

HERITAGE

Vancouver

Newsletter



The Wing Sang looking east: Because of its narrow stairwells, furniture was winched through the second-storey door beneath the date stone.

REMEMBERING THE WING SANG BUILDING

An inside look at one of Chinatown's most compelling structures

by **Larry Wong**

Most people know about the Wing Sang Building, the oldest in Chinatown. But few people these days have been inside. A Victorian Italianate design at 51 East Pender St., it dates to 1889. In 1901 owner Yip Sang and architect Thomas Ennor Julian (best known for the Holy Rosary Cathedral) extended the building to 69 East Pender, adding more shops along the way. In 1912 Yip Sang built a six-storey brick building across the alley behind Pender to provide a separate floor for each of his families — he had three wives simultaneously and 23 children — and extra room for social gatherings and a warehouse.

An elevated passageway connects the two buildings. Beneath it runs Market Alley, once a thriving retail area with small shops and services fronting on the lane. Back in those days, pungent air wafted from the Wing Sang's opium factory.

Later, the building hosted Chinatown's first Chinese doctor and two of its best-known restaurants. Dr. Kew Ghim Yip, a son of Yip Sang's second wife, practised at 53 East Pender in the late 1930s. At that time the Gim Lee Tobacco shop operated at No. 59, the Hoi Ming Gwok Society at No. 61 and the famous B.C. Royal Cafe at No. 67.

By 1955, the Yip Sang Travel Agency occupied No. 51 and the Wo Fat bakery No. 53. Eventually the B.C. Royal switched location to No. 61 and the Yen Lock cafe to No. 67.

I remember entering the travel agency as a kid. It was dark inside; a counter with a brass wicket stood at the back. On either side of the room were shelves with glass doors, some wooden chairs and a couple of tables with Chinese-language newspapers.

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PRESENTS

**Nat Bailey Stadium:
A Tour and Pro Baseball Game
Tuesday, July 22, 5:45 p.m.
4601 Ontario St. (east side of QE Park,
at 30th Avenue)**

Advance tickets from Heritage Vancouver are required. Visit www.heritagevancouver.org or phone (604) 254-9411 for ticket info.

While the Vancouver Canadians warm up for their July 22 game, Heritage Vancouver guests will take a behind-the-scenes look at Nat Bailey Stadium. Baseball historian Bud Kerr will share his wealth of lore as he guides us through the 6,500-seat venue.

Opened in 1951 as Capilano Stadium, it's one of the oldest minor league ball parks still in use. The stadium is now home to the C's, a Northwest League affiliate of the Oakland Athletics.

After the tour we'll join the crowd to munch hot dogs, quaff beer and cheer on the home team.

Heritage Vancouver tours offer members and non-members an inside look at local landmarks. At last month's event, TV host and underwater archeologist Jim Delgado led us through the St. Roch with a thrilling account rich in historical detail, anecdote and colour. We heard about the saga of the Northwest Passage, ship-building techniques, a brawl between Mounties and the U.S. Navy, and firsthand advice on the best way to eat seal meat — fresh, raw and bloody.

Our May event took us through Crofton House, a private girls' school on a 10-acre Kerrisdale estate. Barely visible from outside the grounds is the Old Residence, a 1902 building that's listed "A" on the city's Heritage Register. Now a day school, Crofton House boarded students until the 1990s when, according to archivist Victoria Blinkhorn, "it became too difficult to control young women on weekends."

For late-breaking info on other summer events, visit www.heritagevancouver.org



Malkin Bowl during preparations for the 2003 season.

Malkin Bowl faces final curtain

Plans are underway to demolish Malkin Bowl, a Vancouver heritage and cultural landmark for nearly 70 years. Scheduled to replace it is a high-tech, semi-demountable structure designed by Busby & Associates.

Marion Malkin Memorial Bowl was built in 1934 as a bandshell, replacing another bandstand at the same location. William Harold Malkin, the grocery wholesaler and a former mayor and parks board commissioner, donated the structure as a tribute to his wife. For most of its history the venue has been used by the summer musical series Theatre Under the Stars (TUTS).

The building, known for its crescent-shaped proscenium arch, is a delightful example of the Moderne style and a beloved city landmark.

The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation considers Malkin Bowl vulnerable to squatters and arson due to its location and wooden construction.

