

HERITAGE

Vancouver

Newsletter



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Vancouver's Hidden Heritage

by *Stephen Mikicich*

When we think of heritage in Vancouver, the images that typically come to mind are of grand Shaughnessy mansions, the painted Victorians of Strathcona and Mount Pleasant, the Craftsman streetscapes of Kitsilano, Edwardian commercial buildings in the downtown core, and Art Deco treasures such as the Marine Building and Burrard Street Bridge. A number of high-profile rehabilitation projects such as Sinclair Centre, Barclay Heritage Square, the Roundhouse Community Centre, and Pacific Heights Housing Co-op and Mole Hill in the West End have also raised public awareness.

But some of Vancouver's oldest buildings are located off the beaten path, nestled between warehouses and manufacturing plants in the city's inner industrial areas. In pockets of Strathcona, Grandview, Mount Pleasant, Fairview, Yaletown and even Kitsilano (as the accompanying photographs illustrate), many late Victorian and early Edwardian houses remain.

These inner-city industrial areas started out as residential neighbourhoods, but transformation to industrial use began as early as the 1920s and continued through the 1970s. Some

houses escaped demolition because of challenges arising in assembling property, shifting market demand, the decline of traditional industries, and the City's purchase of certain properties for proposed public works projects that have not proceeded.

For years, these vernacular buildings provided rooming-house accommodation, and office and warehouse space — or stood vacant, awaiting redevelopment. As holding properties, the buildings themselves had little if any value and were allowed to deteriorate. Today, we are fortunate that many of these buildings have survived long enough to be 'rediscovered' in the current wave of gentrification sweeping East Vancouver neighbourhoods.

While it is municipal policy to retain these lands for future industrial use, a number of factors are influencing land-use change and the preservation of heritage resources. First, general changes in manufacturing, warehousing and distribution technologies have dramatically altered industrial location and land use requirements. Rising property values are displacing traditional industries, and land is being converted to other uses, including commercial and residential. There is a blurring of definitions

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between land uses, as evidenced by the rise of 'mixed-use' and 'live-work' developments. As well, gentrification has attracted more upscale tenants such as photographic studios, athletic clubs, personal and business services.

It seems that we are now reaping the benefits of "preservation by neglect" — as areas once considered highly undesirable are turning into funky, historic, mixed-use neighbourhoods. This trend is most apparent in Mount Pleasant, north of Broadway, and on the edges of Strathcona and Grandview-Woodlands; it is also visible in the industrial areas around the False Creek Flats.

Most of these old houses are not listed in the City of Vancouver's Heritage Register, as the lands they occupy are designated for industrial use. However, given that these buildings are now valued in the marketplace for their heritage appeal, and many of them are now being restored, it makes sense that the City's Heritage Register be updated to include these excellent examples of early vernacular buildings.

The City of Vancouver's Industrial Lands policies are also up for review by 2005. As part of this review, consideration should be given to existing heritage resources, and the merits of preservation and re-use versus demolition. An updated land use and design vision for these areas should build upon long-established industries, historic buildings, and historic elements such as period paving and landscaping to create more distinctive industrial neighbourhoods. This would be in keeping with the sustainable development principles being advocated for Southeast False Creek and the False Creek Flats — principles that include the re-use of limited resources, and the reduction of stress on the natural and human environments.

In summary, we need to explore means to encourage further heritage preservation within our rapidly changing inner city. The remaining early houses in the inner industrial areas represent the first layer of neighbourhood development; together with factories, warehouses, offices, corner stores, railway tracks and remnants of old paving, they provide the raw materials for building new, sustainable communities, with a strong link to our city's industrial past.

Fraser River Bridge Celebrates 100th Birthday

Nestled below the spans of SkyBridge and the Patullo Bridge, a Greater Vancouver landmark celebrates its 100th birthday. One hundred years ago, on Saturday, July 23, 1904, Lieutenant Governor Sir Henri Gustave Joly de Lotbiniere and Premier Sir Richard McBride officially opened the Fraser River Bridge, the first structure to span the Fraser River between New Westminster and Surrey.

