

Chapter 3 The Drill Hall is Built



The Drill Hall in 1917
(6FESMA)

In 1912 Ottawa promised an immediate start on the drill hall. The site had originally been donated to the City of North Vancouver, for a park, by Edward Mahon, a North Vancouver businessman. The city in turn donated two and half acres to the military for a new drill hall, with the understanding that if the military no longer needed the site, it would be returned to the city.

In the mean-time parades were held in Larson's Dancing Pavilion, near the North Vancouver waterfront. It was not until the Great War was well underway that the new drill hall was occupied.

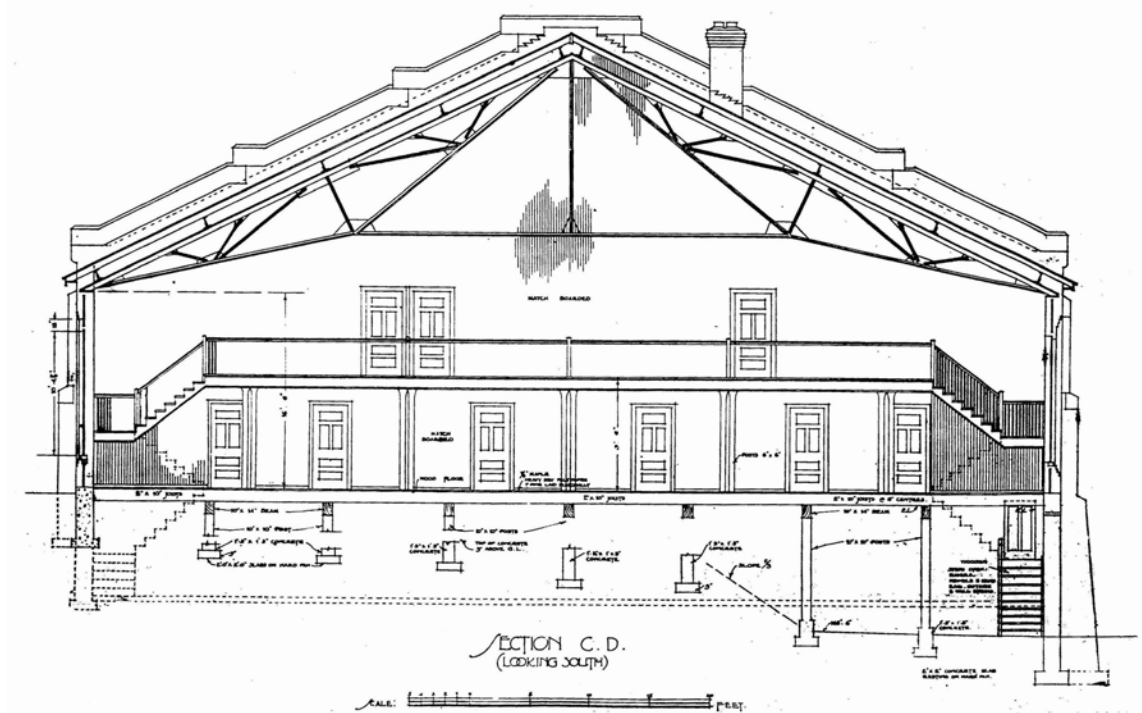
The North Vancouver drill hall was only one of a few built by the Militia Department rather than the Public Works Department. The then Minister of Militia the Right Honourable Sam Hughes decided in 1914 that the Ministry of Militia would construct its own buildings. This appears to have not only caught Public Works Department by surprise but also the permanent force engineer officers in Victoria, who weren't staffed or prepared to take on a major construction project. And said so in no uncertain terms. However, Sam Hughes prevailed and the project started.

The first problem encountered were the tender documents prepared by the Militia Department. These were reviewed by Public Works and in a letter dated September 22, 1913 David Ewart, their Chief Architect, stated "*Many items of importance have been overlooked when the specifications were prepared, and many others very indefinitely specified. They are too numerous to set forth here in detail*".

