

HERITAGE

Vancouver

Newsletter



Now a Chinese Christian church, Fountain Chapel was once the focal point for the Black community in Strathcona.



Hogan's Alley, which ran between Union and Prior Streets, was the heart of Vancouver's historic Black community, and was known for its lively nightlife. It was destroyed to construct the Georgia Viaduct.



Pender Street in the late 1800s was the heart of Vancouver's Chinese community. Chinese people were actively discouraged from living and working outside of Chinatown.

Heritage Trail

Highlights City's History

By *Don Alexander and Brendan Hurley*

The False Creek basin in many ways encapsulates the history of our city. The False Creek Urban Heritage Trail Guidebook (http://www.newcity.ca/Pages/false_creek_trail.pdf) – a recent initiative of the New City Institute – uses False Creek as a microcosm to traverse many of the city's historic neighbourhoods including Yaletown, Chinatown, Strathcona, the False Creek Flats, the proposed sustainable community at Southeast False Creek, South False Creek/ Granville Island, and Kitsilano. It seeks to unearth the basin's ecology, its grassroots history, and its role as a canvas for urban planning and design — “the good, the bad, and the ugly.”

False Creek is the heart of Vancouver as it is here that the transcontinental railway finally found its terminus. Since then, the basin has undergone many transformations. Prior to the railroad, the first European visitors encountered a

Squamish village called Sun'ahk in the approximate location of today's Credit Union Central headquarters. The rest was old growth forest, trails through the brush, and teeming fishing grounds in a shallow and marshy inlet that stretched much further than today's False Creek.

By the turn of the century, the forests had been logged to feed the growing ring of sawmills on the Creek and industry, such as locomotive repair, and residential development had begun to establish themselves on its slopes. Its waters, which still extended to Clark Drive, were increasingly filled with log booms, and the air had become sooty with smoke from beehive burners.

Then, in 1913, work on the Grandview Cut began to fill in the False Creek Flats, a part of the Creek that became mud flats at low tide, to allow railway access and to permit

See page 2 **Trail**

Trail from page 1

construction of new railway yards and stations. The relentless filling in of the Creek around its periphery accompanied this process, as industries sought to reclaim land and to dispose of refuse. By the 1950s, the Creek had shrunk to a quarter of its original size and had become so polluted that some politicians proposed filling it in entirely.

Two events, however, in the early 1970s transformed the look of the Creek. The first was the decision by the federal government to redevelop industrially derelict Granville Island into a "people place." In an approach influenced by the fresh winds blowing in planning and architectural circles, the project consultants decided to keep the Island's industrial buildings and to develop the ambiance around them.

The other innovation was to redevelop the south shore of the Creek as a residential area. The resulting community was socially diverse, with housing options for every part of the economic spectrum, and with high quality design



Vancouver's Skyline in the early 1900s

and community amenities. It was here that Vancouver's famed and much admired seawall was born and redevelopment of the downtown area began.

Through the years, False Creek has always been a canvas for labour, for immigrants and their descendants, and for community activists fighting against community-destroying free-ways and urban renewal. Around its margins one can find community projects, such as community gardens and art projects, which enhance our overall quality of life while encoding our social memory.

With this inspiration in mind, a small

group set out several years ago to establish a False Creek Urban Heritage Trail to document this largely hidden history. It soon became clear that getting the cooperation of all relevant city departments would take a lifetime of volunteer labour — not for lack of support but because the stakeholders all had already overcrowded agendas. To help lay the groundwork for an actual trail, we decided to establish first a online virtual trail. This way people could look at the trail guide online, print it off, and walk, cycle or drive it on their own. Having achieved this feat — thanks to a small grant from the now-defunct BC Heritage Trust and lots of dedicated volunteers — we are already seeing results. The City of Vancouver has linked the Trail to its own Southeast False Creek web page (<http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/commsvcs/southeast/links.htm>), and the

guidebook has received positive reviews from city officials and community leaders. Recent meetings with an ad hoc group assisting the City with its Downtown Heritage Greenway suggest that incorporating ideas from the Trail into that project may be possible.

Publication of the Trail Guide online has coincided with an upsurge of interest in our city's heritage, as expressed in the recent "In The Heart of the City" theatre production, and the Carnegie Centre's Footprints Community Art Project. These efforts are helping to foster a sense of belonging, an opportunity to refresh and re-visit our values, and a chance to rededicate ourselves to social and environmental justice. This is most welcome.

See Heritage Vancouver Newsletter, volume 8/Number 4 (April 1999) for further information re the False Creek initiative.

Don Alexander is a consultant, part-time instructor at Simon Fraser University, and research director for the New City Institute. Brendan Hurley is a student in geography at Simon Fraser University. His latest refinement of a part of the Trail (for his Cartography 351 class) can be viewed at <http://www.sfu.ca/geog351fall03/groups-webpages/gp9/stuff.html>

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

April 22, 7.30 p.m./Vancouver Historical Society @ Vancouver Museum
"Stories in Stone: A Geological Tour of Vancouver's Buildings and Monuments."
Speaker, Peter Mustard, SFU Earth Sciences & Past President of the Geological Association of Canada.

May 1, noon to 4 p.m.
North Vancouver Museum & Archives
Sea to Sky Regional Historica Fair.
Student displays, workshops and celebrations.

May 8, Vancouver Museum
Vancouver Regional Historica Fair.
Student displays, workshops and celebrations.

