



## Walking Tour of Nelson's Heritage Buildings

Created by R.J. (Ron) Welwood & Alistair Fraser, with diagrams courtesy Robert Inwood, this © material is based upon content from: kootenay-lake.ca

**W**ith over 350 designated heritage buildings and a population of about ten thousand, a walk through Nelson opens a window on an earlier time.

Many of those buildings are residential, but the town also boasts good early commercial and institutional structures. Several dozen of these are illustrated below. Visitors browsing Nelson's modern shop windows are often unaware of the grander building above. To see the facade, cross the street and look up.

All the buildings, below, were opened during a thirty year period from 1895 to 1924. They are an easy walk from one to another, being either along, or within a block of Nelson's main commercial street: Baker. Some relevant architectural ideas:

### High Victorian architectural styles

Commercial High Victorian generally took two forms in Nelson. Queen Anne Commercial is characterized by bay windows, decorative brick work, asymmetrical composition and the use of towers for decorative purposes. Italianate Commercial features a bold and elaborate cornice at the roof line, a series of arched windows and an indented central entranceway with large display windows on the ground floor.



### Late Victorian architectural styles

This period of architecture revived a wide range of historic styles. The Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris upheld Greek and Roman Classical styles. The Chateau style is a revival of the French castle of the fourteenth and fifteen centuries. This style incorporated steeply pitched roofs, towers and conical caps and dormer windows. A later style of commercial building was based on the Chicago School of Architecture which returned to the grid work pattern of facade organization with subdued decorative features.

