

HERITAGE
Vancouver
N e w s l e t t e r

BONUS ISSUE



A circa 1940 view of Christ Church Cathedral, the Hotel Vancouver and the Georgia Medical-Dental Building: The first two are part of our heritage; the latter is history.

HISTORY AND HERITAGE

All too often the distinction is missed, says John Stuart

by **John Stuart**

Some months ago I had the pleasure of discussing industrial heritage with the Vancouver Historical Society. For many it was an introduction to the world of the heritage advocate. And there is that critical difference. By definition historians talk about events and heritage advocates talk about things. It can be very useful to understand the relationship between history and heritage.

The Random House Dictionary defines history thus: "1. The branch of knowledge dealing with past events. 2. A continuous, systematic narrative of past events as relating to a particular people, country, period, person, etc., usually written in chronological order. 3. The aggregate of past events. 4. The record of past events, esp. in connection with the human race" The Concise Oxford Dictionary definition is similar, as is Webster's or any other authoritative source. What is

absent is a reference to substantial objects.

Heritage is fundamentally different. The Random House Dictionary defines it this way: "1. That which comes or belongs to one by reason of birth; an inherited lot or portion. 2. Something reserved for one. 3. Law. A. that which has been or may be inherited by legal descent or succession. B. any property, esp. land, that devolves by right of inheritance." Rather than focusing on events, heritage is more concerned with "any property, esp[ecially] land, that devolves by right of inheritance."

In the context of heritage conservation the reference to real property, especially (but not exclusively) land, is the critical issue. Heritage comprises the kinds of things that may be passed down in a will — land, buildings, grandmother's tea

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In Memoriam



Once located at 3690 Osler Cres., this house came down last year. Its replacement is a bloated Louis-the-something-or-other palace that also took down the trees in front, much to the neighbours' dismay.

The original house was sold from the estate of Francis and Kay Reif, builders of Hemlock Towers (Peter Kafka, architect). It boasted a period interior with elaborate box beams, wainscotting and a notable collection of contemporary art — Victor Vasarely, in particular — and Jacobean antiques. The backyard contained a sculpture garden.

The house was in good repair, although somewhat aged. With robust wood detailing on the exterior, asymmetrical massing and tripartite expression, this was a typical First Shaughnessy mansion. Its removal also imperils the Astley house beside it.

EXTRA! EXTRA!

You're reading a bonus August issue.

The Heritage Vancouver Newsletter normally publishes 11 times a year, with one edition for both July and August. This month, to accommodate extra material and make up for the lack of a newsletter last December, we're publishing an extra issue.

Thanks to all the contributors who make this newsletter possible and all the readers who make it worthwhile.

Greg Klein, Editor



Archival photo: Stuart Thomson

Crowds gather on West Pender, circa 1926: The Pender Ballroom is the building with the triangular pediment, second from left.



Will an appropriate design rise from the ashes?

1908 building lost, streetscape threatened

One of Vancouver's Heritage Register "B" buildings was destroyed on July 3 in a spectacular blaze that caused power cuts and traffic closures. Businesses were wiped out and a few people were lucky to get out alive. What remained of the building, located at 319 West Pender St., was demolished the next day.

Mistakenly reported in the Vancouver Sun as "one of the city's oldest heritage buildings," the structure dated to 1908. Originally the Riggs-Selman Building, it was later known as the Victory Block, but popularly remembered as the Pender Ballroom for its upper-floor dance hall.

The third-floor auditorium also served as a labour meeting hall during the 1930s. A mural painted by Fraser Wilson adorned one wall for many years until it was moved to a labour hall on Victoria Drive.

Tragically, this building was located on one of Victory Square's most unified heritage streetscapes. The 300-

block West Pender was almost completely intact, with many older architectural gems including the Victoria Block, the old Bank of Canada and the Lyric Theatre. The loss of this building leaves a huge gap in the area's historic fabric, which will now have to be filled with a new building. How sympathetic it will be to the heritage streetscape remains to be seen.

The blaze was started by an illegal resident, a convicted drug trafficker who had been evicted from her prior home, allegedly for setting a fire while making marijuana oil. The Pender Street building was not zoned for residents. Their presence indicates the marginal economics for many of the area's historically significant buildings. Under-utilized and in some cases abandoned, without sprinklers, alarms or building code protection, any number of Victory Square's buildings could meet a similar fate.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

The Royal Engineers and Their Families. Cemetery tour with Archie Miller. Aug. 10, 3 p.m. Free. Fraser Cemetery, 100 Richmond St., New West.

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

Ongoing

Walking tours with John Atkin. The historian and heritage advocate has a schedule too busy to list here. Does anyone know Vancouver better? www.johnatkin.com

Orpheum Theatre tours. Aug. 5 & 7 at 10 a.m., Aug. 9, 16, 23 at 10 a.m. & 2 p.m. Smithe & Seymour entrance. \$5. No reservation required. (604) 665-3050.

Chinatown walking tours. Tues.-Sun. 11 a.m. & 2 p.m. \$6 adults, \$4 seniors, students, kids. Chinese Cultural Centre, 50 East Pender St. (604) 658-8883.

Gastown walking tours. Every day to Aug. 30. 2 p.m. Free. Meet at Gassy Jack's statue, corner of Water and Carrall. (604) 683-5650.

A Century of Technology. Exhibit showing the evolution of "The Tower" through technology and architecture. Mon.-Thurs. 8:30-5 p.m. Fri. 8:30-1 p.m. Free. AIBC Gallery, 440 Cambie St.

