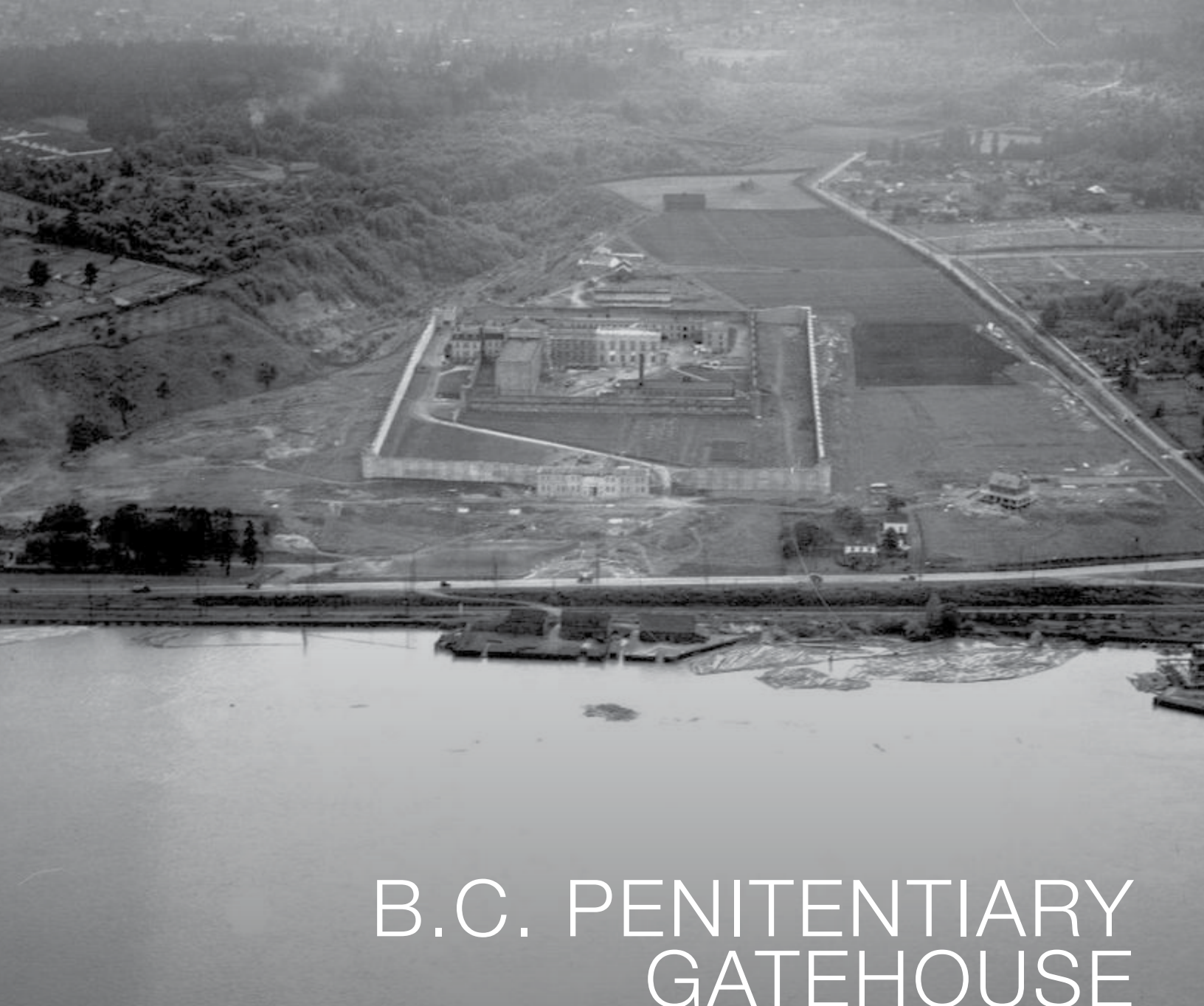


Appendix C:

*Preliminary Conservation Strategy and
Statement of Significance*



B.C. PENITENTIARY GATEHOUSE

319 GOVERNOR'S COURT, NEW WESTMINSTER, BC

HERITAGE REPORT AND PRELIMINARY CONSERVATION STRATEGY

FEBRUARY 2022

DONALD LUXTON
AND ASSOCIATES INC





319 GOVERNOR'S COURT, NEW WESTMINSTER

B.C. Penitentiary Gatehouse: Heritage Report and Preliminary Conservation Strategy

Historic Name: Administration Building and Gateway

Original Owner: Crown Federal

Architect: Canadian Department of Justice

Date of Construction: 1924-1929

Heritage Status:

- New Westminster Community Heritage Register
- City of New Westminster Heritage Designation Bylaw: #6132

The British Columbia Penitentiary, commonly referred to as the BC Pen, was a maximum-security prison in New Westminster, on a site overlooking the Fraser River. Opened in 1878, it was home to prisoners serving sentences longer than two years, and was the first federal penal institution west of Manitoba. The prison was closed on May 10, 1980.

