

HERITAGE Vancouver Newsletter



2006 Top Ten Endangered Sites

This year marks publication of the sixth annual “Heritage Vancouver Top Ten Endangered Sites”. Since its inception, our “Top Ten” list has become recognized as the authoritative overview of the city’s threatened heritage resources.

It is, sadly, always difficult to keep the list to ten: the explosive real-estate development market exerts constant pressure on our heritage stock. That designated heritage sites are on our list is cause for great concern, and we continue to be anxious about the state of the Heritage Register. The final choice of sites includes those already in critical danger or likely to be so shortly.

Back this year in the No.1 spot is the Burrard Bridge, threatened yet again by the new City Council’s decision to scrap the proposed lane-reallocation trial and proceed full-tilt with sidewalk outriggers. Arthur Erickson’s Evergreen Building is not yet out of the woods and remains on the list. Back on the list from 2004 is Malkin Bowl, as TUTS continues to raise funds to replace it. Predictably, a host of new sites are endangered, including Salsbury Gardens, the Vogue Theatre, and the iconic 2400 Motel on Kingsway.

1. Burrard Bridge

Hatchet job. These are the only words to describe the current plan to widen the bridge’s sidewalks, as the newly elected City Council wasted no time overturning the previous Council’s trial-

lane reallocation. Heritage Vancouver, which is open to other solutions, supported the trial of assigning the outer lanes for bicycles, pedestrians and transit. If successful, the trial would have avoided the need to widen the bridge, saving the taxpayers at least \$25 million in current estimated construction costs. Now Council has instructed City staff to prepare final plans for construction of massive outrigger structures that will permanently desecrate one of our most iconic landmarks. What will we show the world in 2010 — a quick-fix hatchet job or a restored world-class landmark?

Completed in 1932 to provide a high-level crossing to the western neighbourhoods, the bridge is a triumph of civic architecture and a key gateway structure. Architects Sharp and Thompson, conscious of the bridge’s ceremonial ‘gateway’ function, embellished the utilitarian steel superstructure with imposing concrete towers, torch-like entrance-pylons, and art deco sculptural details. Unifying the parts are heavy concrete railings, originally topped by decorative street lamps.

The current turn of events takes us back to 2002 and is our worst possible scenario. Cantilevered outrigger sidewalks would radically alter the bridge’s appearance — adding bulky appendages that slice across the bridge’s architectural features. The existing railings would be demolished to make way for new railings pushed out to the edges of the new sidewalks. Without

its original railings, the bridge would lose its strong edges, and its defining architectural features would be isolated in a broad expanse of pavement.

For HV, the issues remain the same: how to accommodate increased numbers of cyclists and pedestrians without compromising the heritage architecture and iconic status of the bridge. One potential solution — a dedicated structure retrofitted underneath the bridge — previously made the City's shortlist and should be seriously reconsidered. Other solutions — such as a new dedicated crossing for pedestrians and cyclists, or a retrofit under Granville Bridge — also merit consideration. Given the escalating costs of construction, other low cost solutions could also be explored. We urge City Councillors to carefully consider all the viable alternatives before rushing to implement a solution that will permanently disfigure this civic landmark.

2. St. Paul's Hospital

1081 Burrard Street

One of the landmarks of downtown Vancouver, the venerable red-brick St. Paul's Hospital built on Burrard Street, may soon be just a memory. Political questions swirl around the issue of whether or not the hospital should be moved — from its original site in downtown Vancouver — to a completely different location in the False Creek Flats.

The first St. Paul's was a wood frame structure built by the famed Mother Joseph in 1894, just eight years after incorporation of the fledgling city. During the great Edwardian-era boom, it was replaced with a new, Renaissance Revival-style structure. With a floor plan laid out in the shape of a cross, this landmark was built of red brick, banded at the base, with extensive terracotta trim and a pantile roof. Terracotta for this project was ordered from Gladding, McBean & Company in Lincoln, California, and the new hospital opened in 1913. The German-born architect, Robert F. Tegen, had worked in architectural offices in New York and other eastern cities before moving to Portland. Tegen's earlier work for the American Sisters of Providence made him a natural choice to design their new Vancouver facility. As the city's population expanded, so too did the hospital, and flanking wings were added between 1931 and

1936, designed by architects Gardiner & Mercer. The hospital was later greatly expanded to the side and rear.

St. Paul's Hospital is A-listed on the Vancouver Heritage Register and is considered one of the city's most significant heritage buildings. However, it is not legally protected and therefore could be subject to serious alteration or even demolition. Should the hospital move, the fate of the historic structure is unknown. We only need to look up Burrard Street at what will remain of the YMCA — a partial façade — to see what could await St. Paul's, even with a sympathetic private developer.