Over the next few weeks correspondence was exchanged between the two departments with Public Works obviously keen to gain control of the project. Even James Blake Hunter the Deputy Minister of Public Works became involved. And for a time, the dispute between the two ministries delayed the project as the awarding of the contract, based on the tenders from three local construction firms was held in abeyance.

By August 11, 1913 the three bids were in:

Campbell & Wilkie	\$28,250.80
James A Allan	\$35,700.00
McAlpine Robertson Construction	\$39,528.00



Cross-section of the Drill Hall from the original drawings of 1915 (CMEM)

In March of 1914 the general contractor had still not been selected. So, Mr. Campbell of Campbell and Wilkie traveled by train to Ottawa to meet D. Ewart in the Public Works Department to discuss the situation. At this point the contract had not yet been awarded but it looked like Campbell and Wilkie, as the lowest bidder, would get the contract.

Much of Campbell’s and Ewart’s conversation revolved around the specifications and the need for changes to meet Public Work requirements. In a follow-on letter dated March 15, 1914 from D. Ewart to the Deputy Minister he noted that although considered sub-standard by his staff the Minister of Public Works desired “... that no changes be made in the drawings and specifications prepared by the Department of Militia & Defence.” And so, it would be built.

One of the results, of all this confusion, was that the land for the drill hall had been cleared and work started before an on-site project manager had been assigned by Public Works. This meant that the contractors worked gleefully for a couple of months, without an inspector interfering with their work. The man named as the Inspector of Clerk of Works in May of 1915 was to be Henry Blackadder of the architectural firm Blackadder and McKay. Blackadder would eventually join the 6th, receive his commission and go on to see action in both France and Belgium and later become part of the Allied Occupation Force in Germany. But before he did that, he had to see that the drill hall got built.

**Schedule of Wages and Working Day Hours in the
Specifications for the Construction of the North Vancouver Drill Hall**

Trade or Class of Labour	Hourly Rate	Hours per Day	Daily Wage
Stonecutters	70 cents	8	\$5.60
Bricklayers	75 cents	8	\$6.00
Masons	75 cents	8	\$6.00
Carpenters	53 1/8 cents	8	\$4.25
Joiners	53 1/8 cents	8	\$4.25
Plasterers	75 cents	8	\$6.00
Lathers	68 3/4 cents	8	\$5.50
Painters and Glaziers	56 1/4 cents	8	\$4.50
Plumbers and Steamfitters	62 1/2 cents	8	\$5.00
Sheet Metal Workers	56 1/4 cents	8	\$4.50
Structural Iron Workers	62 1/2 cents	8	\$5.00
Electrical Workers	62 1/2 cents	8	\$5.00
Plasters Labourers	50 cents	8	\$4.00
B&M Labourers	43 3/4 cents	8	\$3.50
Ordinary Labourers	37 1/2 cents	8	\$3.00
Driver with horse and cart		9	\$5.00
Driver with 2 horses and wagon		9	\$7.00
Driver with 2 horses and scraper		9	\$7.00

And things weren't going well. On July 9, 1915 Ewart wrote to his Deputy Minister that:

"The contractors have notified Mr. H Blackadder Clerk of Works that they refuse to be responsible unless the inner brick walls are increased to 13" and the concrete walls to 25... On the 23rd of June Mr. Blackadder wrote that the grade of the road will necessitate the ground floor of the building being raised 2'10". He also recommends increasing the piers carrying the roof trusses. He states that it is also necessary to take the foundations lower than shown on the plans, in order to get a hard bearing for the footings. He also considers it advisable to increase both brick and concrete, and on July 8th, reported that the total expenditure cost of the above enumerated changes will be \$2,369.00"

It seems that regardless of what the Minister of Public Works wanted the contractors and Blackadder were determined they were going to do things properly. And D. Ewart fully supported them.

However, things were still not up to the standards of the Militia Department. A Board of Officers inspected the newly completed building on September 8th 1915. In their report they stated that:

"The hardwood flooring is, in the opinion of the Board, not up to specifications, being composed in the main of very short lengths and with an uneven surface. This applies to the main hall and also to the smaller rooms.

