



Newsletter



Heritage as a vocation

*Profession, pastime and
passion come together
for Robert Lemon*

Robert Lemon and the Edgett Building: Now home to the AIBC, the building's rehabilitation was a project of Busby + Associates Architects with Robert G. Lemon Architecture & Preservation.

by Greg Klein

His name comes up so frequently in Vancouver heritage circles that he's almost ubiquitous: Robert Lemon is one busy guy.

He's chairperson of the Vancouver Heritage Foundation and until recently held the same position with Docomomo.bc, which he helped establish. He's a board member of the Contemporary Art Gallery and holds memberships in the Association for Preservation Technology, the International Council on Monuments and Sites, the Architectural Institute of B.C., the Heritage Society of B.C. and Heritage Canada. Oh yes — he's a Heritage Vancouver member too.

So much for his spare time. His architectural practice is about evenly divided between residential work and preserving historic buildings. Although primarily an architect, he also acts as a heritage consultant.

With so much overlap, it's hard to tell where pastime ends and work begins. "I can't separate my job from my interests," he says.

His calling came to him rather young. Lemon credits a high school teacher, Paul Baldwin, as "one of those rare teachers who could really inspire a student." Baldwin took a keen interest in the buildings of their town, St. Thomas, Ont., and actually incorporated local architecture into the Grade 10 history curriculum — a

fact that can turn other aficionados green with envy.

A 1979 grad of Carleton University's architecture program, Lemon won the lieutenant-governor's award as well as the Heritage Canada student design award. The latter distinction allowed him to travel Britain, paying special attention to the work of Mackintosh, Voysey and Lutyens.

That same year a job offer brought him to Vancouver. Then in 1984 he took on a six-month program in architectural preservation through the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property, a UNESCO agency based in Rome. His main area of study was Carlo Scarpa, whose work in the 1950s and '60s included interventions in historic buildings around Venice, Verona and the surrounding area.

In 1998 Lemon completed an MA in conservation studies at England's University of York. His thesis discussed modern interventions in historic buildings, focusing on heritage case studies of mid-20th century modernism.

"This is about how you 'read' a building and determine how it fits in an historic setting — for example, how you determine whether an addition is compatible with its surroundings. I created a methodology to assess this," says Lemon. "It looks at a building's

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Suited up in WCB-approved regalia, the Heritage Vancouver crew was a Pride Parade hit for the third year in a row. This year's theme, Building Pride, drew enthusiastic response and helped raise our public profile. Thanks to all involved for making this August event a success.

Not even Highland dancers, old-time fiddlers, Japanese drummers or free ice cream could distract visitors from our display at last month's Wales Street Heritage Day Fair. A steady stream of people stopped by to ask questions and pick up literature outside the historic Avalon Dairy.

Mark your calendar

Oct. 15 Restoration of Burnaby's Interurban Car #1223. Ed Eckley addresses the New West Historical Society. 7:30 p.m. 716 Sixth Ave.

Oct. 16 B.C. Packers: 100 Years of History. Richard Gregory talks about Richmond's last working cannery. 7 p.m. By donation. Richmond Museum, 7700 Minoru Gate. (604) 231-6460.

Oct. 18 Heritage Barns Tour with historian and heritage advocate Graham Turnbull. 1-4 p.m. \$20. Bus leaves from Richmond Museum, 7700 Minoru Gate. (604) 231-6460. See story page 3.

Oct. 23 Vancouver's Glory Years: Public Transit 1890-1915. Transportation historian Henry Ewert addresses the Vancouver Historical Society. 7:30 p.m. Vancouver Museum, 1100 Chestnut St. www.vcn.bc.ca/vhs/

Oct. 28 Vanishing B.C. Heritage Vancouver co-founder Michael Kluckner discusses his work in progress. 7 p.m. Free. Chilliwack Library, 45860 First Ave. (604) 792-1941. Visit www.michaelkluckner.com for an advance look.

Oct. 29 Delicious Deco: Victoria Deco. A panel discussion about Victoria's Art Deco design. 7:30 p.m. \$10 Vancouver Museum members, \$15 non-members. 1100 Chestnut St. (604) 734-7368.

Nov. 5 Vanishing B.C. See Oct. 28 for details. 7 p.m. Free. White Rock Library, 15342 Buena Vista, White Rock. (604) 541-2201.

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

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

Do you own a heritage house?

You may be eligible for a Vancouver Heritage Foundation grant!

If your house is listed on the Heritage Register and you're willing to designate the property, you're invited to apply for Restore It!

