

HERITAGE

Vancouver

N e w s l e t t e r

OH, IT WAS ATHLETIC

Life and times at The Penthouse nightclub

by *Maida Price*

Who could have imagined that the modest building on Seymour Street would grow up to be so immodest and so famous? In 1941, the date of the photograph, it was the home of the Eagle Time Delivery System and Diamond Cabs. Today, it's The Penthouse, with a checkered past and a firm place in the cultural and social history of Vancouver.

The building began its growth into infamy when Joe Philliponi remodeled the lower floor of his transportation company building into the Eagle Time Athletics Club for boys. The club had a boxing ring with tiered seating and other sporting accoutrements and did teach boys to box. Around about the same time, the upper floor also became a sporting venue of sorts: it turned into a drinking club with a



full complement of barstools and bright lights and people out for a good time. When the Athletics Club got its liquor license in 1947 it was raided on its first night—and a few other times as well, so frequently that a buzzer was installed to alert everyone when the police were on the way. It required plenty of athletic ability to hide the bottles away before the police got inside the door.

Newspapers customarily announced these as raids on Joe's *penthouse* and the club's name was eventually changed to match.

Later remodeling jobs included turning the entire building into a supper club and the upper floor into a popular restaurant called the Steak Loft. Big-name performers came up from Las Vegas to perform and party at the club and, in the 50s, couples came to dine and

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**Sequins and G-Strings Galore:
Striptease Staged at the Penthouse
Cabaret, 1945-1980**
Wednesday, November 21, 6:30 pm

Join Heritage Vancouver for an offbeat evening at The Penthouse, Vancouver's oldest cabaret. Experience the ambience of the Penthouse as UBC Sociology and Women's Studies teacher and author Becki Ross takes us on a rollicking journey through the history of striptease at the Penthouse. Stay on and see a show at 8:00pm, 1019 Seymour St. Members free non-members \$5. Note: This meeting is in place of our regular monthly meeting at the Vancouver Museum

Chinatown by Night
Friday, November 23,
8:00pm (rain or shine), Chinese
Cultural Centre, 50 East Pender Street

It's time to take a different look at Chinatown. Heritage Vancouver, with John Atkin, explores the history and architecture of this unique area in a new series of evening tours. Chinatown by night is a world away from the bustling daytime streets. It's a chance to explore and experience this historic area in a whole new light. Don't forget to bring your flashlight. Meet in the courtyard of the Chinese Cultural Center, by the gate. \$5 for members \$10 for non-members.

*The Vancouver Chinatown
Millennium Society and
Heritage Vancouver*

*invite you to the
ground-breaking ceremony of*

The Chinatown Millennium Gate

Join us at S.U.C.C.E.S.S.
Choi Hall
28 West Pender Street
November 24, 2001 at 11 a.m.
for a formal ceremony

VANCOUVER MODERN



Photos: Robert Moffatt

Block Building short but stands out

by *Robert Moffatt*

Block Building
2695 Granville Street, Vancouver
C.B.K. Van Norman & Associates,
1964-65

At seven stories tall it's hardly a skyscraper, but the Block Building displays the fine proportions, high-quality materials and attention to detail of the best International Style office towers. It's also the last Vancouver office building designed by Charles Van Norman still standing and in original condition.

Van Norman's design was likely inspired by the large American firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM), which by the early 1960s had largely defined the postwar corporate office building. Following the pattern set by several SOM designs, including the 1959 Norton Building in Seattle, Van Norman chose the elegant but extravagant placement of the elevators and services in a separate tower adjoining the curtain-walled office block. Placing the service core outside the slim office block also

allowed unobstructed floor plates, which were then cantilevered over a glass-enclosed bank branch at street level.

The building's details are a further testament to Van Norman's skill. Metal curtain-wall spandrels were anodized a rich, patinated olive-bronze colour; the unusual vertical segmentation adds visual interest. Prominent aluminum mullions draw the eye upward in counterpoint, while the W-shaped corner detailing elegantly joins the wall planes. Sand-coloured bricks cover the service tower and ground-level pilotis, contrasting the smooth glass and metal surfaces. The recessed entrance court is enlivened by a richly-toned enamelled-glass mosaic and a metal bas-relief sculpture, both by Lionel Thomas.

