

# SELF-DIRECTED GUIDE BOOK ENGLISH



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
*of* BRITISH COLUMBIA





## Welcome to the British Columbia Parliament Buildings

In this booklet you will find an overview that describes the architectural and historical significance of these working buildings that are home to the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia. The information is laid out to assist you in a self-guided tour of the buildings.

The Parliament Buildings and surrounding areas are located in the traditional territories of the Lekwungen-speaking (pronounced Le-KWUNG-en) peoples. Now known as the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, these Coast Salish people have a rich culture and history dating back thousands of years.

We hope that you will enjoy your visit.

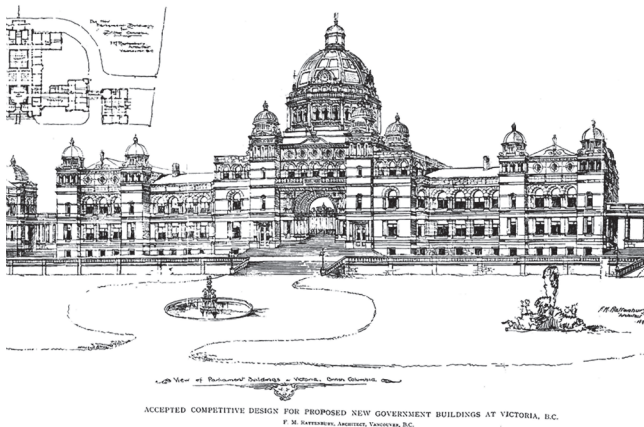


## THE BIRDCAGES

Construction of the first legislative buildings on this site, known as the “Birdcages,” began in 1859 and was completed in 1864. These buildings were described in the press of the time as “a mixed style of architecture, the latest fashion for Chinese pagoda, Swiss-cottage and Italian-villa fancy birdcages.”

The Birdcages continued to serve as the capital buildings after British Columbia became a province in 1871. By the early 1890s, they were no longer large enough to serve the growing population’s needs.

In 1892 an architectural contest was held to select a design for new Parliament Buildings. Of 65 sets of drawings submitted by competitors from across North America, those of 25-year old architect, Francis Mawson Rattenbury, were selected. This project was his first major commission and, following its successful completion, he went on to design several more landmark structures in British Columbia.

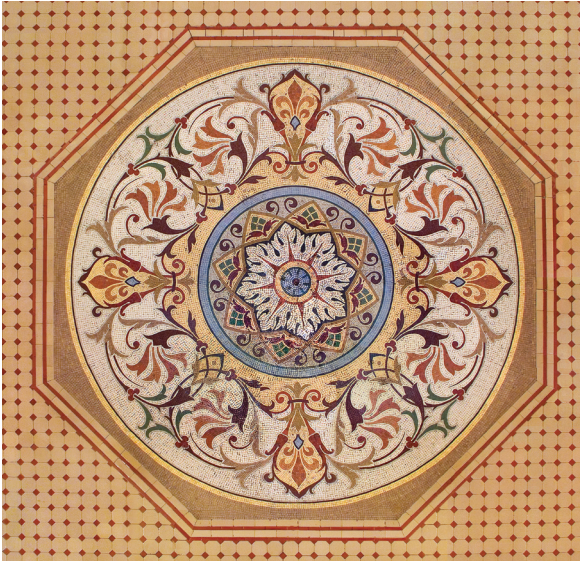


## PARLIAMENT BUILDING DESIGN

Construction on the new Parliament Buildings began in 1893 and was completed by the end of 1897. The Parliament Buildings were officially opened on February 10, 1898. Various additions were completed between 1913 and 1920. The cost of all of the construction was just over \$2 million.

The style of the Parliament Buildings has been described as “free classical,” Renaissance and Romanesque. Rattenbury designed the building to feature, wherever possible, the raw materials of the Province. The grey Haddington Island andesite on all facades of the building, the Nelson Island granite used in the foundation and front stairs, the now-oxidized copper domes, and the assortment of hardwoods paneling the interior rooms display the abundant natural resources of British Columbia. Slate from Jervis Inlet originally tiled the roof, although during the restoration it was replaced with Pittsburgh slate.

