

**HERITAGE**  
**Vancouver**  
 Newsletter



# A WALK AROUND THE BLOCK

*by Maida Price*

**T**he 600 block of Granville Street: it is the best of blocks. it is te worst of blocks. That it is also an interesting block was indicated by the size of the crowd that showed up for a recent Heritage Vancouver guided tour.

About 20 people were expected to come out and walk around the block. Instead, over 70 clamored for tickets and another guide was needed so the crowd could be divided into two groups. And while prior articles in *The Vancouver Sun* and *The Courier* had raised interest in the tour specifi- cally, there exists overall a very high level of interest in the future of the block. Cameras and reporters from French and English media were on the spot doing interviews and following the action. Volume and excitement enticed passers-by to ask questions and join in, and out-of-towners were signing up: does Granville Street have potential life as an historic area of town?



All this action took place at the corner of Granville and Georgia in front of The Bay building. This building is safe, but an earlier version of the HBC store, lurking behind the facade at 622 Granville, is among a row of buildings on the east side of the street that are at immediate risk of demo- lition. Just to the north, adjoining the Bay, is a brick building that was built in 1892, during the early development of Granville Street into a north-south corridor leading to the CPR's Hotel Vancouver, then at Granville and Georgia. Our tour groups saw only the dark corrugated metal cladding, emblazoned with Orientique, which hid the original building. This has since been removed, and the building deserves a

second trip downtown for a look. It has a wonderful air of Victorian austerity personified and is a dramatic contrast to the high-rises around it.

*see Granville page three*

**The Great Streets of Vancouver**

**Wednesday, September 19th**

**7:30pm**

Ever wonder what it was like to ride the streetcar in Vancouver in 1907? Colin Browne, filmmaker, writer, historian, professor of film at SFU, and director of B.C. Heritage Trust, will show us the earliest moving picture footage of Vancouver still in existence. This unique film is an amazing glimpse of our bustling city during the boom years, and brings alive the look and feel of early Vancouver. An added bonus is footage from Victoria of the same period, including shots of the Empress Hotel under construction in May 1907. Following the film, Colin Browne and Donald Luxton, heritage consultant and author, will examine in more detail what we have seen, focussing our great commercial streets of the time, Granville Street and Hastings Street.

Free for members \$5 for non-members  
*Everyone must check-in & pick up a ticket at the Vancouver Museum desk on the way in.*

**An Autumn Stroll with the Mayor**

**Saturday, September 22nd, 1:30pm**

Back by popular demand! Do not miss this unique opportunity to view the magnificence of Shaughnessy through the eyes of Vancouver Mayor Philip Owen. Mayor Owen has many fascinating stories to tell and memories to share about the neighbourhood that was home to him for most of his life. Join us for an autumn stroll through this wonderful estate like area. Since numbers are limited, register early to avoid disappointment.

Call HV at 604-254-9411 to register. Leave your name & number, we will confirm your registration & give you the meeting place for the tour. \$5 members \$10 non-members.

**VANCOUVER MODERN**



East Asiatic House

John Roaf c. 1973



Crab & Space Centre/Museum

Ted Colowiski 1972

## Gerald Hamilton's New Formalism

by Robert Moffatt

With Modernism continuing to diverge stylistically in the mid 1950s, New Formalism emerged as a more decorative counter to the then dominant Miesian minimalism and the concrete heaviness of Brutalism. Led by American architects Edward Durrell Stone and Minoru Yamasaki, New Formalism reintroduced the cool, formal dignity of classical Greece and Rome with the decorative exoticism of Middle Eastern cultures. Rigorously unadorned Modernist structures were enlivened with delicate arched columns, usually white in colour, and richly patterned walls, tile mosaics and metal screens. Considered a heresy from the beginning by the form-follows-function school, in lesser hands New Formalism often degenerated into garish kitsch and had largely vanished by the early 1970s. In Vancouver, architect Gerald Hamilton was the city's most visible practitioner of New Formalism. Arriving in Vancouver in 1950 after architectural training at Leeds University, Hamilton quickly built a thriving practice designing Modernist commercial, religious and apartment buildings. His taste for colourful visual delight made New Formalism a natural fit, and through the 1960s he designed numerous buildings in the style. Hamilton's first large-scale exercise in New Formalism is the East Asiatic House, built in 1963 at 1201 West Pender Street. Hamilton broke away from the typical single slab tower, instead framing a low banking pavilion with two adjoining office blocks. Sculptural wall panels of white

