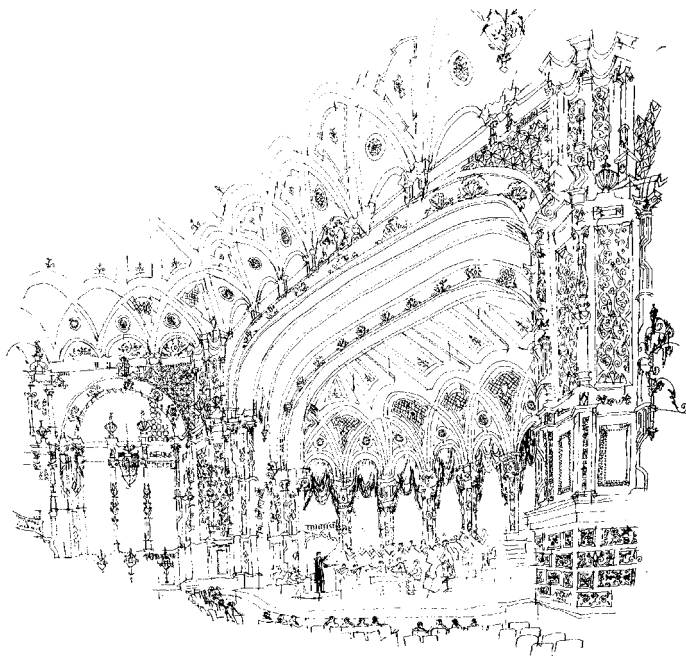


HERITAGE

# Vancouver

Newsletter



## Vancouver's Picture Palace

# ORPHEUM THEATRE

by *Maida Price*

**T**he present Orpheum Theatre—the third of its name in Vancouver—opened on November 7, 1927 as a combination vaudeville/silent movie house. No one in charge of its construction anticipated the impending doom of both these mediums. Sound was just around the corner, and the *all talking, singing picture* would change entertainment in North America forever—assisted, of course, by the advent of radio and the Great Depression.

Unlike its predecessors, this Orpheum has survived. Location helps. And while politics has undoubtedly played a part over the years, the theatre has survived because it has both beauty and a solid utilitarianism that has kept the building functional and the theatre-going experience, no matter what the show, pleasurable. The architect, B. Marcus Priteca, deserves credit for this. A Scotsman transplanted to Seattle,

he began designing theatres early in his career and, known for both his designs and his practical innovations, won gold medals for theatre design around the world.

During the Depression years, patrons probably didn't care much about the medals. Going to the Orpheum was a chance to escape from reality. Go to the theatre and leave behind the hard times; become as good as a Moroccan princess or a Spanish grandee for the price of a ticket. Be drawn into luxury, grandeur and comfort. This is a theatre that makes an event of itself.

While the ornate and fabulous visual experience of the Orpheum is what catches the eye, the nuts and bolts of the architecture make the adventure possible. The building's placement on the block and its interior floor plan work to draw customers into the experience. Economics dictated the

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HERITAGE  
**Vancouver**  
PRESENTS

**Beatty Street Drill Hall:  
Past, Present & Future  
Wednesday, March 20, 7:30pm  
Beatty Street Drill Hall**

The Beatty Street Drill Hall, an A building on the city's Heritage Register, is the oldest building in downtown Vancouver still used for its original purpose. Join us at the Drill Hall for our March Heritage Vancouver meeting as we tour the building with our hosts, the BC Regiment Association, and discover the glorious past of this majestic building. We will also discuss current issues facing the building's future and hear from the city on the future of the Beatty Street Escarpment, Viaduct Park and the CPR tunnel (No. 8 on our Top Ten list). Members free; non-members suggested donation of \$5 to Heritage Vancouver.

**Wrecking Ball or Restoration? *The Future of Hastings Street: Cambie to Main*  
Wednesday, April 17, 7:30pm  
The Vancouver Museum**

A panel made up of representatives of government, heritage and business will discuss the future of this once great street. Will it to continue to suffer from neglect and demolition or will it be returned to a thriving commercial corridor? Will the heritage buildings be torn down to make way for new social housing and social services, or will the buildings be restored to provide, once again, a viable business area for this neighbourhood? The panel will discuss these and other issues facing the Vancouver's best surviving turn-of-the-century streetscape. Your input and questions are welcome. Members free, non-members \$5.

