

1st Window

Page 1

Title: A Time and A Place : History of the Site

Intro text:

The Old Hill Street Police Station stands today as MICA Building, the headquarters of the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts. Although built as a police station and barracks, the building's significance lies in the history of the site, which was once associated with entertainment and education. It was here, between 1845 and 1856, that the Assembly Rooms, a space for public functions and a building that housed a theatre as well as a school, once stood. After the Rooms were demolished, a temporary theatre was built where amateurs performed till 1861. The performances at the theatre were to raise funds for the scenery, costumes and properties for a new theatre at the new Town Hall at another location; this would eventually become the present Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall, a place of the performing arts.

It seems that the arts have never been far from the Old Hill Street Police Station, whether in time, association or distance.

1836 map

1854 map

1857 map

1862 map

1868 map

Page 2 (1836 map)

As shown in this 1836 map, the site of the Old Hill Street Police Station was vacant in the 1830s. Some sources have stated that this was the site of Singapore's first jail though others have cited a temporary prison at the "end of the east bank of the river, close to where the stone landing steps are now." This is likely to be where Empress Place stands at present.

Page 3 (1854 map) – the link to text on Assembly Rooms is from this map/text

C. B. Buckley (*An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*) described this 1854 map, lithographed in London, as being in "a very dilapidated state." It shows the location of the Assembly Rooms, which, in Buckley's words, stood "at the corner of Fort Canning and River Valley Road ... at the north-west corner of Hill Street and River Road..."

Click here to find out more about the Assembly Rooms.

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The Assembly Rooms

Of special note is the role the Assembly Rooms played in the social, arts and entertainment scene of 19th century Singapore society, from 1845 to 1856. Constructed under the superintendence of

the architect D. L. McSwiney, the Assembly Rooms measured about 150 ft long and 80 ft wide, with a portico in the centre of the front, and were erected by subscription at a cost of about \$6,000 (Spanish silver dollars). Even though the appearance of the building itself was not met with positive response – it was said to have been "distinguished by its ugliness" – the building was the centre of numerous social activities during its time.

A free school by a Reverend Sames was also located at the Rooms. The school, as later noted by C. Bazell, a former staff of the Education Department, in *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, was closed in 1855 with Reverend Sames' departure for England.

There were provisions for an orchestra and theatrical performances in the building, as C. B. Buckley noted in *An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*: "It was built of lath and plaster and attap, open beneath, with a large room to the left as you entered, for a ball-room, dinners, & c, and a room for a theatre, with a well for the orchestra next to the footlights, on the right hand side of the building..."

Buckley further elaborated that, despite its ugliness, the Assembly Rooms possessed "...a spacious ballroom and a very passable theatre..." The scenery for the theatre, a view of Singapore, was painted by C. A. Dryce, and used for many years. In fact, the theatre at the Assembly Rooms opened with a comedy production and an amateur orchestra, both performances that were highly praised.

Whatever reservations there may have been about the physical appearance of the building, the Assembly Rooms must have once been a place of great social activity. The Theatre Royal, formerly at Coleman Street, was located there and the Rooms also saw various balls hosted in honour of dignitaries, such as Sir James Brooke, Lewis Fraser of Maclaine, Fraser & Co. as well as occasions commemorating the anniversary of Raffles' founding of Singapore as a trading settlement.

[Click here for accounts of](#)

- The first theatricals staged in 1845

- A commemorative ball in 1854

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"The stage is more spacious than at the old theatre, and the accommodation for the performers combines more convenience and comfort. There are complaints, however, regarding the imperfect transmission of sound, the performers being quite inaudible in the back part of the theatre. The drop scene – a view of Singapore – does great credit to the amateur artist by whom it was painted... Our old friend Mr Folair as Charles XII, King of Sweden, sustained the character admirably ... Miss Petowker as Baroness Ormsdoff was tastefully dressed and wore her honours with becoming self-possession and dignity. Miss Ledbrook is always perfect and as Catherine Ormsdoff was excellent ... [In *The Mummy*], Mr Johnson as Toby Tramp, kept the house in roars of laughter... The amateur gentlemen who attended the orchestra deserve the highest praise, the music was exquisite... The proprietors of the theatre ought to be, and we have no doubt are, very grateful for the assistance of these gentlemen. It gave us great pleasure to see the house so well filled (not a vacant chair to be had) and graced with the presence of all the beauty and fashion of the Settlement."

- An account of the performances of *The Conquering Game* and *The Mummy*, the first theatricals staged at the Assembly Rooms, 25 November 1845, as reported in *Singapore Free Press* of 27 November 1845.

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"The ball-room was very tastefully fitted up, the principal decoration being a large transparency, representing in one division, Singapore as it might be supposed to appear before it became a British possession, thick jungle clothing the whole landscape ... In contrast to this, the division shewed us Singapore in 1854. The sombre jungle had disappeared and was replaced by warehouses and residences of our merchants ... In front of the transparency a pedestal supported the bust of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles ... Dancing was commenced at 9 o'clock, and at half-past eleven the company proceeded to supper, which was laid out in the lower room, where two long tables afforded ample accommodation to the whole of the guests. After supper the health of the Queen was drunk in the loyal manner which is characteristic of the Singapore community..."

- An account of a ball by Governor William John Butterworth at the Assembly Rooms on 6 February 1854, commemorating the 35th anniversary of Stamford Raffles' arrival in Singapore. Source: C. B. Buckley, *An Anecdotal History of Old Times Singapore*.

Page 4 (1857 map)

The Assembly Rooms are no longer shown in this 1857 map, as they were demolished in 1856. In 1854, the secretary of the Rooms wrote to the Resident Councillor declaring the dilapidated state of the Rooms and recommending a new building to meet the needs of the increasing size of the population. Trustees for the new building, which would become the Town Hall, were appointed. As stated in a letter to the Municipal Commissioners by the Trustees, the Assembly Rooms were "so imperfectly finished, so loosely put together, and constructed of such miserable materials, that first of all the tiled roof had to be taken off and an attap one put on ..." and deemed by a professional builder to be unsafe and not fit for repair. Given the state of the building and that the site was viewed objectionable, the Trustees resolved that it was better to build another building on another site.

Following the demolition of the Assembly Rooms, C. B. Buckley (*An Anecdotal History of Old Times in Singapore*) states that a temporary theatre was built there where amateurs performed till 1861. At the same time, Buckley also states that a commissariat office godown was built there. The performances at the theatre were to raise funds for the scenery, costumes and properties for the new theatre at the new Town Hall, that would eventually become the present Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall, a place for the performing arts.

Page 5 (1862 map)

In this 1862 map, the commissariat office godown was still there.

Page 6 (1868 map)

By the time this map was made in 1868, the godowns were no longer indicated. Later maps ranging from the 1870s to the 1880s suggest that the site was likely vacant until the end of the 19th century. The construction of the Old Hill Street Police Station would only begin later in 1931.

2nd Window

Page 1

Title: Here, There and Everywhere : The Surrounding Areas

Intro text:

The site was once deemed "most objectionable for many reasons ..." as a location for the Assembly Rooms and the building has been associated with authority and terror: once a police station, it was used by the Japanese army during World War II. The building was also once regarded as bad *fengshui* by the Chinese businesses along Singapore River as it destroyed the original geomancy of the site that had been shaped like the Chinese New Year fish.

