

# HERITAGE

# Vancouver

N e w s l e t t e r



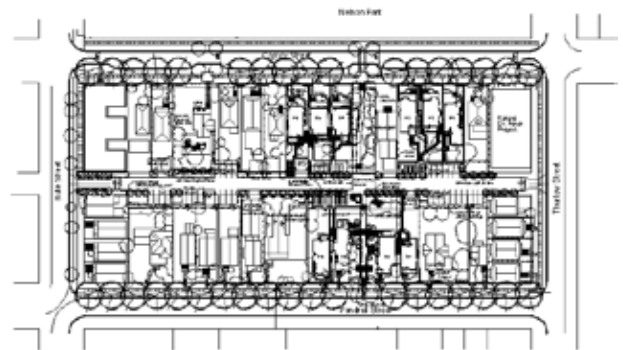
## Mole Hill is Affordable Heritage

by Sean R. McEwen

**MOLE HILL IS IN VANCOUVER'S WEST END,** bounded by Comox, Thurlow, Pendrell and Bute Streets. It is made up of thirty-four houses built between 1888 and 1942, and one apartment building built in 1910. Twenty-eight of the houses are owned by the City, and the remaining five and the apartment are privately-owned.

Since 1950, Mole Hill had been under threat of demolition for redevelopment and for proposals to extend Nelson Park to the north across Comox Street. A long public process has now culminated with the City's commitment to preserve the historic streetscapes of Mole Hill. The City is partnering with the Provincial government, and its community-based partner, the Mole Hill Community Housing Society, to restore the City-owned houses on the block as affordable housing.

The Provincial government, through its HOMES BC Program, will provide the construction financing for the upgrade of houses, and an on-going subsidy to assist lower-income households to keep rents affordable. The City will lease its City-owned land and its heritage houses to the Mole Hill Community Housing Society for 60 years at no cost. This partnership will allow the preservation of an important part of Vancouver's heritage, while providing affordable housing for low and moderate-income singles and families.



Mole Hill Plan  
May 1, 2000

see **Mole Hill** page 3

HERITAGE  
Vancouver  
PRESENTS



Queen Anne style house, 602 Keefer St.

R. Ward

Wednesday, July 19, 2000 7:30 PM  
**Strathcona Tour**  
Meet at 921 Princess Avenue

## SUMMER HV Events

**O**ur July meeting takes place in Strathcona. On Wednesday July 19th, we're going to look at some recent heritage projects in Vancouver's oldest neighbourhood. Recent developments in Strathcona have included restorations, new construction and infill buildings. For this meeting we'll meet two people working in the neighbourhood and tour their projects. We'll learn first hand about the challenges involved in working with heritage in this neighbourhood.

In August, we'll meet outside the Vancouver Museum on the 16th at 7:30 pm for a walk in the neighbourhood, it will give us a chance to meet the members of Heritage Vancouver as we take a ramble looking at buildings and landscape. Its a perfect way to relax before we begin our regular program in September.

## VANCOUVER MODERN



Photo: Robert Moffatt, 1999

# Royal Bank puts on a pleasing front

by *Robert Moffatt*

**Royal Bank building  
798 Granville Street  
Underwood, McKinley, Cameron  
& Associates 1962-63**

While it may not look particularly remarkable at first glance, especially in its current state of near-abandonment, the former Royal Bank building at Granville and Robson offers a surprisingly elegant exterior design for an extremely restricted site.

Building on a site only 42 feet wide, architects Underwood, McKinley, Cameron & Associates managed to present intricate and stylish elevations to the street. Flush, linear strips of reflective glass, charcoal-coloured granite and brushed aluminum were mixed with advancing and receding exterior wall planes, creating a tight, clean composition with pleasing visual interest. Pearly grey mosaic tile used inside and out added contrasting colour, if somewhat crude and dated in texture.

A George Norris water sculpture of aged copper set at the front corner provided a ground-level focal point until it was replaced by ATMs in the 1980s.

