

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Spencer Mansion (The Art Gallery of Greater Victoria)

1040 Moss Street, Victoria BC

Date of Construction 1889

DESCRIPTION OF HISTORIC PLACE

The Spencer Mansion located at 1040 Moss Street is situated at the corner of Moss Street and Wils Spencer Place. It is a substantial 2 ½ Storey wood frame dwelling located on a prominent rock outcropping in the Rockland neighbourhood of Victoria and currently part of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria.

The Spencer Mansion, originally known as *Gyppeswyk*, is a late-nineteenth century villa, was designed by the local architect William Ridgway Wilson. Design elements such as a prominent Oculus or Belvedere, numerous corbelled chimneys, highly detailed bay windows and eaves create an interesting mix of Italianate and Queen Anne elements in this significant building.

The mansion and its later additions have been at the forefront of economic, political and cultural activity in the City of Victoria since its original construction. The mansion sits on a 5,701 m² remnant lot of a former large estate which originally consisted of 24,281 m² of grounds with gardens, orchards, tennis courts, stables and a coach house. The remaining natural features such as rock outcroppings and groves of Garry Oak trees help define the original context of this historic site on which the mansion was built.

HERITAGE VALUE of HISTORIC PLACE

The heritage value of the Spencer Mansion 1040 Moss Street is summarized below in accordance with the Thematic Framework set out in the Official Community Plan of the City of Victoria.

Theme 1 Coastal Settlement

Constructed in 1889, the Spencer Mansion was originally built by the Green Family and has enjoyed a prominent role in the history of the City of Victoria and the Province of British Columbia ever since. The Green family called their new home *Gyppeswyk*, after the village in England where they were married and lived in for a while. Alexander Green, settled in Victoria in 1873, had become a successful businessman and banker before he passed away in 1891. He was popular in local community and had participated actively in various charity foundations.

Theme 3 Capital City: Governing the West

The Mansion was the political focal point of British Columbians at the turn of the 20th Century. After the tragic fire and destruction of Government House, Carey Castle, the home of the Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia in May of 1899, the Province rented from the Green Worlock estate the Mansion for Government House till the new Government House was constructed in 1903. On May 25 1899, the Mansion became a public building when Thomas Robert McInnes, as Lieutenant-Governor, took up

residence there. Government House functioned in the Mansion under the tenure of two Lieutenant-Governors including Sir Henri-Gustave Joly de Lotbiniere who succeeded McInnes after he was removed from office over his controversial actions in conducting the business of the Legislature. The Mansion served as the Province's Government House and was the site of ceremonial functions for 4 years, which included a state banquet for visiting royalty in 1901. The Duke and Duchess of Cornwall (later King George V and Queen Mary) were welcomed by Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier, Premier Edward Prior, Lieutenant Governor Lotbiniere, Bishop and Mayor, amongst other guests.

Theme 4 Community of Neighbourhoods: Associations and Organizations

From 1903 to 1951, the Mansion was occupied by the Spencer family. The Spencer family renamed their new home *Llan Derwen*, which is Welsh for "under the oak" in reference to the Garry Oak grove that it resided in. Spencer dedicated his life to philanthropy, the church, and the family's department store business. As chatelaine of the Mansion after 1934, Sara Spencer had opened the Mansion for social events organized by her many charitable efforts. She served as president of the Victoria Symphony and once hosted a reception for the inaugural concert of the season. Sara Spencer was, like her father, a dynamic personality who had a big heart for arts and social responsibility lived in the house from 1934, until she donated the family mansion to the City for use as an art gallery. Victoria Arts Centre informally opened in November 1951. Today, a portrait of Sara still hangs in the Mansion's foyer. In 1951, Sara decided to donate the family mansion to the City for use as an art gallery. Governor General Vincent Massey presided over the official opening of the Victoria Arts Centre (later the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria). Within a decade, the Art Gallery had the largest ratio of members to population of any civic art museum in Canada.

Theme 5 Cultural Exchange

The Mansion was designed by William Ridgway Wilson (1862-1975), an English immigrant, who was born to British parents in China. Ridgway Wilson received architecture training in England before moving to Canada in 1887. He became one of the most prominent architects in Victoria, BC. . He became one of the most prominent, long standing, and prolific architects in Victoria's history. His works also include other mansions, the Bay Street Armory, South Park School, Wilkinson Road Jail, and St John's Anglican Church amongst others. The building contractor was George C. Mesher (1860-1938). Like Green and Ridgway Wilson, he was an English immigrant and prospered in the family's construction and design business in Victoria. The design is an eclectic mix of popular styles of the late 19th century which include Italianate and Queen Anne elements and a well crafted Baronial styled interior.

CHARACTER-DEFINING ELEMENTS

The key elements that define the heritage character of the Spencer Mansion include:

- it's location on a prominent rock outcropping ridge in the Rockland Neighbourhood.
- The site's natural environment surrounding the Mansion, rock outcroppings to the south and west and the Garry Oak groves that are located on the perimeter of the site around the mansion.
- Italianate style elements -
 - elaborate wood eaves details, decorative brackets, and applied decorative wood battens, tall narrow windows, including the Palladian windows on the south and east sides each of which has a central, arched sash flanked by smaller rectangular sashes.
 - rooftop belvedere viewing station

- hipped roof, with surfaces that slope in 4 directions.
- Queen Anne style elements -
 - the projecting bay windows including flared roof elements with diamond shaped wood shingles and cut away trim on the second floor.
 - A variety of dormer elements including barrel vaulted and gable end elements with arched windows
 - numerous tall elaborately detailed corbelled brick chimneys.
- Construction materials including: original wood sash single and double hung windows, original wood dropped siding with corner boards, rock rubble wall and brick foundations.
- Interior elements -
 - Baronial style foyer with a grand staircase and a gallery lining the second floor. Above the grand staircase is the art nouveau window, which was originally a part of the exterior facade. Jacobean-style coffered ceiling.
 - Eastlake style woodwork in the foyer, the newel post, balustrade, and paneled walls are composed of geometric ornament, incised lines, and relief carvings.
 - Ornate fireplaces
 - Original dinner room, drawing room and morning room with inset sliding doors