

HERITAGE

Vancouver

Newsletter

*A New Chapter for
North Vancouver's*

HAMERSLEY HOUSE

by Karen Russell

Very soon, Hamersley House will be for sale. The City of North Vancouver has recently decided to carefully release one of its own inventory buildings—a cherished municipally owned heritage building—in order to brighten the future of this historic property. The imposing home—remarkable for its concrete and brick construction—is about to enter a new phase in its 96 year old life. Hamersley House, located at 350 East Second Street, is an interesting case study from a heritage conservation perspective, not only because of its obvious architectural and historical merit, but also because of the community stewardship that it has fostered. In fact, a review of its recent local history over the last 25 years is somewhat reflective of changing attitudes and approaches to municipal heritage planning policy at a broader level over the same period.

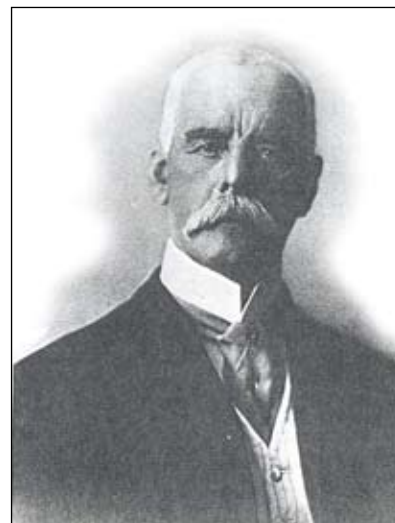
Colonel Alfred St. George Hamersley arrived in Vancouver from New Zealand in 1888 and within 2 years became the first City solicitor for the newly incorporated City of Vancouver. For his home, however, the Colonel chose a site across the Inlet. From 1902 to 1905 this concrete and brick house in the Tudor Revival Style was built on land purchased from an English financier by the name of Heywood Lonsdale. It is believed to be the earliest building in the Vancouver region constructed using concrete above its foundation. Unfortunately, the family only stayed 2 years. Afterwards, it housed a number of community uses: sanatorium, municipal hospital, and a senior citizens home before being acquired by the City of North Vancouver in 1977. Leased by the City for restaurant use for 20 years, Hamersley House has been vacant since 1997.

Over the years, the property has undergone changes altering its



Hamersley House

City of N. Vancouver archives



Colonel Alfred St. George Hamersley

City of Vancouver archives

HERITAGE
Vancouver
PRESENTS

Wednesday, June 21, 2000 6:30 PM

Our June meeting will be in Yaletown, you are invited to a members only reception at **Councillor Gordon Price's** Yaletown condominium. Here's a chance to take in the view of this former industrial neighbourhood and talk to Councillor Price about heritage, urbanism, bikes and living downtown. It's a fundraising event for HV (tickets are a reasonable \$5.00) and space is limited. Call the HV line at 254.9411 for reservations.

At 8 pm, everyone is invited to join Councillor Price and John Hunt, president of Yaletown Business Improvement Association, at the Roundhouse Community Centre for a walking tour of Yaletown. See how this area is still evolving from its industrial warehouse past into one of this city's trendiest neighbourhoods.

SUMMER HV Events

Our July meeting takes place in Strathcona. On Wednesday July 19th, we're going to look at some recent heritage projects in Vancouver's oldest neighbourhood. Recent developments in Strathcona have included restorations, new construction and infill buildings. For this meeting we'll meet two people working in the neighbourhood and tour their projects. We'll learn first hand about the challenges involved in working with heritage in this neighbourhood. Meet at 921 Princess Avenue at 7:30 pm.

In August, we'll meet outside the Vancouver Museum on the 16th at 7:30 pm for a walk in the neighbourhood, it will give us a chance to meet the members of Heritage Vancouver as we take a ramble looking at buildings and landscape. Its a perfect way to relax before we begin our regular program in September.

VANCOUVER MODERN



Photo: Robert Moffatt, 2000

Time running out on Mitchell house

by *Robert Moffatt*

Mitchell house
1562 Western Crescent, Vancouver
Semmens and Simpson 1951

Nestled next to the University of British Columbia campus, the University Endowment Lands have long been a treasure of quality modernist houses. Developed primarily in the late 1940s and 1950s, the UEL is dotted with houses by Ron Thom, Duncan McNab, John Porter and many other notable Vancouver architects of the period.

