



# VICTORIA PRESS BUILDING

2621 DOUGLAS STREET, VICTORIA

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

FEBRUARY 2018

**DONALD LUXTON**  
AND ASSOCIATES INC



### 1.1 HISTORIC CONTEXT: POSTWAR MODERNISM IN VICTORIA



Aerial of Douglas Street showing clearing for Victoria Press Building (top left), 1970, City of Victoria Archives M08575

After the conclusion of World War II, North America began to settle into a prolonged period of relative peace and economic prosperity. As a wartime defense centre and Canada's major west coast naval port, Victoria was especially affected by the demobilization of thousands upon thousands of troops, returning from duties overseas. The once sleepy Victoria grew rapidly, and the city's population more than doubled between 1946 and 1966. In addition to the returning veterans, a pent-up demand for cheap housing, the baby boom, ready availability of automobiles, improved ferry access to the mainland (beginning in 1960), and new consumer confidence also contributed to the unprecedented growth of the city. Through the postwar period, large tracts of suburban housing were built across the region, turning downtown Victoria into an increasingly active urban core. Within this new urban context, there was a widespread acceptance of modernist architecture. Easy to build, inexpensive, economical of scarce materials, and expressive of new technology, this new type of construction rejected traditional architectural styles and provided the means to re-conceive the city in a response to current social, political and economic conditions.

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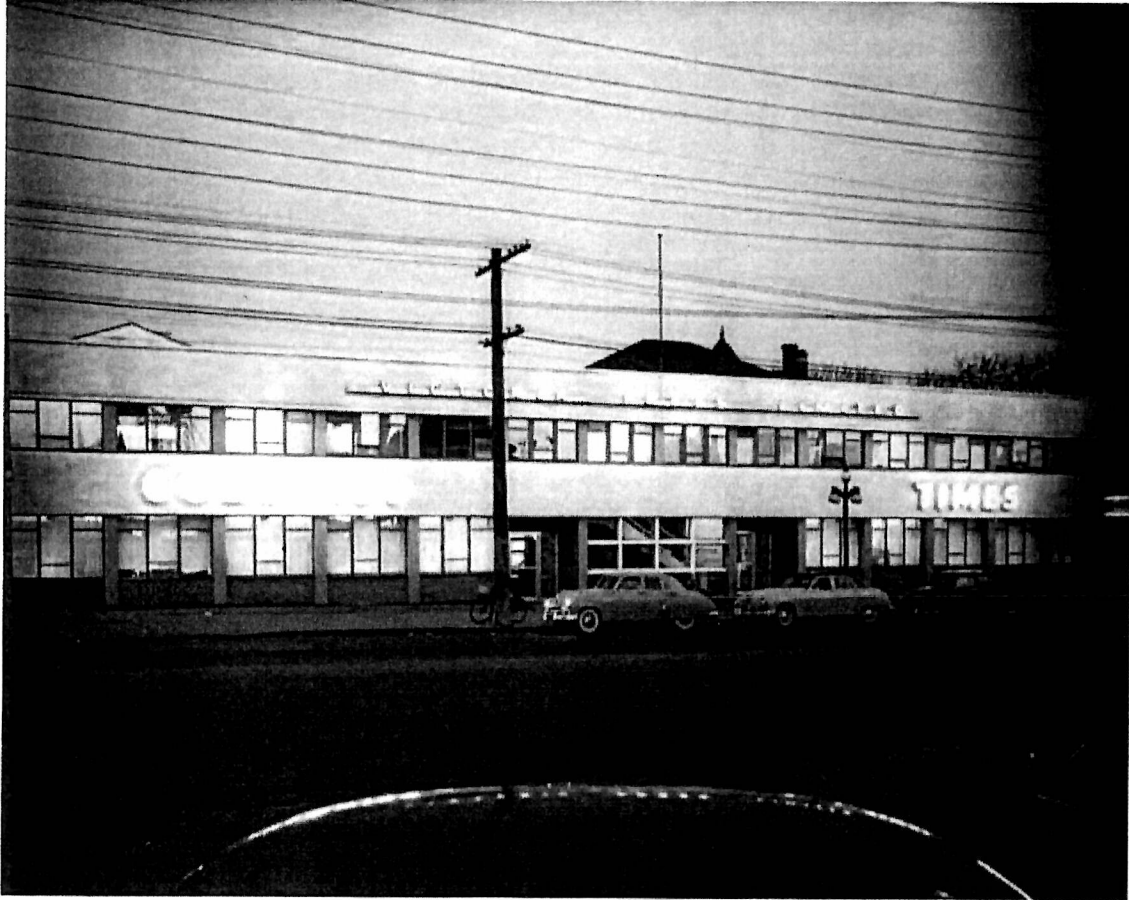
The legacy of postwar modernist architecture in Victoria is distinctly different from that of Vancouver. The differences arise in two key areas, first in the careful integration of Victoria's historic building stock within the urban context and the subsequent rise of the heritage preservation movement, as well as the development of highly idiosyncratic variations on modernism by several key architects. Victoria has long been characterized by an expectation of social conservatism. The seat of government and the military, cut-off from the mainstream of commercial activity, and perceived as a retirement community, Victoria could be considered a surprising place to find an effective and intellectual response to the postwar global trends in modern architecture. In most major North American cities, modernism was coupled with contempt for historic buildings, which were perceived as something to be swept away rather than valued. In Victoria, the introduction of modernism was characterized by a period of transition between the traditional, British ideas of architecture and a determination to rejuvenate and modernize the city. Here, a careful balance was achieved between traditionalism and modernism that, in retrospect, was far ahead of its time, and a model for current thoughts about sustainability.

