



P.O. Box 3336 (M.P.O.)
Vancouver B.C.
V6B 3Y3

To the Mayor and Councillors:

The membership of Heritage Vancouver is concerned that the city may lose yet another heritage building. This time, one of the oldest buildings outside of Gastown, the **INNES-THOMPSON BLOCK (1889)**, could be demolished as part of the new proposal for the 500 block, West Hastings Street.

The current proposal calls for the **INNES-THOMPSON BLOCK** to be replaced as part of the new development with a three-storey facade in the same scale as the original. It would seem that this is an opportunity to preserve an original facade and, at the same time preserve and enhance an important streetscape with the newly-renovated Standard Building (1912) to the east and the T.D. Bank Building (1919), to be retained in the new scheme, to the west.

The idea of retaining the original facade will and does bring up the question of facadism. Usually, this has been seen as inappropriate in Vancouver when it relates to heritage preservation because many of the projects have been poorly done. There have been excellent projects too, most notably the Palms Hotel facade that is now incorporated into the Cineplex Theatre complex on Granville Street. Buildings such as the **INNES-THOMPSON BLOCK** and much of the early commercial architecture in Vancouver are really brick and stone facades placed in front of a wood-framed structure, much different than buildings such as the C.P.R. Station or Art Gallery where more than just the front of the building has been considered by the architect. The removal of the structure behind the facade and its replacement with a new structure would seem appropriate in this case. In cities such as London and Amsterdam, among others, facades both small and very large are routinely preserved with new structures built behind.

Heritage Vancouver hopes that the importance of the **INNES-THOMPSON BLOCK** is recognized and that the building, an increasingly rare piece of early Vancouver, not be condemned but be retained for future generations.

Attached is some information on the **INNES-THOMPSON BLOCK**, researched by Heritage Vancouver members Jason Turner, Don Luxton, and Cathy Barford.

Sincerely,

The 150 Members of Heritage Vancouver

THE INNES-THOMPSON BLOCK

FACTS

PRESENT ADDRESS:

516-528 WEST HASTINGS STREET

LEGAL DESCRIPTION:

LOTS 5, 6, & 7, BLOCK 24, D.L. 541

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION:

1889

ARCHITECT:

CHARLES OSBORN WICKENDEN

STYLE:

ROMANESQUE REVIVAL

construction, J.S. Matthews, Vancouver's first archivist, described this site as "a wet swamp, covered with old tree roots and broken small logs, - debris of the former forest - boulders, stones, etc. and the habitat of hundreds of croaking bull frogs hiding under the luxurious skunk cabbage."

The building has been known since the time of its construction as the Innes-Thompson Block. It is named after Vancouver pioneer Frederick Colleton Innes, a notary public, real-estate agent, and financier, who opened his first office on Cordova Street in 1885. His firm, Innes & Richards Real Estate, occupied offices in this building. Philip N. Thompson occupied the westernmost storefront, 412 West Hastings in the building.

HISTORIC IMPORTANCE

The Innes-Thompson Block is extremely important for being one of the first masonry buildings to be built outside of the Gastown area immediately after the Great Fire of 1886. This makes it one of the oldest surviving buildings in the City of Vancouver, having been built just three years after the city's incorporation.

The Canadian Pacific Railway began promoting the development of this area by establishing their own offices at the corner of Hastings and Richards, next door to this site; rapid development followed the construction of the prestigious Bank of British Columbia, which still survives at 490 West Hastings Street.

Construction of the Innes-Thompson Block commenced in the early part of 1889, and it was occupied by November of that year. It is difficult to imagine, now that the building stands in the centre of an urban area, but at the time of its construction it was at the end of civilization in the new settlement. Before its

The Innes-Thompson Block is a very rare survivor from the city's first development, and thus stands as an extremely important link to Vancouver's pioneering past.

ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE

Wickenden's design was based on the Romanesque Revival Style, which originated in Chicago in the 1880s as the most modern and appropriate style for commercial buildings and warehouses; he was undoubtedly familiar with the style through his practice in Winnipeg, where the Romanesque was already firmly established. The brick and stone facade is divided into three bays, with triple arched windows in each bay on the second floor, each with six smaller windows above. The ground floor is treated as a series of rectangular storefronts typical of the era. It is an important early surviving example of the Romanesque Revival, and serves as a reminder that the city's early commercial buildings were often quite utilitarian in appearance, which is understandable considering the frontier nature of Vancouver just three years after its establishment.

The Innes-Thompson Block is also an early example of non-flammable construction. In accordance with fire regulations passed in July 1886, the stone and brick walls of the ground floor are 17" thick, and those of the upper floors are 13" thick. The danger of fire was still uppermost in the minds of Vancouver's citizens, who had seen their entire city disappear in the Great Fire.

URBAN CONTEXT

The West Hastings Street corridor contains a number of landmark historic buildings, and acts as a transition zone between the downtown business area and the heritage areas of Chinatown and Gastown. Immediately adjacent to the Innes-Thompson Block are two listed heritage buildings, the Union Bank Building (later the Toronto-Dominion Bank) to the west, and the Standard Building to the east. The Innes-Thompson Block thus helps define a historic streetscape, and is indeed one of the very oldest buildings on this street.

Demolition of this building would severely compromise the historic character of the area, and detract from the setting of the other adjacent landmark buildings.

THE ARCHITECT: C.O. WICKENDEN

Charles Osborn Wickenden, designer of the Innes-Thompson Block, was one of Vancouver's very first architects, and also helped introduce the Romanesque Revival Style to the West Coast.

Wickenden had a wide-ranging career before settling in Vancouver. Born near Rochester, Kent in 1851, he articulated in England before moving to New York. He then moved to St. John, New Brunswick, where his commissions included Acadia College in Wolfville, Nova Scotia.

In 1881 Wickenden moved to the booming western city of Winnipeg, which was attract-

ing a number of architects at the time. His commissions there included the court house in Winnipeg, Brandon and Neepawa, the Provincial Offices, Christ Church, and numerous other buildings for private businesses and for the Hudson's Bay Company.

Arriving in Vancouver in 1888, Wickenden was one of only a handful of qualified architects. The city was expanding explosively following the devastation of the Great Fire and the arrival of the transcontinental railway, and Wickenden launched immediately into a number of very important commissions, including the Innes-Thompson Block (1889), the Lefevre Block (also known as the Empire Building, 1888), the original Hudson's Bay Store at Granville and Georgia (1891), and Vancouver's oldest surviving church, Christ Church Cathedral (1889-1895). His last known designs were a competitive sketch for a Presbyterian Church and the Municipal Hall in the District of North Vancouver.



Wickenden was a founding member of the Council of the British Columbia Institute of Architects (1891-1894) and served as its second president. In 1903 he became Reeve of North Vancouver; he retired about 1910, and died December 7, 1934 in Vancouver.

RESEARCH BY:

JASON TURNER, DON LUXTON, CATHY BARFORD