**Hastings Street:  
*Vancouver's Heritage Corridor*  
Saturday, April 20, 10:30am**

Walking Tour begins at Victory Square Park Hastings Street between Granville and Main was once Vancouver's centre of trade and commerce. Many of our most prominent early office buildings and institutions were located here, and many still survive. Although the western section is still a bustling business district, the eastern section between Cambie and Main now suffers from neglect, and many wonderful heritage structures sit vacant and abandoned. Join heritage consultant Donald Luxton for a walk along Hastings Street, which will end with a real treat—a tour of the 1907 First Pantages Theatre, the oldest surviving purpose-built vaudeville house in Canada, and the oldest surviving Pantages theatre. Meet at the Cenotaph in Victory Square. Members \$5, non-members \$10.

**VANCOUVER MODERN**



## Britannia Hangar heralded the Jet Age

by *Robert Moffatt*

Britannia Hangar  
British Columbia Institute of Technology, Sea Island campus  
Otto Safir (engineer) 1958

Billed as Canada's first jet-age hangar, the Britannia Hangar was commissioned by Canadian Pacific Airlines to house their new Bristol Britannia turbo-prop airliners. Existing hangars at CP's Vancouver headquarters were too small to clear the Britannia's tall tail and broad wingspan, so noted Vancouver structural engineer Otto Safir responded with a structurally innovative and visually striking new hangar.

Safir devised a system of concrete arches which were anchored by caisson pilings driven 30 feet into the spongy Sea Island subsoil. Claimed as a first in civil aviation history, the arch design required no vertical supports and provided almost 52,000 square feet of unobstructed floor space. The arches were then covered by some 3200 curved concrete slabs forming the roof base. Two Britannia planes fit easily inside with ample working space, and were flanked by offices, workshops and storerooms. Large areas of glazing flood the interior with natural light and create a transparent effect by exposing the structural arches and the aeronautical equipment inside. Compared to the typical blank-walled, boxy airplane hangar, the Britannia Hangar conveys a sense of technological triumph and captures the romanticism of early jet-set air travel.

Ironically, the Bristol Britannia planes the Britannia Hangar was built to house were soon out of service, superseded with a few years by new pure-jet planes like the Boeing 707 and the Douglas DC-8. The hangar eventually became part of BCIT's newly-established Sea Island campus in 1987, and rests amid other period relics at the South Terminal of the Vancouver International Airport.

Photos: Dominion Photo (exterior), CP Air (interior), both c.1958

The Vancouver International Airport turned 70 years old in 2001, and to mark the occasion the Richmond Museum is featuring the exhibition **Up In The Clouds: The History of the Vancouver Airport**. The exhibit runs through May 2002 at 7700 Minoru Gate, Richmond. Call 604-231-6457 for more information.

from cover **Orpheum**

narrow arched entrance on the high-tax street and the bulk of the theatre on less expensive frontage, but it also meant patrons passed through a small entrance and encountered a grand concourse visually stretching into the distance. Ease of movement through the concourse and up the double staircase combined with the sense of beckoning horizon would move people up



into the foyer. Here also was a sense of space and of the exotic; the open stairs and the mezzanines, again facilitating easy movement into the theatre proper, had Moorish latticework and open arches that allowed a view down to the crowd and a glimpse up through the arches. Anyone could be a princess or a duke when seen at a distance through an arched window.

Arches are the most easily read of the Spanish Renaissance design motifs that give unity to the theatre. As surface decoration, especially in areas like the entrance concourse, their diminishing curves add a sense of perspective that draws the eye forward. Structurally, they appear repeatedly throughout the building, most notably in the three colonnaded levels that form backing and entry to the various levels in the house. The domed ceiling in the theatre echoes the idea of the arch (even if it is only an acoustical shell hung from the actual ceiling).

And of course, all the curves are working throughout to build expectation for the largest arch of all—the stage itself, another area of exotic adventure and transport from the ordinary.

Priteca didn't forget the less tangible aspects of the theatre experience. The building had state-of-the-art ventilation and heating and cooling systems. In-coming air was passed through falling water and blocks of ice to cool

it to 54 degrees Fahrenheit, and then warmed to the interior temperature required by the weather of the particular day. Ice blocks are no longer around, and Orpheum now heats with oil rather than coal, but the original infrastructure is still being used. Indeed, it's remarkable how the systems and structure and solid bones of the working theatre are still functional and still delighting audiences today.