In the last 20 years of the 19th century, the only passage to the Surrey side was a ferry service to the village of Brownsville. Finally, in August 1902, the Province of British Columbia started construction; the bridge was completed in July 1904 at a cost of \$1,000,000. The new crossing was hailed locally as "a magnificent structure of stone and steel" and "one of the great engineering feats of the century." A huge crowd came out to view the opening ceremonies, which included a procession of ships, canoe races, a luncheon and, at night, a fireworks display, illumination of the bridge, and a torchlight procession.

Unlike modern bridges, the bridge's low steel truss spans provide little clearance, requiring a 'swing span' that pivots open to allow marine traffic to pass. Like other bridges of the period, the structure was designed to accommodate two decks, the lower deck for trains,



Opening of rail/highway bridge
Fraser River - 1904
Credit: G.F. Treleaven, *The Surrey Story*, 1970

and the upper deck for vehicles and pedestrians. Tolls were charged until March 1910. When the high-level Patullo Bridge was opened in 1937, the upper deck of the original bridge was removed.

After 100 years, the bridge still serves its original function of carrying rail traffic across the Fraser. Recent newspaper articles hint at the possible need for a replacement structure to accommodate planned fast trains between Vancouver and Seattle. This, in Heritage Vancouver's opinion, is not good news — this early transportation landmark could soon become yet another victim of technological change. Every effort must be made to ensure the bridge is either sensitively upgraded, or saved and adapted for other uses such as bicycles and foot traffic.

Happy Birthday Fraser River Bridge, and many more!

Of Interest...

Heritage Schools: Good news!! In late May, the Ministry of Education funded an accelerated process to identify all provincial schools requiring seismic upgrading. Between June and October, all public schools in high-risk earthquake zones — as many as 800 schools in the 39 school districts — are to be assessed for seismic need. The Ministry will then prepare a long-range plan for school safety. The hope is that all needy schools will be upgraded within 10 to 15 years. We hope this means retention of many of the heritage structures that contribute to the education of Vancouver's children.

Asian Heritage: Welcome to the Chinese Canadian Historical Society of British Columbia (CCHS), the goal of which is "to bring out the unknown history of the Chinese in this province." Of interest to Heritage Vancouver members, its activities have already included the co-sponsoring of a series of lectures on Vancouver Chinatown Revitalization; future projects include exploration of the historical identities of Vancouver's Chinatown business sites. For further information contact: Edgar Wickberg, edbw@interchange.ubc.ca; Jean Barman jean.barman@ubc.ca; Larry Wong lywong@shaw.ca; and Imogene Lim limi@mala.bc.ca

ADVOCACY UPDATE

Hastings Park/PNE sites

The hectic pace of public discussion about Hastings Park/PNE issue continues. City staff presented a report and recommendations to Council on May 18: of critical importance was the evidence from public opinion surveys that most Vancouverites, including those living in the Hastings Park area, support the retention of park and Playland — and heritage. Speakers at the three City Council public hearings in early June confirmed these findings. Acting on the results of this consultation, City Council voted, at its 22 June meeting, to accept a modified version of Options 3 & 4, thus retaining both the PNE and Playland.

The Roller Coaster seems secure and may well act as the southern anchor to a relocated Playland. So too do the three buildings on the Heritage Register — the A-listed Garden Auditorium and the B-listed Forum and Rollerland.

But the fate of the Livestock Building is still unknown. The good news is that the Hastings Park/PNE Steering Committee consulted the Heritage Commission and that it specifically cited Heritage Vancouver's concern about the Livestock Building in its report to Council. In turn, Council specifically directed staff to report back on "the heritage value of the Livestock Building and the costs associated with the restoration of the barns."

Next steps are resolution of the racetrack/slot machines issue and the decision about the modified version of the conceptual plan. At its July 26 meeting, City Council will review the response of the public hearings to the proposal to allow 600 slot machines at Hastings Park. The staff reports about the modified version etc. will probably return to Council in September. Decisions about the future shape of Hastings Park/PNE should be complete by fall 2004.

Heritage Vancouver continues to press Council; in a open letter, the Board writes:

Dear Mayor Campbell and
Members of Council
July 13, 2004

Re: PNE/Hastings Park
Dear Mayor and Council;

We write to you on behalf of our membership regarding Council's latest decisions related to PNE/Hastings Park.