marble create a richly textured effect and seem to float above the emerald-green arched columns of the ground floor. The building's raised podium allowed an intimate front courtyard several feet above street level, the sense of calm repose accentuated by extensive plantings, fountains, and the requisite abstract sculpture. The H.R. MacMillan Space Centre (formerly the Planetarium) and Vancouver Museum complex was Hamilton's next major project. Labelled the Taf Mczlta on the creek when it opened in 1968, the Space Centre and Museum is probably Vancouver's most recognizable and iconic building. Its identifying feature is the planetarium dome, a quirky conical shape likened to an overturned teacup, a Coast Salish native hat and a flying saucer. George Morris's much-loved Crab sculpture guards the front entrance, a series of shallow reflecting pools traversed by two curving pedestrian bridges. The walls of the complex are finished in delicately detailed white concrete panels, their ornament and relationship to the reflecting pools reminiscent of Yamasaki's Pacific Science Center for the 1962 Seattle World's Fair. Hamilton's other buildings in the New Formalist vein include St. George's Greek Orthodox Cathedral, built in 1970 at 4500 Arbutus Street, and an office building at 1090 West Pender Street completed the same year. Other good examples of the style are the first two Bentall Centre towers at 595 Burrard Street (Frank Musson, 1965-69).

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

**Saturday, September 15th,**

**10:00 am**

### ***How to Look at Neighbourhoods***

Join John Atkin exploring the neighbourhood around the Joyce Street Skytrain Station. Part of a series exploring the neighbourhoods around the Skytrain line. Registration is not required, just show up!

\$5 members \$10 non-members

**Wednesday, September 26th,**

**8:00 pm**

### ***Arts & Crafts Bathrooms & Kitchens***

As part of the Thomson & Page Arts & Crafts Series, Jane Powell, the author of *Bungalow Kitchens*, will provide a wealth of ideas on how to design or restore period or period-style kitchens and bathrooms. Jane will also offer advice on how to integrate modern technology into the bungalow look, in an entertaining and often humorous way.

\$15 members \$20 non-members

Call the museum at 604-734-7368 for tickets and information

**Saturday, October 13th**

### ***Secrets of the City Tour***

Grab this rare opportunity to walk the post office tunnel to the old CPR Station. Space is limited.

Call the Vancouver Museum at 604-734-7368 for reservations and information.



Granville tour guide Peter Vaisbord gives details for the Bay Building at Granville and Georgia Streets.

### ***Granville from cover***

Next to it, still heading north, is the old Woolworth's store at 632 Granville, a fixture on the street for about 65 years, and then the Crewes Block, another very early building, where the first HBC store on Granville hides behind a Moderne face. In this case it is the smooth stone facade, added in 1948 by Saba Brothers, that is considered the heritage element. Next comes one building cleverly disguised as two: the new fronts on this have also been removed since the tour hut the building is currently hidden behind hoarding and nets. Finally, at the end of the block, is the old BC Electric Showroom. The name doesn't do justice to the building's elegant proportions, which are anything but industrial. It has intricate bronze window casings now pale green against the buff walls and it is the best of the buildings on the best of blocks.

If richness of history and architecture make this the best block, a walk down the alley behind shows why it is also the worst of blocks. The backs are a mess. Pigeons love them. Everything is dirty, peeling, rusted, rotten or green with algae. Windows are broken right out or have holes punched through. The exterior walls have holes punched through. Doors gape. Squatters have stuffed clothing into broken windows to keep out the wind. It looks bad enough, but to really understand the neglect, stick your head through a broken window and take a deep breath. The smell is of wet and cold and ruin. These buildings are rotting from the inside out in a classic case of demolition by neglect.

The tour also took in the 500 block of Granville, another interesting mix. Along with new structures, there are the CBC building on the south corner, with an interior mural by B.C. Binning on industry in the province (with the livestock wittily outlined in steaks and chops) and the recently vacated London Drugs site with an ominous sign: WILL BUILD TO SUIT.

The now empty Bank of Montreal, a nice example of a temple bank building, sits on the north corner awaiting its fate. The final stop on the tour was the pub holding the longest continuing liquor license in Vancouver. Crying in your beer was allowed.

*Maida Price is a writer and editor in Vancouver.*

Photographs by Brock Piper.



Michel Desrochers, City of Vancouver, Parks Board, Research Planner, interviewed by CBC French TV during the Granville tour.



Heritage Vancouver tour guide Peter Vaisbord comments on the 1892 brick building just north of the Bay as the media records the event.

## **Heritage Vancouver Update Stop the Demolition of our Heritage Buildings!**

Hopefully, the 600 block Granville buildings will still be standing when this newsletter reaches you. The City of Vancouver, on May 31st, issued a demolition permit for all of the buildings on the 600 Granville Block between the Bay and the BC Electric Building. This has been done despite the fact that Heritage Vancouver had alerted the City in the early 1990s to the heritage significance of these buildings. Due to the City's failure to include these buildings on the Heritage Register as we have been requesting, Heritage Vancouver is now forced to appeal to the owner to consider incorporating the facades of these treasures into the new design for the block.