After 70 years without regular improvements, the Parliament Buildings had deteriorated noticeably. With leaking roofs, rotting foundation timbers and an antiquated electrical system, the building was showing its age. In 1972, the government committed to an extensive restoration and renovation of the building at a cost of \$80 million.



## THE LOWER ROTUNDA

In the centre of the room on the floor is a hand-laid Italian mosaic. Placed on the mosaic is *Shxwtitostel*, a traditional inland river canoe, carved by The Honourable Steven Point, 28th Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia, and Chief Tony Hunt, Hereditary Chief of the KwaGulth and master carver. *Shxwtitostel* means “a safe place to cross the river” and represents the idea of a bridge between peoples.

Looking upward, the dome stretches to a height of 30.5 metres (100 feet). Rattenbury chose to use an octagonal renaissance-style dome that distinguishes the Parliament Buildings from the many circular neo-classical domes used on American state and federal capitol buildings. On top of the dome is a two-meter tall statue of Captain George Vancouver. The statue is made of beaten copper and plated with 14 carat gold.



## BRITISH COLUMBIA COAT OF ARMS



Adopted in 1987, the British Columbia Coat of Arms contains elements of our colonial past and the province's natural splendour. The crowned lion standing on the crown represents

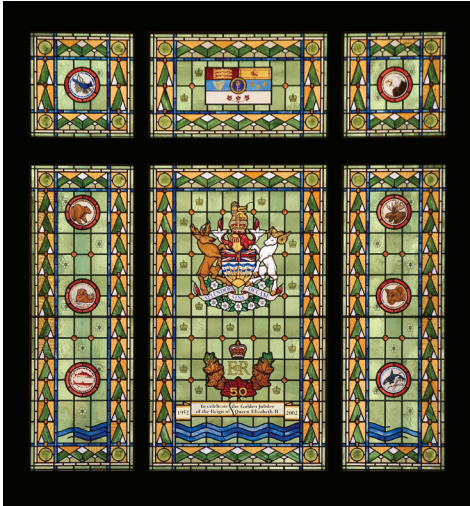
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's Royal Crest. On the shield, the blue stripes represent the Pacific Ocean while the white stripes represent the snow-capped Rocky Mountains. The setting sun indicates B.C. is Canada's western-most province. On the left, the wapiti stag (or elk) represents the former Colony of Vancouver Island while the big horned mountain sheep on the right represents the former mainland Colony of British Columbia. The motto at the bottom — "splendor sine occasu" — is written in Latin and essentially means "Beauty without Diminishment" or "Beauty without End." Located around both the lion's neck and the bottom of the Coat of Arms is a dogwood garland—B.C.'s provincial flower since 1956.

## HALL OF HONOUR

Today, the Hall of Honour is used for special functions and receptions, but forty years ago it was still office space for the former Department of Lands and Forests. At that time, the space was partitioned into cubicles with red linoleum on the floor. During the restoration, the ceiling of this room was discovered and restored to its original Early French Renaissance style. When the linoleum was lifted, restorers recovered the original parquet of local Douglas fir.

# STAINED GLASS

## QUEEN ELIZABETH II'S GOLDEN JUBILEE WINDOW



The Golden Jubilee Window was a gift from the Government of British Columbia to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II to commemorate her Golden Jubilee in 2002. It was crafted by two Victoria artisans, Edward Schaefer and Thomas Mercer. In the topmost portion, you will notice Her Majesty's Canadian Royal Standard. This is the Queen's own personal Canadian flag and is flown only when Her Majesty is in Canada.

You can also see various B.C. symbols, including our provincial bird, the Steller's Jay, our provincial fish, the Pacific Salmon, and our provincial gemstone, jade, which is indicated by the green inserts at the bottom.

## QUEEN VICTORIA'S DIAMOND JUBILEE WINDOW

The Diamond Jubilee Window was commissioned for Her Majesty Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, the sixtieth year of her reign, in 1897. On the left side is the date of the 18 year-old Queen Victoria's accession to the throne (1837), and to the right is the date of her Diamond Jubilee (1897). The letters "V" and "R" stand for the Latin "Victoria Regina," or Queen Victoria.





The Diamond Jubilee Window was originally located on the second floor behind the Legislative Chamber. In 1912, due to the construction of the new Legislative Library, it was placed in the cellar for safe-keeping, where it remained for the next 62 years until it was found during the restoration in 1974.

