

HERITAGE

Vancouver

N e w s l e t t e r

HV Project



Denise Whittle, Joanne Penhale, Diana Leung, Anny Ko, Scott Erdman

In early September of 2000, five Communications students from Simon Fraser University took on the task of creating a comprehensive media kit for Heritage Vancouver Society to increase media coverage and public awareness of the organization. Starting with basically no knowledge of Heritage Vancouver, we banded together under the made-up-name of *Spectrum Consulting* and began by learning everything we could. Given that the Society does not have a central locale, and it is not widely advertised, our initial findings were mediocre. Our interviews with some of Heritage Vancouver's stakeholders and board members turned out to be more fruitful as we discovered that each person we spoke to is a wealth of information and an integral part of the Heritage Vancouver team.

The media kit that we have created is designed to enable the Society and its members to spread their knowledge to a wider audience of Vancouver's citizens, thus increasing heritage advocacy in the city. After four months of researching, brainstorming, debating, writing, editing, and trying not to go crazy, we finally completed our kit, and admittedly are quite proud of our product.

Three members of our team presented the media kit at the December board meeting, at Janet Leduc's, and we sincerely hope that once fully reviewed and implemented, it is found to be helpful and ultimately instrumental for the growth of the Society.

We genuinely believe that Heritage Vancouver Society is a worthy and necessary organization in Vancouver and feel that everyone involved is fortunate to be amongst such well-informed and pro-active people. Our involvement with Heritage Vancouver has been a positive and educational experience. In addition to practicing the skills taught in our Communications classes, we were also afforded the opportunity to learn about heritage issues and the importance of preserving architecture that spans a range of periods.

We thank all members of Heritage Vancouver for allowing us the opportunity to work and learn with their team, and give you all our best wishes for a prosperous future.

Joanne Penhale
Denise Whittle
Anny Ko
Diana Leung
Scott Erdman

HERITAGE
Vancouver
 PRESENTS

OUR PARKS ARE DUMPS
Wednesday, January 17th, 2001
7:30 PM, Vancouver Museum

Our Talking Dirty Series continues. We shift gears in January with *Our Parks are Dumps*. A look at the heritage of Vancouver's park system and the fact that many of them are built on former garbage dumps.

THE AIR THAT BITES
Wednesday, February 21st
7:30 PM, Vancouver Museum

Meet conservator Andrew Todd who talks about restoring damages caused by the ravages of city air. His most recent project is the exterior sculpture on the Main Post Office building. Past credentials, too numerous to list, include the monuments on the grounds of Parliament in Ottawa. Join HV for an entertaining journey through dirty air.

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**City of Vancouver
 Heritage Awards**

The recent civic strike has put all city business a little behind, and planning the Heritage Awards is no different. The Heritage Awards will not be occurring in February of next year, but rather in March. However, this has some unexpected benefits which just might lead to considering rescheduling the Awards permanently. Instead of trying to assemble nominations during the Christmas season, nomination forms will be made available in January. The awards evening may coincide with the Vancouver Heritage Foundation's Heritage Fair which will also be occurring in March 2001. We'll all have lots of time to prepare outstanding nomination packages and have a heritage extravaganza to celebrate the winners!

VANCOUVER MODERN



**ROBERT MCKEE: Vancouver's
 forgotten Modernist architect?**

by *Robert Moffatt*

Today, Robert McKee is rarely mentioned in the history of Vancouver's Modernist architecture. Yet in the 1940s and 50s McKee was one of the city's more prominent architects, completing significant commissions and gaining regular coverage in Canadian shelter magazines and architecture journals.

Born in Vancouver in 1913, McKee trained in the beaux-arts style at the University of Washington and worked for Charles Van Norman's prolific firm in the late 1930s. Van Norman was shifting towards Modernism at that time, building a radical new house for himself and generating numerous clients for his clean-lined interpretations of Cape Cod cottages. After returning from the Second World War McKee began his own Vancouver practice, mixing European Modernism with decidedly Populuxe influences.

His LeFohn house was one of his earlier projects. Built in 1950 and owned by the LeFohn family through the late 1990s, it remained virtually unaltered inside and out until its

demolition in 1998. It was also notable in that McKee was granted considerable control over both interior and exterior design, creating a house strongly reflective of his design inclinations.

Like many McKee houses, the LeFohn house spread across its Shaughnessy site as a series of long, low cubic forms. Surfaces were flat and unornamented, with walls of smooth plywood sheeting alternating with floor-to-ceiling windows. Fieldstone provided texture along the front façade and helped tie the building to the site. An inset entrance with overhead trellises added a Japanese feel.

McKee carried his comprehensive planning to the interiors, designing much of the freestanding furniture as well as built-in storage. The living and dining rooms were spare and airy, featuring flush mahogany ceiling panels and an unusual egg-crate concrete fireplace wall. The recreation room was finished with lighter birch woods for the built-in cabinetry and furniture. Borderline kitsch elements included glass-topped drift-

wood coffee tables and a huge Nootka Indian-inspired wall mural painted by McKee himself.

McKee's love of exuberant colour combinations was evident inside and out, as in many of his other houses. Exteriors were Caribbean blue walls with yellow and grey accents; matching blue and yellow tiles formed the rear patio. Inside, the main living areas were somewhat more restrained, with pearl-grey carpeting anchoring largely neutral-coloured seating and brass cone-headed lamps. Colour ran amok in the service rooms, however: the kitchen featured chartreuse walls and floors and Swedish Red ceilings, countertops and appliances. In the bathroom, cake-batter-yellow walls mixed with coral fixtures and wine-red floor tiles.

