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Government Office 1897, Kuala Lumpur

Kuala Lumpur's 1st Government Office Building on Jalan Raja, built on the site of a row of shophouses fronting the Padang.

Hubback's Official Post: Selangor PWD Chief Draughtsman & Acting Architect

Design Team:

Designed and built under the supervision of State Engineer C.E Spooner who visited India to study similar building style and construction.

Put under the charge of Selangor P.W.D Architect A.C.A Norman.

Overall Design by R.A.J Bidwell Selangor Chief Draughtsman & Acting Architect who then left for Singapore in 1895 and replaced by Chief Draughtsman & Acting Architect A.B Hubback who worked on the alterations and interior details and the East (Rear) Wing in 1903.

Year Designed: 1894-1896

Laying of Foundation Stone: 6 October 1894

Year Completed: 1897

Official Opening: 3 April 1897 (by F.M.S Resident-General Frank Swettenham)

Contractor: Towkay Ang Seng

Construction Cost: \$152,000 Straits Dollars though actual cost reported by Resident-General Frank Swettenham as \$153,000 Straits Dollars.

Architectural Style: Mughal Eclectic

Brief Architectural Description:

The first 'Mohamedan' (sic) architectural style in the Malay States, a vision by C.E Spooner who previously served in Ceylon.

The foundation stone was laid on 6th October 1894 in a cavity below the stone the Governor placed a yen, some Straits coins, a piece of Selangor tin from the Straits Trading Co., and a copy of the current number of the Selangor Journal.

Original Use: Government Administration

Original Building Type: Office & Public Building

Current Name: Bangunan Sultan Abdul Samad

Current Use: Office

Current Building Use: Office

Gazetted as Malaysia's National Heritage List in 2007

Gazetted Name: Bangunan Sultan Abdul Samad

View 1897 Spatial Usage & Tabulation [here](#)

Alteration History:

"Minarets around the edge of the roof and on pediments were removed as an air raid precaution in 1939-40. The clock tower was in fact hit in 1941 and its clock stopped".

Powickens

(ANM Acc. No. 1957/0576130: Enquiry Regarding the Federal Secretariat Building -1952)

*Interior renovated into a court house by BEP Arkitek in 1988.

Measured Drawings:

1. Bangunan Sultan Abdul Samat, 2007 by Fakulti Alam Bina, Universiti Malaya

The Perak Pioneers & Native States Advertiser, 7th April 1897, p3

Document obtained from Arkib Negara Malaysia

Opening of the Selangor Government Offices.

An important function was carried out on the night of the 3rd instant when the Resident-General opened the new Government Offices in Selangor.

At 9 P.M. the Resident-General arrived being received by a guard of honour of the Malay States Guides under the command of Mr. Graham. His arrival was the signal for everybody that could get space to troop into a room in which a carpeted platform had been prepared. On this stood a handsome easel on which nested a beautiful dark frame containing an excellent photograph of a portion of the new offices, (bearing a presentation inscription) besides a chair or two. The Resident-General and Resident ascended the platform together with Mesdames Rodger and Spooner, the group being subsequently joined by Mrs. Ridges. Around them stood several of the officers of the Federation and many of the State, together with a few visitors from other places; a large number of ladies lending grace to the scene. Mr. Rodger said he was happy to find that the ceremony of opening the building was about to be performed by the Resident-General. The event was an auspicious one as shewing the advances the State has made in material progress. He could remember the time when what are now called the old offices had been opened, and the difficulty that had been experienced in the filing that, for those times, stupendous building. Since then the prosperity of the country had demanded greater accommodation and the building being thrown open that night was projected. He hoped that the time was coming in which it would be discovered as he and the Resident General had just recently found by personal examination of the old offices which are crowded far beyond their capacity, that the necessities of this expanding state, would yet require more space in which to store its muniments and carry on its administration. He much regretted the absence of Mr. Treacher from the gathering as to him is mainly due that this large and successful undertaking was put in hand. In important enterprises of this kind it was inevitable that many difficulties should present themselves as the work progressed. These Mr. Spooner had dexterously overcome with the aid of his valuable assistants, and he would say that their labours were worthy of the highest appreciation. He would mention in connection with this matter the names of Mr. Norman, Mr. Bidwell, (now of Singapore) how he was glad to see present on the perfection of the work he had so much contributed towards designing, and Mr. Groves, the constant presence of whose carriage and of that of the State Engineer, Mr. Spooner, at these offices denoted, in the most unequivocal manner, the deep interest each took in completing in the most satisfactory way the great undertaking, now a substantial record of skill and assiduity, they were then discussing. In mentioning the names of these gentlemen he did not desire in any degree to lessen the value of the services of Mr. Spooner who, necessary as the head of the Public Works of the State, was entitled to a very large need of praise for the liberal manner in which he had employed his talent in the construction of this fine and commodious building. In the Service successes redound, to some extent, in favour of the head of the department concerned, as a small compensation for the whole of the blame of a miscarriage that his position invariably brings on him. He believed that in the matter of the choice of colouring on the walls, a committee of ladies played a conspicuous part, but he was not at liberty to mention their names. He would draw attention to the circumstance that the estimated made by the State Engineer had not been exceeded except in a couple of minor improvements he had thought fit to authorize. One of them was the substitution of granite steps at the foot of the staircase in places of less durable material. One anecdote he would intrude on them, as shewing the appreciation of the aboriginal Malay for fine architecture. He was coming along in front of the new offices with a Malay notability when the naïve remark was made that it was fortunate the road in front of the building was so smooth, as otherwise passers by would trip and fall through their eyes being uplifted to take in the noble proportion of the construction.

