

Downtown New Westminster is the heart and oldest part of the Royal City.

Behind a modern facade of bustling bridal boutiques and friendly coffee shops, visitors will discover a rich civic history dating back to the late 19th century—even before the iconic CPR first chugged alongside this stretch of the Fraser River.

Today visitors can see how New Westminster's modern metropolitan sensibility seamlessly blends with its timeless small town charm. Traffic in the area is kept to a minimum due to posted 30km speed limits, making this an ideal spot to park and take a stroll.



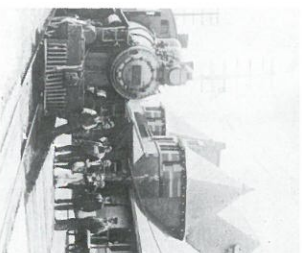
The area may be best known for boutique shops and antiques, which is no surprise considering the city's rich historical past. Both Front and Columbia Streets house thousands of square feet of furniture and collectables.

Downtown is easily accessed from both the Columbia and New Westminster SkyTrain stations or the City Parkade at Fourth and Columbia Streets. Begin your tour at the bottom of Eighth Street and Columbia Street at Hyack Square. As you go, don't forget to look up! Admire the architectural detail, which ranges from the Victorian period through modern today.

FRONT STREET

Once known as New Westminster's other main downtown street, Front Street was named either for its location along the waterfront or it was the Front of the city. Colonel Moody's initial plan for the city included several lots and streets where land did not exist. The intent was to later fill this land in to create the city's docks. Historic Front Street was also home to the original Chinatown, waterfront docks and a market. Today, Front Street boasts several interesting antique stores and a dance studio. It is also where Blackbuster movies such as I, Robot, New Moon, Blade and Shooter were filmed. The waterfront area along Front Street will soon be a 10 acre Westminster Pier Park.





1
Key Restaurant
(former Canadian Pacific Railroad Station)
800 Columbia Street

Architect: Edward Maxwell, Gardner & Mercer, 1899
Built in the CPR Chateau style, the New Westminster station saw depot receptions for the Duke of Connaught in 1912, Edward, Prince of Wales in 1919, and Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip in 1951. Originally a wooden CPR station was erected around the time the railway arrived in 1886. The station burned down in 1898 and was replaced by the stone and brick building you see today — now the home of the Key restaurant.



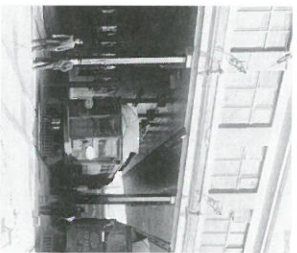
4
Trapp Block
668 Columbia Street

Architects: Gardiner & Mercer, 1912–1913
Initially completed in 1902, the Trapp Building was built as a four-story warehouse for I.J. Trapp's hardware business across the street — a convenient location to offload wholesale supplies from the railway along Front Street. A fifth story was added in 1904, and eight years later it reached its current seven-story profile. The building's terracotta facade is an excellent example of Chicago School architecture.



2
Hyack Square
800 Columbia Street

Adjoining the station, Hyack Square was created from the bottom part of 8th Street — built entirely on reclaimed land. Before Front Street existed the area served as an access point to the warehouses and wharf lining New Westminster's shoreline. During both world wars, this same area was the assembly point for soldiers boarding trains to go overseas. Today the Square is a meeting point for local events — the Santa Clause Parade, the Annual Show and Shine car show, and Music in the Square.



3
BC Electric Building
(now Salvation Army Thrift Store)
811 Columbia Street

Architect: MacLure and Fox, 1911
Beside Hyack Square, the large brick structure that now houses the Salvation Army thrift store was home to the BC Electric Railway. From this interurban station, commuters rode electric streetcars into Vancouver, throughout New Westminster and into Sapperton. Throughout the railway years the square was a gathering place for travelers, but crowds lessened when the interurban line stopped running in the 1930s and the CPR stopped in the 1960s.



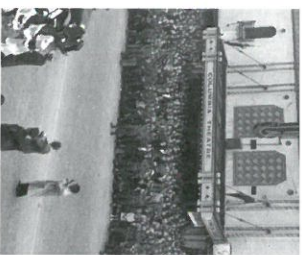
5
Crescent/Lewis Block
(now Copp's Shoes)
630 Columbia Street
1905

The Crescent Block was built for Major Charles T Dupont of Victoria. Copp's Shoe Store, at the corner, is worth a visit for its Edwardian period interior. The family shoe store has been in business since 1925 and is run by the fourth generation of the Capps family. Visitors can still see the original oak National Cash Register and the silver Fairbanks scale, used by a very thrifty John Percy Copp to make sure he was not being shorted on weight by the parcel delivery services.