Yet, the Old Hill Street Police Station could not have been a finer location for the headquarters of the arts and heritage agencies under the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts: the National Heritage Board (NHB), the National Arts Council (NAC) and the Media Development Authority (MDA). No matter where and how one looks out from the building, it is surrounded by history and the arts. There is the Singapore River to its South; Fort Canning to its West; and finally, almost straight down from the building in the East is Empress Place, where the Asian Civilisations Museum resides, just across the road from Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall.

Explore the area surrounding the Old Hill Street Police Station and discover its rich history. Stop at the various monuments and buildings and click for more information.

Text for the various parts of the map:

Kim Seng Bridge. This bridge was built in the mid-1800s and named after Tan Kim Seng, the prominent businessman.

Clemenceau Bridge. Built in 1920 by the Public Works Department, this bridge was named after the French Prime Minister M. Georges Clemenceau who visited Singapore in the same year. Clemenceau Avenue, for which he turned the first soil, was also named after him.

Ord Bridge. Named after Sir Harry St. George Ord, the first governor (1867-1863) appointed by the Colonial Office after the transfer of Singapore's administration from India to England. The bridge was built in 1886.

Read Bridge. The bridge across this site in the 1880s was called Merchant Bridge. It was not high enough to allow *tongkangs* to pass and was replaced by the present bridge, named after William Henry Macleod Read, a prominent businessman of the time.

Coleman Bridge. Two earlier bridges crossed the Singapore River here before the present one. The first was a brick bridge built in 1840 by G. D. Coleman, appointed the first Government Superintendent of Public Works in Singapore in 1833. At one time, it was one of the only two bridges (the other being Thomson Bridge, see Elgin Bridge) across the river. In 1865 another bridge was built, of timber, but was not well constructed. The present bridge was built in 1886 and at first called New Bridge.

Elgin Bridge. This bridge stands on the site where the first bridge across Singapore River was built in 1819. In 1822, a second bridge by gunnery officer Lt Philip Jackson was built and called Presentment Bridge. It was demolished and replaced by J. T. Thomson's bridge in 1846 which in turn was replaced by an iron bridge in 1862 and named Elgin Bridge, after the Governor General of India from 1862-1863. This was demolished and replaced by the present bridge in 1926.

Cavenagh Bridge. Named after William Orfeur Cavenagh (1859-1867), the last governor of the Straits Settlements when it was under the Supreme Government of India. It was designed by the Public Works Department when John Turnbull Thomson was in charge and built to commemorate the founding of the Crown Colony of the Straits Settlements in 1867.

Anderson Bridge. Named after John Anderson, Governor of the Straits Settlements and High Commissioner for the Federated Malay States (1904-1911). The bridge was opened in 1910 by Anderson and was built to replace an older one that was too low for vessels to pass under at high tide.

Pulau Saigon Bridge. This bridge used to comprise two bridges, spanning a place once known as Pulau Saigon which was once occupied by sago mills and was later a railway depot. The bridges were first built in 1890 and later rebuilt in the 1930s. The present bridge links promenades on both sides of the river.

Whampoa's Ice House. This was one of the most famous buildings to stand opposite the site of the Old Hill Street Police Station. Hoo Ah Kay (1816-1880) or Whampoa, was a prominent businessman and active in public service. In 1869, he became the first Asian to be appointed as a member of the Legislative Council, later he became an extraordinary member of the Executive Council then was the first Chinese Consul when the Chinese Consulate was established in 1877. The Ice House, actually a godown, was built in 1854 and stocked with ice imported from Boston. It was a landmark till 1981 when it was demolished. Tan Kah Kee, possibly the most influential Chinese leader in early 20th century Singapore later established his company Kiam Aik there in 1904.

Ellenborough Market. Built in 1845, the Ellenborough Market was the only outstanding landmark in the area across Coleman Bridge but it was barely developed then. The market was also commonly known as New Market, distinguishing itself from the old market at the seafront. It was restructured in 1891 but later gutted with fire in 1968. The wet market was closed in the 1970s while a part of it remained as a spice market and hawker centre till the 1980s before it was completely demolished.

Victoria Theatre and Concert Hall, c. 1910. Victoria Theatre was originally the Town Hall (1852-1862) built to replace the Assembly Rooms. The original Town Hall had venues for performances on each floor. It was renovated to become the Victoria Theatre in 1909. Victoria Concert Hall was originally Victoria Memorial Hall, built in 1905 as a memorial to Queen Victoria. A historic building – it was here that the People's Action Party held its inaugural meeting in 1954 – it was renovated in 1979 to house the Singapore Symphony Orchestra.

Central Fire Station. Opened in 1908, the Central Fire Station was a step towards modern and efficient fire-fighting methods. The station was fitted with residential quarters, garages for motorised engines – replacing horse-drawn engines – and had a central tower to watch out for fires, as well as drying out hoses. The station came at a time that marked a break from the 19th century where fires were dealt with by volunteers and men from the police and military. From 1888, fire stations with living quarters were opened and men were trained and employed as

professional firemen. This station replaced the main station at Cross Street. Still operational today, the station saw the addition of an extension in 1926 and another in the 1950s.

St Andrew's Cathedral. The present St Andrew's Cathedral is the second ecclesiastical building on its site. The picture shows the first St Andrew's Church and Government Hill, c. 1837. It was neo-classical in style. A tower and spire was later added, the bell is now on display at the Singapore History Museum. The church was struck by lightning twice in the 1840s and was pronounced unsafe in 1852. The present St Andrew's Cathedral was built between 1856 and 1861 and designed by Ronald MacPherson – one of the few examples of English Gothic architecture in Singapore.

Old Parliament House, c. 1830. Once known as the old Court House, the old Parliament House dates back to the late 1820s and is said to be the oldest government building in Singapore. It was originally designed as a residence for John Argyll Maxwell, a merchant and one of the first three magistrates appointed by Stamford Raffles. The building, designed by G. D. Coleman, however, was built on land designated for government use. Upon completion in 1827, Maxwell leased it to the government and it was used as a courthouse as well as for government offices. Extensions and remodelling were made to it in 1873-1875, 1901, 1909 and 1954-1955. It was re-opened in 2004 as The Arts House, the only gazetted historic government building to be designated as performing space.

Armenian Church. The church was designed by G. D. Coleman and consecrated in 1836. The picture shows the original bell-tower and domed roof. These were removed in 1853 and replaced by a pitched roof and a tower and spire were installed.

City Hall. One of Singapore's most historic public spaces, it has witnessed the formal surrender of the Japanese Army to the Allied Forces in 1945; the proclamation of Singapore as a city by Royal Charter in 1951; the proclamation of self-government in 1959 by then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew; and in 1965, the declaration of Singapore as an independent republic by Mr Lee.

