

104-year-old Vaudeville palace being demolished this week

The City of Vancouver issued a demolition permit for Vancouver's Pantages Theatre

BY JOHN MACKIE, VANCOUVER SUN APRIL 7, 2011 9:24 PM



1999: The Pantages Theatre in 1999 and today. The theatre is part of a six-lot parcel that was put up for sale for \$9 million in 2008.

Photograph by: Ian Smith, PNG, Vancouver Sun

It's curtains for the Pantages Theatre, Vancouver's oldest vaudeville and movie house.

The century old landmark at 144-150 East Hastings near Main will probably be torn down in the next couple of days, after the city issued a demolition permit for the site.

"They've been chewing away next door, so [demolition is] imminent," said Don Luxton of Heritage Vancouver. "They've already started ripping out the backs of the buildings."

Several groups have attempted to revive the Pantages, which was the oldest theatre remaining from a legendary chain of vaudeville palaces that Alexander Pantages built across North America.

It has been vacant since 1994, and has been rotting inside from rain seeping in through a damaged roof, a textbook case of what heritage activists call "demolition through neglect."

"I think it's a tragic and irreversible loss," said Luxton. "We're losing what was clearly recognized as a historic theatre. We can't get it back now, it's gone."

Demolition permits have also been issued for the four adjacent properties at 130, 132, 134 and 138 East Hastings, which means there will soon be another big empty lot in the troubled Downtown

Eastside.

Will Johnston of the city's licences and inspections department said no plans have been approved to redevelop the site.

The Pantages was built in 1907-08 in the middle of Vancouver's original downtown.

It was converted to a movie house in the late 1920s, and in the early '30s survived a fire in the projectionist's booth and a bomb that was thrown into the theatre during a labour meeting. It had several names over its lifetime, including the Royal, State, Queen, Avon and City Nights. It last operated as the Sung Sing, a Chinese-language theatre.

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