For the longest time the neighbourhood existed in a sort of time-freeze.

While the large sites overlooking Burrard Inlet saw some new construction, much of the UEL remained as built. That began to rapidly change several years ago. Many older houses have been demolished, including several by significant architects, and typically replaced by the McMansions filling other upscale Vancouver neighbourhoods.

The Mitchell house is the latest teardown candidate. Designed in 1951 by Harold Semmens and Douglas Simpson for a pie-shaped view lot, the house is a good example of the firm's clean-lined, Breuer-

inspired residential work. A simple front elevation of concrete block, wood siding and strip windows hides the living and dining areas in the rear stem of the T-shaped house. Enormous window walls stretch the length of the living area, revealing the North Shore mountains to the north and a sun-drenched deck to the south. A large brick fireplace anchors the rear. Below, the dining area is illuminated by ground-level window walls and openings to the living area above. Semmens and Simpson's careful detailing includes vertical mahogany siding extending from the outside to the inside, an open-treaded spiral staircase set in a glassed stairwell, and teak-paneled storage walls throughout.

Despite its pedigree, the Mitchell house deteriorated in later years into little more than a garish Pepto-pink ruin. Vancouver's modernist houses are fast dwindling in number and often declining in condition, and demolition is particularly regrettable for the relative few which can be clearly viewed and appreciated from the street. They are very much a form of semi-public art, and it is a small tragedy for them to deteriorate and vanish forever.

Mark Your Calendar

Until June 10

Picturing the Past

This photography-based exhibition chronicles the many architectural, social and economic changes that West Vancouver communities have undergone over the past one hundred years, since Model T Fords rambled down dirt streets and women with parasols strolled across wooden sidewalks. West Vancouver Museum and Archives, 680 17th St., West Vancouver. Tuesday — Saturday 12:00 - 4:30 PM.

June 10

The Conference of Big City Preservation Organizations Seattle

There will be a round-table seminar for the community at Town Hall, 1119 Eighth Avenue from 10:30 am to 3:30 pm. Free. Call 206.622.6952 for more info.

June 19

The Industrial Garden Realm a Regional Project of Sustainability for Expo 2000 Hannover

Public Lecture with Dr. Harald Kegel 5:30 pm Monday, at the Architectural Institute of British Columbia
The Industrial Garden Realm is a visionary project initiated by the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation. Located in the German Province of Saxony-Anhalt, in the regional triangle formed by Dessau-Bitterfeld-Wittenberg, the Industrial Garden Realm was selected as a satellite destination to the Expo 2000 Hannover. Rejecting the typical 'commercial events fair' approach to a world exposition, the Province of Saxony-Anhalt opted instead to promote itself as a destination for educational tourism, presenting not only its culturally rich heritage, but also its vision of renewing an economically depressed post-industrial landscape. Receiving the European Planning Award in 1998, the Industrial Garden Realm showcases a built legacy of sustainable planning initiatives.

rsvp! The lecture is free, however seating is limited. Please confirm your attendance by calling Julie Foxall at 331-8081.

from **Hamersley cover**

original plan and muddling the interior. It has been divided into suites, re-roofed in asbestos shingles, and enlarged. Later, when it became a restaurant under the City's ownership, the wraparound verandah was enclosed to provide additional table capacity. Alterations required for Building Code and safety reasons resulted in unfortunate alterations to its interior that have seriously compromised its integrity.

In the mid-1970s, municipal heritage conservation programs were still in their infancy and little was in place to protect significant buildings. The City of North Vancouver took a bold and responsible step in 1977 when it decided to invest up to \$1 million dollars (today's dollars) to ensure that Hamersley House would not be lost to future redevelopment. In those days, the only way to protect a heritage property with certainty, was to purchase it. Today, municipalities are fortunate to have many legislative tools to choose from in order to protect a heritage property. It is no longer necessary for a municipality to own a heritage building in order to preserve it. In fact, it may be in the best interests of the property that it be owned privately yet protected publicly. Today, most municipalities don't always have the resources to invest the necessary funds required to properly maintain and rehabilitate an inventory of municipally owned heritage structures.