The Block Building has survived the years well, although the transparency of the ground floor has been compromised by bank ATM machines and some brickwork has been painted a uniform beige colour.

Beatty Street Drill Hall turns 100

The Beatty Street Drill Hall at 620 Beatty Street is an oddity in downtown Vancouver: it's a whitewashed medieval castle with three-foot-thick walls of granite and brick, bristling with turrets and battlements. It belongs to the era of military pageantry and brass-buttoned scarlet uniforms, not one of smart bombs and stealth fighters.

Those walls turned 100 years old this year, a milestone celebrated in a ceremony on October 14. Some 250 guests looked on as Lieutenant-Governor Iona Campagnolo unveiled a plaque honoring The British Columbia Regiment (Duke of Connaught's Own) and their historic drill hall. It's the oldest building in Vancouver still housing its original occupants.

The Drill Hall was built from 1899 to 1901 on a high bluff overlooking what was then False Creek on one side and the Cambie Street Grounds on the other. The hall was opened on September 30, 1901 by the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall, later King Edward VII and Queen Mary, as part of their royal tour.

Today the Drill Hall stands as stolidly as ever, guarded by a pair of WWII-era Sherman tanks and ancient cannons. Yet changes are soon to come. Concord Pacific owns the parking lot to the south of the building and the land at the foot of the bluff, and is proposing residential towers and a multi-level retail complex extending up the bluff to the level of Beatty Street. The Drill Hall will survive, its exteriors protected by federal Level 2 heritage designation and City of Vancouver schedule A designation. Its status as a military facility may change, though, as the Department of Defence is planning to reduce military infrastructure.

With Remembrance Day gaining fresh poignancy this year as a new war unfolds in Afghanistan, it's worth reflecting on the thousands of men and women who have marched through the Drill Hall's heavy doors over the last hundred years in defence of our nation.

Penthouse from cover

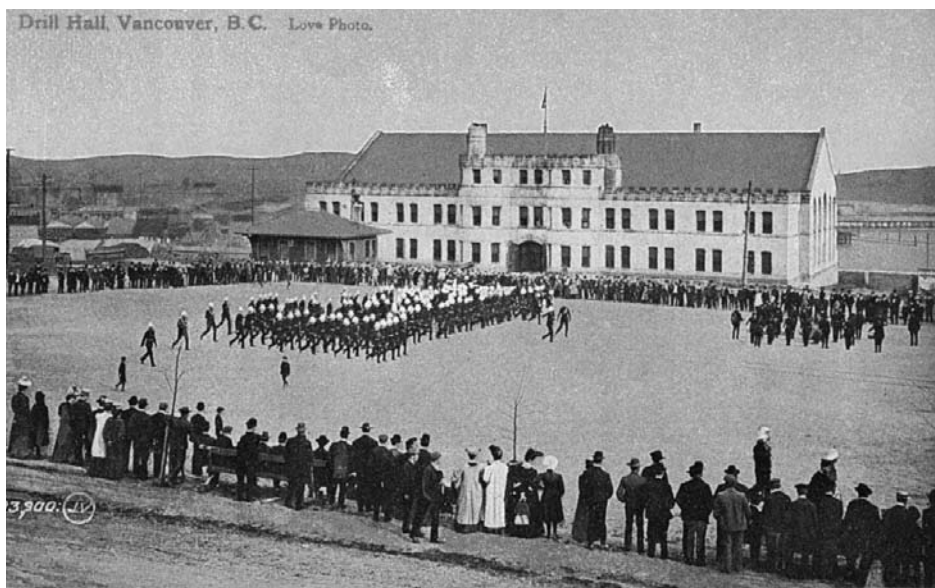
dance. It was popular and respectable but as times changed, so did the club, moving to burlesque acts and then strippers and finally to complete ignominy when The Penthouse, as part of a clean-up campaign on prostitution in the city, was raided and closed.

