

MONTROSE APARTMENTS

1114-1126 BLANSHARD STREET

Original Owner: Andrew Sheret

Architect: C. Elwood Watkins

Date of Construction: 1912

Description of Historic Place

The Montrose Apartments is a three-storey, brick apartment block, located at the corner of Blanshard and View Streets in Downtown Victoria. The two main façades are articulated with decorative Edwardian-era elements, including brick detailing in two colours. Six retail storefronts face Blanshard Street, with the two central ones having the narrowest frontage.

Heritage Value of Historic Place

Constructed during the height of the pre-World War One real estate boom, the Montrose Apartments is valued as a reflection of the surge of development that characterized Victoria's gateway economy. With its substantial size, brick construction and classically-influenced detailing, the Montrose was, and remains, a downtown landmark. It was built in 1912 as an investment property by Andrew Sheret (1870- 1947), who had arrived in Victoria in 1891. He established a local plumbing firm in 1893 that continues in business to the present day; a painted sign advertising Sheret's Plumbing is still visible on the west façade. Sheret named this apartment building after Montrose, his birthplace in Scotland. Its scale reflects the optimism and rapid growth of the Edwardian era, prior to the collapse of the local economy in 1913 and the outbreak of World War One the following year. The Montrose illustrates the continuing redevelopment of the eastern edge of downtown, through the replacement of earlier buildings on prime sites during a time of great prosperity. At the time it was built, Blanshard Street was being established as a significant north-south commercial street that rivalled Douglas and Government Streets.

The Montrose Apartments is a superior example of the dense, cubic apartment blocks typical of the Edwardian era, which provided housing alternatives in a rapidly urbanizing environment. Originally an apartment-hotel, it provided a variety of accommodation in a location that provided convenient access to downtown amenities. The city relied increasingly on trade and commerce and was growing swiftly with large numbers of immigrants. Apartment blocks suited people and families in transition who could not afford or did not want a single-family home. This was a familiar housing type to those from denser eastern cities and from Europe, who were fuelling coastal settlement.

This is also notable as a superior example of the work of Victoria-born C. Elwood Watkins (1875-1942). Watkins began his architectural apprenticeship in 1890 in the office of Thomas Hooper, and by 1902 had become a full partner. He opened his own office in 1909, and in addition to his many commercial, institutional and residential projects, Watkins was the official architect of the Victoria and Saanich School Boards. Reflective of the architectural expression of the Classical Revival styles that were popular during the Edwardian era, the Montrose is articulated in a tripartite division of base, shaft and capital. The richly-detailed main façades are clad in two tones of brick, with sophisticated detailing that demonstrates a high quality of design and craftsmanship.

Character-Defining Elements

Key elements that define the heritage character of the Montrose Apartments include its:

- prominent location at the corner of Blanshard and View Streets, in Victoria's historic downtown core
- continuous use as an apartment building with retail storefronts at ground level
- form, scale and massing as expressed in its three-storey height, full basement, rectangular plan, flat
- roof and central entry with raised parapet above, built to the property lines with no setbacks
- Edwardian era decorative features including: symmetrical design that demonstrates a Classical Revival influence; pressed metal cornice above the storefronts; arched window hoods with keystones; herringbone brick nogging in spandrels; decorative cast-stone insets; and central arched entry with inset oak door assembly
- masonry construction, including pressed tan brick for two main façades, high-fire iron-spot brown brick for quoins and piers, concrete window sills, and common red brick for side and rear façades
- original fenestration, including: variety of 6-over-1 and 8-over-1 double-hung wooden sash windows in single and double assembly; 1-over-1 double-hung wooden sash windows in lightwell on south side; and multi-paned casement window assemblies with transoms in central stairwell
- surviving early storefront elements including transoms, bulkhead tiling, and mosaic tile insets at the entries
- flagpole above main entry
- early painted wall sign on west façade
- areaways that extend under the sidewalk, with purple glass prism lights interior features including original room configuration, central staircase with cut-out flat balusters, lath-and-plaster walls and wooden trim