Closed as a bank branch a few years ago and now vacant, the Royal Bank building's fate seems sealed as part of a redevelopment of the half-block of Granville opposite the old Eaton's department store.

Architects Percy Underwood, Kenneth McKinley and their various partners and associates formed fairly prolific firms in Vancouver from the late 1940s through the 1970s. They were favourites of the Vancouver Parks Board, designing the Bloedel Conservatory and restaurant at Queen Elizabeth Park, the entrance pavilion at the VanDusen Botanical Garden, and the Parks Board offices on Beach Drive. Most of the city's larger parks and beaches have at least one of their structures.

## Mark Your Calendar

### Sunday, July 23 Annual Clayburn Village Heritage Day

1:00-5:30 PM  
Clayburn, B.C. (Abbotsford)  
Opening Ceremonies, Heritage  
Tours, Clayburn Church, Clayburn  
School, Brick Plant Site, Live  
Entertainment, Vintage Cars  
Contact Helene Sundberg  
854-3960 for further information.  
www.faximum.com/clayburn

from **Mole Hill** cover

Phase One of the redevelopment of the block is set to begin construction in July 2000. It encompasses the renewal of ten of the houses, with the remaining sixteen houses comprising a second phase of planning and construction. The design intent is to rehabilitate the houses in a manner that is sensitive to the heritage aspects of the houses, including the house exteriors and the historic streetscapes and lanescapes of the block, as well as the interior features of the houses, most of which have benefitted from "benign neglect" over the years and are remarkably intact. At the same time, the intent is to create a variety of modestly-sized housing unit types, from studios through three-bedroom units, in sufficient numbers to create a core of community for the block.

Central to the strategy of the block's redevelopment is the idea of turning the laneway which bisects the block between Comox and Pendrell streets, into a "living lane", where residents on the block, and others from beyond the bounds of Mole Hill, can come together in a variety of outdoor and indoor spaces that support community activity. The lane will be traffic-calmed, and while vehicles will be allowed to pass through, it will be clearly designed as a pedestrian priority area.

The lane focuses at its mid-point on a community square, which is linked north and south to Pendrell and Comox streets with landscaped pedestrian paths through mid-block vacant lots. These paths will allow pedestrians moving through the site to view the handsome side elevations of some of the houses, which generally are not seen because of

the small sideyards separating the houses.

The lane also features community garden plots, and community-oriented uses, such as a common laundry room, a workshop, a tool and garden shed, a refuse and recycling area, and meeting room, all installed in the small garages and existing house additions that back onto the lane. The lane itself, which is thirty-three feet wide, will be narrowed to the City-standard twenty feet, allowing for the verges on each side to be intensively landscaped, which will significantly add to the green character envisioned for the lane.

Already well-used by West End pedestrians, with these enhancements, and with the upgrades to the houses themselves, including replacement of the rear fire escapes with a visually consistent set of painted steel stairs and decks, the lane should become even more of a feature of the West End's system of pedestrian ways and mini-parks.

On Comox and Pendrell streets, the intent is to restore the fronts of the houses to create a turn-of-the-century streetscape. Later additions on the houses and non-heritage elements will be removed, and landscaping that reflects the original character of West End front yards will be introduced. The original colour schemes of the houses will be restored.

The project is benefiting from last year's relaxations to the Vancouver Building Bylaw, which now more liberally allows for alternative code compliance methods to preserve heritage details on buildings. At Mole Hill this means that historic railings and stairs on the front porches, and original siding and windows in sideyards, can be retained. Inside the houses, it means that existing wood floors and lath and plaster walls can be retained in individual suites.

For the house interiors, floor plans have been developed which fit the original structural configuration of the houses. Generally, the intent is to respect all existing interior elements of heritage character and value. At present, most of the pre-existing units in the houses are comprised of housekeeping suites which share bathroom facilities. The new units will all have self-contained, modestly-sized bathrooms and kitchens, which along

with new building services and life safety features, will be integrated into the structure of the existing houses to minimize impacts to existing heritage details.