By releasing the building for sale, but using tools to place protective controls over conservation practices, rehabilitation standards, and landscaping provisions, Hamersley House may now go on to live another chapter of its life that is truer to its origins. Hopefully—another bold but wise step for the City of North Vancouver.

Karen Russell is a planner in the Engineering, Parks and Environment Department for the City of North Vancouver. She is also a board member with Heritage Vancouver.

Mt. Pleasant tour unique

On Sunday, May 21st, a group of hardy souls waited in a downpour at Mount Pleasant's "nucleus square" at Main and Kingsway for a Heritage Vancouver walking tour by Bruce MacDonald. (Decades ago, a band once played in the centre of this muddy intersection and the streetcar coming up the Main Street hill, swung west at Broadway. Wooden churches and stores have been replaced by more substantial buildings.)

Those souls deterred by such small inconveniences as rain, missed a great afternoon. We toured parts of the business and residential sections, building on Bruce's dynamic talk to HV members at the Vancouver Museum. Using photos and anecdotes, along with his maps tracing the area's density, Bruce conjured up a vivid picture of the past; whilst Mount Pleasant resident Nancy Chiavario joined in with her stories of preservation headaches, histrionics and victories.

The rain let up as we arrived at the Davis houses on Tenth Avenue. The group received a warm welcome along with tea and shortbread provided by the Davis family. We relaxed in the courtyard by the old stables and admired the heritage enclave's successful blend of the old and the new.

John Davis was a cordial and congenial host taking us inside some of the houses to view relics found tossed into the foundations of the houses—including horse liniment and baby bottles, as well as old newspapers and magazines discovered during restoration work. Family snapshots of early residents hang in the hallways.

It was a wonderful afternoon, one to be long remembered and thanks to Heritage Vancouver, Bruce MacDonald, and the Davis Family, a unique one.

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Words from the President

Thoughts to Ponder

Dear Members,

Despite our usual weather, the summer season is almost upon us. It means for many of us its time to travel. If you're travelling in BC take time to stop at any of the historic sites along the road because there is an amazing amount of neat stuff out there to be found.

If you're off to exotic destinations you'll be taking in the sites and monuments of ancient cultures and marvelling at their age and maybe wondering how these things have survived in to this century. Surprisingly most of the sites we look at in awe were not considered worth preserving at some point in their life. Places were looted and destroyed (we travel to see these ruins now) and in many parts of the world the building materials were recycled into other buildings. In Tunis for instance, the old city has many buildings—700 years or older—built using stone from the Roman ruins, mosques will feature dozens of columns of different designs all taken from a variety of sites.

Today we still recycle building bits through used building supply stores. But from India, Pakistan and other Asian countries, all manner of traditional buildings continue to end up a decorator pieces in someone's living room. Our desire for the exotic means destruction. Many buildings, torn down because they are seen as merely old, are now just seen as money waiting to be made—fetching a very good price as they are sold off bit by bit.

As we fight to save the heritage of this city, think about the providence of the nifty door or window grill before you buy it. Its something to think about.

A heritage advocate's job is never done, there are preservation issues everywhere.

Cheers



John Atkin
Interim President, Heritage Vancouver

Celebrities May Have Reason to Celebrate

Plans are underway to start a comprehensive restoration program at Celebrities Nightclub on Davie Street. The buff-brick commercial structure is suffering from a spalling brick veneer facade that caused the club to be closed last winter for safety reasons. The brick veneer will be completely removed, and intact bricks set aside for re-use. The back-up wall will be partially rebuilt and re-pointed. The facade will then be rebuilt using the salvaged brick and replacement bricks taken from the same clay source in Abbotsford. Now, to solve the universal dilemma regarding windows...

For Sale

Digital answering machine.
No tapes, accessible remote.
HV is now on a voice mail system and no longer needs it. Was \$90, asking \$45.

Phone Susanna at 734-2933

Heritage Vancouver
PO Box 3336, Main Post Office
Vancouver BC V6B 3Y3

604.254.9411

<http://home.istar.ca/~glenchan/hvsintro.shtml>

Join Heritage Vancouver

Annual membership runs from October 1st to September 30th. Members receive a monthly newsletter, free admission to monthly speakers' programs and reduced rates for tours and other activities.

Charitable donation #1073758-52. Membership fees are not tax deductible.

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