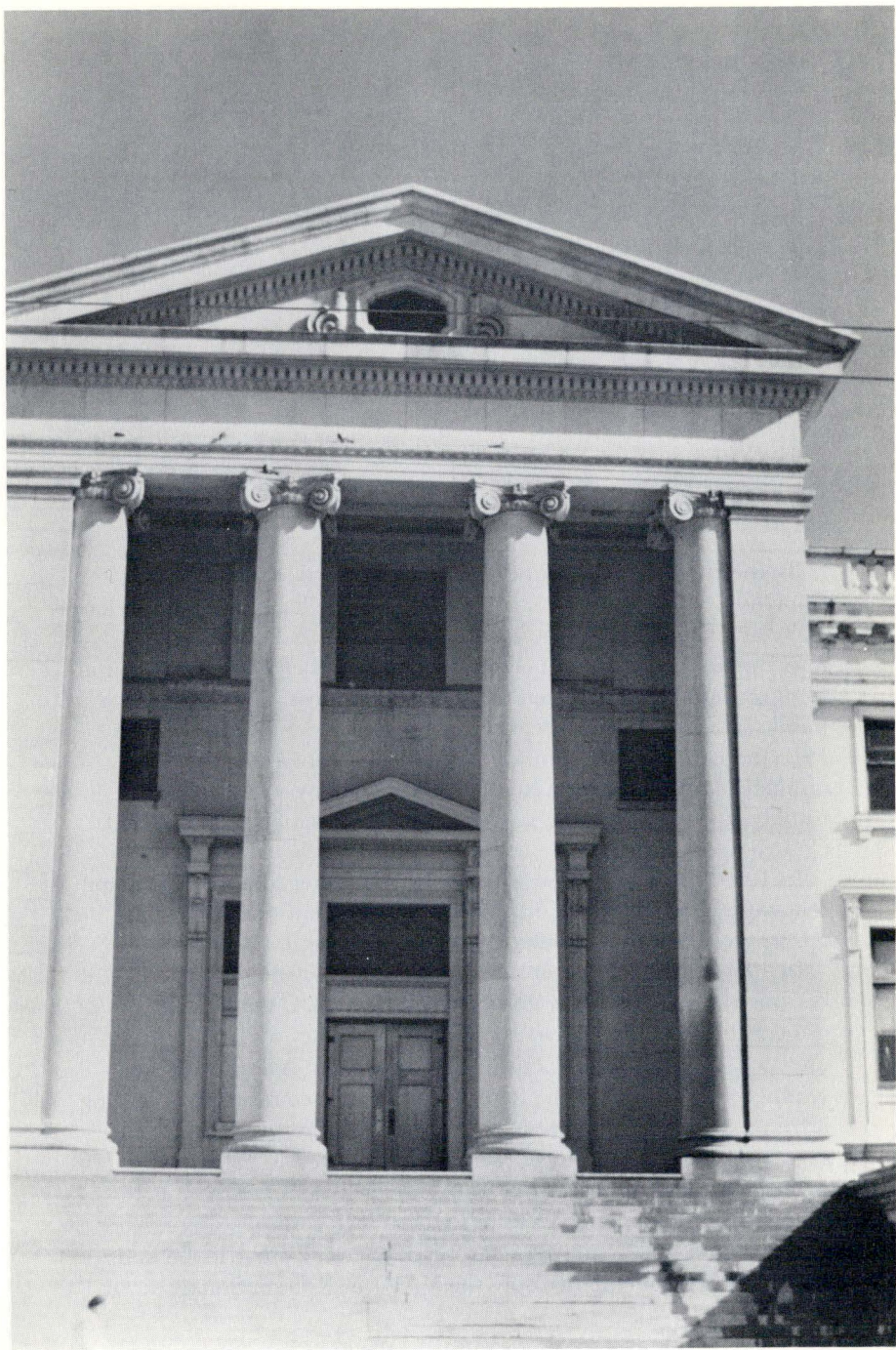


BETWEEN THE OLD COURTHOUSE AND THE NEW

In the years 1907 to 1911, while Rattenbury's Courthouse was under construction, Vancouver's population had doubled to 100,000. The building was finished at a cost greatly exceeding its 150,000 dollar budget, and this increase was largely the result of the inflation that accompanied the boom. At the same time, the population spurt caused an increase in litigation which rendered the Courthouse inadequate at the date of its opening (Barret et al. 173-174).

In 1906 Rattenbury had proposed that, in such an eventuality, the government offices be moved to detached wings or to two storey additions built onto the sides of the building. "Rather than adopt either solution, the government commissioned Rattenbury's old foe, Thomas Hooper, to erect an extension on Hornby Street which was linked to his temple of justice by a somewhat disharmonious structure" (Barret et al. 173-174). The temple front Hooper designed for Robson Street, however, is a lovely rephrasing of the vocabulary Rattenbury had provided. This addition was complete by 1912, and contains some fine Classical rooms that remain in use today.



By the time the Hooper addition was finished, the site of the Courthouse had been discussed as the location for a civic centre for Vancouver, perhaps surrounded by a city hall, a library, art museum and auditorium ("From"). On the other hand, the lawn in front of the courts had been described in this period as one of two public spaces in Vancouver's business and residential district.¹ In 1912 the Edward VII fountain was placed at the centre of the original plaza on Georgia Street.² And for many years, until it rotted, the tallest flagpole in the Empire was the boast of the Old Courthouse square.³

In 1959, the Courthouse with its Hooper wing (despite additional renovations in 1952) was judged inadequate, and the provincial government considered adding another wing to it.

