

Appendix B

Statement of Significance

728 Columbia Street Statement of Significance

Description of Historic Place

The Bank of Nova Scotia is a one-storey plus mezzanine masonry banking structure, with large window openings illuminating the main banking hall. The exterior was influenced by the 1930s trend towards modernism, and the influence of the Stripped Classical style is evident in the large fluted columns between the window openings on the front facade. It is located on the south side of Columbia Street at the corner of Begbie Street in New Westminster's historic downtown commercial district.

Heritage Value

The Bank of Nova Scotia is significant for its contribution to the consistent and distinctive built form of Columbia and Front Streets, which dates from 1898 to 1913, when New Westminster was the major centre of commerce and industry for the booming Fraser Valley area. In 1899, this was the site for the B.C. Electric Railway Company office and depot; when it relocated in 1911 the building was renovated for use by Merchants Bank of Canada, and was later the location of the Bank of Nova Scotia. Despite the Crash of 1929 and the following Depression, conditions improved in the later 1930s, and in 1938 the bank announced the construction of a new building on this site, symbolizing its confidence in the area and the end of a long period of stagnation in downtown New Westminster. The new bank was opened on June 1, 1939, and was enlarged to the rear and renovated in 1958.

The Bank of Nova Scotia is a superlative example of modernistic architecture. During the 1930s there was a widespread movement towards the adoption of non-traditional styles of architecture, here reflected in severe planar surfaces, minimal detailing and the lack of a traditional cornice. Typical of the conservatism of large banks, it retains some of the monumental characteristics of the earlier Temple Bank movement, evident in the influence of stripped classicism and in the use of fluted pilasters on the front facade that recall traditional classical columns. The bank was designed by Toronto-based architect Murray Brown (1885-1958), who was known for his distinctive Moderne and Art Deco buildings, and who designed Bank of Nova Scotia branches in Halifax, Calgary and Saint John, New Brunswick. The facing is Haddington Island andesite, with a Quebec black marble base. Carved stone plaques represent the fishing and lumber industries - the source of much of the province's wealth; a sailing ship symbolizes trade and commerce, and the bank's crest is prominently displayed on the front and side facades.

This site is additionally significant for the long-term presence on Columbia Street of the Bank of Nova Scotia, founded in Halifax in 1832 to facilitate the thriving trans-Atlantic trade among Britain, North America and the West Indies. By the early 1900s, the bank had a coast-to-coast network of branches, facilitated by amalgamation with several other banks. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, a number of local branches were built in British Columbia to strengthen the bank's presence on the West Coast. The Bank of Nova Scotia still occupies the building and this remains one of the last banking halls on Columbia Street.

Character-Defining Elements

Key elements that define the heritage character of the Bank of Nova Scotia include its:

- location on a prominent corner at Columbia, Front and Begbie Streets, part of a grouping of commercial buildings in historic downtown New Westminster
- siting on the property lines, with no setbacks
- geometric form with asymmetrical entry, one-storey plus lower level scale, flat roof and cubic massing
- masonry construction with facing of Haddington Island andesite and Quebec black marble trim
- elements of modernistic design, including planar walls with minimal ornamentation, simplified detailing and the lack of a projecting cornice
- vestigial references to classical architecture including fluted columns on the front facade
- original exterior decoration, including: carved stone reliefs representing B.C. fishing and lumber scenes and a sailing ship on the Begbie Street facade; carved stone bank crests on the front and side facades; cast bronze sign letters; smaller lettering in nickel and cadmium plating; and bronze plaque on side facade 'The Bank of Nova Scotia Incorporated Anno Domini 1832' nickel and chrome-plated metal window sash that divides the large banking hall windows into smaller plate glass units
- interior elements such as its high ceilings; original radiator caps and window ledges; and four steel and concrete vaults