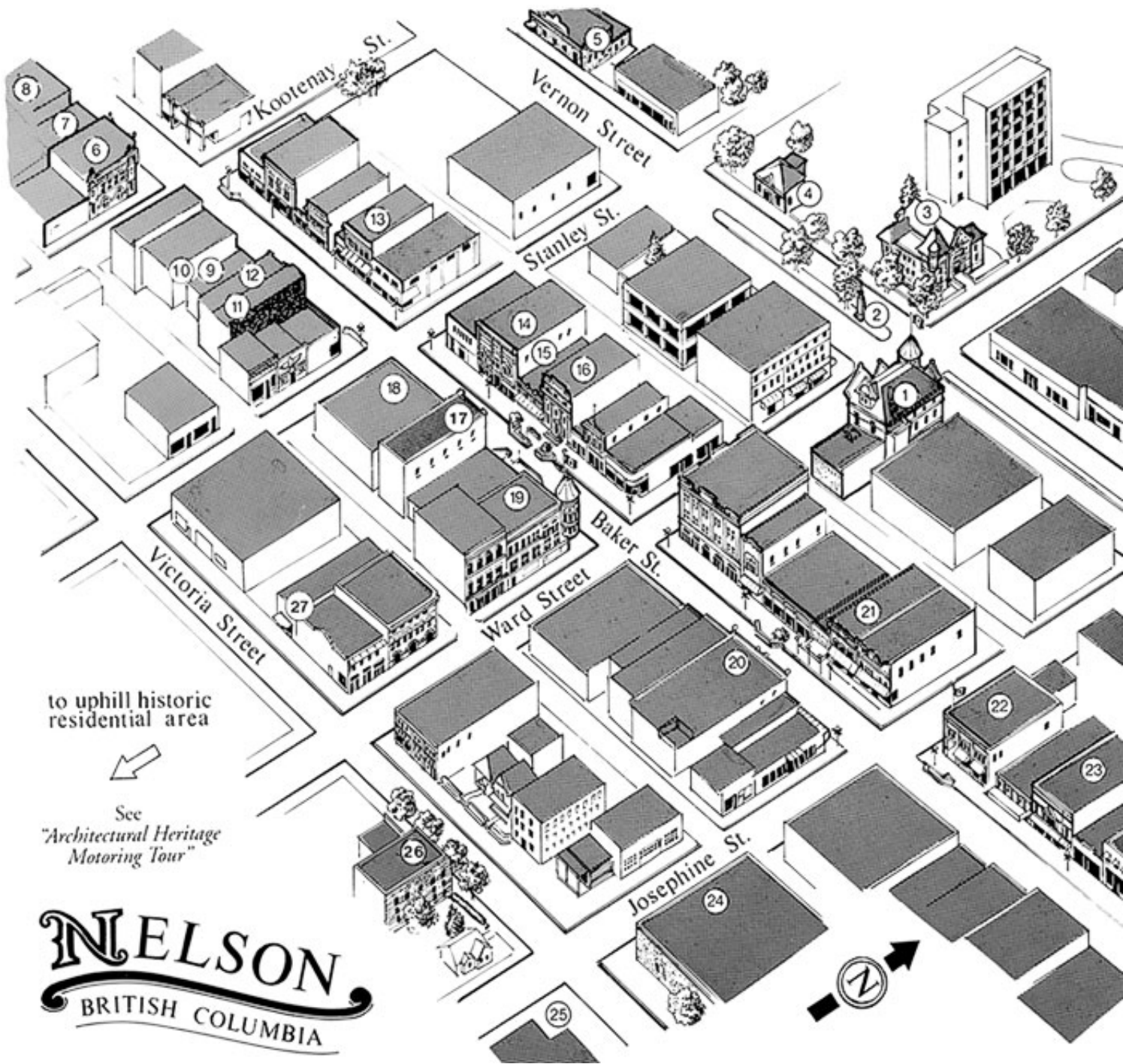
### Architectural history

Nelson, located in the heart of the Kootenay region in southeastern British Columbia, is within sixty kilometers of the international border. A city of many contrasts, it has mainly been influenced by north-south trends in architecture with some commercial buildings that are more typical of those in San Francisco, Seattle and Spokane than those in eastern Canada. The ornate and grandiose High Victorian style was introduced to Nelson by a transient, fortune seeking population but modified by the conservative English settler. Even during construction, it was an architectural style that was twenty to thirty years behind the times.

**Architects** When a name is known, it appears in a box in the caption following the building's date and address. Architects known to have designed early local buildings: Henry Cane, Alexander Carrie, George Dillon Curtis, Alexander Charles Ewart, Arthur E. Hodgins, James A. Macdonald, Francis M Rattenbury, W. George Taylor.

A Nelson map showing the location of these buildings is found on the next page, and a diagram illustrating architectural features is on the tenth and final page.

A map of building locations



Information in the boxes

date
address
architect(s)



**1. Post office & Customs House**

1902

502 Vernon St.

Spokane pink brick and Kaslo marble provide an interesting and picturesque mixture of textures and patterns to this building. Locals were furious when the construction contracts for this Chateau-style structure were awarded to Eastern Canadian firms. This building has also served as a Museum, 1955–59; City Hall, 1960–2005 and since 2006 as Touchstones Nelson: Museum of Art and History.

**2. Houston Memorial**

1926

Vernon St. median

Nelson's first mayor, John *Truth* Houston, established Nelson's first newspaper, *The Miner*, in 1890. Two years later he sold it and started *The Tribune*. Houston developed the Province's first hydroelectric plant on Cottonwood Creek (February 1896), which he later sold to the city much to the objection of the taxpayers. Note the horse trough behind the monument.

**3. Court House**

1909

320 Ward St.  
Rattenbury

F.M. Rattenbury, noted architect of British Columbia's Parliament Buildings and Empress Hotel in Victoria, designed this building that cost \$109,145.88. It is a fine example of Beaux Arts Chateau style architecture with its high-pitched roof, tower with conical cap, gables and paired windows. Ironically, in February 1909, men from the gaol were commandeered to "hurry things into shape" for County Court sittings.





#### 4. Land Registry Office

This High Victorian building used fire-retardant materials retractable heavy metal shutters and a metal fire door to protect the main entrance. It was commissioned by J. Fred Hume, a Nelson hotelier, member of the B.C. Legislature and Minister of Mines.

1900  
403 Vernon St.  
Ewart, Carrie



#### 5. McDonald Jam Factory

A two-storey frame structure was built as a jam factory in 1911 with a stone warehouse added in 1920. The design included two-foot thick granite walls to serve as the street's retaining wall. The owner, James Albert McDonald declared that his jam should be "absolutely pure and free of false colouring, glucose and other cheap substitutes." The Jam Factory received Nelson's first Heritage Building of the Year awarded in 1980.