At the topmost portion of the window, you will notice British Columbia's original Coat of Arms. The government adopted this Coat of Arms by Order-in-Council in 1895. It contains many of the same symbols as the one used today, however, British officials were unable to accept this design. It was considered inappropriate to have the British flag on the shield in an inferior position to the setting sun, as it contradicted the popular expression of the day that "the sun never sets on the British Empire." The flowers in the original are the emblems of the United Kingdom: the purple thistle of Scotland, the green shamrock of Ireland, the pink Tudor rose of England, and the yellow daffodil of Wales.

## STAIR WINDOWS

As you climb the stairs to the Memorial Rotunda, you will notice a set of stained glass windows, displaying quotations from 17th and 18th English writers and thinkers, which are here to inspire legislators and spectators as they approach the Chamber.



# THE MEMORIAL ROTUNDA

The Memorial Rotunda gained its name because it is the site of several war memorials dedicated to British Columbians who gave their lives for Canada. The Books of Remembrance list the names of British Columbian civil servants who served as soldiers and who died during the First and Second World Wars.

In the centre of the Memorial Rotunda is an open circle surrounded by a ring of dark Tennessee marble. The walls are lined with two colours of Tennessee marble and decorated with 23 carat gold leaf, which was applied during the restoration. The terrazzo floor is constructed from tiny segments of marble and granite that were imported from Italy.

Four paintings decorate the dome of the Memorial Rotunda representing the primary economic industries of early British Columbia: forestry, fishing, agriculture and mining. Painted on canvas in 1935 by George H. Southwell, they were installed in 1952.





## CEREMONIAL ENTRANCE

The Ceremonial Entrance provides access to the Memorial Rotunda and leads directly into the Chamber – the physical and symbolic heart of these buildings. It is only used for the most special of occasions, including each year in February, when the Lieutenant Governor enters the buildings to open a new session of parliament. Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II, last came through these doors in March of 1983.

A new precedent was established on December 2, 1998 when Chief Joseph Gosnell was accompanied through the Ceremonial Entrance to address the Legislative Assembly from the bar of the House during debate on the *Nisga'a Final Agreement Act*. He has been followed by a number of First Nations Chiefs attending to complete treaty agreements.

# LEGISLATIVE CHAMBER



The Chamber, which measures 12 by 18 metres (40 by 60 feet), is paneled with brown Italian marble and decorated with 22 columns of green, white and purple Italian marble. The ceiling is trimmed with gold leaf and features four domed stained-glass skylights. The large wrought-iron lamps are replicas of those hung in the Chamber in 1898.

Inside the Chamber, elected Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) serve as members of the government or as members of the opposition. Government MLAs are those members who belong to the political party that wins the largest number of seats in a general election. The political party that wins the second largest number of seats forms the Official Opposition. MLAs from other political parties

and independent MLAs are also part of the opposition. The role of opposition MLAs is to question government actions and present alternatives to existing policies.

When parliament is in session, MLAs are responsible for studying, debating and voting on all proposed laws (called bills) that are introduced in the Chamber, also referred to as the House. In addition, they scrutinize and approve the government's budget spending proposals (known as estimates), and they ask questions about government plans and activities.

Another important way that MLAs serve their constituents is by representing their views in the House and raising local issues that concern them. MLAs serve as an important link between the public and government, helping people in their constituencies to access government programs and agencies.

## MEMBERS' DESKS

The Chamber is divided into rows of desks on either side of the floor. Traditionally, the government sits to the Speaker's right, and the opposition sits to the Speaker's left. In B.C.'s first parliament, back in 1872, there were 25 MLAs. Today, there are 87 MLAs elected from across British Columbia to serve in the Legislative Assembly.

## SPEAKER'S CHAIR

At the far end of the Chamber is the Speaker's Chair. The Speaker is an MLA elected to preside over debates and make sure the House follows established rules of behaviour and procedure. The Speaker is elected by a secret ballot by all MLAs. Once elected, the Speaker must behave in a non-partisan manner and is responsible for ensuring that all MLAs, no matter what party they belong to, are treated fairly and impartially.