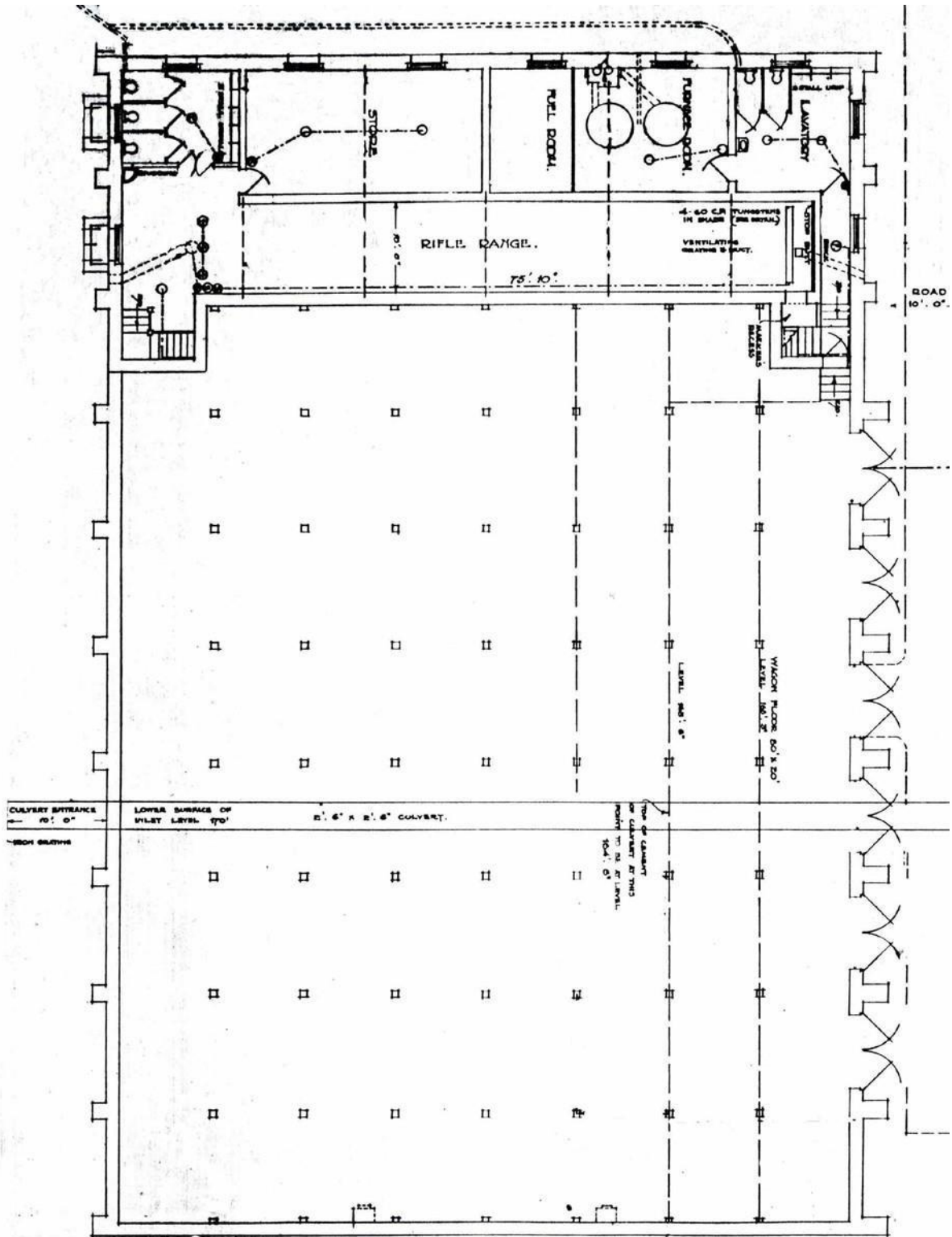
The brickwork throughout the whole building is of a very inferior character and very roughly laid, and unevenly painted. The plaster used has apparently not been properly mixed as it is very soft and friable and this, taken in conjunction with the very thick painting (in some cases over one inch in thickness) makes a very unsatisfactory wall...