The board has agreed with TUTS to replace it with a state-of-the-art facility providing more space for drop scenery and other equipment. TUTS has already begun raising money for the new structure without seriously considering an upgrade of the existing building.

If you disapprove of the plan, phone TUTS president Doug Louth at (604) 267-2337, TUTS general manager Sean Allan at (604) 734-1917 or the parks board at (604) 257-8400.

St. Paul's and the Vogue

Development proposals threaten two more "A" listings on the Vancouver Heritage Register.

St. Paul's Hospital could be reduced to rubble. The owner, Providence Health Care, and the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority are considering new premises for the facility. The land — minus the historic building — could fetch \$50 million from high-rise developers.

St. Paul's is a Renaissance Revival structure. Its original section was built between 1912 and 1913 for the Sisters of Providence to replace an 1894 wooden building. The designer was Robert F. Tegen, a German-born architect who worked in New York, Chicago and Portland before creating several major institutional buildings in the Lower Mainland.

The hospital's floorplan takes the shape of a cross. The building comprises red brick, banded at the base, with extensive terra cotta trim (from Gladding, McBean & Company in Lincoln, Calif.) and a pantile roof. In the 1930s the hospital added matching wings designed by architects Gardiner & Mercer.

As Heritage Vancouver president Scott Barrett says, "We'd be outraged if the old parts of St. Paul's were torn down. It provides a sense of historical context that has mostly been lost in the West End."

Not far away, an entirely different landmark also faces uncertainty. The Vogue Theatre is up for sale. This striking 1941 Moderne venue, a mainstay of Theatre Row and an Art Deco delight, is a National Historic Site representing a significant example of Canada's cultural heritage. But that designation is commemorative rather than legal. Nor does its "A" listing on the Vancouver Heritage Register legally protect the building. Real estate broker Morgan Dyer told the Vancouver Sun the theatre could face "possible redevelopment for alternative uses."

from cover **Wing Sang**

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Next door was a landmark in itself — the B.C. Royal Cafe, a favourite locale for many, including some veterans of the 1880s railway-building days. The cafe figures largely in *The Concubine's Children* by Denise Chong, whose grandmother once worked there.

If you sat at the counter and asked for coffee, it came with a dollop of condensed milk and sugar already in the cup. You'd look over the display case and choose from a selection of cream puffs, egg tarts, honey twists, the famous apple tarts, butterhorns, baby fingers, apple pies, lemon pies, coconut pies, raisin pies, banana cream pie and my all-time favourite, Boston cream pie.

The Yen Lock was popular, too. It was a narrow restaurant with a counter and a row of booths on one side. At the rear, a flight of stairs led to a mezzanine that held half a dozen small tables. In later years, the restaurant expanded and upgraded to banquet standard complete with white tablecloths and fancy wall decorations.

Another prominent tenant was the Wo Fat bakery. Its window display featured sponge cakes, Buddhist cookies, almond cookies, egg tarts and the especially popular jin dui — a small, round dumpling, deep fried and sprinkled with sesame seeds.

Except for a curio shop at street level and a family association on the second floor, the front building is deserted. The rear tenement sits empty and is deteriorating. The Chinese Benevolent Association considered converting the structures into a seniors' residence, but balked at the renovation costs. The buildings remain on the market, reportedly with an asking price of \$1.2 million.

They're now a shadow of their former glory, but what glorious memories they bring.

Larry Wong was born and raised in Vancouver's Chinatown and worked as a career federal civil servant. Now retired, he is secretary/curator of the Chinese Canadian Military Museum, and a member of Heritage Vancouver and the soon-to-be-formed Chinese Canadian Historical Society of B.C.

July 13 Clayburn Heritage Day. Open houses and walking tours in a 1905 village. 11-4 p.m. 3 miles NE of Abbotsford. 1-604-854-3960.

July 15 Secrets of Stanley Park. Historian Peggy Imredy discusses landmarks and sculptures. 7 p.m. Free. Central Library.

July 16 Illustrated talk on graveyards associated with B.C. ghost towns, by Archie Miller. Free. New West. Public Library, 716 6 Ave. 7:30 p.m.

July 17 Fashion show hosted by fashion historian Ivan Sayers. Heritage Hall, 3102 Main St. 7 p.m. Proceeds to Roedde House. (604) 684-7040.

July 19-20 People, Plants & Places. Self-guided tour presented by Bowen Island Historians. 10-4 p.m. \$22. (604) 947-2655 for info. (604) 314-7425 for tickets.