Alexander Pantages, theatre czar of the early 1900's, actually gave Priteca his first chance at theatre design, and the young architect went on to design many of the Pantages theatres. Heritage Vancouver members will have a chance to see another of his theatre designs when Don Luxton conducts his walking tour of Hastings Street on April 20.

## Advocacy Update

### University Endowment Lands

The proposed demolition of a 1927 Tudor-revival mansion at 1610 Westbrook Crescent on the University Endowment Lands received considerable media coverage in February. Heritage Vancouver sent a request to the Minister of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services to stop the demolition process. In addition we requested that the Minister take appropriate actions to



1610 Westbrook living room



1610 Westbrook stairs

help initiate the development of a draft Heritage Registry, Management Plan, and Heritage retention incentives for the UEL. A 30 day stop work order was issued and we are continuing to advocate for heritage protection for buildings located on the UEL.

### Beatty Street Escarpment (False Creek North)

Heritage Vancouver sent a position paper to Mayor and council requesting that the heritage issues that had not been addressed at the time of the original rezoning of this area be address-

continued on back page **Advocacy Update**

## WORDS FROM THE PRESIDENT

# Development & Heritage

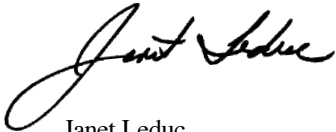
## *Compatible Marriage or Ugly Divorce*

Dear Members,

Cities evolve and develop to meet present and future demands. We at Heritage Vancouver accept this reality, but does it mean that all traces of our past must be obliterated for the sake of progress? As it stands now, No.8 on our Top Ten list will suffer this fate: the Beatty Street Escarpment will become a concrete retaining wall for a parkade, the tunnel portal will be demolished and Viaduct Park will be obliterated.

Are these all throw-aways? The Art Deco portal is an important monument to Vancouver's early railway history. Viaduct Park commemorates the 1915 Georgia Viaduct with the reuse of original concrete railings and street lamps. The escarpment is among the few remaining natural features in the downtown.

Last fall we wrote a letter notifying the city of the impending loss of these historic features to a new Costco store and apartment tower development. We offered creative solutions to incorporate these features into the new development. Staff expressed concern and now hopefully they can work out something with the developer to save these features. Only buildings that are on the city's (incomplete) Heritage Register are brought to City staff attention when new developments are about to go ahead. It is time for the city to come up with new and creative mechanisms to ensure that there are increasingly more compatible marriages between development and heritage. It is time for Vancouver residents to demand these mechanisms before our past is completely dismantled, one portal, one escarpment, one park at a time.



Janet Leduc  
President, Heritage Vancouver

### Advocacy Update

es during the proposed zoning amendment to allow for the building of a new Costco store and residential towers in this area. These issues are mentioned in the President's letter and will be addressed by city staff at our March meeting at the Beatty St. drill hall. (for the complete text of these and other letters see [www.heritagevancouver.org](http://www.heritagevancouver.org).)

### The Burrard Bridge

On Thursday March 14, city staff are presenting recommendations to Vancouver city council concerning potential pedestrian and cyclist crossings of False Creek. Although all three bridges will need better accommodation for cyclists, staff's first priority is the Burrard St. Bridge. Staff recommend further studies to examine how outriggers for this heritage A art-deco, land mark bridge could be sensitively designed. HV President, Janet Leduc, is making a presentation at this meeting urging council to eliminate the outrigger option before any further studies are carried out. We firmly believe that outriggers no matter how sensitively they are designed will destroy the important heritage features of the bridge.

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## Join Heritage Vancouver

Membership valid one year from date of issue. Members receive a monthly newsletter, free admission to monthly speakers' programs and reduced rates for tours and other activities.

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

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Individual: \$25

Family: \$30

Donation: \$

Supporting (no newsletter) \$5

Corporate: \$50

Patrons: \$100

YES

I would like to volunteer  
for Heritage Vancouver

Please send cheque or money order to: Heritage Vancouver, P.O. Box 3336, Vancouver, BC V6B 3Y3