Hill Street. Following the building of Coleman Bridge in 1840 (rebuilt in 1886), this street has remained a busy thoroughfare. A tram system once ran along Hill Street and was the only form of public transport in Singapore in the early part of the 20th century, although rickshaws still proved popular. It was operated by the Singapore Electric Tramways Company which was established in 1905. F. J. Hallifax, a former president of the Municipal Commissioners, noted that around 1917, 14,451 vehicles passed over Coleman Bridge in 12 hours, the majority being rickshaws. Up till 1965, the tramways that ran from Hill Street to High Street was part of a trolleybus system that ran from Outram Road up to Victoria Street.

Empress Place Building. Built in 1865, the Empress Place Building now houses the second wing of the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM), opened in March 2003. It complements the first wing of ACM at Armenian Street. It houses 11 galleries showcasing over 1300 artefacts from the civilisations of China, Southeast Asia, South Asia and West Asia. The building is located at Empress Place, named in honour of Queen Victoria in 1907 and is today one of the key areas earmarked for conservation. Originally meant to be the new Court House so that the old Court House (now the old Parliament House) could be used as government offices, the building's first occupant was the Government Secretariat. Between 1902 and 1920, extensions were added to both ends of the building, which remained faithful to the original design by J. F. A. McNair. The building has also been home to the Immigration Department and the Registry of Births and Deaths up to the 1980s. It was later restored and became the Empress Place Museum

in 1989, a venue for historical and cultural exhibitions, before closing once again for its present refurbishment works.

Civic District. The Old Hill Street Police Station stands right at the very edge of a historic area known as the Civic District, once the seat of the British colonial government. The Civic District, which first appeared in the Raffles Town Plan of 1822, was bounded by the Singapore River, Stamford Road on its North, the coastline further East, and the foot of Fort Canning, once known as Government Hill. Reserved for government use, the area was developed throughout the 1800s with the establishment of the old court house and government offices within the district and European residential and mercantile areas north of the Singapore River. At present, this entire area falls under the Urban Renewal Authority's Civic District Master Plan (May 1988 and February 1992) that aims to revitalise the historical area bounded by the Singapore River, Clemenceau Avenue, Orchard Road, Bras Basah Road and the Esplanade Park as a "key cultural and retail magnet..."

Asian Civilisations Museum. Opened in 1997, the first wing of the Asian Civilisations Museum (ACM) occupies the former Tao Nan School building. The school was one of several built in this area, known for its quiet surroundings, at the time. It was established in 1906 by the Singapore Hokkien Huay Kuan to provide Chinese education at a primary level but was not housed in this building until 1912. Initially, it had occupied philanthropist Tan Kim Ching's residence in North Bridge Road, opposite St Andrew's Cathedral. After more than 70 years in Armenian street, it moved to its current home in Marine Parade in 1982. As the first Chinese school to accept students from all dialect groups (1909) and the first to change its medium of instruction from dialect to Mandarin (1916), Tao Nan was a pioneer in Chinese education. Perhaps it is only apt that the previous home to one of Singapore's early Chinese schools is now home to a museum whose aim is to trace and present the ancestral cultures of Singaporeans.

The Substation. Converted from a disused power station built in 1926, the building now houses The Substation, an arts organisation and venue for the arts. Since its establishment in 1990, it has become an important part of the arts scene in Singapore, and is known for presenting cutting-edge works of all art forms as well as being a strong supporter of new talent.

Page 2 (Singapore River)

A River Runs Through It

From the time Stamford Raffles founded Singapore as a trading settlement in 1819 up till about 120 years later, the Singapore River was to be the centre of Singapore's commercial activity. The role it has played in Singapore's history cannot be over estimated. Historian Edwin Lee has called it "the old commercial heart of Singapore"

while in the preface to *Singapore Lifeline: The River and its People*, it was referred to as "an economic and trading artery of colonial Singapore... A mart where the diverse migrant communities which made up colonial Singapore worked out how best to live harmoniously with their fellow men..."

Indeed. Throughout the better part of the 19th century, the offshore area between Singapore and Rochore rivers was the port frequented by ships from around the world. The area now known as Boat Quay was initially occupied by Chinese artisans, but Stamford Raffles later relocated them to make way for commercial development. By 1835, the south bank of the river, Telok Ayer and Raffles Place had developed into a commercial area and godowns and shops were built along Boat Quay. Although there was little activity beyond the area where Coleman Bridge is located,

the growth of trade and population led to development upstream in the 1860s. In fact, by the turn of the century, the sites at present day Robertson Quay and Havelock Road were already well developed.

The primary importance of the river was twofold: as a means of transportation of goods for business along the river and as a natural shelter from tropical storms. Moreover, it served as an anchorage and moorage point.

Trade on the river was dominated mainly by the Hokkiens and Teochews, with the big wholesalers having their offices by the river but their godowns further away, while the smaller wholesalers operated from shophouses by the river. Trade included anything from gambier (in the early years) through food to rubber and even humans – the coolie trade. Given its economic significance, it is not surprising to find that almost every important Chinese community leader and businessman had a place for himself along the river: Tan Tock Seng (1798-1850), Tan Kim Seng (1805-1864) and Seah Eu Chin (1805-1883). Tan Kah Kee (1874-1961), regarded by some as the most influential leader of Singapore's Chinese community, came from a family with many shophouses and stores in Boat Quay. He also owned a company at the junction of North Boat Quay and River Valley Road, opposite the Old Hill Street Police Station, where Whampoa's Ice House used to be.

The Old Hill Street Police Station, it seems, stands by the flow of time.

Captions for pictures:

Twakows were boats that plied the coastline and rivers. The Hokkiens and Teochews dominated the *twakows* since the 19th century and their boats were distinguished by specific colour schemes. Boats that plied inter-island were known as *tongkangs* and these were operated by Indians and Hokkiens.

A Notice Board stating regulations on the berthing of *twakows* along Singapore River on the bank opposite from the Old Hill Street Police Station. Disturbances by unlawful societies and feuds among the clans and dialect groups who dominated trade and business along the river were common. A committee was set up in 1928 to enquire about congestion at the river and Notice Boards such as this on the berthing of *twakows* helped to avoid quarrels.

Page 3 (Fort Canning):

A Hill Alive

Once known as Bukit Larangan (Forbidden Hill), then as Government Hill, and now popularly called Fort Canning, this hill is perhaps the most well-known historical site in Singapore. The hill was believed to have been the site of an ancient kingdom, probably dating back to the 14th century and was sacred as a palace as well as burial ground. Its name, Bukit Larangan, stems from the belief that during those times, no one was allowed up the hill without being summoned by the ruler. A holy grave, dating from around this time, which remains on the hill, is still revered till this day.

Raffles was indeed awed by the history of the hill and built his residence there, the structure being known as Government House. The House remained there till 1859 when construction on Fort

Canning began. Between the 1830s and 1865, there was also a Christian cemetery until a new cemetery was opened at Bukit Timah Road. The Gothic style gateway to the cemetery still stands there today.

Fort Canning had been built in the belief of providing defence to the city. Unfortunately, upon its completion, it was discovered that Pearl's Hill was higher and it blocked the guns mounted on Fort Canning. The top of Pearl's Hill was consequently cut off. In the 1920s, several buildings were built there and used as the operations centre of the Malaya Command prior to World War II. An underground bunker system was also built, and, together with the buildings, remain till this day.