The need for a federal prison in western Canada became apparent after British Columbia joined confederation in 1871. The population was expanding, and until the transcontinental railroad was completed, it was costly and difficult to transport prisoners long distances east to other federal institutions. New Westminster was chosen as the location in 1874, adjacent to the provincial asylum. The original complex opened in 1878 with twenty-three inmates. The large cell blocks, which housed most of the inmates, were constructed between 1904 and 1914. The site was initially fenced by a wooden fence, which was soon upgraded to 30-foot rock walls, and finally 40-foot concrete walls, with guard towers located on each corner. The BC Penitentiary contained the standard features of a maximum security prison of its era, including cell blocks, offices, hospital, kitchen, work and school facilities, and two chapels (one Catholic, one Protestant).

Most of the buildings on the former BC Pen site have been demolished and replaced by residential housing and parkland. Only four parts of the original prison still remain: the Gatehouse, the Coal House, the original Centre Block (which has been converted to offices), and the cemetery. The Call-In Bell is located in a glazed pavilion on a private property.

For many years, the Gatehouse was the public entry to the site, and was often featured in news stories about the prison, especially during times of unrest. The adjacent walls have been demolished, leaving the Gatehouse isolated, but it retains its ceremonial staircase leading to the front entry. The Gatehouse is listed on the City's Heritage Register and is a designated municipal heritage resource.



Current Condition





Penitentiary Grounds and Asylum, City of New Westminster, 1892 [Detail. R.J. Williams CVA MAP 617]



New Westminster Mental Hospital and Penitentiary, circa 1870s. [BCA A-03360]

Dominion of Canada, Department of Justice, *Annual Report of the Superintendent of Penitentiaries*, for the Fiscal Year ended March 31, 1928, page 30 [British Columbia]:

- On February 28, 1928, work on the new administration building had progressed only to the height of the top of the windows of the lower storey. By March 31, 1928, the concrete of the main gateway had been poured, and the walls carried to the total height of the building in line with the roof, this leaving only the parapets and towers to be erected. The pouring of the balance could not be proceeded with until the arrival of the necessary construction steel,

Dominion of Canada, *Annual Departmental Reports, 1928-29*, Vol. III, Report of the Superintendent of Penitentiaries, pages 25-26 [British Columbia]:

- Administration Building. – The reinforced concrete on the walls of this building has been completely poured and the towers completed. The concrete floors and roof slab are also completely poured. The main gateway has been finished. The large exterior doors at the entrance of the gateway were completely manufactured in the institution. These are constructed of boiler plate with two thicknesses of oak – which is panelled – and one thickness of fir. Same are hung on ball-bearing hinges, and although each door weighs over eighteen hundred pounds it can be opened and closed with the greatest of ease. The interior entrance to the gateway is protected by a roller steel curtain. This curtain can either be operated by hand or electrically controlled. The partitions in the Administration building are poured and placing the hollow tile on the inside of the exterior walls has been started. At the rate of progress being made this building should be ready for occupation by the Administrative staff on or about the 1st of August.
- Ornamental Grounds.-Concrete driveway around the historical cairn. Excavation has been completed and concrete poured with the sidewalk leading from the main stairway to Columbia street. An ornamental wall, approximately 10 feet back from the sidewalk has been erected with concrete posts about 2 feet square, similar to those bordering the driveway. This wall, which joins up with the retaining wall at the warden's grounds, has been completed around the cairn driveway and up the ornamental stairway to new Administration building. On every fourth post in this wall there is erected a pebbled concrete light standard. The wiring has been completed and connected up, the whole making a very effective lighting system at night.

Dominion of Canada, Department of Justice, *Annual Report of the Superintendent of Penitentiaries*, for the Fiscal Year ended March 31, 1930, page 30 [British Columbia]:

- New Construction. New Administration Building. – New Administration Building. – Water, steam and electric light connected and fixtures installed. New offices occupied on October 2, 1929.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

DESCRIPTION

The British Columbia Penitentiary Gatehouse is a two-storey battlemented structure with distinctive bartizans, turrets and a crenellated parapet, with octagonal towers flanking the main entrance. The building faces the Fraser River and is approached from East Columbia Street by a long flight of stairs that constituted the main public entry to the former penitentiary site. The penitentiary lands have now been redeveloped as a residential neighbourhood, and the Gatehouse is one of the few prison structures that have been preserved on the site.