3. Evergreen Building

1285 W. Pender

The future is still uncertain for this modern landmark. Arthur Erickson designed the Evergreen as an office building for owner John Laxton. Completed in 1980, the Evergreen's unique stepped terraces and hanging gardens were configured to create the experience of working on a mountainside. Unlike other office buildings, every floor has access to outdoor patio space — an ideal condition for residential conversion. Erickson took full advantage of the stepped configuration, creating complex geometries through the interplay of offset zigzag and linear floor plates, each floor diminishing in floor area within a trapezoidal building footprint.

But, according to Laxton, the Evergreen's smaller upper-floor areas are a disadvantage in the current office market, while the location has high residential demand due to spectacular views and amenities. The existing office building is only 10 storeys high (about 130') in a zone that permits a tower height of up to 300'. Considering conversion to residential, Laxton concluded that additional floor space was needed to improve financial return. To address compatibility with the original design, Laxton retained Erickson, who designed a light, 4-storey, glass and steel box — intended to resemble a lantern — on the roof of the existing building. In September 2004, City staff supported the proposed addition, which would bring the total building height to 175'. To the surprise of many, however, the DP Board (an independent panel) refused to approve the

conversion application due to the size of the proposed addition. Displeased, Laxton responded that he would apply to replace the Evergreen with a new 300' tower; this, he claimed, would be cheaper to build and more marketable than conversion of the existing building. Unfortunately, the building has no heritage protection as it did not meet the 20-year age requirement of the 1990 Recent Landmarks Inventory.

Fast forward to 2006: efforts to find a solution to save the Evergreen have been fast and furious. Heritage Vancouver and others have made representations to City Council, which in turn instructed its heritage planning staff to further engage Mr. Laxton regarding incentives and alternatives for preservation. Covering all angles, Laxton has responded by filing two parallel development applications: the first is to demolish the Evergreen and construct a new residential tower, and the second is to keep the existing building. The first application (to demolish) has already been approved, subject to final disposition of the second (retention) application — which is still being negotiated. Details of the negotiations are not yet known but could possibly involve the addition of floors and/or density transfer to another site. We are collectively holding our breath as the retention option works its way through the process. If the process fails, the way is clear for a demolition permit.

4. Vogue Theatre

916-920 Granville Street

Say it's not true! Vancouver's fabulous Vogue theatre — a National Historic Site and a Vancouver Heritage Register A-listed site — is threatened. Allied Properties has purchased the building, and the initial plan to convert the theatre to a supper club/cabaret suggests an irrevocable compromise of the theatre's elaborate interior spaces. Stepped tables will replace the theatre seating with the existing stage converted to kitchen space.

This 1940 landmark, designed for the Odeon chain by architects Kaplan and Sprachan, is a magnificent example of the Art Deco style. The Vogue's towering prow-like signage, etched in neon and topped by goddess Diana's golden silhouette, has been a defining image on the

Granville streetscape for over 60 years. A herald of the new modern age, the theatre's crisp stylized architecture and streamlined forms provided both a glimpse of the future and a vicarious experience of Hollywood glamour. This message was carried through to the exquisite lobbies and the auditorium, and expressed with sinuous curvatures and detailed in fine woodwork and distinctive period lighting. Of particular note is the auditorium ceiling, an undulating swirl of stepped tiers back lit with neon tubing. The auditorium's sidewalls are finished in padded fabric mounted with stylized Diana silhouettes and are flanked by murals painted by master decorator Ernest Prentis. The acoustics are excellent and, unlike most other movie houses, the Vogue can accommodate both movies and live shows — which explains why the Vogue has continued to be an active venue for live music and performance.

The Vogue should be retained as a performing arts venue. Because it recently lost an alternative waterfront location, the City needs a new medium-sized performance venue. Why can't the City use the money earmarked for a new facility to acquire and rehabilitate the Vogue as a civic theatre instead? Divorcing the theatre's architecture from its intended use cannot help but impair its historic status. If the new use is a cabaret, so much the worse, as the retention of period décor is not likely to be compatible with the requirements of a contemporary nightclub. For those who remember the old Commodore, listen up!

5. The "2400 Motel"

2400 Kingsway

The future of the 2400 Motel — Kingsway's iconic landmark — may soon be up for public discussion. Rumour has it that the City will soon be conducting a planning process for the stretch of Kingsway around the '2400' with a view to encouraging higher density residential/commercial developments. In fact, the City has already been working with the owners of the nearby Eldorado Motel to rezone and redevelop this site as a mixed-use development. Several years ago, in an unrelated move, the City's properties department purchased the 2400 Kingsway site with a view to re-sale down the road as a development

site. Now, as the planets align along Kingsway, it's looking more than likely that the 2400 will be next on the development agenda.