Heritage Canada is extremely interested in this situation and after reading about the situation in the National Post, the Director has contacted our organization to offer assistance in saving these buildings. It is time for all of us to step up our efforts in lobbying the City to carry out a thorough review of the Heritage Register and to stop the demolition by neglect of our heritage buildings.

# Demolition by Neglect

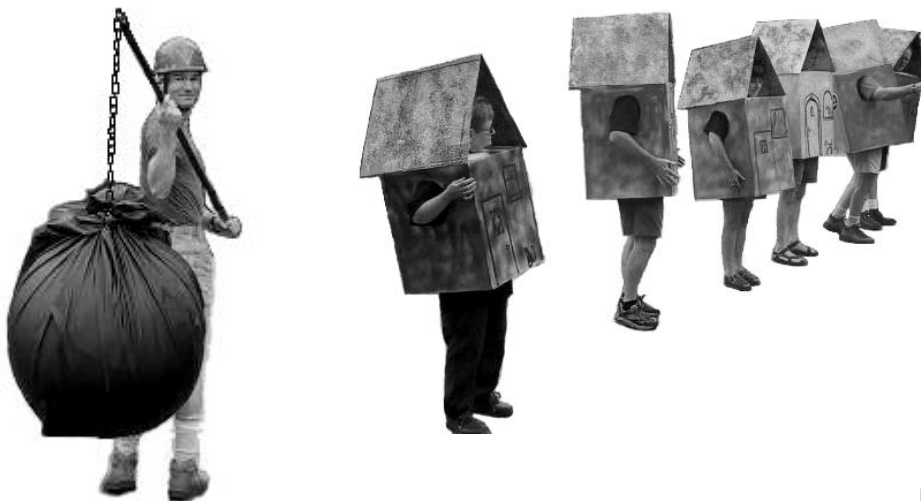
*Our tour of the 600 Block Granville St. on July 18th inspired Randy Knill to become a member of Heritage Vancouver and write a letter to me about **Demolition by Neglect**. My President's letter this month is based on his letter. Thank you, Randy for getting involved.*

Many historically significant buildings in Vancouver have been allowed to sit vacant for several years with little or no maintenance. Without heat or repairs, the buildings quickly deteriorate and restoration costs become prohibitive. Is it possible developers are doing this on purpose so they can demolish a significant building in the name of public safety and so avoid controversy? It's a passive way to eliminate heritage buildings without having to do battle with the City or Heritage Vancouver.

Happily, Vancouver does have a policy that is meant to avert this situation. The City of Vancouver Building By-law No. 8057 1999 clearly spells out the obligations of building owners. Basically, it is the owner's responsibility to take necessary action to put a building in a safe condition (and recent updates include any penetration of the building envelope as a violation of the Code). The Code allows the Chief Building Inspector to enter the premises to enforce this by-law or, failing action by the owner, to make repairs to ensure public safety and recover the costs of these from the owner.

Too often, the Code seems to be ignored. This could stem from the problem of defining an unsafe condition or from the bureaucratic nightmare of trying to justify the spending of public funds which may not be recovered. On a deeper level, there are issues regarding intervention in a property owner's freedom on action and choice.

In any case, we need no new regulations, only a stricter policy regarding the enforcement of the existing ones. We've lost enough of the non-renewable heritage resources that give our wonderful city its unique character. Later is too late for a heritage-friendly policy. Immediate action is required to stop demolition by neglect.



**Annual General Meeting**  
**Wednesday, October 17th**  
**7:30pm**  
**Vancouver Museum**

With our annual general meeting just around the corner, it is the time for you to think about the role you would like to play in Heritage Vancouver in the upcoming year. Is this the year you would like to become a board member, or a member of one of our committees; programming, advocacy, communication, administration? Please contact Janet Leduc at 604 331-8430 to discuss the type of involvement that would be perfectly suited to your interests and your available time. Contribute to heritage, meet fascinating people and have fun all at the same time!

Heritage Vancouver  
PO Box 3336, Main Post Office  
Vancouver BC V6B 3Y3  
  
604.254.9411

## Heritage Makes a Hit at the Parade

Our first-time entry in the August 5th, Pride Parade in Vancouver's West End was a big hit! Our rainbow coloured houses danced through the streets to the cheers of tens of thousands of delighted parade-watchers, while brave Heritage members fought off the greedy developer's wrecing ball (left).

Despite the pouring rain, fun was had by all. We got the word out that while Heritage Vancouver is serious about saving buildings, we're having a good time too. Congratulations and thanks to organizer, Don Luxton and the many volunteers who made the costumes and the parade entry a resounding smash! Let's start thinking about how

Parade photo Albert Lunshof