Aside from its historic significance, Fort Canning today is a place strongly linked with the arts. One of the buildings from the 1920s, Fort Canning Centre, houses two of Singapore's more prominent arts groups, the Singapore Dance Theatre (SDT) and Theatre Works, while Fort Canning itself has been the site of many well-known outdoor performances. Since 1995, the SDT's "Ballet Under The Stars" has been held there while the Singapore Festival of Arts' Festival Village and the WOMAD event continually attract crowds with performances by cultures from all over the world.

From the Old Hill Street Police Station, wherever you turn, there are the arts, and there is history.

Captions for pictures:

View of Singapore from Government Hill, 1846. Painted by government surveyor John Turnbull Thomson, this painting is said to give an excellent impression of Singapore in the 1840s, the time the Assembly Rooms were built. Note the important buildings in the picture: the old St Andrew' Church beside Freshwater Stream (Stamford Canal); the large houses that used to stand by the Padang; Ellenborough Market, built in 1845, at the right of Chinatown and partly hidden by the west flank of the hill. The roof of Thian Hock Keng temple can be seen on the seaward edge of Chinatown on the far right.

View of Town and Harbour from Government Hill, c. 1825-1827. This was how the town and harbour looked from the present Fort Canning just a few years after Raffles' arrival in 1819. Note the two large buildings that stand out in the shoreline. On the left is a house designed by G. D. Coleman for David Napier and next to it, Raffles Institution, designed by Philip Jackson in the 1820s but repaired by Coleman in 1837. Further right, partially hidden by the foliage, is the Old Parliament House, then known as the house built for John Argyll Maxwell. To the right of the Singapore River is Chinatown.

According to local belief, this terrace has been popularly regarded as a *keramat* since 1822. In 1822, it was claimed that this site was the burial place of Raja Iskandar Shah who, according to Malay tradition, was the last of five Kings who ruled Singapore in the 14th century. When Singapore fell to enemy forces, Iskandar Shah escaped and two year later founded another great kingdom, Melaka. Chinese records of early Melaka report that Iskandar Shah died around 1420, but no sources gave his place of burial. Traditional Malay chronicles state that the first King of Malays, Sri Tri Buana and his Chief Minister, Demang Lebar Daun were buried on this hill. The origins of the belief are unknown, but by 1822, the site was already regarded as a *keramat* and venerated by Muslims, Chinese and Hindus. The original structure has

vanished but archaeologists have discovered pottery and other 14th century artifacts a few metres north and east of this terrace.

3rd Window

Page 1

Title: Memories in the Shell of Time : Old Hill Street Police Station

Intro Text:

The Old Hill Street Police Station – originally known as Hill Street Police Station and Barracks - was specially built to provide accommodation for a large number of police personnel who could be called upon immediately in an emergency. In 1927, the Colonial Secretary of the Straits Settlements wrote to the Chairman, Singapore Improvement Trust, requesting the use of the site for the construction of the building that began in 1931.

Menu:

From the Shelter of My Mind
Keeping the Peace
In the Rooms of Memories

Page 2

From the Shelter of My Mind

Present Name:	Old Hill Street Police Station. Also known as MICA Building
Original Name:	Hill Street Police Station and Barracks
Other Names:	The building was renamed Silver Jubilee Building to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the reign of King George.
Architect:	Major J. F. A. McNair, Public Works department
Year Opened:	1934
Opened By:	G. Sturrock, Director of Public Works and Advisor of Malay States
Accommodation:	Police Station with Charge Room, offices and garages; quarters for 125 married men, 144 single policemen, 4 clerks, 5 sub-inspectors; and flats for 5 Asian and 5 European inspectors.
Cost:	\$634,236

Design and Key Features
Construction of the Building

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Design and Key Features

The building is designed in the Classical Renaissance style, a feature of most non religious and civic institutional buildings in Singapore gazetted for preservation. Municipal Council architects from 1860s to 1920, such as G. D. Coleman, J. F. A. McNair, John Bennet and Frank Dorrington Ward, adopted the popular elements of the Renaissance period into their work.

The Old Hill Street Police Station comprised blocks arranged around two courtyards: one triangular and the other rectangular. It had a utilitarian layout with barracks, rooms, kitchens and

recreational rooms. Most of the barracks had a row of rooms facing into the courtyards. The floors used by married couples had lattices for modesty reasons.

Key Features

- * Buildings configured in long thin blocks surrounding internal courtyards
- * Symmetrical façade design
- * Regular rhythm of solids and voids
- * Tripartite façade division
- * Projecting bays

Captions for pictures:

The concept of configuring buildings in long thin blocks surrounding internal courtyards is typical of most classical palazzos in Italy. It is characterised by rooms built on a single functional band, facing outward onto the street and inward to the courtyard. Example: Palazzo Farnese, 1546, by Antonio da Sangallo the Younger.

The symmetrical façade design concept is common in classical architecture. Example: Palazzo Farnese, 1546, by Antonio da Sangallo the Younger.

Regular rhythm of solids and voids is another feature of classical architecture. Example: Banqueting House, Whitehall, London, 1619-22, by Inigo Jones.

A tripartite horizontal division emphasised by horizontal cornice mouldings and a gradual lessening in the rustication of the wall surfaces in higher storeys is common in the Italian palazzo. Example: Palazzo Medici-Riccardi, Florence, Italy, 1444-60, by Michelozzo di Bartolomeo.

Projecting bays are possibly an adaptation of a style of wooden frame construction typical of Turkish buildings in the Balkans and Anatolia. Examples of these can be found in houses in Istanbul and Bursa.

Page 2b

Construction of the Building

“The end of 1932 saw the completion of the reinforced concrete skeleton of this building which includes a Police station, barracks for married and single men, flats for officers and housing for 1,000 persons. A contract for the necessary sanitation work was entered into, and satisfactory progress was made with the excavation of the slope of Fort Canning Hill at the rear, by means of rock blasting. The use of flat hollow reinforced concrete roofs, treated with bitumastic material and sand blinded, testified to their value from the point of economy and durability.”

- Extract from the Straits Settlements Annual Report, 1932

“1933: Sanitation, water supplies, and three electric lifts were installed, the elevations in grey granolithic were practically completed and the completion of the road, drain, pavements, entrance roads and court yards, was well advanced by the end of the year.

1934: The Hill Street Police Station and Barracks which is the largest single building erected by the Government in recent years and completed and occupied during the year. It is six storeys high..."

- Extracts from the Straits Settlements Annual Report, 1933 & 1934

Captions for pictures:

Ground Floor: The police station itself, comprising offices for inspectors and detectives, a charge room and the cells were on the ground floor, at the triangular wing of the building at the junction of River Valley Road and Hill Street. There were also rooms and kitchens on the ground level. The Parade Ground stood at the centre of the building, where the ARTrium is now. The recreation area was in the wing facing Fort Canning.

Second Storey: The second to sixth storeys comprised mainly living quarters. The dormitory for single men, on all the floors, was at the corner of the building facing the junction of River Valley Road and Hill Street. The mess areas for the Chinese, Muslim and Indian members of the force were on the second storey.