Grants of up to \$2,500 will help fund exterior restoration projects such as windows, masonry, cladding, roofs and stucco.

Application deadline is Oct. 31st.

For more info or an application form visit www.vancouverheritagefoundation.org or call (604) 264-9642



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Richmond's rural relics

Preserving historic barns through historic uses

by Greg Klein

It's a marvel that something as functional as a barn can be so beautiful. But it's that purely functional purpose that puts these buildings on the endangered list.

Esthetics, history and sentiment mean little when residential and industrial development encroaches on farmland. So maybe it's not surprising that some of Richmond's oldest structures are not conversions, adaptations or museums, but working barns on working farms.

Typically, interest in these buildings has been growing in proportion to the threat they face. The Richmond

Museum started documenting barns in 1985. A decade later, Historic Sites and Monuments designated the 12-sided Round Barn on Richmond's Ewen farm as a federal historic site. The following year,

the Richmond Heritage Commission, with matching funds from the now-disbanded provincial Heritage Commission, began a thorough project of documenting and photographing 20 remaining barns. Almost simultaneously, the museum



Beckwith Barn photos courtesy of City of Richmond

The Gambrel-roofed but metal-clad Beckwith: A workable compromise.

and Shaw Cable shot a video, *The Barns of Richmond: A Proud History*.

Thorough as the documentation is, the barns aren't any more secure.

True, 16 of the original 20 survive.

But, according to heritage advocate Graham Turnbull, "quite a few are in rough shape. Three might not be with us much longer."

Turnbull, a member of the Richmond Heritage Commission, chairperson of the Steveston Historical Society and board member of the Gulf of Georgia Cannery

Society and Richmond Museum, wants to see these barns endure. But some of the city's most striking monuments are ramshackle derelicts that could go down at any time.

Federal designation didn't save the Round Barn. A distinctive, expensively built hay barn designed for maximum floor space (and built for status, Turnbull suspects), it was one of only a few such structures in Canada. But when a wind-

storm burst through a hole in the roof, the building lifted from the ground then fell and collapsed like a pile of sticks.

"The federal government goes to great lengths to research and document a

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form, shape, material, colour and response to stylistic or vernacular language."

An addition to an historic building might follow one of two approaches, he says. "One is a literal response, which is indistinguishable from the original building. Another approach would create something completely different as a foil or contrast. Often the best approach is somewhere on the continuum between these extremes."

Lemon helped produce the Gastown Heritage Management Plan, which he describes as "helpful, rather than trying to dictate." As for homeowners, he says they face special challenges which the Vancouver Heritage Foundation is addressing.

"Homeowners are often very interested in preserving their houses as heritage buildings. But there aren't many places for them to turn to. They're creating something for the public benefit and deserve help in overcoming obstacles." He hopes the Founding Pillars endowment campaign

will reach its target of \$150,000 by the end of this year, with a long-term goal of \$2 million to provide further grants for heritage preservation. Founding Pillars was launched with contributions from philanthropist Yosef Wosk and Heritage Vancouver board member Richard Keate. "It's important that future homeowners see this as a long-term resource," says Lemon.

Why does any of this matter?

Lemon sees three main reasons for heritage preservation. "There's the continuity manifested in remaining buildings, the tangible evidence of previous cultures. You can walk down Burrard and see the city's oldest church and a modern landmark. You see how the city evolved, where it's going."

There's an environmental factor too. "Preservation conserves materials rather than reducing them to landfill."

And heritage makes economic sense. "It's labour-intensive. It requires the work of a number of trades. Heritage preservation is a healthy part of the North American building industry."

He says unusual places to live and work are becoming increasingly popular, which he attributes to a reaction against an increasingly ephemeral society. "There's a sense of impermanence in which an old building is a tangible record of the past."

Lemon's own home is a 1936 Art Moderne design by Ross Lort. Inside, the house reflects his partner in life and occasional collaborator in work, interior designer Robert Ledingham. Lemon describes it as "the integration of an historic exterior with a modern interior."

As for the future, he hopes to do more landscape architecture. He also hints at an entirely different direction, mentioning his admiration for Alvar Aalto, the renowned Finnish architect who made his fortune designing furniture. For someone so rooted in the past, Lemon's future may yet offer surprises.

Robert Lemon and Donald Luxton will discuss VHF grants at Heritage Vancouver's Nov. 19 talk, Colourful Money. See page 4 for details.

An exciting new speaker series that takes us into 2004!