The Penthouse struggled back and has now reopened after yet another remodeling job, this one by Joe's nephew Danny Fillipone. To bring the club up to date he has redone the lower floor—without losing the flavor of the fifties, Uncle Joe's patterned carpet (albeit new) or the original silver curtain—and has new acts, like a jazz bar on Thursday nights, in addition to the strippers. The rest of the building remains as it was, a fascinating warren of floors all at different heights and short flights of stairs going everywhere and nowhere. Odd spaces remain perfectly empty. The upper floor has the old bar stools and a bearing wall decorated with plaster Romans on horses, and somewhere around floor one-and-a-half, the kitchen remains, crammed with stuff but

probably perfectly functional with a good cleaning. Up another flight of stairs, Joe's VIP room, where he entertained Louis Armstrong and Sammy Davis Jr. among others, has wonderfully kitschy green-flocked wallpaper and fifties lampshades. Good friends got to use the catwalk across to the girls' dressing rooms, or partied on in Joe's top floor apartment next door.

Now old autographed photos of famous performers hang over the banquettes they posed at, and the strippers up on stage evoke heady days of dance halls and bottle clubs and nice but naughty Vancouver supper clubs. With its ramshackle arrangement of rooms and odd bits of the past sitting around, the building condenses over half a century of entertainment and the social ideas underlying it into a dark and interesting mix. It's the history of Vancouver, stuffed into that old building on Seymour Street like a stripper into a bustier. Come and visit it with Heritage Vancouver on November 21st.

Maida Price is editor of the Heritage Vancouver newsletter.



Beatty Street Drill Hall turns 100

WORDS FROM THE PRESIDENT

Victory Square

a special place 365 days of the year

Dear Members,

November 11th. Politicians, veterans, dignitaries and ordinary people walk solemnly to Victory Square to honor our war dead. Workmen clean up needles, set up chairs, install TV cameras and special lighting to make the park pretty for the annual Remembrance Day Ceremony. Participants lay wreaths, listen to speeches, say prayers, shed a tear to the lament of the last post, and watch the proud, elderly veterans on parade. At noon, it's over for another year. Drug dealers come back to the park, addicts shoot up, the park becomes too unsavory for ordinary people—life returns to normal.

This special place of remembrance is also one of the City's prime heritage treasures. Victory Square Park is ringed by some of the finest heritage buildings in our city. It contains the Cenotaph and surrounding plaza, a *heritage monument* and an *Edwardian heritage landscape*, and perimeter trees that were part of the landscaping for the original Courthouse. In recognition of its significance, area citizens calling themselves *The Friends of Victory Square* have initiated a project to bring more light and beauty to the park. We laud this project, await the increased illumination and hope that this is just the beginning. Now is the time for the city to implement the Victory Square Area Concept Plan and ensure that open drug dealing and other criminal activities are no longer tolerated in this special place of remembrance. Let's honor our War heroes on November 11th—and every other day of the year.



Janet Leduc
President, Heritage Vancouver

HV UPDATES

HV Website

Have you checked out the new website yet? Our volunteer webmaster, Albert Lunshof, is looking for your comments, suggestions and photos. Go to www.heritagevancouver.org

HV Memberships

Check to see if yours was among those expiring on September 30th. To renew, send your form to Heritage Vancouver at PO Box 3336, MPO, Vancouver BC V6B 3Y3. If yours has expired, this will be your last edition of the newsletter.

HERITAGE VANCOUVER'S ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Members attending the AGM on October 17th, 2001 heard that the organization is in good financial shape and that we've made progress on various projects over the last year.

On the newly-elected Board of Directors:

Janet Leduc, President
Karen Russell, Treasurer
Scott Barrett, Secretary
Peter Vaisbord, Advocacy Chair
Maida Price, Communications Chair
Art Perret, Events & Programs Chair
Ian Fisher, Membership Chair
Lee Johnston, Fundraising Chair
Brock C. Piper, Newsletter
Richard Keate, Member-at-large, Heritage Commission
Steve Brouwer, Member-at-large, CHAPAC

After the elections, guest speaker Norman Young entertained us with tales of the theater in Vancouver.



The Executive and Board of Directors of Heritage Vancouver request the pleasure of your company at

A VICTORIAN CHRISTMAS PARTY

at the Roedde House Museum,
1415 Barclay Street
December 13th, 6 to 9pm

The Roedde House will be decorated in authentic Victorian style for Christmas and this gathering will be an opportunity for volunteers, members and friends of Heritage Vancouver to celebrate the festive season. Light refreshments will be served.

RSVP to 604-254-9411
if attending.