## CLERKS' TABLE

The table in front of the Speaker's Chair is the Clerks' Table. The Clerk of the House and assistant Clerks sit here, ready to advise the Speaker and MLAs on parliamentary procedure.

## PUBLIC GALLERY

The Public Galleries are the seats located on the third floor that overlook the Chamber and are open to the public when the Legislative Assembly is in session.

## PRESS GALLERY

The first row of the gallery directly above the Speaker's Chair is reserved for members of the media who are assigned to cover news stories about the Legislative Assembly and the provincial government.

## THE MACE

Centuries ago, the Mace was the personal weapon of the Sergeant-at-Arms and also his badge of office and authority, displaying the royal insignia to people who could not read. In modern times, the Mace has become the symbol of the authority of the House and of the Speaker, and it must be present on the Clerks' Table for the Legislative Assembly to conduct its business. Its presence signifies that the House is in full session, with the monarch's full knowledge and consent.





**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
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This concludes your tour of the Parliament Buildings. Thank you for visiting us today.

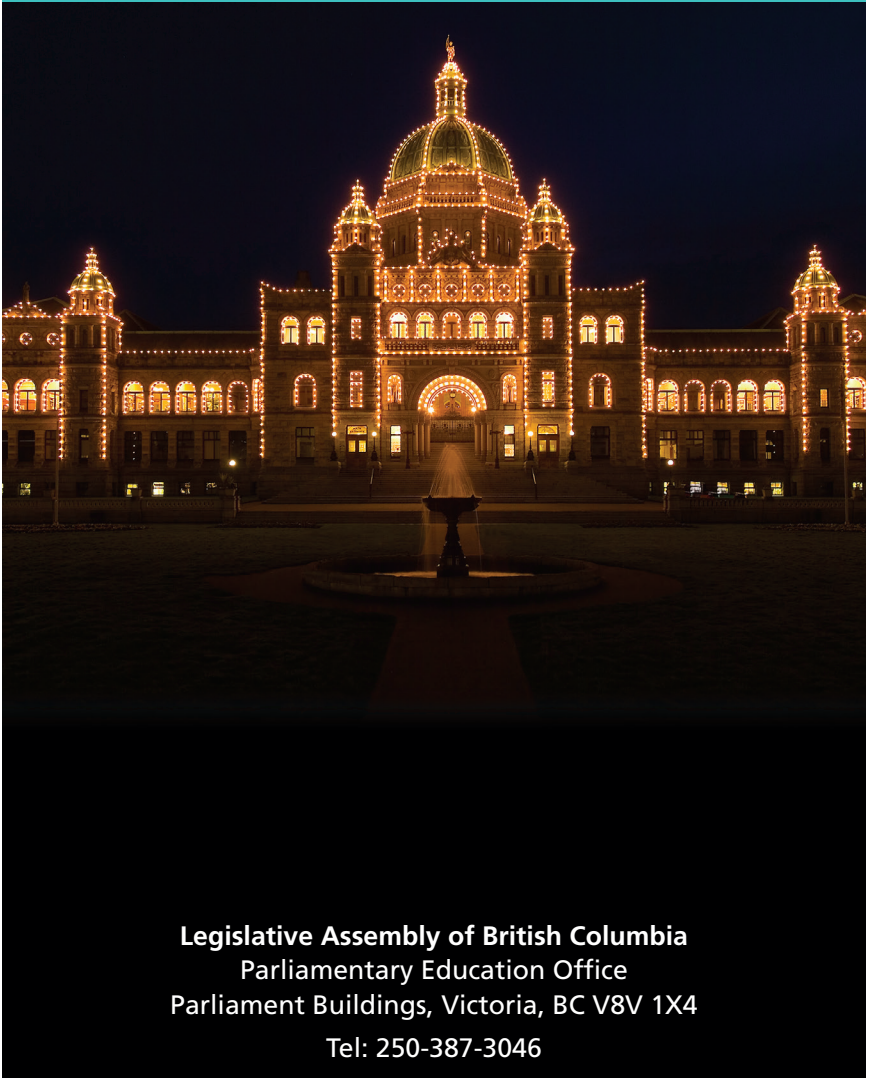
We hope that you have enjoyed your visit to the Parliament Buildings.

If you would like more information, please visit the website at

**[www.leg.bc.ca](http://www.leg.bc.ca)**



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