As the city grew, new services were naturally required. Banks, hospitals, and schools had to be constructed rapidly in the first few years after the end of the War. The Victoria Press Building was one of the larger structures built during this time, a testament to the newspaper's importance to Victoria. Since 1858, through more than 150 years of Victoria's history, its newspaper, the *Times Colonist* (a result of the 1980 merger of the *British Colonist* and the *Victoria Daily Times*), has been the main source of information for Victorians. The *Colonist* newspaper has been produced in a number of locations across the city, though since 1951, it has been run out of an architecturally modern building along the 2600-block of Douglas Street, which was rebuilt in a larger, more prominent form in 1971, resulting in the building that remains standing at 2621 Douglas Street.



City of Victoria Archives  
Chestnut trees soon to make way for new Victoria Press building on grounds of old North Ward School, ca. 1970, City of Victoria Archives M02313

## 1.2 *TIMES COLONIST*



First Victoria Press Building, 2631 Douglas Street, 1951, British Columbia Archives I-02427

The roots of the *Times Colonist* are older than the city of Victoria and indeed, Canada itself, planted over 150 years ago. Throughout the decades, the respective newspapers, in their various iterations, were managed and edited by four B.C. premiers, two city mayors and one senator.

The first version of the paper was a weekly whose first edition of 200 copies, dated December 11, 1858, was just four pages long; the first copy went to the paper's first subscriber, Edward Cody Johnson. The paper expanded to three times a week in 1859 and in 1860, it became the *Daily British Colonist*. In 1863, the paper was sold to a group of five employees under the name Harris and Co., as other morning newspapers started appearing to challenge the *Colonist*. By that time, the paper had replaced the flatbed press with a Hoe Cylinder Press that could print 1,000, four-page papers an hour.

The newspaper moved into new quarters on the west side of Government Street across from Trounce Alley where a new press was installed, but the rollers were still hand-cranked. These technological challenges were repeated throughout the newspaper's history. In 1862, the first merger in the history of the newspaper occurred: *The Chronicle* had bought out the newly formed *Press* after the two papers waged a costly war that left both on the verge of bankruptcy. *The Colonist* and *The Chronicle* merged under the name *Daily British Colonist* and *Morning Chronicle*

