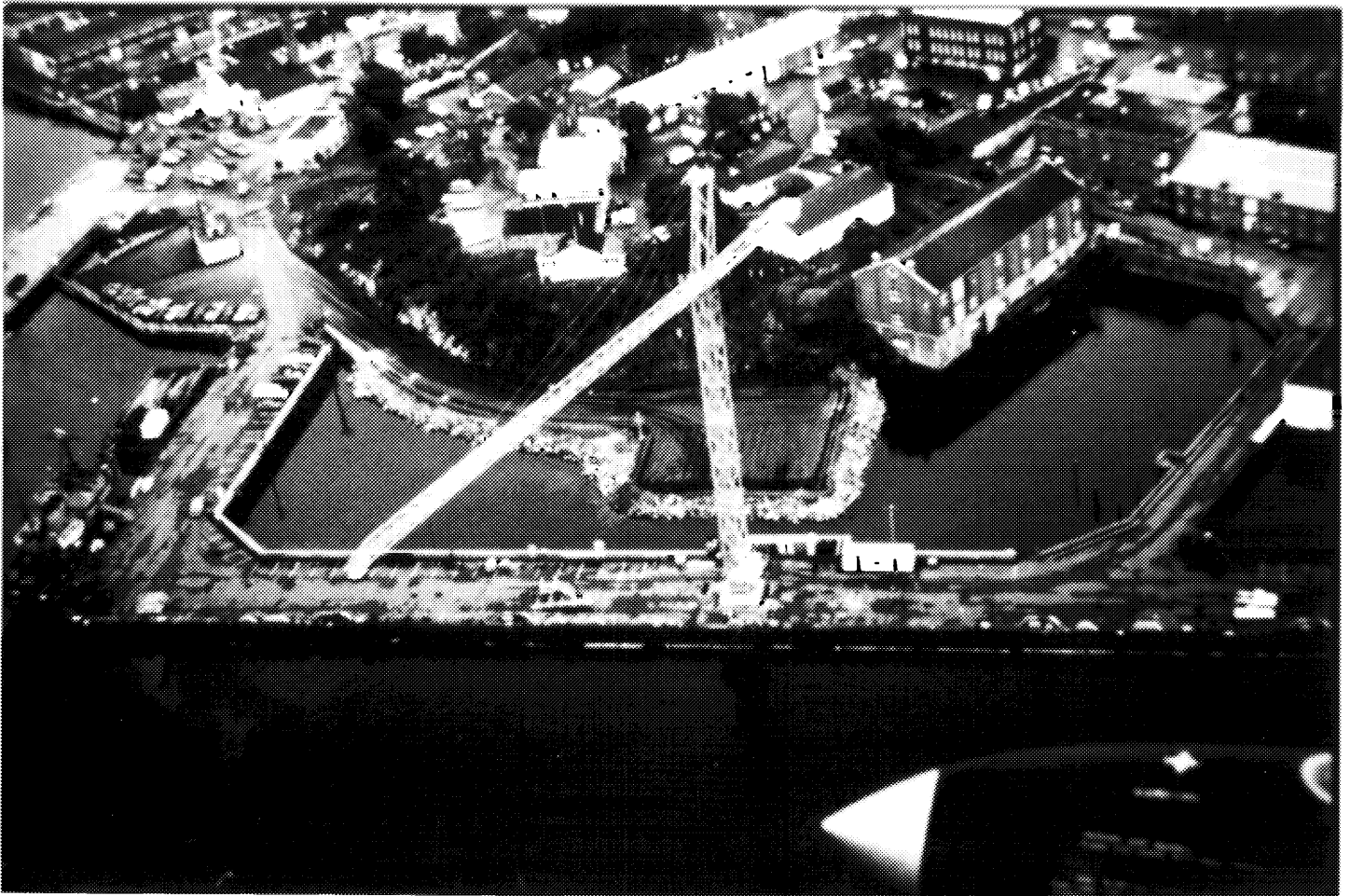


11. Map Showing Victoria, including Esquimalt Naval Base.
(Public Work Canada, Area Screening Paper - Victoria, 1982.)

WAREHOUSE D85, ESQUIMALT DOCKYARD, BRITISH COLUMBIA



12. North elevation, Warehouse D85, prior to infilling of the basin.
(DND)



13. Aerial view of Dockyard prior to in-fill of basin. (DND)



14. New and old buildings, Esquimalt Dockyard. (CIHB)