Sixth Storey: According to *The Straits Times*, at the time the Old Hill Street Police Station opened, five Asian inspectors were accommodated on the fifth storey while the European inspectors were on the sixth. These quarters included bedrooms, living rooms, separate baths, kitchens and dining rooms.

In the following pictures, we take you through the Old Hill Street Police Station, as it stood before the renovation to become the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts.

The former parade ground was used as a carpark after the police shifted out. This picture shows the carpark as it was before the renovation into the present ARTrium.

Page 3

Keeping the Peace

The Old Hill Street Police Station was opened in 1934, during a time of peace and order. In the words of historian Mary Turnbull, the 1930s was a time when "everyday living was easier and healthier than before" and "life had never been so pleasant for the prosperous and the well-to-do, particularly the European community..." The mass of the population still lived in poverty but "some of the benefits of the new amenities filtered through to the mass of the population, in the form of improved health facilities ... better law and order." It was a contrast to the past decade of the 1920s, when the colony had been known as the "Chicago of the East" and the police force of about 2,000 in the 1930s was certainly a far cry from the 14-man team more than 100 years ago.

1819-1900

1900-1939

1945-1980

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1819-1900

In 1819, shortly after establishing Singapore as a settlement, Stamford Raffles organised a police force, comprising one sergeant, 12 constables and later a Chief Police Officer. By 1821, the force had increased to include a writer, a goaler, two sergeants and 17 constables. Twenty years later in 1841, it grew to comprise a sitting magistrate who was also a superintendent, three European constables, an assistant local constable, 14 officers and 110 policemen.

However, up till 1842, the Singapore Police Force faced difficulties: it was understaffed, overworked and ill-equipped to face the problems caused by a rapidly expanding and growing settlement. It was not until 1857 that the police force was augmented and in that same year, Thomas Dunman became the first full-time Commissioner of Police (the post later being re-designated Inspector General of Police) of the entire Straits Settlements Police.

By 1861, the force had increased to 410 men and by 1863, the police were given regular uniforms for the first time: this being a dark blue serge coat and cap, white trousers and black shoes. A khaki uniform – long-sleeved shirt, shorts and helmet – was experimented with in 1890 and by 1893, it had become the permanent uniform of the force up till World War II. After the war, a grey flannel shirt and beret were introduced though the khaki shorts remained. In 1969 the force switched to the present all-blue uniform with the shorts replaced by trousers.

The next two decades witnessed important developments in the force. In 1881, two new contingents, the European and Sikh contingents, were introduced, while 1884 saw the organisation of the Detective Force as a separate department. The department was commended for its work in the same year. 1886 saw the Central Police Station being built in South Bridge Road to replace the old one and in 1905, new buildings in the same compound were completed.

This was to remain the headquarters until 1954 when it moved to Pearl's Hill Blocks, the last of the big police buildings of the 1930s which also housed the Sikh contingent before the war.

Page 3b

1900-1939

The force continued to grow in strength in the early years of the 20th century, with the establishment of a Criminal Registration Department in 1901 and the introduction of a fingerprint system in 1903.

However, in the 1920s, Singapore, as described by historian Mary Turnbull, was a "haven of gunmen and street gangs, who carried out a reign of terror in Chinatown and rural districts". Murders and secret society fights were an everyday occurrence. Despite reforms such as a Special Branch created in 1919 to deal with political subversion and a police training school established in 1929, the police force was still under-strength and facing various problems.

By the 1930's however, the police force had become more efficient: officers who had undergone the police cadet system held senior posts; technological advances in telecommunications and transportation made police work easier; the force had expanded to 2,000 strong.

It was also in this decade that construction of some of the finest police buildings in the country took place. These included: Beach Road Police Station, Traffic Branch at Maxwell Road, Kandang Kerbau Police Station, Joo Chiat Police Station, Pearl's Hill Blocks and of course, the Old Hill Street Police Station. These buildings were more than just police buildings: they were some of the more modern buildings in the country and there were few others that could equal them.

Nonetheless, the Old Hill Street Police Station, then known as Hill Street Police Station and Barracks, stood out from among its peers. Upon its completion in 1934, the six-storey building was the largest government building in the 1930s and regarded as a modern skyscraper. It had been quickly occupied upon its completion and must have been the talk of the town. *The Straits Times* headlined its article by describing the building as a "Tenanted Police Skyscraper" and used the sub-heading "Luxury Quarters" in its description of the flats for the European officers, which were located on each of the four corners of the Hill Street section of the building. These, according to the newspaper, were "among the best in town", with its two bedrooms, bathrooms, living rooms, kitchens, servants' quarters and large verandas. During the war, however, the Old Hill Street Police Station was occupied by the Japanese army and atrocities were committed there.

Page 3c

1945-1980

The surviving members of the police force were regrouped after the war and order was quickly restored. In 1949, the first batch of policewomen joined the force. The following year, 1950 saw the Maria Hertogh Riots and with that, the special 'riot squads' were introduced. These squads, currently known as the Police Task Force, played an important role in the racial, political and labour unrests of the 1950s and early 1960s.

With independence in 1965, the police force became known as Polis Republik Singapura (Republic of Singapore Police). In 1968, it became a member of Interpol and in the following year the Police Training School became the Police Academy. The late 1960s and the 1970s saw the force in action, triumphant over several crises.

By the time the police force vacated the building in 1980, several important developments were underway. A team comprising Ministry of Home Affairs analysts conducted a study on the force and the report was presented in 1981. It commended the force for its performance, but also made recommendations for more efficient organisation. The same year, reorganisation took place. At an operational level, vigorous crime prevention programmes were launched: the National Prevention Campaign, aimed at involving the public in a more active role in crime prevention, and the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme.

It seems apt then, that having been built in time of peace, then having served the police throughout some of the most tumultuous moments in Singapore history, the Old Hill Street Police Station should end its police history in a time of peace.

Page 4

In the Rooms of Memories

The building served the police force well right up till 1980 when the force moved out and the building was subsequently renovated. From 1983 onwards, its new occupants, the National Archives of Singapore (known separately as the National Archives and Oral History Department

until 1993), Official Trustees, Official Assignees and Public Receiver, and Board of Film Censors, moved in. For visitors to the Old Hill Street Police Station between 1983 and 1997, their experience would have been that of a haunting juxtaposition of past and present, old and new.

The Past in the Present
A Resource for the Future

Page 4a

The Past in the Present

It is not that easy to forget the past even though there were changes to the building. The second storey, once containing living quarters, kitchens, a dormitory and bathrooms for the police force had become the public search room, library, offices and meeting rooms for the then National Archives. The ground floor, where living quarters as well as cells, recreation rooms and the station offices once were, had become an exhibition area, general administration office and conservatory laboratory for the archives as well as offices for the Board of Film Censors (BFC). In 1984 and 1987 there were additions and alterations to the building: these being mainly internal repartitioning to accommodate offices for the archives and an auditorium and offices for the BFC.

Yet, despite these renovations, there was no escaping the building's origins, whether you were there as a staff or for research or for an exhibition or for a meeting between 1980 and 1997.