Wednesday, Oct. 8, 7:30 p.m.
Vancouver Museum
1100 Chestnut St.
Landscape Modern:
a talk by Charles Birnbaum

Admission \$10 for members of Heritage Vancouver or the Vancouver Museum. \$15 for non-members.

Co-ordinator of the Historic Landscape Initiative with the U.S. National Park Service, Mr. Birnbaum will discuss preservation of modernist landscapes.

And starting Oct. 15th Heritage Vancouver, with Barking Mad Special Events Ltd., presents a new six-part series: The Mechanics of Heritage Preservation. This is your chance to hear an exciting lineup of speakers who make heritage preservation happen.

The talks take place the third Wednesday of October and November. Starting in January, we shift to the third Thursday of each month. All events in this series take place at the Vancouver Museum, 1100 Chestnut St., at 7:30 p.m. Admission is free for Heritage Vancouver members, \$5 for non-members. The Thursday events will include admission to the Vancouver Museum exhibits.

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building, but doesn't care if they save it," says Turnbull. "Designation is prestigious but it's an empty gesture if there aren't any funds to save the building."

Practical buildings are best served by a practical purpose, he believes. The barns least likely to go are those still used on working farms.

The use-them-or-lose-them approach applies regardless of age.

The 1882 Tilson/Gilmore Barn at 10631 Dyke Rd. is Richmond's oldest barn and only a few years shy of being the city's oldest building. It's still used. The simple gable structure (Richmond's most common) blends in with nearby buildings and the landscape, providing an enduring monument of the pastoral past.

Another working barn, the Beckwith at 18331 Westminster Hwy., shows the romanticized Gambrel roof, commonly



presents

The Mechanics of Heritage Preservation

Wednesday, Oct. 15, 2003

A Nudge in the Right Direction

Marco D'Agostini of the City of Vancouver will discuss new incentives for three historic districts: Gastown, Chinatown and Hastings Street. Mr. D'Agostini's talk will follow Heritage Vancouver's very brief Annual General Meeting.

Wednesday, Nov. 19, 2003

Colourful Money

The Vancouver Heritage Foundation offers two grant programs for homeowners. Robert Lemon and Donald Luxton of the VHF discuss what these programs can do for you and your city.

Thursday, Jan. 15, 2004
New Money for Old Things

The Land Conservancy: There have been big changes in the way heritage grants are handled at the provincial level. Find out who is doing the giving and how.

Thursday, Feb. 19, 2004
25 Years of Heritage Trust Projects

Here's a chance to look back at the many influential projects the former B.C. Heritage Trust funded over its 25-year history.

Thursday, March 18, 2004
Vancouver's Heritage Commission

This volunteer commission offers advice to city council on heritage projects and policy. Find out what they do exactly and how.

Thursday, April 15, 2004
Where Do We Go From Here?

Speakers from each of the past events return for a panel discussion on the future of heritage in Vancouver.

No, we didn't forget December. Watch for news about our annual Heritage Vancouver Christmas party!

associated with idyllic country scenes. Romanticized or not, the Gambrel design serves a practical purpose by offering a clear span and therefore more interior space. The charming dormer existed for an uncharming pastime — hauling hay.

Many Gambrel barns have a hip-roof extension at one end. These add-ons, again practical contrivances, often provide a delightful patchwork effect to the barn's exterior. Inside, the building can be quite complicated, with a maze of compartments for cattle, hay, milking stations, equipment and other purposes.

Covered in barn-red metal siding and a shiny metal roof, the 1919 Beckwith Barn demonstrates the compromise often necessary to maintain these buildings. "Some people might not see this as a purely heritage structure because of the metal cladding," says Turnbull. "But I'd sooner see that than see it fall down."

So far in Richmond, non-agricultural approaches to preservation have been, well, fruitless. There was talk of converting the Round Barn into a theatre, Turnbull says. That idea was literally blown away. Other ideas involving business, residential, arts or community use lie dormant, although barns once served the community for dances and political meetings. "Trying to convert a barn for public occupancy would involve a horrendous task of meeting building codes and safety regulations," warns Turnbull. "These buildings are best saved when on an active farm."

Still, he maintains, they should be saved. "It's worth keeping these reminders of the past. They speak of history and continuity."

Graham Turnbull will lead a bus tour of Richmond barns on Oct. 18, from 1 to 4 p.m. Tickets are \$20. For more information, phone the Richmond Museum at (604) 231-6460.

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Individual membership \$25, Family \$30, Corporate \$50, Patron \$100.

Members receive a monthly newsletter and reduced rates for Heritage Vancouver events.

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