



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of BRITISH COLUMBIA





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Situated in downtown Victoria, British Columbia's majestic Parliament Buildings overlook the busy waters of the Inner Harbour.

The Parliament Buildings and surrounding areas are located in the traditional territories of the Lekwungen-speaking (pronounced Le-KWUNG-en) peoples. Now known as the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, these Coast Salish people have a rich culture and history dating back thousands of years.

The timeless architectural splendour of the buildings offer a restful counterpoint to the liveliness of the harbour, where float planes descend and taxi to their moorings, ferries, boat tours and charters motor through, and the occasional canoe or kayak braves the floating traffic.

The buildings are open to the public throughout the year, whether or not the House is in session. Free guided tours are offered Monday to Friday. During summer the buildings are also open to weekend visitors who enter as part of a formal tour.



THE BIRDCAGES

Construction of the first legislative buildings on this site began in 1859 and was completed in 1864. The Colonial Administration Buildings were built to serve as the government buildings for the Colony of Vancouver Island. They came to be known as 'the Birdcages' because of their unique architectural style.

The Birdcages continued to serve as the capital buildings after British Columbia became a province of Canada in 1871.

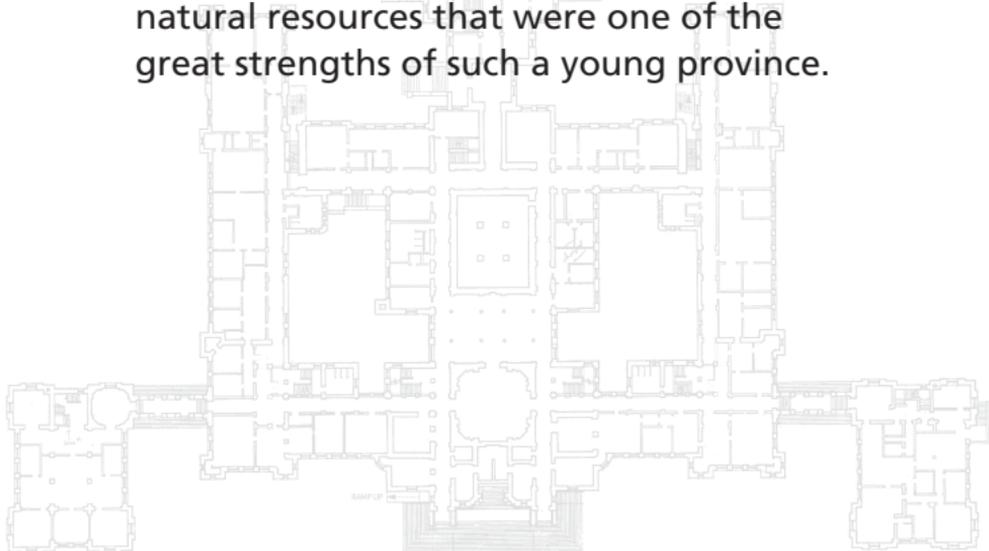
THE COMPETITION

By the early 1890's, it was recognized that the Birdcages were no longer adequate for the growing province. In 1892, a competition was held to select a design for new Parliament Buildings. Architects from all over North America submitted designs and Francis Mawson Rattenbury, who had recently arrived from England, was chosen as the winner. Rattenbury was only 25 years old and the Parliament Buildings were his first major commission.



CONSTRUCTION, ADDITIONS, AND RENOVATIONS

The style of the Parliament Buildings has been described as “free classical,” renaissance and Romanesque. Rattenbury used the buildings to show off the raw materials from B.C. The rough-hewn Haddington Island stone, the Nelson Island granite used in the foundation and front stairs, the Jervis Inlet slate roof and the copper domes display the abundant natural resources that were one of the great strengths of such a young province.





By 1912, Rattenbury was commissioned to design an addition consisting of two wings of offices and the Legislative Library to the south of the

main block. Using the same stone and a fairly consistent architectural style, the three additions fit quite well.

After 70 years without regular improvements, the Parliament Buildings were showing their age with leaking roofs, rotting foundations and an antiquated electrical system. The restoration and renovation project made every effort to use original or historically appropriate materials to return the buildings to their former glory, including replicas of the original iron light fixtures in the Legislative Chamber.