There were parts of the building which remained largely as it had been since it was built. Air-conditioned corridors and rooms would lead to open stairwells or courtyards. On the third floor, which served the conservation unit and as a storage space for the archives, parts had remained unoccupied and unchanged: the visitor could still walk into rooms originally designated as living quarters. Then, there was the sixth storey: once the quarters for the married policemen with bedrooms and living rooms as well as barracks for single men, most of the entire storey had been left as it was, except empty of furniture and decoration. Here, in these spaces, the building had become in part an empty shell, filled only with memories

Page 4b

A Resource for the Future

Yet, for most of the time during these years, the Old Hill Street Police Station had become a resource for the future. Although housing other agencies, it was perhaps the archives that attracted most of the public. The National Archives had been formed in 1968 and was originally housed at the National Library and then Fort Canning Hill while the Oral History Department, originally formed under the archives from 1979 to 1985, had become independent in 1985. The two departments merged to form the National Archives of Singapore (NAS) under the National Heritage Board in 1993.

By the mid-1990s, the archives public search room was a place where virtually the cross-section of the Singapore public converged. Whether it was for academic work or to satisfy curiosity or to trace a school certificate, from retirees to students, from artistes to engineers, they were all there. In 1994, an article on theatre practitioners using archival materials for their productions in *The Straits Times* felt that "the sleepy archives and Oral History Centre ... have become a favourite haunt for Singapore's dramatists." Headlined "Dramatists get help from the archives", the article noted that four productions between 1992 and 1994 had been staged with the help of archival

materials in their research: of these four, one, *Lao Jiu* written by Kuo Pao Kun, has become a classic in Singapore theatre. As Kuo, widely regarded as the doyen of Singapore theatre, remarked in the 1994 *Straits Times* article: "The archives is not only a memory bank. It is also a station where 'dead documents' and living human beings interact."

Today, with the national arts and heritage agencies housed there, the Old Hill Street Police Station remains a space where past and present converge and from where the future takes off.

Captions for pictures:

A view of the veranda that the living quarters (on the left) opened out to.

An entrance leading to a bathroom. There were two types of bathrooms. The communal bathrooms were on all storeys and the individual bathrooms were on the fifth and sixth storeys. The communal bathrooms comprised the bathing area with a tank.

The urinals were still intact in the building in 1997 when the Old Hill Street Police Station was vacated for renovation.

A bathing tank in the bathroom.

In the late 1960s, the police force's housing priorities scheme advocated the accommodation of personnel in Housing and Development Board flats. The families moved out in the early 1970s and the last occupants of the barracks left in 1979. A police post and the Arms and Explosive branch remained till 1981.

Despite the presence of the new tenants throughout the 1980s and 1990s, parts of the building – especially the sixth storey – were as they had been when the police moved out.

Students visiting the National Archives of Singapore public search room during a school tour, c. 1980s

Students looking at a model of Singapore at an exhibition on the Japanese Occupation of Singapore held in 1985.

Documents being repaired using the leaf-casting process, c. 1980s.

Filming documents at the Micrographics Unit, c. 1980s. The unit preserves paper-based materials on microfilm.

An interview at the Oral History Centre, c. 1980s. The centre records, documents, preserves and disseminates information on Singapore's history via interviews with personalities as well as people from various social, cultural and economic backgrounds.

Publicity for a National Archives of Singapore exhibition. One of the key functions of the Archives is that of organising exhibitions, highlighting to the public the rich heritage of Singapore's past.

Official opening of the “History of Chinese Clan Association Singapore” exhibition at the Old Hill Street Police Station carpark, 1986.

4th Window

Title: A Present from the Past : The Transformation to MICA Building

Intro Text:

Page 1

In 1998, the Old Hill Street Police Station was gazetted as a national monument. It was to become the new home of the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, after being redeveloped and refurbished at a cost of \$82 million. The transformation was completed in March 2000.

Today, it is known as MICA Building and in addition to housing the ministry, it has as its occupants the National Arts Council, the National Heritage Board, the Media Development Authority (MDA) and the Singapore Kindness Movement.

The slope of Fort Canning Hill had to be stabilised, with the retaining walls terraced and landscaped with greenery, water features and sculptures to make the hillside appear less imposing.

One of the many structural additions was the new mezzanine level floor slab over the original double volume arches facing Fort Canning Hill to accommodate the government Press Centre (The Esplanade Room). To preserve the "transparency" to the greenery beyond, the presence of the mezzanine floor slab was minimised with bulkheads that are set back and lightweight handrails.

To accommodate the electrical and air-conditioning requirements of a modern office, raised flooring of 60-90 cm was introduced throughout the building while suspended ceilings were installed to allow the central air-conditioning ducts to pass below the existing beams. As a result the height of the offices has been reduced.

The MICA library that requires a heavy loading limit is housed in the replacement block to take advantage of the new structure.

To create more basement space, an existing block had to be demolished which subsequently tripled the basement footprint available. The basement space then could be extended under Fort Canning plaza without having to worry about foundation getting in the way.

One of the challenges was to create adequate basement space for more parking lots and building's plant facilities.

Efforts were made to avoid the demolition of existing buildings. Eventually only the toilet block at the back of the building was demolished to allow for the new driveway and formal entrance.

One of the key challenges was to provide adequate vehicular access. To create the present driveway, the old driveway behind the building was widened by cutting back into Fort Canning Hill.

The new driveway now leads to a formal and grander entrance that is also accessible from Fort Canning while the old police garages gave way to a VIP car parking area.

One major new structure is the lift tower, constructed to provide lift access to all floors. The tower, set away from the existing building fabric to avoid problems with structural integration, houses four lifts, clustered around a lobby. As there was no clear central core in the original building layout, the new lift lobby also serves as a focal circulation point.

The old parade ground in the central courtyard as seen in this picture is no longer an outdoor area but has been assimilated as part of the building's interior.

The old parade ground has been transformed into an atrium, named the ARTrium, with a glass skylight and adorned with sculptures by Anthony Poon and Ng Yak Whee. The skylight has been designed as light as possible with the glass held in compression by a system of cable ties. Here, arts activities and performances are held while shops, art galleries and cafes surround the ARTrium.

A second block had to be removed to enable the basement to be built but this was reconstructed. The replacement block, while modern in design, remains in proportion to the existing blocks.

Where new structures were constructed, such as the replacement block, the ARTrium and the lift tower, they were expressed in contemporary architectural language, using glass, steel and granite. Glass and steel are considered light and transparent materials that give contrast to the original elements yet do not obscure them.

The MICA library that requires a heavy loading limit is housed in the replacement block to take advantage of the new structure.

Page 2

In 1998, the Old Hill Street Police Station was gazetted as a national monument. It was to become the new home of the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, after being redeveloped and refurbished at a cost of \$82 million. The transformation was completed in March 2000.

Today, it is known as MICA Building and in addition to housing the ministry, it has as its occupants the National Arts Council, the National Heritage Board, the Media Development Authority (MDA) and the Singapore Kindness Movement.

"When people see it, they'll think that it doesn't look like a typical government building. I think that's probably a good thing. This is a place where the arts are to be encouraged and having a building that looks bright and welcoming seems appropriate."