Mr. Spooner addressing the Resident-General, and the assembly generally, said he had had the most loyal services of his staff in rearing the building he was there that night to hand over to the Government. Mr. Norman had afforded him yeoman service and Mr. Bidwell, whose mind he found to be magically sympathetic, had grasped ideas suggested to him for incorporation in the design in a manner to evoke his utmost respect. And he was also indebted to Mr. Bidwell for original ideas that had much contributed to improving the first conception. Afterwards, when Mr. Norman was on leave, and Mr. Bidwell had retired from the service, alterations that it had become necessary to make as the construction proceeded, he had had admirably dealt with by Mr. Hubback, whose skill at the drawing board, from daily practice, naturally exceeded his own consequent on desuetude of the pencil. To Mr. Groves he was greatly indebted for the unsleeping attention he had given to the valuable duties he had entrusted to him. He had been to India, himself, to learn there information that might be useful in the building of these offices, and he might properly say, on the subject of material, that bricks he had seen accepted there would have been rigorously excluded from the building of which he was talking. It was only by the selection of the most suitable material that gracefulness has been secured and unsightly heaviness avoided. In one part of the flanking towers the pressure is as much as nine tons to the square foot, and in other places this is somewhat exceeded. These are strains that can only be ventured upon where the building, materials employed are of the most reliable description. Four million full sized bricks had been employed with Portland cement, lime, timber and other materials in necessarily large quantities. The foundations had been a source of trouble, since though the borings had led to the belief that the soil was suitably firm, when being prepared it was discovered that a number of wells were scattered over the ground, and that, in places, holes had been filled up with town refuse. In the end, however, these difficulties resulted in the foundations becoming stronger than if they had been laid in the natural soil as it existed before the excavation of the wells and the addition of the rubbish.

The Resident-General, whose speech was universally admired, then addressed the gathering and his speech is only partly reproduced below.

He observed Mr. Rodger and Mr. Spooner had already said what he had in contemplation to remark on finding himself about, in the near future, to open this building and, therefore, there remained almost nothing for him to observe. He would say that with Mr. Rodger he agreed that it would have been most desirable if Mr. Treacher had been present at the inauguration of these offices, in as much as to him was very largely due the credit of their inception. He admired the courage that had led to their proposal. A couple of names had been omitted from the list of those to whom the State owed the building and those he would mention. Sir William Maxwell was Acting Governor when Mr. Treacher conceived so ambitious a design, and he it was who sanctioned the undertaking. Then there is the present Governor who, with misgivings it is true, as High Commissioner and as a high speculative mason, truly laid the foundation stone of the superstructure that now stands a noble pile before the gaze of all who visit Kuala Lumpur. The assembly had heard that the estimate, which was one hundred and fifty two thousand dollars, had not been exceeded. As to that he was impelled to say the circumstance is a miracle. That the estimates of any public work of magnitude, should not be largely exceeded, is an event that scarcely comes to man in a life time; and when it does, the phenomenon is worth treasuring up