6
Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce
(now UFCW Local 247)
544 Columbia Street

Architect: Darling & Pearson, Toronto, 1911
This handsome Classical Revival building is built in brick and stone with fluted columns and lavish architectural detail. Bank clerks used to live on top floor. Beside the bank at the Sixth Street corner is the 1899 Ellis Block, a brick and stone block designed by J.G. Tanks for the Bank of BC.



7
Columbia Theatre
(now Burr Theatre)
530 Columbia Street

In 1927, a new “atmospheric” theatre opened its doors and the age of motion picture entertainment came to town. The Columbia opened to great fanfare and expectations with a mixture of “vaudeville and photoplay” (cinema, vaudeville, and live music). In the late 1990’s, the building was destined to be a community project named after prominent native son, actor Raymond Burr. Today, the theatre is planned to live on in the downtown as the new Lufflines at the Burr Theatre.



10
Bank of Montreal
(now Whitley wedding)
511 Columbia Street

Architect: Sharp, Thompson, Berwick & Pratt, 1947-48
The Bank of Montreal has been on this site since 1888. In 1911, it was the scene of the then biggest vault robbery in North America. The current structure was designed by architects Sharp, Thompson, Berwick, and Pratt, the longest surviving architectural firm in Vancouver’s history, known for the design of UBC. Across Church Street, local favourite, the Heritage Grill serves up an eclectic West Coast / European menu and live music every night.



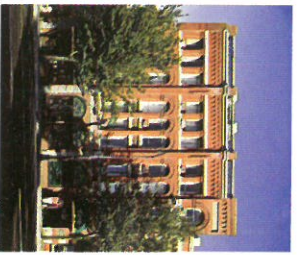
8
T. Eaton Company Building
(now Army and Navy Department Store)
502 Columbia Street

Architect: C.B.K. Van Norman, 1949
The Eaton’s building is typical of the large department stores that began to proliferate in city centres after the Second World War. The building sits on the former site of Lytton Square—originally laid out by Colonel Richard Moody and the Royal Engineers as the heart of town. Lining the Square were the Hotel Lytton and the City Market, originally established in 1893 and thought by some to be the origin of the Great Fire of 1898



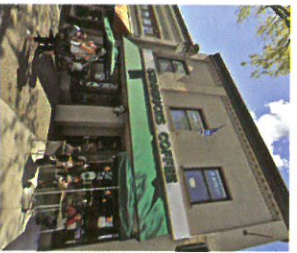
11
Federal Building and Post Office
(now New Westminster Police Station & Museum)
549 Columbia Street

Architect: E.A. Gardiner, 1958
The current New Westminster Police headquarters has been the site of government buildings since the city was founded. Previous incarnations include customs office, library, land registry offices, city hall, and fire hall. The current building is a reinforced concrete structure with a Haddington Island stone facing. Next door, the Gifford Block, built in 1909, features tan brick and stone. Today, the building is also used as residential lofts.



9
Burr Block/ Queen’s Hotel
(now Met Hotel & Bar)
Fourth St. & Columbia Street

Architect: G.W. Groat, 1892 (Burr Block), 1887 (Queen’s Hotel)
The two oldest buildings in New Westminster’s downtown both survived the Great Fire of 1898. Fire Chief Carlisle directed the fire brigades from the top of the Burr Block that fateful night. Both buildings are designed in the Queen Anne style. The Queen’s Hotel was the city’s premier Victorian hotel and the scene of many civic banquets. Beloved English Boy swimming teacher, Joe Fortes was a bartender here in the early 1890’s.



12
Ellard Block
(now Starbucks and Drink Urban Lounge)
601 Columbia Street

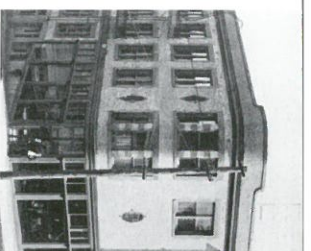
Architect: Clow & Welsh, 1899
James Ellard was a Royal Engineer who stayed in New Westminster after detachment’s disbanding in 1863. He became a merchant operating a dry goods store on this site until his death in 1878. His estate financed the construction of this building. Today the Ellard Block is home to Starbucks and chic martini bar, Drink Urban Lounge. Stop into either spot to rest your feet and enjoy an afternoon pick-me-up.