INTERIOR – RECEPTION HALL, LOWER AND UPPER ROTUNDAS

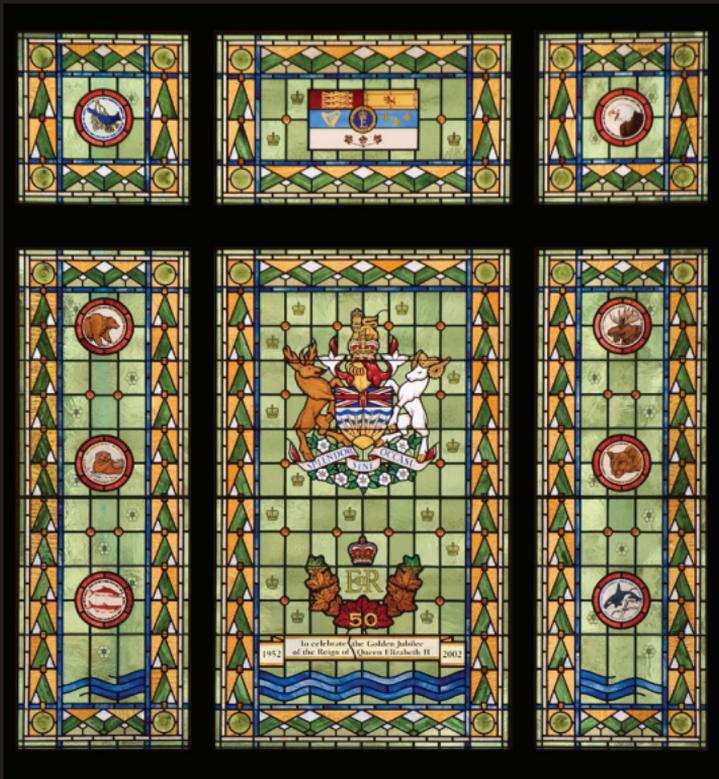
Reception Hall:

The Reception Hall, occasionally used for special functions and receptions, includes two stained glass windows.



The first is the Queen Victoria Diamond Jubilee Window commissioned for Her Majesty Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in the 60th year of her reign in 1897. On the left side is the date of the 18 year old Queen Victoria's accession to the throne in 1837, and to the right is the date of her Diamond Jubilee in 1897. The letters "V" and "R" stand for the Latin "Victoria Regina", or Queen Victoria.

The second is the Golden Jubilee Window, a gift from the Government of British Columbia to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II



to commemorate her Golden Jubilee in 2002. Featured are Her Majesty's Personal Canadian Flag, the B.C. Coat of Arms and the Canadian Golden Jubilee logo. Medallions show indigenous wildlife and the borders symbolize the Province's mountains and forests.

Lower Rotunda:

British Columbia's Coat of Arms contains elements of both our colonial past and natural splendour. The crowned lion standing on the crown represents Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's Royal Crest. On the shield, the blue stripes represent the Pacific Ocean while the white stripes represent the snow on the Rocky Mountains. The setting sun indicates that B.C. is the western-most province. On the left, the elk represents the former Colony of Vancouver Island, while the big horned mountain sheep on the right represents the former Colony of British Columbia.



The motto at the bottom is in Latin—
“splendor sine occasu” - that essentially
means “Beauty without Diminishment”.
Located around both the lion’s neck
and the bottom of the coat of arms is a
dogwood garland—B.C.’s provincial flower.

Upper Rotunda:

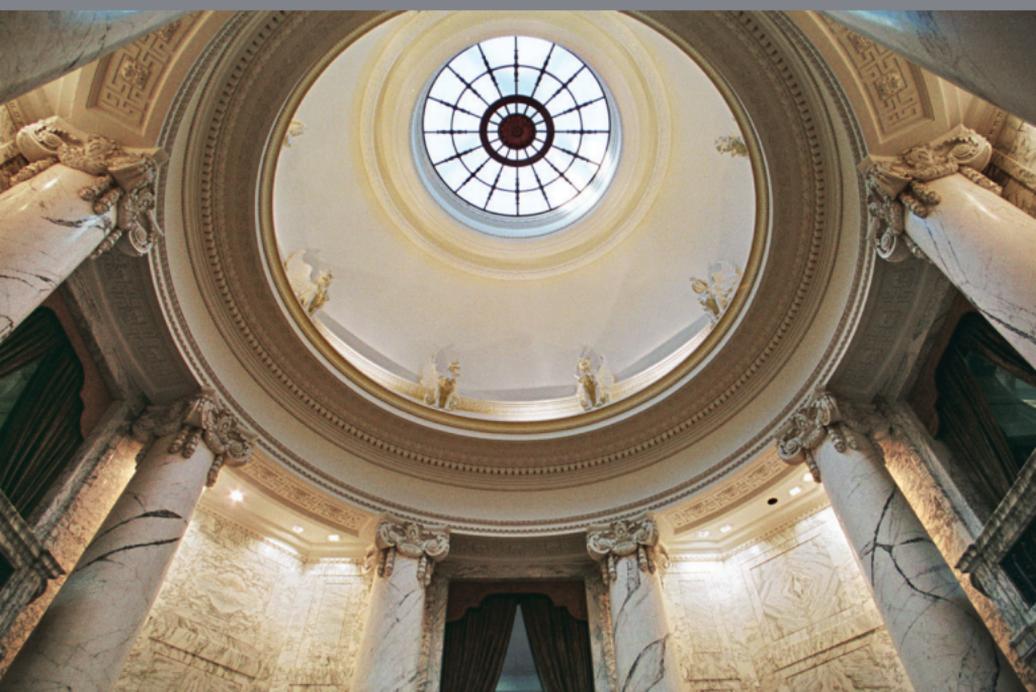
In the centre of the exquisite octagonal
Memorial Rotunda is an open circle
surrounded by a ring of dark Tennessee
marble. The walls are also lined with two
colours of Tennessee marble. Inside, the
dome stretches upward to a height of
30.5 metres, while the height from the
main floor to the top of the Captain
Vancouver statue is 39.6 metres. The
Memorial Rotunda gained its name
because it is the site of several memorials
dedicated to those from Victoria and B.C.
who gave their lives for Canada.