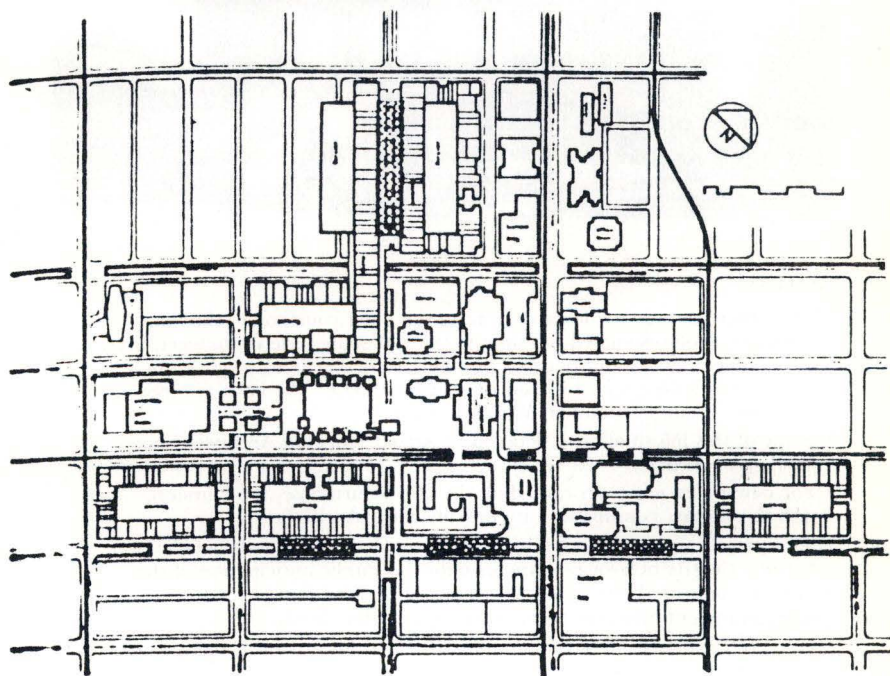
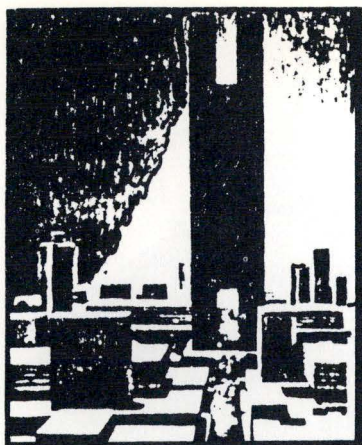
In 1966, the lawn in front of Rattenbury's facade on Georgia became the location for a grandiose fountain, a Canada Centennial project that was the province's gift to Vancouver and, until it was unveiled, a well-guarded 250,000 dollar secret.⁴ Apart from the symmetry of its design, the fountain took no account of the building it fronts. Its programme of nearly invisible figures carved into the stones is Celtic. The floor of the pool is rendered in colourful mosaics arranged in wave-like patterns.⁵ This fountain, it was thought, would become a "Bum's Roost." Its rush of water is welcome and anticipates now the three waterfalls that lie behind Rattenbury's Courthouse (now the VAG) in Robson Square.

* * *



Another Centennial project played an important part in the history of Robson Square. The Community Arts Council commissioned Erickson/Massey to conduct studies on the impact of potential development in the downtown core and the resulting impact on traffic patterns. The city was committed to building a civic centre, new court rooms were necessary, and a multi-purpose office block was likely to be built on Blocks 51 and 61, properties owned by the city and the province. Erickson/Massey suggested that, if a highrise was necessary, it should be dramatic. The photograph of the model reproduced here shows a drive-through skyscraper straddling the street.

Before the government buildings were actually commissioned, Premier W. A. C. Bennett, impressed with the new Bank of America building in Los Angeles, resolved to have a similar structure in the proposed complex. His concept of a fifty-five storey building relied on corporate co-sponsors; the Bank of British Columbia and BC Hydro, for example, were two corporations initially interested. Thompson, Berwick and Pratt and McCarter/Nairne were commissioned, but the multi-building complex did not enjoy strong community support (Nichols). In fact, when an election replaced Bennett's Social Credit Party government with Premier Dave Barrett's NDP government, there were not enough clients to fill the proposed highrise. Further, the city and the province disagreed about some aspects of the proposal, such as whose responsibility the cost of the required parking lots was, for example. Because of these problems, the province and, by coincidence, a now also newly elected city government (TEAM) reconferred. Block 71 was included, and the whole area was developed as a three-block complex called Robson Square.



2

Legend for all traffic

- Transit
- Service traffic
- One way streets east and south
- ▲ x ▢ One way streets west and north



NOTES

- ¹ The other one was the lawn in front of the older courthouse, the now-destroyed Hofar-designed building in the Italianate style reproduced here. This edifice's dome and porticos probably were consciously echoed in Rattenbury's design for his Vancouver Courthouse. The lawn referred to is now Victory Square off West Hastings.
- ² Some of this information is detailed in Arthur Erickson Architects' notes on Robson Square.
- ³ For newspaper clippings regarding the Old Courthouse, the fountain, and the square, consult the City of Vancouver Archives.
- ⁴ This project was surrounded by a hoarding for many months which became the site of a locally famous paint-in. Public anticipation of the fountain increased, but when it was unveiled, some thought it a disappointment and even a misspending of public funds.
- ⁵ For a full explanation of the fountain's iconography, consult the invitation to its unveiling in the City of Vancouver Archives.

IMAGES

PAGE

- 31 Ann Rosenberg.
- 33 Nathan Hohn.
- 35 Arthur Erickson Architects.
- 36 Vancouver Public Library Historical Photograph Collection.