We commend Council on what appears to be the retention of the roller coaster as a permanent feature of Playland. The Coaster has, as you know, long been a critical issue for Heritage Vancouver, appearing regularly in its annual listing of Vancouver's Top Ten Endangered Sites. The Roller Coaster is one of the last remaining wooden roller coasters in North America, one of the world's highest when it opened in 1958, and continues to be a significant tourist attraction. We look forward to its continued operation in Playland.

We remain concerned, however, about the fate of the Livestock Building. The Livestock Building is significant both for its Streamline Moderne Architecture (designed by McCarter & Nairne, famed architects of the Marine Building, in 1939) and for the role it played in the province's internment of the Japanese during WWII. The building should continue to play a vital role in a revitalized Hastings Park.

Both the Livestock Building and the Roller Coaster are integral elements of a vibrant Hastings Park. We look forward to a positive resolution of these issues.

Yours truly,

Heritage Vancouver Board of
Directors

Woodward's Department Store (101 W. Hastings Street)

The City has unveiled the three final proposals for redevelopment of the Woodward's Building submitted by Westbank Projects, Concert Properties and Millennium Development Corporation.

All three design proposals would add new buildings or towers to the site in the 100-block of West Hastings, and all would open up the old department store building to allow public access to a central courtyard. All three proposals would retain the big "W" that has marked the Vancouver skyline for decades. Two would keep it approximately where it is on the roof of the old store. The third would bring it down to the ground and use it as a monumental feature of the courtyard.

We hope that you attended one of the open houses held during July, and we welcome any feedback.

The public process resumes in September and the critical dates are:

- Thursday, September 9/Open House/W Room, 101 W. Hastings Street/6 - 8 pm. City staff will provide an overview of their recommendation to Council.
- Wednesday September 15/Special Council Hearing/City Hall Council Chambers/2-6 p.m. and again at 7.30 if required. Public Hearing of delegations.

Heritage Vancouver strongly favours the Concert Properties proposal as being most respectful to the heritage building and its historic context. We are presently preparing a letter to City Council outlining our position. This will reach the Council (with copy to all HV members) in late summer.

As always, please consult the City website for the most current news.
www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/woodwards/

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Tours & Expeditions

to October 28/Tours of Arthur Erickson Garden/Thursdays at 5:00 p.m., or Monday and Thursday afternoons for groups of 3 or more.
\$10. Reserve at 604-738-4195 or email aegarden@telus.net

Heritage Walks with John Atkin Wednesdays, rain or shine, 7.00 p.m. Members \$5; Non-members \$10 For more information call 604.734.7368 or visit www.johnatkin.com.

Sunday August 22/Tour of Hycroft Manor, 1489 McRae Avenue, Vancouver/ 2 p.m. meet under the port cochere. Tour organized by Vancouver Historical Society.

September 25 & 26/Town Hall Seattle, 1119 Eighth Avenue at Seneca Street/10 am-4 pm 2004 Bungalow & Craftsman Home Fair & Lectures
<http://www.cityofseattle.net/commnty/histsea/events/#fair>
Cost: \$5 members; \$10 general public Register: Call Historic Seattle at 206.622.6952 ext. 234

In its seventh year, Historic Seattle hosts over 50 craftspeople in metal, tile, glass, textiles, ceramics, and lighting; architects; interior designers; and antique dealers at Town Hall Seattle. The fair is an opportunity to learn about early 20th century architecture and design and to ask questions and get answers from knowledgeable people in the field.

HERITAGE
Vancouver

PRESENTS

Sunday August 15 Walking Tour, False Creek Urban Heritage Trail 1-3 p.m. Rain or shine
Meeting point: Granville Island Brewery (see map at http://www.discovervancouver.com/maps/granville_island_map.html)
Please preregister by leaving your name and phone number or email address on the HV voicemail (604-254-9411)

Don Alexander and Brendan Hurley, who developed the False Creek Urban Heritage Trail Guidebook described in the April 2004 Newsletter, will guide us through a section of the trail eastward from Granville Island. We will hop on the heritage tram as well. See newcity.ca/Pages/false_creek_trail.pdf

September 16, 7.30 p.m.
Vancouver Museum
General Meeting

October 21, 7.30 p.m.
Vancouver Museum
Heritage Vancouver
Annual General Meeting.

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