HERITAGE VALUE

The British Columbia Penitentiary Gatehouse is of heritage value for its contribution to our understanding of the infrastructure and logistical operation of Canada's penal system. The penitentiary was begun in 1874, shortly after Confederation and British Columbia's entry into the Dominion, as part of the federal government's program to revamp the country's prison system. After the original penitentiary building was completed in 1878, the prison continued to grow as numerous buildings were constructed to house the burgeoning number of inmates, the staff that worked at the site and the industries conducted there to help it achieve self-sufficiency. The Gatehouse is a symbol of the massive growth of the penitentiary during the 1920s and 1930s, when new structures were required to meet the needs of the complex and its inmates. After the penitentiary closed in 1980, the site was redeveloped for housing, and most of the prison structures were demolished. The British Columbia Penitentiary Gatehouse is of architectural significance for its imposing presence and unique style, influenced by late Gothic Revival architecture. Built in 1924-1929 as part of the construction of nine metre-high walls encircling the penitentiary, this gatehouse became the main entrance to the 31-hectare closed penitentiary community, and also housed the prison's administrative offices. The fortress-like appearance was for many years the grim public face of the institution. The battlements, turrets, and towers, with the formal stairs approaching it, make this structure a landmark on East Columbia Street and a potent reminder of the site's long historical occupant. Furthermore, it is a significant example of the use of monolithic cast-in-place concrete, where the material is used structurally and was also exposed as cladding. Additionally, the British Columbia Penitentiary Gatehouse is significant for its surviving landscape features, which provided a ceremonial entrance and a forecourt to the prison. The monumental staircase, on axis with the entry, provided a formal sense of entry to the site. The railing's iron work, which displays a high quality craftsmanship and artistry, was manufactured by the Westminster Iron Works Company Ltd., a firm established in New Westminster by John Reid (1852-1949) in 1874. The ornamental iron work department of the firm was largely developed and supervised during the company's early years by master ironworker, James Auld Blair (1877-1957).

CHARACTER-DEFINING ELEMENTS

Key elements that define the heritage character of the British Columbia Penitentiary Gatehouse include its:

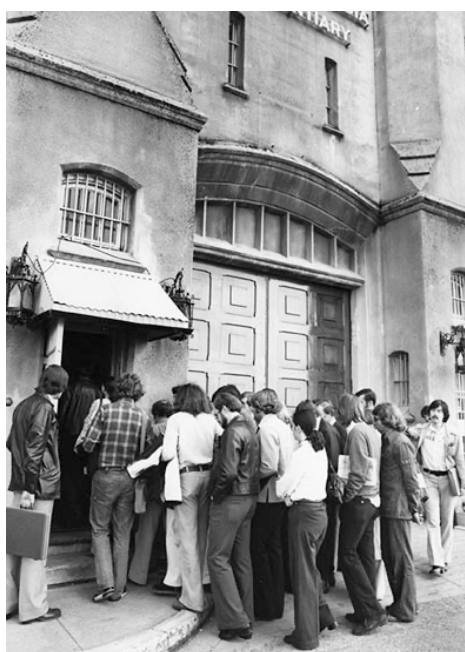
- prominent elevated location on a sloping site, overlooking the Fraser River, on axis with the Wharf Warehouse;
- institutional form, scale, and massing as expressed by its two-storey height and regular, rectangular plan;
- reinforced, cast-in-place concrete construction and cladding, now obscured by recent stucco cladding;
- Gothic Revival style battlemented exterior elements such as bartizans, turrets and towers; corbel tables at the cornice; highly articulated frontispiece flanked by octagonal towers and containing a cased segmental arch doorway with stylized portcullis;
- symmetrical fenestration including lancet windows in the towers and frontispiece, and deeply inset, segmental arched windows with simple surrounds and sloping sills; and
- associated landscape features including: a straight flight of stairs, aligned with the front entrance and connecting the building to East Columbia Street, comprised of square, panelled concrete posts with caps, and rough-dressed concrete block sides with concrete coping and iron work railing; retaining wall / ironwork fence with centre steps comprised of square, panelled concrete posts, separating the driveway from the front entrance of the building; concrete fence surrounding the building, with decorative ironwork and regularly spaced concrete fence posts, and concrete gateposts at steps to main door.



Entry to the BC Pen, 1976 [New Westminster Museum & Archives IHP10001-1963]



British Columbia Penitentiary Staff, May 1932. [New Westminster Museum & Archives IHP6700]



Left: Entry to the BC Penitentiary, 1976.
[New Westminster Museum & Archives IHP10001-1886]



Closing of the BC Pen, 1980 [New Westminster Museum & Archives IHP10001-2118]



Closing of the BC Pen, 1980 [New Westminster Museum & Archives IHP9391]

PRELIMINARY CONSERVATION STRATEGY

CURRENT CONDITION

The building was altered from its original appearance at the time of its conversion to commercial uses. This included the application of an EIFS system that covered the original concrete walls, and the replacement of the original windows and doors with metal frames.