of the land, which of course, is not a part of construction. They had heard some interesting remarks from Mr. Spooner on the subject of pressure. They had been told that in some places in reached ten tons to the foot. He was not aware whether ladies realized the problem. He might as a rough illustration of a ponderous question say that he pressure indicated is fairly represented by the weather at the present time on human nerves, weather which so oppressive as to make every one miserable. But they had to add to this conception another that while the weather will probably change, the ten tons of Mr. Spooner will continue inexorably to press for all time. Taken full and by inside and out he thought the State has got a cheap bargain for its money. Singularly the day of the inauguration of the building came the day before the departure of Mr. and Mrs. Rodger from the State. The former for a short period the latter for a longer one. He had heard one gentleman say that this lady was the most lovable woman that had ever occupied the high position that she does. He might not remark such a thing himself as everyone one would then say he as shewing preference, which every one knew perfectly well he was incapable of. But he might say that the State was losing, for a time, a delay whose absence will be a very large hiatus, and that it will be impossible that at any time the vacancy she will leave can be occupied by one more worthy of the utmost respect and affection of all who have the privilege of knowing her. As to Mr. Rodger he had not said anything of himself in his speech as it was impossible that he could, but he (the R.G) was able to tell them that Mr. Rodger, during his occupation of the residential office, both acting and substantively, for a period exceeding a good deal the tenure? of any other officer, had been closely knit with the progress of this State and with its great undertakings, and he is now connected with one greater than any other yet taken in hand. He then declared the building dedicated to the purpose for which it was built.

Dancing now commenced and was kept up till 12.30 A.M. when supper supervened. At the ?? of that most of the guests took their departure.

To the ladies of the Public Works Department under the guidance of Mrs. Spooner, who, with Mrs. Rodger, had received each guest on arrival, those who attended- possibly three hundred persons are deeply indebted for the successful hospitality of the eventful evening. Their exertions were unflagging, and on the part of the guests we take upon ourselves to tender their heartfelt thanks. We do not profess to exhaust the list of those who so generously assumed the heat and burthen of a large supper, but the names are: Medames Bellamy, Groves, Langslow, Norman and Spooner. Of course the worthy lords of these fair dames played no inconsiderable part in making the evening a success. The decoration of the rooms with pots and plants and other green stuff, the suspension of pretty Japanese paper lanterns from every arch, the thousand and one details that go to make a pleasurable evening, received their earnest attention and so far we observed – bar that bit of ice could not find four our champagne and the rather rough dancing floor- there was not a flaw in anything. Their guerdon shall be these few commemorative lines.

Mr. Swettenham, the Resident-General in the course of his speech said he fully concurred in the ??? that had been passed on the various gentlemen mentioned by Messrs. Rodger and Spooner. We are in a less favorable position than he to form a just verdict, but the offices, the subject of the article, form a noble building and we are bound to assume that such being the case good work has been done by some and there remains but to say "Gentlemen of the Public Works Department of Selangor the greatest monument of your labours you can have is the Government office of Kuala Lumpur-may you ever be as successful in gaining applause for your undertakings."

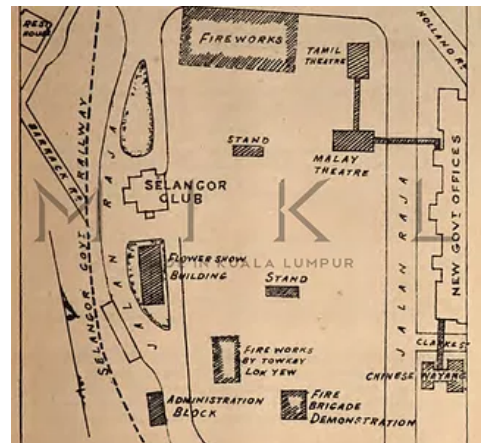
Mr. Watkins' electric lamps and oil spray lights formed the major part of a brilliant illumination inside and out.

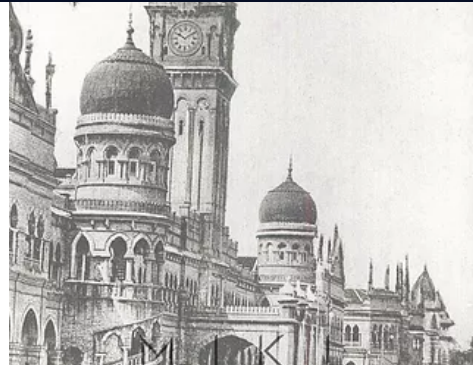
Selangor Journal: Jottings Past & Present

"I had almost forgotten, "Trilby", I beg pardon, Mr. A.B Hubback. If I had done so I should have most unjust, as although comparatively speaking a newcomer, his pen has designed some of the most beautiful ornaments in the building – the massive staircase and central hall ceiling, and other fittings the Council- Chamber dado, the screens – all elegant in design and perfect in execution."

"In the building in which we are now-the climax of our development-the resources of the State abound in perfection. The bricks and lime are developed from the soil, the timber from the forest and the roof gutters probably contain tin delved from the soil by the people. What greater development can one hope for in a short decade and a half?"

H.F Bellamy at Selangor P.W.D Dinner in conjunction with the opening of the new Government Offices





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