

Schedule A

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

LEE BLOCK 565 FISGARD STREET

Updated March 2024, City of Victoria

Civic Address: 565 Fisgard Street, Victoria, BC

Original Owners: Lee Woy, Lee Yan and Lee Chong

Architects: Hooper & Watkins

Builder: Thomas Brydon

Date: 1910



DESCRIPTION OF HISTORIC PLACE

The Lee Block is a prominent building located at the corner of Fisgard and Government Streets in the heart of Victoria's Chinatown. The three-storey masonry building is identifiable by its corner siting in Chinatown and location adjacent to the Gate of Harmonious Interest. The Edwardian-era commercial building with its symmetrical structural bays and regular fenestration, contains storefronts on the main floor.

HERITAGE VALUE

The Lee Block is valued as part of a grouping of early buildings that contribute to the historic character and urban pattern of Victoria's Chinatown a National Historic Site, the oldest and most intact Chinatown in Canada. In the 1850s, exacerbated by political and social turmoil in China, thousands of Chinese migrated from a small region in the southern province of Guangdong to frontier gold rush sites in California, setting up a permanent base in San Francisco. In 1858, the Fraser Gold Rush spurred the growth of Victoria as a significant port town and prompted the

movement of many Chinese into the province. Victoria was the primary point of entry for Chinese into Canada until the early twentieth century.

The buildings are also representative of the dominant role Chinese merchants played in Victoria's Chinatown. Chinese merchants, already established in San Francisco, moved to [Victoria](#) and purchased lots as early as 1858, opening stores backed by funding from San Francisco headquarters. The Lee Block was a product of the second wave of merchants who immigrated to Victoria's Chinatown in the 1890s to 1910s. Lot 442 was purchased by Lee Woy, Lee [Yan](#) and Lee Cheong, who owned Lee Woy & Company, in 1910, and the building was constructed as 'stores and rooms' the same year. The use of a 'cheater-storey', a low-ceiling mezzanine that was not taxed, is one of its significant character-defining elements and typical of commercial buildings in Chinatown. The Lees also owned the Lee Woy & Company Building, 557-571 Fisgard Street. In 1954, the Lee Block was sold to the Dart Coon Club.

The Lee Block is also expressive of a degree of duality in its architecture. With its main frontage on Government Street, the Lee Block presents an almost totally Western appearance. Designed in a symmetrical fashion and divided into distinct bays, it displays the tripartite articulation that reflects the influence of the Chicago School. The exterior evidence of its Chinese ownership and use is limited to the multiple doorways to the upper floor, which indicate the presence of tenements and meeting rooms for volunteer association on the upper floors. Western architects were hired to design buildings throughout Chinatown, as the Chinese were shunned as professionals in the building trades. Charles Elwood Watkins (1875-1942), a prolific Victoria architect, designed the Lee Block. In addition to his many commercial, [institutional](#) and residential projects, Watkins had a number of clients in the Chinese community.

This building was built by Contractor Thomas Anderson Brydon (b. Selkirk, SCT, 1855-1920) who was prominent both professionally and politically, and his association with this building contributes to its historical value. Brydon apprenticed in Edinburgh as a carpenter and joiner and came to Victoria in 1885 and by 1889 Brydon was Clerk of Works for the construction of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church (924 Douglas St, Downtown). He constructed many buildings, including the [Janion](#) Block and the Chinese School (636 Fisgard St, Downtown). Brydon served on Victoria City Council from 1899-1901 and in 1906 Thomas became the first Reeve of the newly formed Saanich Municipality.



CHARACTER-DEFINING ELEMENTS

Key elements that define the heritage character of the Lee Block include its:

- location on Government Street, at the corner of Fisgard Street, part of a grouping of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century historic masonry buildings in Victoria's Chinatown
- continuous commercial, residential tenement and institutional use
- siting on the front and side property lines, with no setbacks
- commercial form, scale and massing as expressed by its three-storey height, with 'cheater' mezzanine, bevelled corner with storefront entry; rectangular plan, flat roof, series of doorways leading to the upper floors, and storefronts facing Government Street
- construction materials, including pressed tan-brick cladding with red mortar on the two main facades, common red-brick side and rear walls, and cast-iron storefront columns
- influence of the Chicago School including: tripartite façade articulation; symmetrical structural bays separated by brick pilasters; pressed metal cornices with metal modillions and corbels; and side entry on Fisgard Street with a sheet metal pediment
- multiple doorways leading to the upper storey tenements and meeting rooms
- sidewall chimneys indicating upper floor occupation
- original windows including one-over-one double-hung wooden-sash windows facing Fisgard Street, storefront transoms facing Government Street and multi-paned wooden-sash windows above the side and corner entries
- interior elements, such as the 'cheater' mezzanine