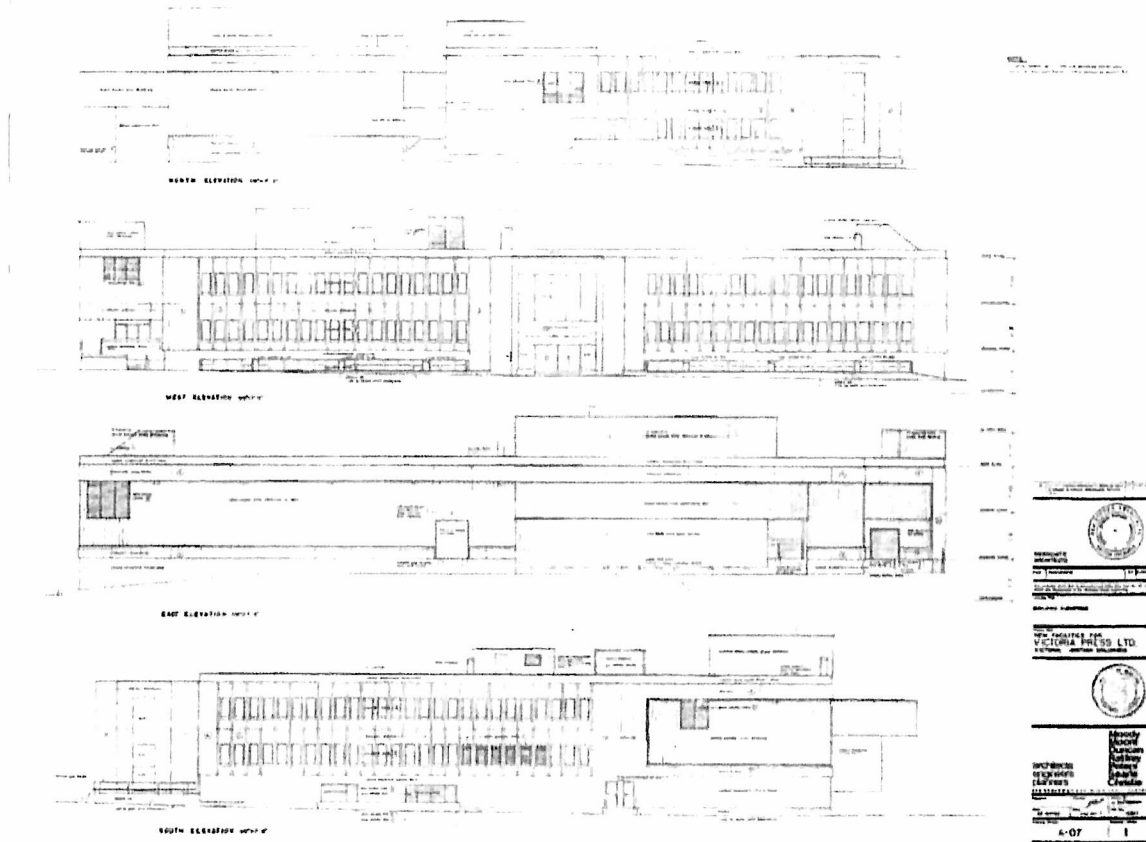
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and David W. Higgins and T.H. Long became the proprietors. The editor, as of 1869, was John Robson, a future premier, who believed in keeping the Sabbath – resulting in there being no work on Sunday for paper workers and therefore no Monday paper. There were a few exceptions, such as reporting the imminent death of Queen Victoria in 1901, but the newspaper adhered to the no-Monday rule until 1983, when it became the first B.C. paper to publish seven days a week. In 1873, the *Colonist* built a new four-storey building on Government Street where the Bedford Regency Hotel now stands, and added new steam-run presses.

On January 1, 1887, the *Colonist* dropped the word 'British' from its nameplate and became simply the *Daily Colonist*. By then it faced significant competition from the *Victoria Daily Times*, which made its first appearance on June 9, 1884, as an afternoon rival to the morning *Colonist*. In the days when newspapers identified themselves with political parties, the *Times* was the first Liberal paper in British Columbia. In 1914, the *Times* was established in a building at Fort and Broad Streets (formerly the site of the Busy Bee Saloon) that was considered to be the finest newspaper building in the Dominion. It remained the newspaper's home for more than 40 years. In the 1890s the *Colonist* moved as well - to the east side of Broad Street between Yates and View Streets with a press run of 20,000 an hour. In 1892, it was sold to James Dunsmuir, who formed The *Colonist* Printing & Publishing Co. Ltd. Dunsmuir, the son of coal baron Robert Dunsmuir and a future premier, bought the newspaper to bring its editorial policy more in line with government views. The *Daily Times*, meanwhile, had been sold to the Spencer family, of local department store fame. Financially, it was the weaker of the two dailies, but was saved when ownership passed out of local hands.