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. Two tours daily to any of five districts. 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. 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.

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.

Westminster Quay walking tours. Maritime and industrial heritage. Sat.-Sun. 1:30 p.m. to Aug. 30. \$5. Meet inside the Discovery Centre, near the Royal City Star. (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. \$2 adults, \$1 kids & seniors. (604) 665-3903.

Stimson-Green Mansion and Dearborn House. Tour two of Seattle's most stately, historic residences with Larry Kreisman. Second Tuesday of each month, 1-2:30 p.m. Additional tour on Aug. 24. \$10. Pre-register at (206) 622-6952. www.cityofseattle.net/commnty/histsea/events/

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service. It is not the list of crops that were grown on the land. It is the 40 acres. It is not the original plans for the building. It is the building. It is not the reminiscence of the parties where the tea service was used. It is the teapot, the coffee pot, the cream pitcher, the sugar bowl and the tray.

The distinction is critical. One can study or write history for a lifetime and never preserve a single object. That means that a city council or an organization can commission a history of the community or the venerable firm and then authorize the demolition of every old building in sight. When protests arise, they have the perfect answer: "We have invested a lot of money preserving our heritage by having the book written. There is certainly no money to preserve that old building."

The suggestion that writing down the story is somehow equivalent to preserving the object is an intriguing one. It assumes that the only valuable knowledge is what has been written down.

As it happens the objects of our concern, buildings, usually result from a variety of skills. There is the skill of the designer who works for a patron. There will be documents that describe the issues here. Yet there are also the varied skills of the people who actually made the thing. Usually a separate trade practises each body of skills. Significantly, those skills are often passed from journeyman to apprentice

and mastered only after long practice. "The mysteries of the craft," to use an ancient expression, aren't always written down. If no one is around to learn from the craftsman, or there is no demand for his abilities, the skills may well die with their practitioner. The only way to study them is to study the object.

The object is as much a repository of knowledge as the diary or archive. We watch the Keno brothers "read" American furniture on the Antiques Roadshow each week. If the piece is truly old and no living person can verify its history, all there is to go on is the object itself. They look at design, primary woods, secondary woods, handles, decoration, finishes, construction technique, tool marks, colour as an indicator of age, wear as evidence of use, and so on. They then compare the object with the story provided by the owner. After all that is done they say the piece was made by so-and-so in such-and-such. They have "read" the artifact and compared it to everything similar they have ever seen. All this makes up the essence of a connoisseur's skills. In case we think that being a connoisseur is somehow esoteric, the same skills may be used to assess almost anything — wine, food, cars, buildings, clothes, apples at the grocery store.

One additional thought: Should we be thinking about heritage for the future? The Oxford definition of heritage certainly suggests the possibility. It says that heritage is "what is or may be inherited." If you had the opportunity, what would you choose from the recent building projects for preservation? I'll leave that question with you. In the meantime, have a look at a Website sponsored by The Canadian Conservation Institute: www.preservation.gc.ca. You will find lots of valuable information about techniques to preserve your heritage.

John Stuart has a BA and MA in Art History from UBC and a Diploma of Mechanical Technology from BCIT. Watch for upcoming events related to his continuing focus of attention, industrial heritage. He welcomes your thoughts at stuartj@direct.ca or (604) 988-5572 evenings and weekends.

WORDS FROM THE PRESIDENT

Heat wave enhances heritage activities

Dear Members,

Summer has arrived and we've been having some of the most beautiful weather I've ever seen in this city. Cheeks are kissed with sunshine, streets are busy with pedestrians well into the night and the beaches are packed. Although we need to remain diligent about heritage, we also need to take a break once in a while and enjoy what we have in this city, and what we've worked so hard to preserve over the years.

Take the opportunity presented by the summer weather to enjoy our amazing city and all it has to offer. Whether exploring heritage neighbourhoods or watching the evening fireworks, you'll find our city has the most to offer this time of year. Heritage Vancouver has also worked hard to provide you with exciting and unique activities. Last weekend we participated in the Vancouver Pride Parade, for the third year in a row, to a receptive and encouraging audience. Thanks to all those who helped build costumes, to the marchers, and to those who came to watch the parade and support us. Special thanks go out to Donald Luxton for organizing the event.

We also brought you the Nat Bailey Stadium tour, followed by a baseball game, on one of the most beautiful nights of the year. Although summer will be wrapping up all too soon, our program of fun activities will not. We are hard at work to ensure some of the most distinctive and exciting heritage programming in the city. Watch your newsletter for more info on upcoming events.



Scott Barrett
President, Heritage Vancouver

REPORT CARD



Photo: Greg Klein

False Creek relic may get a misguided makeover

Domtar Salt Building
85 West First Ave.

Along with Opsal Steel (a former Top 10 structure likely to be saved as part of a residential development), the Domtar Salt building is the last vestige of industrial heritage in the southeast False Creek area.

This 1931 Class B heritage site still has its original single-glazed multi-pane windows and red wooden siding. There are plans to make this a "model sustainable building."

Keeping heritage from the landfill is laudable, but plans for the building might include replacing or concealing original cladding, windows and other features, and adding unsympathetic features such as solar-generating devices. We plan to keep a close eye on this well-intentioned, but potentially misguided makeover.

Join Heritage Vancouver

Membership valid one year from date of issue. Members receive a monthly newsletter and reduced rates for tours and other activities.

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

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