LEGISLATIVE LIBRARY

Among the library's interesting features are the portico entrance and the sculptures of historical and mythological figures adorning the outer walls. The portico entrance features the original gates from the pre-1915 south entrance to the Parliament Buildings.

Inside the library, the rotunda is three storeys high with the walls finished in Italian Carrara marble and punctuated with eight impressive columns made from scagliola, an Italian neo-classical revival of stone and plaster intended to imitate marble.

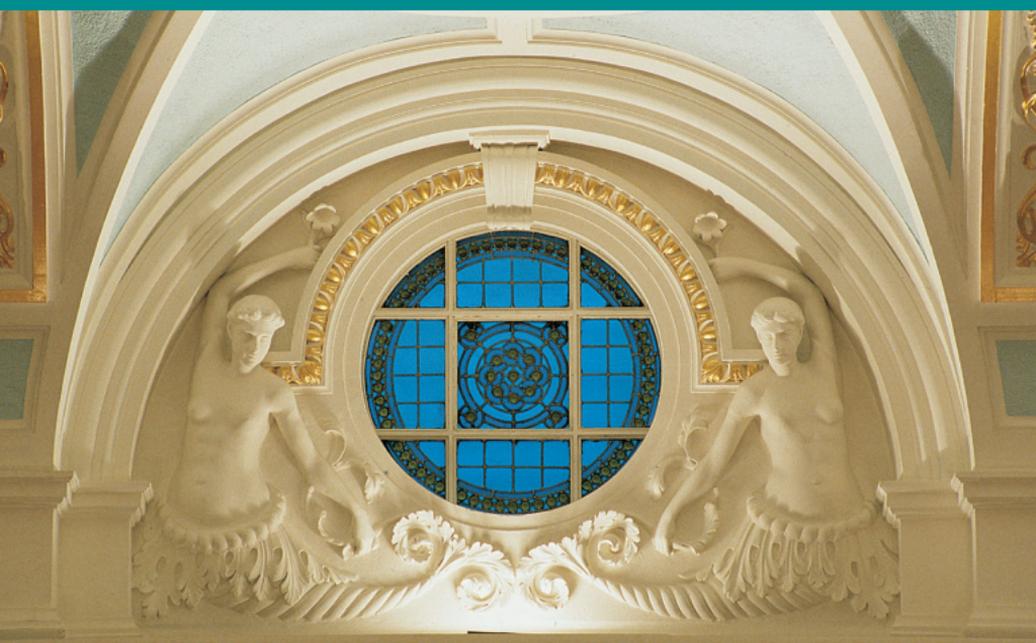
The exterior features 14 statues of famous British Columbians in history and six medallions of great literary figures; Shakespeare, Homer, Dante, Socrates, Milton and Sophocles. The female figures represent the arts of painting, music, sculpture and architecture.





THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

At the south end of the Memorial Rotunda is a doorway with “golden gates” of lacquered brass. This leads across the Members’ Lobby to the Legislative Chamber. A brass rail, known as the Bar of the House, blocks entry to the Chamber. This barrier cannot be crossed without an invitation by the Speaker of the House. The Chamber is quite large, measuring 12-by-18 metres, with walls panelled in brown Italian marble. Punctuating the walls are 22 green marble columns that support an ornate ceiling, trimmed with gold leaf and hosting four domed stained-glass skylights.





There are several plaster faces looking out at intervals from under the main ceiling moulding. Some sources suggest that these faces are of famous philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle, but they are thought more likely to be anonymous representatives of the people keeping an eye on the legislators.

The Speaker's Chair oversees the Chamber and is carved from Indiana white oak. The twisted columns on either side are each surmounted by an Ionic capital. The canopy above the chair is carved of the same wood and features the provincial Coat of Arms.





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