The 2400 Motel, built in 1946, is simply the best of the post-war Kingsway auto-courts. As the late 1940s and 50s ushered in an age of unprecedented mobility, auto-courts sprung up across North America to capture the market for highway-oriented accommodation. With completion of the Patullo Bridge and King George Highway in 1936, Kingsway became the final leg in a modern highway system linking Vancouver to the border and the States. Typical of the early motels, the 2400 was built as a cluster of cottages on a lawn around a central office, with a freestanding roadside neon sign to attract passing motorists. An early example of the trend to modernism, the Motel's 'streamline moderne' design — most notable in its flat-roofed office building — evokes the new post-war world of speed and personal mobility. The 2400 Motel has been scrupulously maintained over the years and is virtually unchanged. With savvy management, it could continue as such into the future, marketed internationally as a unique travel experience.

6. Salsbury Garden

1117 & 1121 Salsbury; 1760 Napier

This unique site, known in the neighbourhood as "Salsbury Garden", comprises three city lots at the southwest corner of Napier St. and Salsbury Drive, including two historic BC Mills cottages (No.1117 & No.1121) and an extraordinary heritage garden/forest. The two small working-class homes, built in 1907, were probably the first houses built on this part of Salsbury Drive and are rare surviving examples of early pre-fabricated construction. They document an important period in the city's socio-economic history, serving as examples of the small, utilitarian workers' cottages common in Vancouver's early days. What makes the site particularly significant is the close to 100-year-old garden, which presently occupies 60% of the site. The garden was created by an unusual placement of the two BC Mills cottages. Instead of placing each cottage on its own lot facing north to Napier, owner Charles Reid placed them in what would normally be the back

yard, then turned them ninety degrees straddling both lots and facing east to Salsbury. This placement created a large rectangular space at the corner of Salsbury and Napier, framed on the west by 1760 Napier. Arthur Greenius, who bought the property from Reid in 1914 and lived at 1760 Napier until the 1950s, was committed to Reid's garden vision and planted many unusual trees such as a California redwood, a giant butternut tree and a California spicebush. The growth of the garden continued undisturbed through the next 80+ years, even though Dr. Greenius was the last person to own the entire property. Throughout the 20th century, Salsbury Garden had a special place and value within the community. Now, one hundred years later, the Garden and homes are threatened. Developer Richard Niebuhr, the new owner of 1117 and 1121 Napier, wishes to obliterate the existing BC Mills cottages and garden treasures, which have absolutely no heritage protection. (1760 Napier, which is separately owned, is not itself at risk.)

Once again, the vulnerability of our heritage is exposed. Like so many areas in Vancouver — and particularly in East Vancouver — this neighbourhood is sadly underrepresented in the Heritage Register. For example, most (90%) of the 54 houses with addresses on Salsbury Drive between 1st Avenue and Venables were built before WWI; none is on the Heritage Register. Little cottages such as those on the site are a fast-disappearing element of our historical record. Even more significant is the potential loss of a unique, intentional development configuration that might be termed a historic 'vernacular' landscape. Although the community cherishes the configuration/ landscape, the 1986 Register, which focuses on individual buildings and architectural merit, is woefully under-equipped to evaluate its significance or to provide mechanisms for retention. We applaud the previous City Council's decision to update the Register and anticipate that ways to recognize and protect sites such as Salsbury Garden in the future will be considered. In light of this, we urge the City to explore creative alternatives for the preservation of this unique resource.

7. “Black Swan Records”

2936 W. 4th Avenue

Old Kitsilano — particularly its early twentieth-century commercial buildings — is rapidly disappearing. The former ‘Black Swan Records’ building — a cherished community landmark at the corner of West Fourth and Bayswater — is set to become another casualty of unabated condo development. Remarkably, this handsome two-storey wood building is not listed on the City’s Heritage Register, even though 2904–2906 West Fourth (aka Topanga Café) ranks a ‘C’ on the list. Although Black Swan lacks Topanga’s brick façade, it has arguably greater architectural appeal and has always had great prominence as a corner building. A rare surviving example of the early commercial development of western Kitsilano, 2936 West Fourth is one of a cluster of commercial structures built near the Fourth and MacDonald intersection as the streetcar line line was extended west. Moreover, Black Swan has a storied history as part of Kitsilano’s 1960s ‘hippie’ culture. One of the few remaining icons of that era, Black Swan become known in its later years for the jazz-themed mural along its Bayswater façade.