13
IOOF and
Masonic
Blocks
(now The Bridal Gallery)
705–701 Columbia
Street

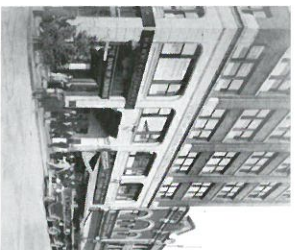
Architect: G.W. Grant, 1899

The IOOF and Masonic Blocks, rebuilt within their 1892 brick and stone walls after the 1898 fire, retain their original Victorian Romanesque architectural features—arched windows, cornice work and granite foundations.



16
Russell Hotel
(now Russell Housing Centre)
740 Carnarvon Street

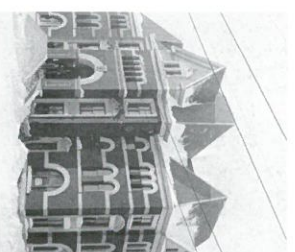
The Russell Hotel was transportation magnate Capt. E.J. Foster's answer to the city's need for a modern hotel. Built in the Classical Revival style, the tan brick and stone building immediately became the scene of May Day dinners and other civic functions. In 1910, G. Aiers Hankey of Vernon bought the Russell, calling it "the only first class hotel in the city."



14
Westminster
Building
713 Columbia Street

Architect: Gardiner & Mercer, 1912

The city's first skyscraper is of the Chicago School (also known as "commercial style"). The steel frame building is supported by forty-foot poles and clad in decorative cream terra cotta and fire-pressed bricks. Today, the building is home to the Westminster Club and Waves Coffee Lounge.



17
Former New
Westminster
Courthouse
668 Carnarvon Street

Architect: G.W. Grant, 1891/1899

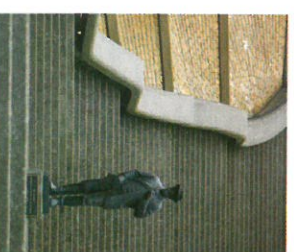
Chief Justice Matthew Baillie Begbie opened BC's first permanent provincial courthouse in 1891. At the time, violence and highway robbery were rampant south of the border, but Begbie—known as "the Hanging Judge"—ensured they were rare in BC. The original structure was destroyed in the Great Fire, but was rebuilt within the original walls by George William Grant—the city's most prestigious Victorian architect. Adjoining the building is the former 1910 Land registry building.



15
Arundel
Mansion
48 Begbie Street

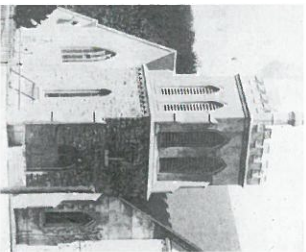
Architect: Thornton Jones, 1912

Constructed in 1912-13 for G. Aiers Hankey, this building was described by the British Columbian Newspaper as "the envy of all good housewives". The building was constructed to act as both a commercial and residential block with the latter boasting spacious bedrooms, sitting rooms and bathrooms. The apartment's kitchens contained ample cupboards, tin lined drawers, ironing boards and a cooling cupboard. Today visitors have the opportunity to spend a night in this glorious Edwardian structure.



18
New Westminster
Law Courts and
Begbie Square
653 Carnarvon Street

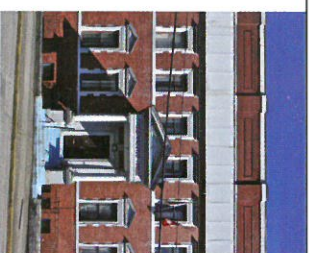
Beside the new law courts, Begbie Square is home to a bronze statue of the pioneer judge Sir Matthew Baillie Begbie. Begbie has been described as: "a towering personality with commanding character, who kept the province from being infested with those freebooters, cut-throats and gamblers who frequent all mining centres." Next to Begbie Square, at 628 Carnarvon, is the former Fisheries & Indian Affairs building, erected in 1906.



19
Holy Trinity
Cathedral
514 Camarvon
Street

Architect: G.W. Grant, 1899

In 1860, Colonel R.C. Moody chose this site "as an ornamental feature" in the centre of Victoria gardens, and a symbol of The Crown's authority in the Royal City. The Anglican church incorporates stone walls of an earlier church that burned in the Great Fire. The stained glass altar windows were designed by James Bloomfield of Henry Bloomfield and Sons.