Sim Soo Kheng, MITA spokeswoman, *The Business Times*, 15 April 2000

From the past... Existing features of the building were retained and restored including the external facades facing Hill Street and River Valley Road. Original features such as the corbelled loggias and balconies and the prison cell vent openings on the River Valley Road facade were kept. Shanghai plaster was uncovered but as they could not be left exposed, a painted finish was chosen. The original windows with steel frames and timber louvres on the external facades including old ironmongery and green-tinted glass were all refurbished. Four layers of paint were revealed during the restoration of the windows, the original yellow, green, blue and light green.

That which remains ... Also retained is the old main entrance marked by double columns topped by a Greek pediment and the two plaques on the columns commemorating the opening of the building in 1934. It now serves as a pedestrian entrance.

Till today... On the internal facades, verandah openings along communal corridors of the barracks were reinstated and chimney flues that served the kitchens of the barracks were retained. Staircases including the original railings and balustrades are now used as fire escape staircases.

And into a new beginning... The new facade is painted a warmer colour than the original grey while the windows are painted in rainbow hues to counterbalance the authoritative images of the old Police station and reflect the progressive outlook of MICA. The use of colours has been extended to the interior atrium walls, which are in blue, yellow and pink.

The Old Hill Street Police Station is now known as the MICA Building. It comprises seven six-storey (with two basement levels) blocks formed around two open spaces in an L-shaped plan. The two open spaces are the interior atrium with a glass skylight and the exterior open-air triangular courtyard. It sits on a site area of 11 square metres and has a gross floor area of 25,000 square metres.

As part of the Civic District night lighting scheme, special night lighting features were installed that enable the building to be lit up in different ways depending on the occasion, from normal lighting to a festival light-up.

Occupied by :
Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts

Tenants :
National Arts Council
National Heritage Board

Media Development Authority
Singapore Kindness Movement

Development team and costs :
Redeveloped in December 1997 and completed in March 2000. Refurbished at a cost of \$82 million.

Owner : Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts
Project Manager : PWD Consultants Pte Ltd
Main Consultant : PWD Consultants Pte Ltd
Main Contractor : M/s Evan Lim & Co Pte Ltd.
Managing Agent: PWD EMS Pte Ltd

5th Window

Page 1

Title: The Wind Beneath A Nation's Wings : Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts

Intro Text:

MICA : Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts. The manifold responsibilities and tasks of this ministry are already inherent and implied in its name. As Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong said in his National Day Rally Speech on 22 August 1999: "... MITA (now MICA) is developing a vision for Singapore to be a Renaissance City. Artistic creativity is an important element of a knowledge-based economy. (MITA, now MICA) will get more funds to promote the arts."

Perhaps it is only apt that a ministry with such a long history is currently undertaking a responsibility of such significance in such a young nation that is only 35-years old. In a way, one could say that the government's earliest efforts to nurture the arts and culture in a systematic and organised manner began with the formation of the Ministry of Culture in 1959, the same year Singapore achieved internal self-government.

Menu:

Pre-1959 : Roots

1959 : The Ministry of Culture

1960-1962 : Growing Up - Some Institutions of Significance

1963-1964 : Merger

1965-1970 : Independence and Development

1970-1980 : Cultural Medallion, Festival of Arts

1980-1989 : Changes

1990-Present : MITA and Beyond

Page 2

Pre-1959 : Roots

Prior to 1959, there only existed departments within the government to address public needs. For government information, there had been a Public Relations Department, a Publicity Department, travelling public addresses and film teams that reached out to the more remote areas of the island. In addition, a Department of Broadcasting had been set up by the governments of Singapore and the Federation of Malaya in 1946 – commercial radio had begun in 1936 with the British Malayan Broadcasting Corporation while the Malaya Broadcasting Corporation was set up by the government of the Straits Settlements in 1940.

This new department had several aims. It served to: provide a full and regular news service; focus on interest and loyalty to Malaya; stimulate interest in the work of the government; broadcast to schools; provide entertainment. The station that carried out these aims was RadiMalaya and broadcasts were made in English, Malay, Tamil, and seven Chinese dialects.

For most of the time in the pre-war years and subsequently the 1950s, performances and exhibitions were very much the effort of individual organisations. This was also the age of the Malay feature film, which saw the rise of many successful films that have since become classics.

Under the Legislative Assembly (1955-1958), the situation remained very much the same although the Public Relations Office was expanded to the Department of Information Services under the Chief Secretary's Ministry comprising a Press Section, Production Division, and Field Translation and Research Sections. In addition, a Fine Arts and Cultural Section under the Ministry of Education had been set up. A Cultural Advisory Council and later a Singapore Arts Council were set up in 1955, with the aim of coordinating the efforts of various arts societies. The Singapore Arts Council however, did not prove effective.

Page 3

1959 : The Ministry of Culture

The objectives, which the new Ministry of Culture, with S. Rajaratnam as its first Minister, had to fulfil in 1959 were herculean in the context of its times:

- * The creation of a sense of national identity
- * Elimination of communal divisions
- * Raising awareness of democratic values in the aim of creating a just society
- * Wide acceptance of the national language
- * Raising awareness of independence through merger and ideals of democratic socialist way of life

The greatest challenge faced by the ministry then was to make people of different cultural backgrounds seek a common identity in the Malayan homeland. It is of interest to note that such ideals remain, albeit with changes in context, part of the present MITA mission to "build a creative economy, gracious community and connected society with a Singaporean identity rooted in our multicultural heritage." Another challenge was to bridge the divide between the English educated and the Chinese educated that arose from the colonial legacy of class divisions.

In some ways, the ministry's organisation and responsibilities foreshadowed those of MICA. The Ministry of Culture comprised seven divisions:

- * HQ : directed and coordinated the activities of the other divisions.
- * News Division : was responsible for the distribution of news and the provision of facilities for the Singapore and international press, international news agencies, broadcasting and television services.
- * Publicity Division : was responsible for informing the population of the aims, objectives, policies, and programmes of the government as well as securing as much mass participation as possible in these tasks. It achieved its aims via the various sections of the former Department of Information Services. These comprised the Exhibition Section, Field Section, Film Section and the Cultural Affairs Section, which fostered the evolution of a Malayan culture via programmes such as the Aneka Ragam Rakyat, an open air variety concert that showcased the art forms of the various cultures. The Publicity Division also managed tourism and furnished advice on publicity to other ministries.

* Broadcasting Division : ran Radio Singapore, the former Radio Malaya.

* Library Division : of significance was the transfer of the museum and library to the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture, a legacy which remains till today. Originally under the Ministry of Education, the library and the museum were transferred to the Ministry of Culture when the new government took office. There were also two part-time branch libraries then, in the Siglap and Joo Chiat Community Centres.

* Museum Division

* Printing Division

Page 4

1960-1962 : Growing Up - Some Institutions of Significance

1960 was to see the birth of two institutions of significance. The Dewan Bahasa dan Kebudayaan Kebangsaan (Institute of National Language and Culture) was set up on 20 May 1960 to develop the national language and promote Malayan culture. The other institution formed was the National Theatre Trust that managed the National Theatre, a performing arts venue that used to stand at the foot of Fort Canning Hill, at the junction of River Valley Road and Clemenceau Avenue.