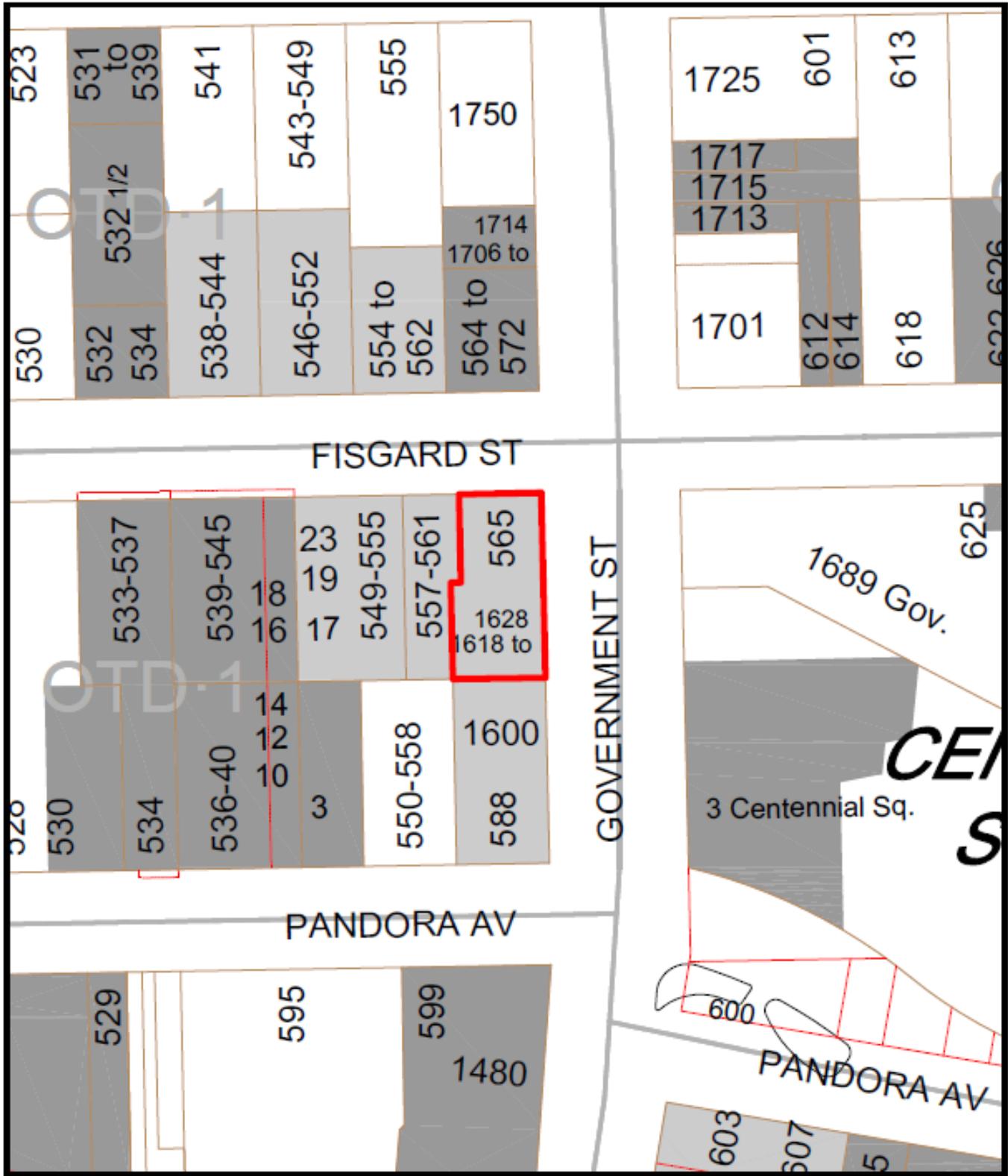
VICTORIA HERITAGE THEMATIC FRAMEWORK

565 Fisgard fits within a few different themes of Victoria's Heritage Thematic Framework. Firstly, this building represents Theme 1.2 Multi-Cultural Origins and 2.1 Frontier Boom Town as in the 1850s, due to political and social turmoil in China, thousands of Chinese migrated from a small region in the southern province of Guangdong to frontier gold rush sites in California, setting up

a permanent base in San Francisco. In 1858, the Fraser Gold Rush spurred the growth of Victoria as a significant port town and prompted the movement of many Chinese into the province. The building is also representative of the dominant role Chinese merchants played in Victoria's Chinatown and the Lee Block was a product of the second wave of merchants who immigrated to Victoria's Chinatown in the 1890s to 1910s. Lastly, the aesthetic value of the building is a good example of a commercial building that shows influence of the Classical Revival style, prevalent during the Edwardian era and an architectural expression that reflects the influence of the Chicago school, so this aligns with theme 5.1 Architectural Expression.







565 Fisgard Street

Heritage Designation #000207



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