22
Masonic Lodge
508 Agnes Street

Architect: Gardiner & Mercer, 1911

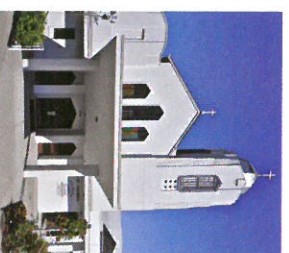
After many years of having their meeting places on Columbia Street in downtown New Westminster and also having overcome a couple of major fires, the local Masonic bodies decided to move up the hill a few blocks. In 1910/11 a new Masonic Hall was built at 508 Agnes Street on the lots that were formerly the home of a Baptist Church that was destroyed in the 1898 City fire. This building with its dramatic brick facade and entrance is home today to many Masonic organizations.



20
Emmanuel
Pentecostal
Church
321 Camarvon
Street

Architect: G.W. Grant, 1889

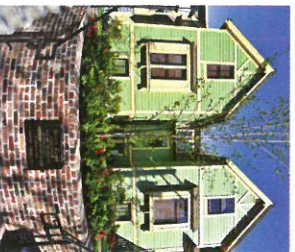
Originally built as St Andrews Presbyterian Church, this red brick Gothic Revival church, has been restored to its original 1889 appearance. From 1863, before the current structure was erected, the church met in the small adjacent wooden hall — most likely the oldest building in New Westminster, and the first Presbyterian Church on BC's mainland. Visitors can still see the original rusticated, arched, board and batten siding and elegant Regency-Gothic styled windows.



23
St. Peters Roman
Catholic Church
330 Royal Avenue

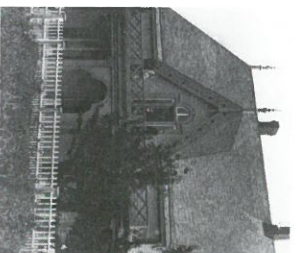
Architect: Twizell & Twizell, 1939

After an earlier St. Peter's was destroyed in a violent storm, this Art Deco landmark was built by R. W. Loftus and his congregation. It was a challenging economic time when he "...asked those who had any money to make a real sacrifice and those who had none, to donate their labour." Concrete was poured in three shifts, 24 hours a day to complete the church. The church was greatly expanded a few years ago.



21
Keary
Cottages
307/305
Camarvon Street

Maria Keary was an Irish immigrant who arrived in 1860 to join her husband, Royal Engineer James Keary. Widowed in 1870, Mrs. Keary supported her family by running a boarding house. To further supplement her income, she purchased a lot in 1887 and financed the construction of these twin Queen Anne Revival style cottages, designed to be properties as rental houses. They are likely the oldest examples of purpose-built rental accommodation in BC's Lower Mainland.



24
Irving House/
New Westminster
Museum and
Archives
302 Royal Avenue

Architect: James Symes 1865

Captain William Irving operated a fleet of paddle-wheelers on the Fraser River. His Gothic Revival style house is considered an excellent representation of early BC craftsmanship and, at the time, was described as "the best and most homelike house which British Columbia (could) yet boast." The home was part of the City's first residential area, which extended up the hill from the Downtown, laid out by Col. R.C. Moody in the City's original plan.



Welcome to historical New Westminster.

Built upon a riverbank and a storied past, the city's charm is moored in a century-and-a-half history and a 21st century future. Whether you are exploring one of New Westminster's historic neighbourhoods, or all six, you can choose to travel on foot, by bike, on SkyTrain or by car. We have suggested starting points for your heritage tours, but feel free to start and end where you like, as inspiration takes you.

New Westminster was the heart and soul of early British Columbia. As the colonial capital, the city rose from the shores of the Fraser River, board by board, brick by brick, extending up the banks to what is now the desirable Queen's Park neighbourhood with its beautiful Late-Victorian homes, and beyond.

Over 150 years ago the Royal Engineers of Great Britain were sent to choose a site for the capital



of the new colony of British Columbia. Chosen by Col. Richard Clement Moody, the city was named by Queen Victoria for her favoured part of London, "Westminster", and has been fondly referred to as the "Royal City" since. It served as colonial capital from 1859 until 1866, then until 1868 as the first capital of the United Colony of British Columbia. The start of the Gold Rush Trail, New Westminster was the mainland berth for a fleet of sternwheelers that paddled their way up the Fraser River to Yale. You can still ride such a paddlewheel.

On September 10, 1898, a Great Fire reduced to ashes the historical commercial downtown district and with it its grand brick and wooden buildings and elaborate classical facades. Showing great resilience, merchants were back in tents the next day and downtown was quickly rebuilt.

As you travel New Westminster's roads, walk its neighbourhoods, and enjoy its parks you will become aware of some curious street patterns, interesting block layouts, and other reminders of the original city plans.

We hope you enjoy the charms of New Westminster, there is plenty afoot in Western Canada's oldest city... *it's happening here!*