

Victoria Masonic Temple
650 Fisgard
Statement of Heritage Significance



650 Fisgard SE corner - 2024

Built in 1878, the Victoria Masonic Temple is a civic landmark and a key monument in the history of Freemasonry in British Columbia. Documentary evidence of the planning, construction, dedication and history of the structure, along with numerous early photographs, support the importance of the Masonic Temple as significant heritage structure.



1877 Laying of cornerstone in NE corner for new Masonic Temple at 650 Fisgard

Historical background and context

Freemasons were among the earliest British, American and European settlers in the Crown Colony. By 1859, they established the first Masonic Lodge in Victoria, under the United Grand Lodge of England. In 1862, Brethren predominantly from the Maritime Colonies and the United States successfully petitioned the Grand Lodge of Scotland and chartered Vancouver Lodge No. 485 also in Victoria. Several other lodges were created in the 1860s under both British and Scottish obediences. In 1871, with the entry of British Columbia into Confederation, the Freemasons voted to create an autonomous Grand Lodge of British Columbia, with eight lodges at that time. As Victoria was the designated the headquarters of Grand Lodge, and several lodges meeting there, it was decided to build a suitably impressive Masonic Temple.



650 Fisgard – View from SE corner circa 1900

The Building

A competition was held, and John Teague was chosen to design and build the structure. Teague was Victoria's pre-eminent architect at that time. His career spanned an impressive body of buildings for the Royal Navy in Esquimalt, through the key institutional civic structures (Central School, 1875; Masonic Temple, 1878; City Hall, 1879; St. Ann's Academy (addition) 1886; Royal Jubilee Hospital, 1889). These prominent brick buildings were executed in variations of the Mansardic style, thus giving Victoria's cityscape its first distinctive architectural character. The Masonic Temple was located in a strategic location at Douglas and Fisgard Streets, and only a year later, Teague designed the Victoria City Hall, only one block away in a similar style.

The Temple consists of two generously proportioned storeys. The first storey features commercial store fronts providing revenue for the second-storey lodge hall. Articulation includes windows hooded with decorative arches; the upper windows accented with brick string courses. The second-storey windows facing Douglas and Fisgard were later filled-in with brick when bright streetlights became intrusive. An elegant corner tower surmounts the original entrance at Douglas and Fisgard. Several decorative details such as scrollwork and cresting on the tower have been lost.

The second-storey interior of the Masonic Temple features the magnificent main hall. At the opening of the Temple in October 1878, the *Daily British Colonist* described the ceiling as “...a masterpiece of work. It assumes the form of a dome and has first been tinted with a sky-blue shade and then studded with golden stars, fringed with clouds, in representation of the firmament. At the eastern end of the room the rising sun is very faithfully depicted.” A pipe organ was located in the loft, with elegant decorative railing supplied by Albion Iron Works of Victoria.

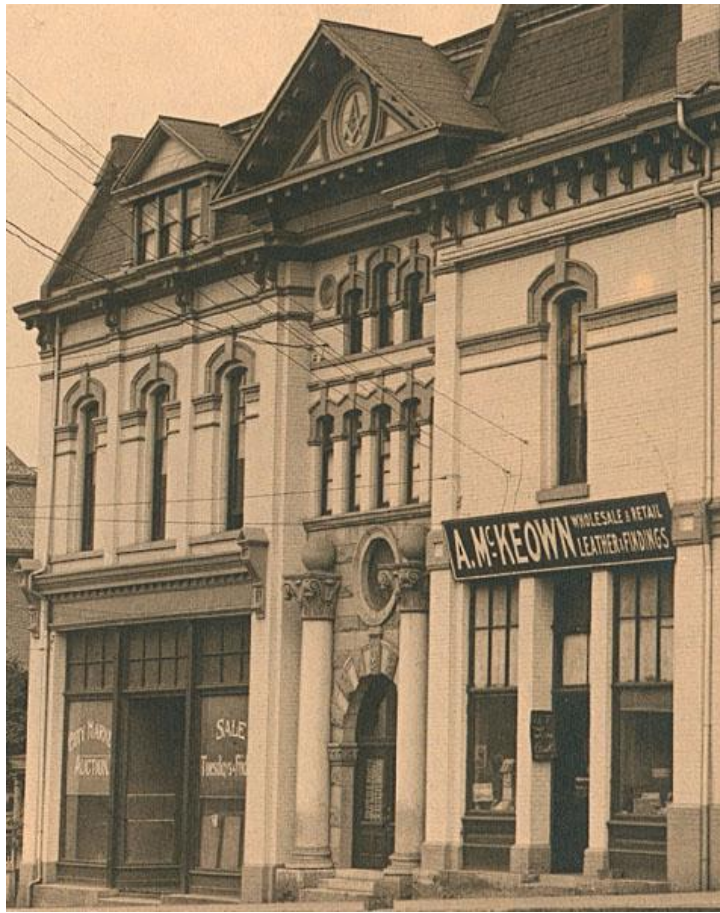


650 Fisgard – SE corner circa 1925

A substantial addition was built in 1909 west of the main structure along Fisgard Street. It included a new entrance in keeping with the style of the earlier structure, with rough and smooth ashlar articulation, and a double-door entry way surmounted by a stone arch with carved Masonic emblems. Two columns with capitals and orbs flank the entrance. Above the arch is a round stained-glass window featuring the seal of Solomon and other Masonic emblems. The addition of 1910 included a library (now a small lodge meeting room) and a third-floor banquet hall.

For a number of years, the office of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia was located in the Temple. It was later moved to Vancouver.

The Victoria Masonic Temple is now the earliest Masonic temple in continuous use in British Columbia.



650 Fisgard South side – date unknown

Historical context

Over the generations, many civic, business and professional leaders, as well as men and women of many callings were members of Masonic lodges meeting in the Victoria Masonic Temple. They include: E.B. Paul, founder of Victoria College; S.J. Willis, pioneer educator; Dr. Eric Boak, physician active in the Chinese Hospital; Justice R. Wooton; R. Wright, champion of Old Town preservation. Lodge Victoria No. 124 was established in 1960 by the Order of Women Freemasons of England.

Among the charities supported by Freemasons are the Grand Lodge Bursary Fund for post-secondary students, transportation for cancer patients, food banks and community kitchens.



650 Fisgard South side - 2024



650 Fisgard East side - 2024