There seems to be an entire lack of sway braces under the floor of the main hall, there being no diagonal braces of any sort. The Board is of the opinion that this should be remedied. The woodwork in the Armouries, Mess Room etc. is splitting in a great many places, presumably due to green timber having been used.

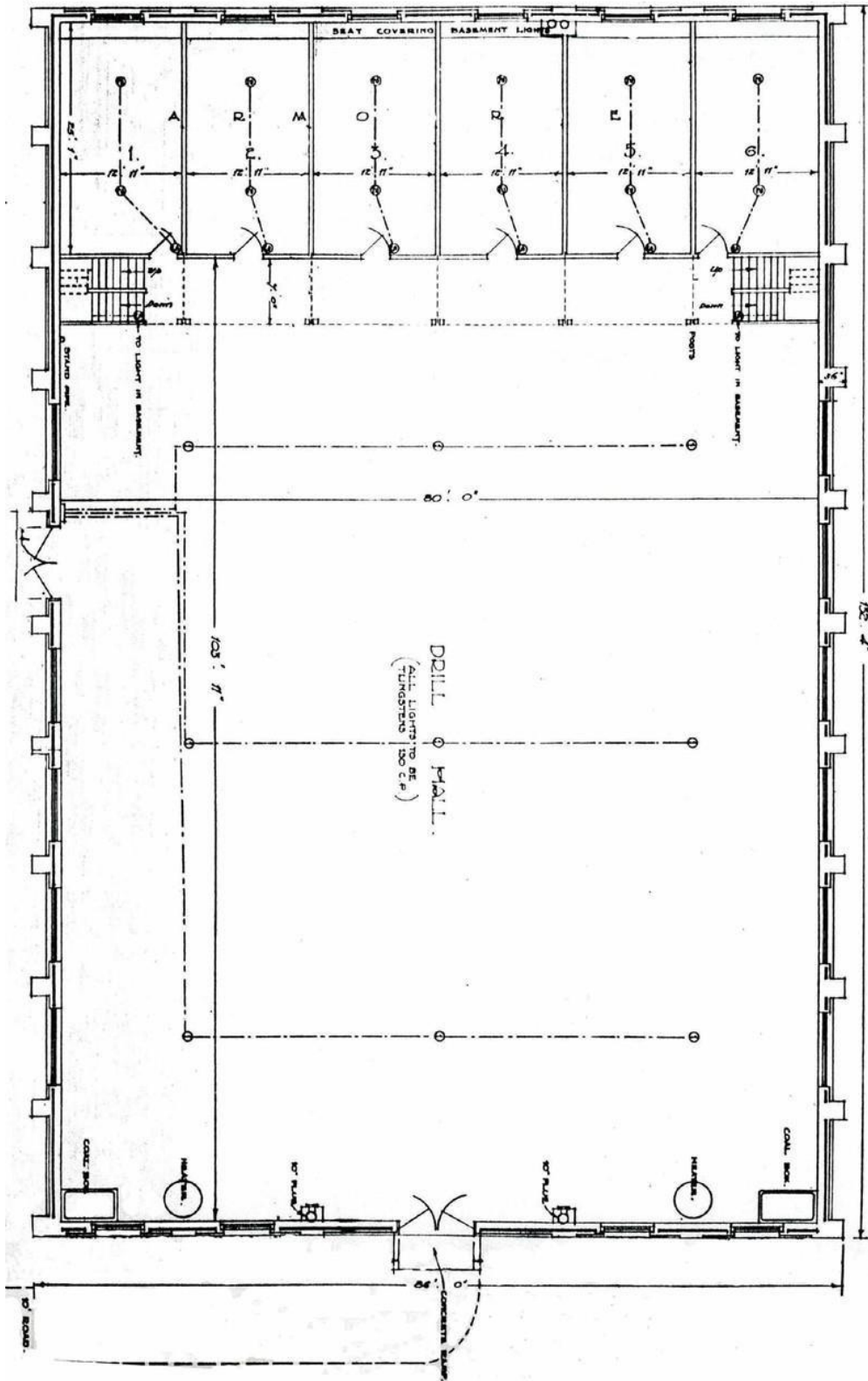
The work throughout seems to have been carried out in the cheapest possible manner."