Kitsilano residents want to retain the building and, in response to community pressure, City Council had earlier instructed heritage staff to explore all options to save it. City staff attempted to negotiate a transfer of density, which was ultimately rejected as insufficient compensation. The most recent chapter ended January 19 when Council unanimously approved a development permit that will allow the developer to demolish and replace the existing building.

What conclusions can be drawn from this experience? At the very least, the Register must be upgraded to fully reflect community values, but this will not help unless the City’s toolkit of incentives is bolstered to meet the pressures of contemporary development. In the meantime, we urge the City to keep exploring avenues to save this valuable heritage resource.

8. Malkin Bowl

Stanley Park

On a return engagement from our 2004 Top Ten list, Malkin Bowl remains in serious danger as TUTS (Theatre under

the Stars) organizers continue to raise funds for its demolition and replacement. ‘Marion Malkin Memorial Bowl’ was built in 1934 with funds donated by William Harold Malkin, grocery wholesaler, former Mayor, and Park Board Commissioner, in memory of his wife. Originally designed as a band shell, the venue has been used for most of its history for the summer TUTS musicals. The building, known for its crescent-shaped proscenium arch, is a delightful example of the Moderne style and a beloved city landmark. The Park Board considers Malkin Bowl a liability — its isolated location and wooden construction make it vulnerable to squatters, vandalism and arson. If TUTS and the Park Board have their way, Malkin Bowl will be demolished. It will be replaced by a high-tech, telescoping, slab-mounted structure designed by Busby and Associates, architects of One Wall Centre. TUTS is only too happy to replace the existing landmark with a state-of-the-art facility that will provide more space for drop scenery and backstage activities. Neither the Park Board nor TUTS has given serious consideration either to upgrading the existing facility for continued TUTS use or, alternatively, to restoring the Bowl as a musical performance venue, while locating the proposed new TUTS structure elsewhere.

9. Stewardship: City-Owned Heritage Sites

The 1865 **Hastings Mill Store Museum**, Vancouver’s oldest building, could be endangered through long-term neglect. Sole existing survivor of the Great Fire of 1886, the building was once the company store for Hastings Mill — located on Burrard Inlet at the foot of Dunlevy Street. In 1936, the store was moved by the Native Daughters of BC to its present location in Pioneer Park at the north foot of Alma Street. Owned by the City, but managed by a dwindling group of Native Daughters, it suffers from low public profile, meager funding, and rudimentary maintenance, with low priority for heritage considerations. To preserve this site for future generations, the City needs to play a much more active role in its stewardship and maintenance.

On the topic of stewardship, we are glad to see that the City is finally doing some maintenance work on historic

Roedde House Museum. However, funding MUST now be secured immediately for the retention and restoration of the **City Hall Windows**. The main City Hall building, completed in 1936 in the Art Deco style, still has most of its original wood sash, double-hung windows. The windows employ an unusual system that allows both panes to pivot horizontally in addition to moving vertically. Although the windows are an integral part of the building’s heritage value, the City has at various times considered replacing them and has not funded the urgently needed maintenance and rehabilitation. The City needs to live up to its own heritage standards and fund the required work before it’s too late.

10. Kogawa House

1450 W. 64th Avenue

In late fall 2005, City Council approved a 120-day demolition delay to allow sufficient funds to be raised for the purchase and preservation of the Kogawa House as a cultural and literary landmark. The Land Conservancy of BC (TLC) has stepped in to help raise the over one million dollars required to buy the house and pay for the repairs and renovations necessary to convert it to a writers’ centre. However, if efforts to purchase the property within the 120-day period (which ends March 31) are unsuccessful, the current private owner will demolish the house.

The Kogawa House has special literary significance as the childhood home of acclaimed Canadian author Joy Kogawa. Through its depiction in her novel, *Obasan*, the house has a strong symbolic and historical association with the internment of Japanese-Canadians during WWII. The novel recalls this episode in Canadian history through the eyes of a child. Kogawa’s childhood home and the cherry tree in the back yard figure prominently in the novel. Heritage Vancouver joins with other arts and literary groups across Canada to support the proposed writers’ centre. We urge them to do so.

Cover Photo Credits:

Top left to right:
Burrard Bridge, *Richard Keating*
St. Paul’s Hospital, *Patrick Gunn*
Evergreen Building, *Patrick Gunn*

Bottom left to right:
Black Swan Records, *Patrick Gunn*
Vogue Theatre, *Patrick Gunn*
Hastings Mill Store Museum, *Patrick Gunn*