In 1950, Calgary publisher Max Bell bought the *Colonist* and the *Daily Times* and brought them under a single corporate umbrella, Victoria Press Ltd. In May 1951, the papers moved from their old downtown locations to a new building at 2631 Douglas Street, next door to the present operation. They moved into a new building at 2621 Douglas, the site of the old North Ward School, in 1972. The papers' business and printing operations were merged, but the newsrooms stayed separate even as Bell brought them into the new FP Publications Ltd. in 1959. That changed in 1980 when Thomson Newspapers bought FP and merged the Victoria papers into the *Times Colonist*, with a morning and afternoon edition. The first edition of the new *Times Colonist* appeared on September 2, 1980. In 1983, the afternoon edition was dropped and the *Times Colonist* became a seven-day-a-week morning newspaper. In 1998, Southam Newspapers bought the *Times Colonist* from Thomson, and in 2000, CanWest Publications became the paper's owner when it bought the Southam group.

## 1.2 ORIGINAL ARCHITECTS: MOODY MOORE DUNCAN RATTRAY PETERS SEARLE CHRISTIE



Moody Moore Duncan Rattray Peters Searle Christie plans of the Victoria Press Building, February 20, 1971

The partnership between Herbert Moody and Robert Moore, which became known as Moody Moore Architects, and, later, MMP Architects, began in 1936. Moody graduated from the University of Manitoba with a Bachelor's degree in architecture in 1926. His experience in the field consisted of more than two years with the firm of Derby and Robinson in Boston (from 1925 to 1928) and nearly five years work as a draftsman for the Toronto office of Sproatt and Rolph. This term ended in 1933 when a Depression-related work slowdown resulted in layoffs; Moody returned to Winnipeg and soon registered with the Manitoba Association of Architects. Before joining with Moody, Moore – who had graduated with a Bachelor's degree in architecture from the University of Manitoba in 1931 – had completed two years of apprenticeship with the firm of Northwood and Chivers in Winnipeg, having registered as an architect with the Manitoba Association of Architects in December 1934.

Given the ongoing economic crisis, undoubtedly business was, at first, difficult to come by for the young practice. The firm's modern outlook was magnified when Moody and Moore were given the opportunity to design new Hudson's Bay Store in Edmonton on the site of the previous (1893 and 1912) stores. With its signature rounded corners, black Quebec granite, Manitoba Tyndall limestone, glass blocks and stainless steel exterior this project was a jewel of the Art Moderne style, which had to be constructed in three contained sections so as not to disrupt trade. This project led to Moody and Moore later being commission to design Bay stores in Montreal, Banff and Kamloops.

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The arrival of the Second World War in 1939 affected the new partnership significantly. At this point Moody felt obliged to enlist and from 1940 to 1945, he served overseas with the Royal Canadian Engineers Army 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, achieving the rank of Major. Moody was stationed first at the Debert Military Camp in Nova Scotia – where he designed facilities for the base – and then travelled to England and France where he designed additions to military hospitals and other buildings for wartime use and, later, he spent time on repair work.

The mid-century years brought many successes and the partnership took on a fairly consistent character: it was well known that while Moody concentrated on the design of their projects, Moore was the business talent behind the successful practice, ensuring that the projects were done properly and on time. Versatile in its range of abilities, during this period Moody Moore also came to specialize in hospital, laboratory and other medical facilities – a natural development given Moody's wartime experience. Education was another early area of expertise for Moody and Moore. In the early postwar period, they designed a plethora of educational facilities, though perhaps the most significant of these was the firm's work in the early 1970s (around the time the Victoria Press Building was designed) on the expansion of the University of Winnipeg.

In 1969, Moody Moore Architects combined with the firm of Duncan Rattray Peters and Searle (formed in 1963) to become Moody Moore Duncan Rattray Peters Searle Christie, Architects, Engineers and Planners. In the past few years, the descendant of Moody Moore Architects and Moody Moore Duncan Rattray Peters Searle Christie – MMP Architects – has branched into multi-family and low-rise residential design, as well as hotel construction, while continuing to work in such areas as retail architecture, healthcare and education.

## 2.0 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE



**Name:** Victoria Press Building

**Address:** 2621 Douglas Street, Victoria, British Columbia

**Architect:** Moody Moore Duncan Rattray Peters Searle Christie

**Date of Construction:** 1971

### Description of the Historic Place

The Victoria Press Building is a linear two-storey, flat-roofed building located along Douglas Street in Victoria's Burnside neighbourhood. The building is characterized by its Late Modern architectural style with pre-cast concrete panel cladding and a prominent, sculpted entryway.