1911, 1920  
303 Vernon St.  
Carrie



#### 6. Bank Of Montreal

At the time of its construction this building was considered one of the finest commercial buildings in the interior of British Columbia. This High Victorian building with Italian influences creates an atmosphere of stability, security and permanence. Note the high parapet, the varied use of arches, the intricate brickwork and the terracotta inlays with the Bank's insignia.

1899  
298 Baker St.  
Rattenbury





**7. (left) Hamilton Powder Co.**

This small structure is a well designed and preserved single-storey Queen Anne commercial building with its arched entranceway and windows, as well as a decorative cornice. The building was sold in 1911 to Canadian Explosives Ltd. and in 1927 to Canadian Industries Ltd. (C.I.L.)

1895  
280 Baker St.

**8. (right) London & B.C. Goldfields Co**

The Nelson Daily News, Nelson's longest published newspaper, purchased this building in 1908 and occupied it until July 2010.

1899  
266 Baker St.  
Hodgins

Stylistically, this is a Late Victorian building with its dentil-patterned parapet which rises well above the roofline, pilasters and curved lintels.

**9. (left) J.M. Ludwig Leathersgoods**

Built for William Goepel, acting government agent and inspector of provincial government offices, this building was soon used as a hardware, clothing and mining-supply store. It is the only remaining wooden frame building on Baker Street with a mansard roof. Note its simple but decorative shingle pattern.

c.1897  
340 Baker St.

**10. (right) Bellamy's Grocery**

Little is known about this wooden structure except that it operated as a grocery store until 1972. This building is typical boomtown architecture with a bracketed cornice that gives an illusion of grandeur. Note the carpenter's detailed sunburst motif and the decorative cedar shingles. The Bellamy and adjacent Ludwig structure received Nelson's Heritage Building of the Year awarded in 1983.

c.1895  
338 Baker St.

**11. (left). Maglio Block**

This Late Victorian style building is constructed with coursed rusticated blocks. The decorative designs of the cornice and the puzzling use of keystones on flat lintels clearly were used to make the building appear more impressive. The attractive, random stone firewall on the side probably was intended to be hidden by an adjoining structure.

1914  
378 Baker St.

**12. (right) McKillop Building**

This Early Victorian style building was constructed for Alexander McKillop, a mineral assayer and one-time alderman. The corniced parapet includes finials and decorative brick panels. Note the Spokane Iron Foundry stamp on the central column.

1897  
364-370 Baker St.





**13. McCulloch Block**

This granite building is in the Late Victorian-Edwardian style. Notice the lintels, sills and cornice. By 1912, the decorative appearance of commercial buildings, as illustrated by this facade, was giving way to more functional designs.

1912  
371-377 Baker St.  
Ewart, Carrie

**14. Mara-Barnard Block**

Built for F.S. Barnard and J.A. Mara, this structure was one of the Province's earliest branches of the Royal Bank of Canada. This elaborate High Victorian style building's second storey bay windows are the only ones remaining in the City's commercial district.

1897  
421-431 Baker St.

**15. Standard Furniture Store**

This Queen Anne commercial building was constructed with locally fired brick. Historical accounts suggest that this building was originally a furniture store where the owners also ran an undertaking business. As with many furniture stores of the day, coffins were constructed on the premises. The right side of this building, once occupied by Eli Sutcliff's barbershop, later became a cigar emporium.

1904  
441-449 Baker St.





**16. Bank of Commerce**

Faced with Kootenay marble this building with its four Ionic pilasters and street-level lintels shows the influence of the Beaux Arts Classical style. With the Bank of British Columbia's 1901 takeover, Nelson had one of the first Bank of Commerce branches in the Province. Reflecting its optimism and confidence in the City, the Bank built this branch in 1907.

1907  
459 Baker St.

**17. (left). Lawrence's Hardware**

This building was the first three-storey structure on Baker Street. Note the highly decorative brickwork facade, arched windows and a high parapet. The cornice projects so far from the parapet that it required the support of cast-iron modillions.

