

89-203

Esquimalt, British Columbia

Signal Hill Building #522 (Former Armament Artificer's and Sergeant's Quarters)
CFB Esquimalt

HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT

Building #522 was built at Signal Hill in 1904 by the Royal Engineers to serve as the Armament Artificer's and Sergeant's Quarters. The site was annexed by the Navy during the Second World War. The building served as a Maritime Museum from the early 1950s until 1968. Following a period as a creative arts centre, the building now serves as part of the CFB Esquimalt Alcohol Rehabilitation Centre. The Department of National Defence is the custodian. See FHBRO Building Report 89-203.

Reasons for Designation

The former Armament Artificer's and Sergeant's Quarters was designated Recognized for its attractive design, quality materials, superb craftsmanship and landmark status, and as a result of its association with the construction of the Signal Hill army complex to defend Canada's western coastline.

Financed jointly by the British and Canadian governments, the Signal Hill portion of the coastal artillery system was designed to defend the Esquimalt naval dockyard and the Victoria coastline, and to house technical and other support facilities for the system. The Armament Artificer's and Sergeant's Quarters was part of the British Army Ordnance Corps facilities at Signal Hill, and among the last structures completed before the withdrawal of the British Garrison.

The symmetrical two-storey brick structure is composed of a rectangular block with paired projecting gables on the front facade, and a single projecting gable at the rear. The superior quality of the construction and of the decorative brickwork is characteristic of the work of the Royal Engineers.

Prominently sited at the base of Signal Hill on a rocky outcropping along the Esquimalt Road leading to the naval dockyard, the building is well known on the base. Previous uses as a naval museum and as a creative arts centre operated by the Community Arts Council of Greater Victoria have made the house a regional landmark.

Character Defining Elements

The heritage character of Building #522 resides in its symmetrical massing, fine detailing, superior construction and materials, and visual prominence in its setting.

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The symmetrical arrangement of the duplex dwelling around centre gables creates a well-proportioned compact composition. The large central chimney acts as a pivot for the design. The integrity of the form and profile should be respected.

The exterior facades are in good condition and the quality of the masonry is noteworthy. The rounded brick detailing, including projecting frieze, plinth and pilasters, the corbelled brick chimney, and the brick voussoirs forming the window openings are design features associated with the work of the Royal Engineers and should be preserved. The contrasting window sills and the original slate roof add variety and texture to the exterior. Repairs or replacement should be carried out in kind. Any masonry repairs should be undertaken in consultation with a masonry conservation expert. The multi-paned sash windows are original, and the large tripartite windows in the front gables have decorative mullions which add to their interest. Care should be taken to preserve and maintain all sashes and frames, which constitute valuable historic material.

Despite changes in the building's function, the original interior plan remains essentially unchanged. Several original fireplaces survive. Future work should respect early circulation patterns and preserve maximum original material.

The natural, rocky site is augmented by landscaping which consists of built-up grassy areas supported by stone retaining walls, while mature evergreens contribute to the informal, domestic character of the landscape. The property adjoins that of the former Married Privates' Quarters, and together they form an isolated residential enclave. The picturesque quality of the setting and historic site relationships should be preserved.

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For further guidance, please refer to the *FHBRO Code of Practice*.