### Heritage Value of the Historic Place

The Victoria Press Building is significant for its direct association with the *Times Colonist* newspaper, as its purpose built headquarters, as well as the evolving nature of the newspaper industry, in particular during the mid to late twentieth century. Built in 1971, the building is additionally valued for its eclectic Late Modern architectural style, as designed by the architectural firm of Moody Moore Duncan Rattray Peters Searle Christie.

The Victoria Press Building is significant for its association with the *Times Colonist* newspaper, for which it was purpose built. The *Times Colonist* was created by the 1980 merger of the *British Colonist*, which began serving the people of Victoria in 1858, and the *Victoria Daily Times*, which began publishing in 1884. The *British Colonist* was founded by Amor De Cosmos, who went on to become the second premier of British Columbia. Coinciding with British Columbia's centennial as a Province of Canada, the new Victoria Press Building was constructed along Douglas Street in 1971. The *Times Colonist* newspaper exists today as the oldest daily newspaper in Western Canada and the building remains a venerable symbol of the importance of the paper to Victoria's history since the middle of the nineteenth century.

The Victoria Press Building is additionally significant for its association with the mid-century developments in the newspaper industry. Victoria Press Ltd. was established in 1950 when Max Bell bought the *British Colonist* and the *Victoria Daily Times* and brought them under a single corporate

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umbrella. In other 'two-newspaper cities' across North America, similar consolidations were occurring in response to the rising costs of producing newspapers and the changing technologies surrounding their production, such as the merging of the mechanical and financial departments of the *Vancouver Sun* and *Vancouver Province* in 1958. The first Victoria Press Building was constructed next door to the current structure in 1951, before expansion and new processing technologies required the construction of this new and larger building in 1971.

Designed in 1971 by the architectural firm of Moody Moore Duncan Rattray Peters Searle Christie, the Victoria Press Building is valued for its Late Modern architecture, with Formalist design elements. The building displays classic Modern tenets including its clean, linear design, which eschews excessive adornments, and its celebration of new building technologies, especially regarding concrete. The concrete materials on the building, specifically the technical pre-cast panels, enhance its streamlined, Modern appearance. Its simple Modern design was influenced by Formalism, which was a short-lived style used primarily for high-profile cultural, institutional and civic buildings. Though Formalism tended to reject the simple and streamlined tenets of Modernism, as well as the heavy Brutalist forms that were gaining popularity through the 1960s and 1970s, the style was cleverly implemented in cooperation with its stylistic relatives on the Victoria Press Building. Formalism highlighted Classical proportions and elements, but also incorporated new concrete technologies, which often resulted in sculpted forms. This is displayed on the curved full-height walls on either side of the front entryway. The building remains a refined and rare example, outside of Winnipeg, of the work of Moody Moore Duncan Rattray Peters Searle Christie, who were known for their institutional commissions. The building continues to be a significant contribution to the architectural landscape of Victoria's downtown/Burnside neighbourhood.

### Character-Defining Elements

The elements that define the heritage character of the Victoria Press Building are its:

- location on along Douglas Street in Victoria's Burnside neighbourhood;
- continuous use by Victoria Press Ltd. since 1971;
- commercial form, scale and massing as expressed by its symmetrical rectilinear form, two-storey height, with full-basement level, and prominent central entryway;
- characteristics of the Late Modern style including its pre-cast concrete panels, exposed aggregate stucco cladding at the entry, roof and foundation lines, and its full-height central entryway with rounded pre-cast concrete walls, suggesting the influence of Formalism, which features a bell-cast stucco covered entry, red-tiled steps, and geometric metal handrails, which are also featured in the interior of the building;
- original smoked-glass recessed fixed-pane window assemblies designed to fit one per pre-cast panel across all elevations; and
- red and yellow cedar carvings by Godfrey Stephens, erected in 1973 in the lobby of the building.

## RESEARCH SUMMARY

**CIVIC ADDRESS:** 2621 Douglas Street, Victoria, British Columbia

**LEGAL ADDRESS:** Lot 2, Section 4, Victoria, Plan 23740

**HISTORIC NAME:** Victoria Press Building

**ORIGINAL TENANT:** Victoria Press Ltd. (*Times Colonist* newspaper)

**ARCHITECT:** Moody Moore Duncan Rattray Peters Searle Christie

**DATE OF CONSTRUCTION:** 1971

### RESEARCH SOURCES:

- British Columbia Archives
- City of Victoria Archives
- University of Victoria Libraries
- <http://www.mmparchitects.com/history/>



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