1897  
446 Baker St.  
Ewart, Carrie

**18. (right) Hudson's Bay Co.**

The interior of this Classical Revival brick edifice featured solid oak fittings and maple floors. This emporium sold groceries, liquor, dry goods, clothing, etc. for many years. Its massive liquor cellar was probably the largest in southern British Columbia. Additions were made in 1929 and 1953. It was adapted for reuse as a multi purpose complex in 1982.

1900, 1929, 1953  
402 Baker St.

**19. K.W.C. Block**

Merchants, Kirkpatrick, Wilson and Clements, paid \$10,500 for the lots. Designed and built in one year, it long remained the largest mercantile block in Nelson. At street level, one of the City's finest grocery stores offered delicacies from afar. The turret, once typical of many corner buildings, is the only one remaining on Baker Street. Arches over the windows on the third storey, decorative brick work and pilasters tie the structural elements together.

1901  
488-498 Baker St.  
Ewart, Carrie





**20. Burns Building**

Designed for millionaire cattle king, Patrick Burns, this building served as the Kootenay headquarters for the P. Burns Co. and housed one of the most comprehensive butcher shops in Canada. Note the stylized foliage in the imported terracotta panels above the bracketed cornice. Over the entranceway is the date stone with an obvious reference to Burns' business.

1899  
560 Baker St.  
Rattenbury,  
Hodgins, Carrie

**21. Aberdeen Block**

Athough built for mine manager and hardware store owner, George F. Beer who later became a Nelson alderman, this building acquired its present name by 1900. The second-storey facade of this Queen Anne building includes connecting low window arches as well as a parapet designed to include a plain centre panel flanked by more elaborate textured brickwork.

1898  
571-579 Baker St.

**22. Houston Block**

John Houston commissioned architect A.E. Hodgins to design and construct this Victorian block. Originally housing a bank, this building still contains two large concrete walk-in vaults. Notice the double arched entrance with its columns of locally quarried marble. The Houston Block received Nelson's Heritage Building of the Year awarded for 1982.

1899  
601-607 Baker St.  
Hodgins





**23. Eagles Hall**

The Fraternal Order of the Eagles, Nelson Aerie, was the twenty-second to be formed in North America and the fourth in Canada. Built of brick and trimmed with local granite, this structure exhibits late Victorian Utilitarianism. While the ground floor originally housed one of the finest dry goods and ladies' wear stores in the Province, the upstairs meeting hall served and continues to serve the membership.

1909  
639-641 Baker St.  
Carrie

**24. City Garage**

This granite building was erected as a service station about the same time as the automobile was becoming popular. The arched doorway in the centre of the Josephine Street facade provides a contrast to the general square look of the building.

1920  
561 Josephine St.  
Carrie

**25. City of Nelson Gaol**

Nelson's first stone building was constructed as the city gaol (the section farthest from Josephine Street). Two additions (1902, 1929) including the lockup served as a storeroom and central offices for electrical distribution to the streetcar system, businesses and residences. The majority of these buildings were adapted for reuse by Kootenay School of the Arts including second level additions in 1996 and 2007.

1897  
606 Victoria St.





## 26. Kerr's Apartments

Once the best-preserved early apartment block in the interior of BC, this building was designed in the Richardsonian Romanesque style and constructed with granite quarried on site. The building, named after Edward Kerr, was considered to be luxurious and modern with conveniences such as electric light, steam heat and gas cooking stoves. Near the top of the exterior's west wall were charcoal marks purportedly a reminder of the adjacent Opera House fire in April 1935. A fire gutted this building in January 2011; its stone walls were demolished in June 2011.

1911  
514 Victoria St.  
Carrie



## 27. Capitol Theater

This unpretentious structure was built as the Central Garage. In 1927, Nelson contractor, A.H. Green, commissioned Vancouver architects to redesign it into an Art Deco theatre, which was officially opened on September 5, 1927 at a cost of \$75,000. After serving as a movie house and catering to live performances for many years, the building slowly deteriorated. It was sporadically used until restored and reopened as a fine 426-seat theatre in 1988.

1924  
421 Victoria St.