Tours & Expeditions

April 24-25
The Vancouver Island Bus Tour.
Join the Vancouver Museum for this weekend on Vancouver Island and in Powell River, touring little known neighbourhoods in Nanaimo, visiting historic Cumberland and exploring the rich architectural legacy of Powell River.
\$220 + GST for members \$250 + GST for general public. Contact Museum at www.vancouvermuseum.com for full details.

May 21-24
Art Deco Exhibition Tour/Fine Art Museum, San Francisco.
The Vancouver Museum and the Canadian Art Deco Society are proposing a group trip to San Francisco to see the "Art Deco 1910-1939" exhibit, which opened to rave reviews at London's Victoria and Albert Museum in spring 2003. If you are interested, please contact D. Luxton at donaldluxton@telus.net. Proposed costs include return airfare, hotel and admission to the exhibit. A minimum number of people is required to enable this trip to happen.

June 6
Open Vancouver 2004. The second tour of heritage homes explores neighbourhoods from Point Grey, Shaughnessy, Southlands and Strathcona. Tickets go quickly, so don't miss this rare chance to get inside these unique private homes. Tickets \$35 including GST and mailing of guidebooks. Available securely at www.vancouverheritagefoundation.org or by phone 604-264-9642



Hastings Park/ PNE Livestock Building

The decision-making process is moving swiftly around Hastings Park/PNE. By the end of April, the final options are to be identified and public support gauged. The Park Board considers the issues on May 17 and provides an information report to City Council on May 18.

Heritage Vancouver has sent the following open letter to City Council:

We are writing to protest the demolition of the PNE Livestock Building. As outlined in our March newsletter, and further featured in our April newsletter, the Livestock Building has national significance for its history as a marshalling facility for the internment of Japanese-Canadians in 1942.

In addition, the Livestock Building is architecturally significant, both as a superb example of the Streamline Moderne style and as part of the grouping of fireproof concrete structures at the PNE built between 1929 and 1940, three of which have already been preserved within Hastings Park (The Forum, The Gardens and Rollerland).

Designed by architects McCarter & Nairne (also known for the Marine Building and the Main Post Office) in 1939, this was a massive addition to the original Livestock Building

(H.H. Simmonds, 1929) which still stands as the northwest corner of the current structure. In tandem with the Streamline Moderne Garden Auditorium, the Livestock Building is one of the city's the best surviving examples in this genre. Ironically, its sleek streamline detailing and striking columned portico are rarely seen because the rear of the building faces the Fair. The front façade faces the racetrack and Miller Walk, at one time the Fair's main axis. Now obscured by a metal walkway and overgrown plantings, this neglected facade is one of the glories of Hastings Park.

The City is currently in the midst of a public process to determine the possible continuation of an annual fair in a greener Hastings Park. A continued fair raises the potential for retention of facilities previously slated for demolition in the existing Hastings Park Plan. The planned demolitions were predicated on the assumption that the PNE would be re-located elsewhere in the region. Depending on the outcome of the current process, an annual fair might well require livestock accommodations. Alternatively, the Livestock Building could be retained for year-round community uses, and would be compatible with a revised vision for Hastings Park. But to demolish any structures at this juncture would prejudice the outcome of the public

consultation and seriously compromise the integrity of the process.

Despite the obvious heritage issues in the visioning process and our previous involvement in the Hastings Park Plan, Heritage Vancouver has not been invited to participate as a stakeholder, although our members did attend the recent Ideas Fair held at the Agrodome. We added our comments to those of many others advocating the retention of the Livestock Building, the Roller Coaster, and other landmarks. The current process is not well-served if any demolitions implementing old directions occur prior to completion of public consultation. Therefore we request your written assurance that no structures be removed until after Council adopts its revised Hastings Park Plan.

Please remember that demolition is forever.

Stay tuned and ready to voice your opinion in the public meetings to be held in May. <http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/pnepark/issues.htm> is the best source of up-to-date information on the next steps of the consultation process.

continued on page 4 Woodward's

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Advocacy update, cont.

Woodward's

The process is moving right along. On April 6, Council approved Urban Design Guidelines for the site: "as a minimum, the 1903-1908 portion of the Woodward's building, as well as The 'W' sign, preferably with its steel tower [are to] be retained and rehabilitated." The guidelines "encourage" retention of the rest of the building, especially the 1925 portion; and heritage conservation incentives will also be available.

Heritage Vancouver supports the preservation of all exterior portions of Woodward's — it is the building as a whole, not just one corner, that has significant historical symbolism. Retaining only the NW corner would ignore the role of Woodward's, not just as an artifact, but as a key defining element of the Hastings streetscape.

Details about the June public open houses to review the proposals, are still to come. Stay tuned to the Heritage Vancouver website for further info.

HERITAGE
Vancouver
PRESENTS

The Future: Where Do We Go From Here?
Thursday, April 15, 7:30 p.m.
Vancouver Museum.

A panel discussion with various experts in the field on what the future holds for heritage in Vancouver, BC, and Canada.



Chinatown Vision: Housing Initiatives & Heritage Incentives.
Thursday May 20, 7:30 p.m.
Vancouver Museum.

Larry Beasley, Director of Current Planning, City of Vancouver

Cover story photo credits :
False Creek Urban Heritage Guidebook
City of Vancouver archives

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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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