Aug. 20 "You Mean It's Only 20 Years?" Illustrated talk by Archie Miller on recent development in New Westminster. Free. New Westminster Public Library, 716 6 Ave. 7:30 p.m.

Ongoing

Walking Tours with John Atkin. The historian and heritage advocate has a full slate of events. Many take place Wednesday evenings and Saturday mornings. www.johnatkin.com

AIBC Walking Tours. Mona Jahedi leads tours to six parts of the Downtown peninsula. Tues.-Sat. to Aug. 30. 1 p.m. \$5. (604) 683-8588, ext. 306 or www.aibc.bc.ca for schedule and start locations.

AIBC Victoria Walking Tours. A tour to one of five districts is offered twice a day, Tues.-Sat. to Aug. 23. 11:30 a.m. & 2:30 p.m. \$5. Meet at 1001 Douglas St. 1-800-667-0753, ext. 306. www.aibc.bc.ca

West Coast Residential. An exhibit of modern residential architecture in Vancouver and four other West Coast cities. To Aug. 31. Charles H. Scott Gallery. At the Concourse Gallery: Western Homes & Living. An exhibit of West Coast homes featured in the magazine from 1950-1969. To July 13. Both galleries open Mon.-Fri. 12-5 p.m., Sat.-Sun. 10-5 p.m. 1399 Johnston St. (604) 844-3811.

Roedde House Museum, 1415 Barclay St. Tour this 1893 Queen Anne Revival house. 7 days 2-4 p.m. \$4 adults, \$3 seniors, under 12 free. Phone (604) 684-7040 to confirm, to arrange group tours or to inquire about tea-and-tour events. Afterwards, walk along Barclay Heritage Square, site of nine houses built between 1890 and 1908.

Irving House, 302 Royal Ave., New West. Tour an 1865 home. Wed.-Sun. 10-4 p.m. By donation. The adjacent museum opens the same hours.

London Heritage Farm, 6511 Dyke Road, Richmond. Tour an 1880s house and 4.6-acre farm. Wed.-Sun. 10-4 p.m. By donation. (604) 271-5220 or londonhf@telus.net for group tours or teas. Nearby sites include Britannia Heritage Shipyard Park, Gulf of Georgia Cannery, Steveston Museum and Steveston village itself.

Walking tours of Westminster Quay. Maritime and industrial heritage. Sat.-Sun. 1:30 p.m. \$5. (604) 521-8401 for more info or to book a group tour.

Downtown Historic Railway takes passengers between the Science Centre and Granville Island. Weekends and holidays from 12:30-5 p.m. (604) 665-3903.

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A shallow approach to conservation

Dear Members,

This month I would like to address a conservation strategy that is becoming more and more troubling to me: facade retention. For those of you not familiar with the term, it's a form of conservation in which only the front facade of a building is maintained and restored. A new building is constructed behind it. What this achieves is a commemoration of the old building through the retention of its street-front character.

I would like to suggest that facade retention is no longer a viable form of serious conservation. Not far from where I work is the former B.C. Electric Showroom at Granville and Pender streets. Little has been left of this once-proud building. Two sides of its facade have been retained. This building has not been preserved and its value, therefore, has degraded. Little of the original building is left. We have fallen into the habit of conserving walls when we should have the courage to conserve entire buildings. Have we learned nothing from the fiasco of the Scotiabank Dance Centre? Only one small facade was retained and it's not even used as the grand entrance it once was.

I would like to challenge those who work in heritage conservation — architects, planners, consultants, etc. — to aim for a higher level of conservation in our city. Let's work together to conserve buildings — buildings that still have their original character, beautiful interiors and a soul.



Scott Barrett
President, Heritage Vancouver



Photo: Greg Klein

Edwardian charm among modern industry

Andrew Gillespie House
(1752 West Fifth Ave.)

This handsome but derelict Edwardian home now surrounded by industrial buildings should have been a "B" on the Heritage Register but was likely missed due to its unfortunate location. Originally on our 2001 Top 10 list, the 1904 house is again endangered and might not see its 100th birthday.

The fine stained glass windows have been removed and presumably sold. The site was recently bought by a developer after plans to pair the house with an infill structure were deemed unworkable. Future development likely won't incorporate the existing structure, so its only hope might be a buyer who's willing to move the house.

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

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