The report generated a detailed response on October 14th 1915 from William Henderson the Department of Public Works Resident Architect in Vancouver to his Department's Chief Architect in Ottawa. In it he refuted many of the claims made by the Board taking particular offense at the statements about the flooring and wall paneling. As for the brickwork he in main agreed, but noted that the first sub- contractor hired to do the brick work had been let go and that the main contractor had then spent a considerable amount of time trying to repair the brickwork. As for the lack of diagonal bracing his only response was a curt "This is according to specifications". Which were the specifications prepared by the Ministry of Militia and Defence.

But by the time of Henderson's October response the military had granted authority for the 6th to move from Larson's Pavilion to the new Drill Hall. And by Mid November 1915 the move was finished.



Basement Level of the Drill Hall from the original drawings of 1915 (CMEM)



Grade floor of the Drill Hall from the original drawings of 1915 (CMEM)

Lieutenant Henry Blackadder (1882-1968)



Henry was born in Dundee, Scotland and entered the architectural profession in 1899 by joining the office of T.M. Cappon in Dundee. After a four-year apprenticeship, he worked at George & Yeates completing several large commissions, one of which was designing the British Pavilion for the World's Fair of 1904.

In 1911, Blackadder moved to British Columbia, first working as a draftsman with Dalton & Eveleigh. In the same year he secured his first commission for a residence in Vancouver. The next year he entered into partnership with Alexander S. W. MacKay. This partnership lasted fifteen years. Together, they furnished North Vancouver with numerous residences in the Tudor Revival and Craftsman Bungalow styles.

Blackadder spent his early years in North Vancouver on Carisbrooke Road. He and his wife Maud were well known within the English and Scottish community of Lonsdale. It was here he cultivated his garden and became a self-taught pianist.

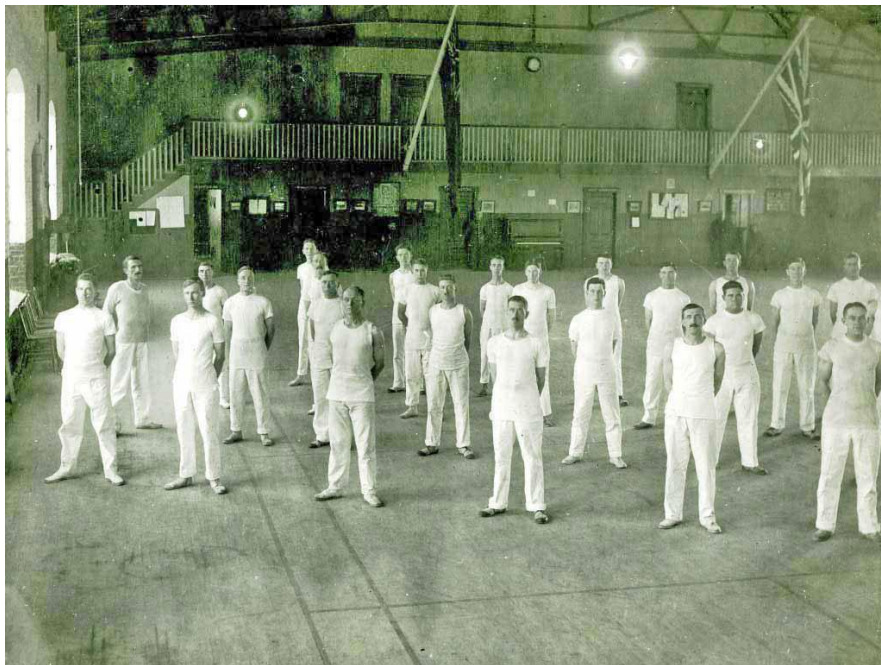
In 1914-5 he supervised the construction of the Drill Hall in North Vancouver. It was then that he joined the 6th's reserve company, in which he served for 18 months. He then transferred to 6 Fd Coy CE where he spent another 4 months, before going east in mid-1917 as a Lieutenant

After 6 months in St Jean Quebec, he arrived in England in January 1918. On August 6th 1918 he joined the 4th Battalion of the Canadian Engineers in France. Two days later the Canadians broke through the German lines at Amiens. He was with the 4th at the battles of Amiens, Scarpe, Drocant-Queant, Canal du Nord, Cambrai and during the final Pursuit to Mons. He then served with the Allied occupying forces in Germany, returning to Canada in June 1919.

