

Esquimalt, British Columbia

**Signal Hill Building #523 (Former Married Privates' Quarters)**

CFB Esquimalt

**HERITAGE CHARACTER STATEMENT**

The Married Privates' Quarters (Building #523) was built in 1904 by the British Royal Engineers as part of the British Army Ordnance Corps facilities at Signal Hill. The structure became the property of the Navy during the Second World War, and served as a Maritime Museum during the 1950s and 1960s. The building is now 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 Married Privates' Quarters was designated Recognized as a result of its association with the construction of Signal Hill to defend Canada's western coastline, and for its classically-inspired design, high quality materials, superb craftsmanship, and landmark status.

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 Married Privates' Quarters housed members of the British Army Ordnance Corps, and was among the last structures completed during the joint Anglo-Canadian development phase.

The Married Privates' Quarters is a good example of the multiple-unit barracks built in Canada by the Royal Engineers, based on Georgian design antecedents. It is a one-and-a-half storey gable-roofed structure, rectangular in plan. The interior layout accommodating four residential units is expressed on the exterior through shed-roof vestibule entrances and prominent chimneys and dormers at regular intervals. The superior quality of the masonry construction and ornamental brickwork is characteristic of the work of the Royal Engineers.

The building, prominently sited along the road leading to the naval dockyard, is well known on the base. Previous use as a naval museum has made the structure a regional landmark.

**Character Defining Elements**

The heritage character of Building #523 resides in its formal massing, fine detailing, superior construction and materials, and visual prominence in its setting.

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**Signal Hill Building #523 (Former Married Privates' Quarters) (Continued)**

The formal organization of the structure into identical sections is classically inspired. Projecting front and rear vestibules, large chimneys, and gable dormers produce a lively silhouette, while the contrasts in colour and texture of the red brick, white-painted trim, large six-over-six sash windows, and grey slate roof add to the visual richness. The British-style exterior plumbing drainpipes located on the rear elevation are functional curiosities virtually unknown in Canada outside the undulate climate zone of Victoria.

The integrity of the overall exterior appearance should be preserved, and modifications which detract from it reversed; for example, electrical boxes on the front facade should be moved to a less obtrusive location. Similarly, removal of two of the four rear sheds and the bricking-in of one of the rear windows have disrupted the regularity of that facade. Future work should be predicated on an understanding of the building's intended symmetry and careful detailing.

The quality of the masonry is noteworthy. The projecting frieze, plinth and pilasters of rounded brick, the large corbelled brick chimneys, and the brick voussoirs are typical of the late nineteenth-century work of the Royal Engineers, and should be carefully preserved. Repairs or replacement should be carried out in kind, while any masonry repairs should be undertaken in consultation with a masonry conservation expert.

While the principal divisions of the interior plan remain, changes in the building's function have disrupted its integrity. The four original side-hall units are now connected by passageways at both levels, and the staircases in two units have been removed. However, several original fireplaces are extant. All remaining original finishes and fittings should be identified and preserved, and early circulation patterns restored where possible.

The front of the site is landscaped with grass and trees appropriate to a residential setting. The rear is occupied by a large paved parking lot backed by a fence separating it from the industrial area to the rear. The appearance of the site could be enhanced by introducing soft landscaping elements into this paved area. The property, along with the adjoining former Armament Artificer's and Sergeant's Quarters, forms an isolated residential enclave: this historic relationship should be preserved.

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