PROPOSED HERITAGE RATIONALE

The proposed redevelopment of the site proposes a hotel use, with the existing heritage building adaptively re-used through rehabilitation, with additions to each side as framing elements.

PRELIMINARY CONSERVATION STRATEGY

The intent is to ensure that the heritage building is appropriately integrated into a new development, that recalls its original framing as part of a larger context. The overall intent is to:

- preserve the existing building in situ;
- rehabilitate and integrate the heritage building as part of a new hotel development; and
- improve the heritage character of the building through appropriate conservation measures.



THE CHARACTER-DEFINING ELEMENTS WOULD BE CONSERVED AS FOLLOWS:

- **CDE #1:** Prominent elevated location on a sloping site, overlooking the Fraser River, on axis with the Wharf Warehouse.
Conservation Strategy: Preserve existing location and rehabilitate for new use.
- **CDE #2:** Institutional form, scale, and massing as expressed by its two-storey height and regular, rectangular plan.
Conservation Strategy: Preserve existing form, scale and massing.
- **CDE #3:** Reinforced, cast-in-place concrete construction and cladding, now obscured by recent stucco cladding.
Conservation Strategy: Preserve and rehabilitate, through investigation of current condition and conservation options.
- **CDE #4:** Gothic Revival style battlemented exterior elements such as bartizans, turrets and towers; corbel tables at the cornice; highly articulated frontispiece flanked by octagonal towers and containing a cased segmental arch doorway with stylized portcullis.
Conservation Strategy: Preserve and rehabilitate.
- **CDE #5:** Symmetrical fenestration including lancet windows in the towers and frontispiece, and deeply inset, segmental arched windows with simple surrounds and sloping sills.
Conservation Strategy: Preserve and rehabilitate, through investigation of conservation options.
- **CDE #6:** associated landscape features including: a straight flight of stairs, aligned with the front entrance and connecting the building to East Columbia Street, comprised of square, panelled concrete posts with caps, and rough-dressed concrete block sides with concrete coping and iron work railing; retaining wall / ironwork fence with centre steps comprised of square, panelled concrete posts, separating the driveway from the front entrance of the building; concrete fence surrounding the building, with decorative ironwork and regularly spaced concrete fence posts, and concrete gateposts at steps to main door.
Conservation Strategy: Preserve and rehabilitate landscape elements.

RESEARCH SOURCES

BRITISH COLUMBIA PENITENTIARY GATEHOUSE

319 GOVERNOR'S COURT

Historic Name: Administration Building and Gateway

Original Owner: Crown Federal

Architect: Canadian Department of Justice

Date of Construction: 1924-1929

Heritage Status:

- New Westminster Community Heritage Register.
- City of New Westminster Heritage Designation Bylaw: #6132.

SOURCES

- Donald Luxton, *Building the West: The Early Architects of British Columbia*, Page 70: "Though DPW architects claimed the credit for their authorship, the plans for the original sections of the British Columbia Penitentiary at New Westminster were prepared by Justice Department staff members, Thomas Painter and James Adams of Kingston Penitentiary. After DPW handed over the completed prison building in 1877, further design work at the site was carried out by Justice Department staff architects. Starting in the 1880s, they planned residences for the warden and the accountant, separate quarters for married and single staff, and a new wharf and combined bakery and laundry. The first major expansion of the institution came in 1904, when inmates began construction of two Justice-designed projects: a long narrow fireproof shops building, 1904-09, and a much-needed north wing, with 116 cells, 1904-05. To these were added the east cellblock, 1911-15; a combined kitchen, chapel and hospital, 1916-19; a laundry, 1922-24; a new administration building and gatehouse, 1924-29; a boiler house, 1930-31; and the west cellblock, 1932-38. The enclosing walls with corner towers were started in 1908 and completed in 1928."
- Dates taken from the annual reports of the Department of Justice. The date of completion is based on the Warden's statement of activities during the fiscal year. Plans were prepared by the Canadian Department of Justice.
- Federal Heritage Buildings Review Office: Building Report 83-17 (Former British Columbia Penitentiary, New Westminster, British Columbia). By Edward Mills.
- J.D. Scott, *Once in the Royal City*, pages 26-27

HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS

- British Columbia Archives I-51853, Aerial View, circa 1930
- NWPL #1590 - Aerial view, 1968
- NWPL #1591 - Construction in front of entrance in 1932
- NWPL #1600 - 1941
- NWPL #2215 - 1984
- NWPL and NVMA - numerous photos of the BC Pen site available online