It was also during this time, as the government prepared for merger, that various pro-Malaya activities were organised, such as Malaysia week, the use of stamps franked with the campaign slogan "Malaysia as sure as the sun must rise," and an essay competition for school students.

Page 5

1963-1964 : Merger

In 1963, the first Southeast Asia Cultural Festival was organised, featuring 500 artists from 11 countries (Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, South Vietnam, Philippines, India, Pakistan, Hong Kong, Sabah, Malaya, and Singapore). The Festival, which was held at the National Theatre and Victoria Memorial Hall (today renamed Victoria Concert Hall), had an audience of 45,000. One significant development during these years was the beginning of national television.

Television Singapura began broadcasting in February 1963 with a pilot service and in April, it was established as a regular service with one channel. Transmission hours were extended and a second channel was introduced later in the year. Programmes were in the four main languages to cater to a multi-lingual audience. Following merger in the same year, it was renamed Television Malaysia, Singapura while Radio Singapore was renamed Radio Malaysia, Singapura.

Page 6

1965-1970 : Independence and Development

The Ministry of Culture was retained after Singapore's independence in 1965. Its basic structure remained the same. Radio and TV

Malaysia (Singapura) became Radio and TV Singapura and the operating hours of the television stations continued to increase with the completion of new buildings and studios for the station. With television and radio broadcasting services as part of the ministry, it was able to leverage on them in the early years of independence for the government's many publicity campaigns.

The late 1960s saw important developments within the ministry:

* 1968 witnessed the birth of the National Archives and Records Centre. The National Archives and Records Centre would eventually expand to become the National Archives of Singapore of today.

* In the same year, the National Theatre Company was established and comprised the Singapore National Orchestra, Chinese Orchestra, Choir, and Dance Company. These companies would play an important role in the performing arts scene until the closing of the National Theatre in the early 1980s.

* In 1969, the first full-time branch library opened in Queenstown.

The ministers of culture during these years were Othman Wok in 1965 and Jek Yuen Thong who succeeded him in 1968.

Page 7

1970-1980 : Cultural Medallion, Festival of Arts

The ministry's activities in the arts continued to expand throughout the 1970s and witnessed the birth of several institutions that would continue till the present.

* The Cultural Medallion, which recognises artistic achievement, was instituted in 1978 to honour the country's artists.

* The Patron of the Arts Award, which recognises arts sponsorship, was founded in 1983.

* The most significant development from this period however, was the beginning of the Festival of Arts, the predecessor of the present day Singapore Arts Festival. In 1977, a Festival of Arts had been successfully organised by the Young Musicians' Society and the Ministry of Education. In the following year, the Ministry of Culture organised the event, then called the Singapore Festival of Arts. From then on, it would become a permanent fixture in the Singapore arts calendar as a biennial event (until 1999 when it became annual and renamed the Singapore Arts Festival) that aimed to present the top artists from all over the world as well as serve as a platform for Singapore artists.

During this time, Ong Teng Cheong was Acting Minister for Culture for three years from 1978 until S. Dhanabalan took over in 1981.

Page 8

1980-1989 : Changes

If the decade of 1970s was about the growth of the arts, then the decade of the 1980s was about change. The first of these changes took place in 1980, when the Broadcasting Division of the

Ministry of Culture became a statutory board, the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC). This was followed by the most dramatic change of all: the dissolution of the Ministry of Culture in 1985 with the functions of its various divisions designated to other ministries.

That year, the Ministry of Communications was renamed the Ministry of Communications and Information (MCI) and as such, the Information Division of the Ministry of Culture came under the jurisdiction of MCI. The arts promotion aspect of the Ministry of Culture was assimilated into the Ministry of Community Development (MCD) as the Cultural Affairs Division. S. Dhanabalan became the Minister for Community Development while Yeo Ning Hong became the new Minister for Communications and Information. However, with S. Dhanabalan taking over the portfolio of National Development in 1986, Wong Kan Seng became the Acting Minister for Community Development.

Despite these changes, many arts festivals that have become predecessors in one way or another to present day events flourished throughout the 1980s. The Festival of Arts continued to expand while events such as the International Jazz Festival, Drama Festival, Dance Festival and Music Festival played an important role in providing an avenue for the country's artists as well as attracting talent from abroad.

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1990-Present : MICA and Beyond

In 1990, the Information Division of the MCI and the Cultural Affairs Division of MCD, together with other associated departments and statutory boards, recombined to form the Ministry of Information and the Arts (MITA, now MICA). BG George Yeo was Acting Minister and subsequently the first Minister of MITA (now MICA) until 1999, when Lee Yock Suan succeeded him.

The last decade of the 20th century saw exciting developments in the Singapore arts and cultural scene.

* 1991: There was first of all, the formation of the National Arts Council (NAC), an amalgamation of the Festival of Arts Secretariat, Singapore Cultural Foundation, Arts Division of MITA, and the National Theatre Trust. With an aim to nurture and promote the arts within Singapore and support the promotion of the works of Singapore artists abroad, the NAC plays a central role in the Singapore arts scene. Among its responsibilities are the overseeing of the funding of arts groups, providing and managing scholarships for aspiring artists, and presiding over arts awards such as the Cultural Medallion, Young Artist Award and the Patron of the Arts award.

Aside from its developmental role, the NAC also manages the most important arts festival in the country, the annual Singapore Arts Festival. The festival, which became annual in 1999, is in effect a combination of the biennial Festival of Arts and the short-lived biennial Festival of Asian Performing Arts which was launched in 1993.

* 1993: The National Archives, National Museum, and the Oral History Department combined to form the National Heritage Board.

* 1994: The Singapore Broadcasting Corporation was corporatised to become Singapore International Media and the Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA), a statutory board under MITA overseeing and promoting the broadcasting industry in Singapore, was formed.

* 1995: The National Library Board was constituted as a statutory board under MITA.

The dawn of the new century has brought changes and challenges for the Ministry. A landmark project under MICA is the building of Singapore's new performing arts centre, Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay. Completed in October 2002, the Esplanade houses a world-class concert hall and theatre, as well as more intimate performance spaces for a variety of arts activities. It also contains the Esplanade Mall where Singaporeans and tourists alike converge to indulge in shopping or grab a pre-performance meal. All in all, the Esplanade seeks to provide a total arts experience as an arts centre for everyone.

On 23 November 2001, MITA underwent yet another change and was renamed the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts, with David Lim Tik En as minister. The enlarged ministry, while retaining the MITA acronym, now includes the Information Technology and Telecommunications portfolio. A fifth statutory board, the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA) also came under MITA.

IDA is a manifestation of the government's commitment to developing the info-communications sector. Its vision is to create a digital future for Singapore with innovation, entrepreneurship and e-lifestyle as the norm. IDA will play a leading role in establishing Singapore as an info-communications hub, and a vital node in the global infocomm network. It will develop, promote and where necessary, regulate the market.

In May 2003, Dr Lee Boon Yang succeeded as the Acting Minister of the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts.

On 1 Jan 2004, SBA, Singapore Films Commission and Films and Publications Department (previously under MITA HQ) merged to form Media Development Authority (MDA). Dr Lee Boon Yang became Minister of MITA on 12 May 2003. The Ministry's acronym was changed from MITA to MICA in 2004.