Like most architectural firms, Blackadder and MacKay, did both commercial and residential buildings, including the Cenotaph in Victoria Park, the Dundarave Block on Lonsdale and the Lynn Valley Elementary School. In 1927 MacKay moved to New Zealand. For the next ten years Henry worked alone.

In 1941 Blackadder entered the drafting rooms of the Burrard Dry Docks in North Vancouver where he served for the rest of the Second World War. After the war he returned to work as an architect.

Blackadder's dedication to the architectural profession extended well beyond his practice. In 1929 Henry became a member of the Royal Architects Institute of Canada. In 1940 he was elected Vice-President of the Architects Institute of BC (AIBC) and between 1941 and 1943 he served as its president. Before he died the AIBC declared him an Honorary Member in recognition of his many contributions to architecture in the province.



Fitness Class in the New Drill Hall in 1917 (6FESMA)

Drill Hall is Nearly Ready

IMPOSING GOVERNMENT BUILDING IS MAGNIFICENT LANDMARK WILL BE FINISHED IN TWO WEEKS TIME – AUSPICIOUS OPENING

The Dominion government's new drill hall in Mahon Park at the corner of Fifteenth street and Forbes Avenue, will be completed in about two weeks, barring unforeseen delays. As far as the official opening is concerned, this is an unknown quantity to the general public but the general feeling is that when the military authorities do decide to put it into commission the dedication ceremony should be an auspice one and worthy of the cause and the fine imposing building which is one of the prominent landmarks on the North Shore.

Imposing Structure

One of the first sights to distract one's eye, from the ferry or from any other location in the inner harbor or entrance to the First Narrows is this large edifice of brick and cement. It is a monument to Imperialism and loyalty on the part of the North Shore citizens who have in the last six months fully justified their claims as soldiers of the king.

Details of Construction

The new drill in measurement is 120 feet long by 80 feet in width. Its walls are of brick construction with imposing panel design with reinforced concrete foundation and basement. The main auditorium is about 80 feet by 100 feet in dimensions with officers' and equipment rooms occupying about 20 feet of the south end of the building.

The roof which is of galvanized iron, is supported by steel trusses. The lighting facilities are excellent. Eleven openings, six on the west side and five on the east, each about 10 by 12 feet, with smaller windows at the north and south ends provide an abundance of light which transforms the interior of the building into a blaze of light.

Maple wood flooring, which is now about laid, is being utilized in the big drill space and at each of the northern corners of the drill hall two large hot furnaces provide the heating for this part of the building.

Basement and Range

Entrance can be gained to the basement either from the main hall or on the west side of the ground floor. The basement has a flooring of cement. It is divided into cloak rooms, lavatory and store rooms. Under the main auditorium is a large space reserved for wagons and other movable equipment. At the southern end of the basement with every facility and accommodation up-to-date is located the miniature range. This extends across the building, being about 80 feet in length. All the equipment for this important branch of military training will be installed at the proper time, and in passing it will be stated that the North Vancouver Civilian Rifle Association are looking at this particular section of the building with longing eyes.

Cost \$30,000

The grading around the drill hall is nearing completion as is also the staining of the floors. The builders are now constructing a short piece of macadam road along the west side of the building for the entrance to the basement.

According to the permit taken out by the Dominion government resident architect, Mr. Wm Henderson, the cost of the new hall is set down at \$30,000.

The building firm, who were fortunate in securing the contract, are Messrs. Campbell and Wilkie of Vancouver and the superintendent of construction for the government is Mr. H. Blackadder, of Blackadder, of Blackadder & McKay, Vancouver.

(1915 Newspaper article on the completion of the Drill Hall)