This approach, of respecting heritage detail and the building structure inside and out, is seen as a cost-effective approach to renewing the houses, and of meeting the rather stringent budget requirements of the Province's affordable housing programs. Typically, the Province's HOMES BC housing allocations have not allowed for the up-grade of existing, threatened rental stock, much less housing that has significant historic or heritage value. It is to the Province's credit that it has seen fit to expand its program base and support affordable housing and heritage renewal at the same time. As well, the City must also be congratulated for its cooperative attitude and for its contribution of land and the houses themselves.

Hopefully Mole Hill can point the way for other projects, in Vancouver and around the Province, for various levels of government, working in concert with communities and the private sector, to collaborate on initiatives that serve a wide variety of social needs, not the least is preserving important parts of our built heritage.

*Architects and urban designers for the Mole Hill Project are Hotson Bakker / S.R. McEwen Associated Architects; Landscape design is by Durante Kruek Ltd.; Heritage and "True Colour Consultant is Donald Luxton and Associates; Development Consultant for the Mole Hill Community Housing Society is Terra Housing.*

*Sean McEwen is a life-long Vancouverite with a keen interest in the built and social history of the City. A bit of a throw-back to an earlier era when many architects were social activists, he continues to try to turn an interest in social justice and environmental concern into a design career.*

## Words from the President

# FINN SLOUGH ALERT!

Dear Members,

The following is an urgent appeal from the newsletter of the Finn Slough Heritage and Wetland Society:

“The situation at Finn Slough has changed. Until recently we have been involved in a process of negotiating to obtain leases for the heritage buildings and residences here at Finn Slough from the Fraser River Port Authority (FRHA). This has broken down as one of the upland owners (Toronto developer, Stephen Smith of “Smith Prestige” has stated he will deny the Slough the permissions necessary to obtain the leases. The FRHA has now stated its intention is to proceed as soon as possible to bring the question of lease acquisition to a close by evicting the residents and fishers and is demanding the destruction of the heritage buildings at Finn Slough. This is a time when the help of public opinion and exposure (which had been held back during the talks) is sorely needed. We are asking for your support in voicing your concerns to the possible dismantling of an important heritage village.”

Letters of support should be addressed to Alan Domaas, Fraser River Port Authority and Joan Sawicki, Minister of Environment Plans and Parks, but forwarded to Finn Slough for distribution. The Society has a sample petition letter. For more information, contact the Finn Slough Heritage and Wetland Society at (604) 878-FINN, or e-mail at [tidetables@hotmail.com](mailto:tidetables@hotmail.com), or on the web: [www.angelfire.com/bc/finnslough/](http://www.angelfire.com/bc/finnslough/).

Cheers



John Atkin  
Interim President, Heritage Vancouver



## HV Members and Guest Event

Join us for the Grand Finale of Symphony of Fire, August 9th Fun, food and fireworks at Janet Leduc's place a spectacular view of English Bay. \$20 per person limited tickets, reserve early to avoid disappointment. More details in the mail this month. Call HV for reservations.

## Mole Hill Gets City Council Approval

“This is a momentous occasion for our community and the city as a whole,” said Blair Petrie, long time resident and community activist. The occasion was the approval of the Mole Hill Block Plan Phase I of the Mole Hill Non-Market Housing and Heritage Project. A partnership between the city of Vancouver, BC through BC Housing and the Mole Hill Community Housing Society. The former foes began working in partnership two years ago when the Mole Hill Living Heritage Society brought the provincial government to the table as a partner. Mole Hill is the oldest intact block of heritage houses in Vancouver, dating back to 1888, when Vancouver was just two years old.

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<http://home.istar.ca/~glenchan/hvsintro.shtml>

In September see Peter Vaisbord's story on an excellent Seattle adventure

## Join Heritage Vancouver

Annual membership runs from October 1<sup>st</sup> to September 30<sup>th</sup>. 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.

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