Other McKee houses include the Ross house in Coquitlam, the Ellett and Waroway houses at UBC, and his own house in the British Properties. They remain in good to excellent condition although only the Ross house retains its original multi-coloured paint scheme. In true Populuxe fashion the Ellett house was originally finished in blue-green and seafoam, its butterfly roof covered with crushed white marble chips.

Larger projects also incorporated some unusual elements. McKee's Granville Chapel of 1949-50 shocked Vancouverites with its low, angular lines; only the smokestack-like brick tower makes any reference to traditional church design. His small office building for the Lovick advertising agency is walled largely in clear glass, the concrete and steel structure clearly visible through the glazing; a sunken outdoor patio is recessed into the rear of the building. His former SuperValu supermarket achieved a column-free interior through a system of arched glulam roof beams supported only by small steel connectors at each end.

In 1964 McKee left Vancouver for Ottawa to join the office of John C. Parkin, then Canada's largest Modernist firm and highly regarded for their institutional and corporate work. He returned in 1968 and quietly continued his practice until retiring in 1979. He died in 1986.



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Selected works by Robert McKee:

Bennett house 1946
2539 Rosebery, West Vancouver

Granville Chapel 1949-50
5901 Granville Street, Vancouver

LeFohn house 1950 (demolished)
1530 West 34th Avenue, Vancouver

Ross house 1950
830 Austin Avenue, Coquitlam

Ellett house 1956
5679 Newton Wynd, UBC

Waroway house 1956
6027 Newton Wynd, UBC

McKee house n.d.
505 Eastcot Road, West Vancouver

Architectural Centre 1957
1425 West Pender Street, Vancouver

Lovick Advertising 1957
1178 West Pender Street, Vancouver

SuperValu store 1960
6415 Victoria Drive, Vancouver

Photo captions:

1. Granville Chapel, 1949-50
2. Lovick Advertising, 1957
3. LeFohn house, 1950
4. McKee house, n.d.
5. Ross house, 1950

All photos Robert Moffatt 1997-2000
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MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Treasure Saturdays is a new series of talks sponsored by the Vancouver Museum which takes a look at what people collect. Every third Saturday of the month offers a chance to learn something new and meet interesting people.

Saturday, January, 20th 2001 at 1.30pm.

See You at The Fair: Worlds Fairs in Postcards

Maurice Guibord will present a fascinating overview of the past hundred years of world expositions through his extensive collection of postcards and other memorabilia.

Saturday, February 17th

The Vancouver Museum presents an afternoon of memories with Michael Kluckner in celebration of the 15th anniversary of the publication of *Vancouver The Way It Was*.

\$6.00 for HV, Art Deco Society and Museum members and \$10 for non-members.

Friday, February 29, 9am-5pm

The City Program Implementing Heritage Conservation Standards

This one-day workshop will provide an opportunity to examine the use of *standards* which guide heritage conservation work. Canadian and US standards will be discussed, as well as their application in the municipal context using Victoria and Vancouver as case studies

Labatt Hall (Room 1700 Simon Fraser University at Harbour Centre, Vancouver, BC)

Fee \$150 +GST

For more information contact, the City Program at Simon Fraser Harbour Centre

www.sfu.ca/city; city@sfu.ca;

291-5254

WORDS FROM THE PRESIDENT

HV Prepares for the Heritage & Antiques Fair

Dear Members,

With less than three months to go before Vancouver's Second Heritage Fair on Saturday and Sunday, March 24 and 25th. our *Heritage Fair Committee* is moving into high gear. We want to make sure that we have the most visited booth at the Fair which once again will be held at the historic Seaforth Armoury. We've booked our booth, obtained a large wheel from a gambling casino and are now composing questions on heritage themes. Our attention-getting booth, including a banner, balloons, attractive and informative displays is sure to be a hit. Visitors to our booth will spin a five-foot gambling wheel, answer a question, and qualify to win a prize. More importantly they'll have the opportunity to discuss heritage issues with one of our knowledgeable volunteers. We're using the Fair as an opportunity to attract new members to Heritage Vancouver, promote our 10th anniversary celebration and launch our new web-site at the online Cyber Café.

We want to make a lasting impression on all the 10,000 visitors who walk through the doors of the Armoury at the end of March. To do this we need volunteers and lots of them; people to give prizes and cash donations, people to take a shift or two at our booth, and people to locate historic photos. We need volunteers now and for the weekend of the Fair. The excitement is building, be part of this amazing event, call Heritage Vancouver today to join in the fun!



Janet Leduc
President, Heritage Vancouver

**Dr. Peter Centre,
1110 Comox Street**

After many years of consultation and design development, the architectural firm NSDA Architects recently presented the proposed design for the Dr. Peter Centre to the Vancouver Heritage Commission (VHC) for the first time.

The proposal consists of a new four-storey building with a modern expression annexed to the existing three-storey building commonly known as the house with the square turret. In this mixed neighbourhood, the issue of what form the new building should take to be contextual was definitely a source of discussion. The proposal for the heritage building itself was sympathetic. Most interior walls will be retained and rooms will be allocated light uses such as meeting space. The exterior will be painted dark green according to the colour analysis of the existing paint layers. Some areas of possible improvement were the retention of the east wall and utilization of the third floor space. This was an inquiry only and the VHC will see the design again when a development permit application is made. Because the zoning for this site is quite flexible, no relaxations will be requested.

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

604.254.9411

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.

Name: _____

Address: _____ City: _____

Postal Code: _____ Telephone: _____ E-mail: _____

Individual: \$25

Supporting (no newsletter) \$5

YES

Family: \$30

Corporate: \$50

I would like to volunteer for Heritage Vancouver

Donation: \$ _____

Patrons: \$100

Please send cheque or money order to: Heritage Vancouver, P.O. Box 3336, Vancouver, BC V6B 3Y3