

HERITAGE

Vancouver

Newsletter



THE FUTURE OF THE PAST IS ON THE NET

Chuck Davis makes a proposal for heritage advocates, historians, patrons and anyone else interested in our past

By **Chuck Davis**

Imagine being able to go onto the Internet and in moments read a reminiscence of Vancouver's vanished Palomar Supper Club by someone who performed there, or a mini-biography of the remarkable Louis Denison Taylor, Vancouver's most-frequently-elected mayor, or the story behind the closing of Woodward's.

Imagine being able to retrieve in seconds the full story of how Frank Patrick's Vancouver Millionaires won the 1914-15 Stanley Cup, or the origins of MacMillan Bloedel, or the heart-warming tale of how Canada's first million-selling song was written by a Vancouver nurse at a local children's hospital. Imagine having thousands of such stories of the city's past at your fingertips. We don't have to imagine it. It's doable.

Seattle is doing it. Seattle is the home of a terrific local history resource called HistoryLink.org, and if you have access to the Internet I urge you to visit the site now, this very minute. It is the best local history data bank I have ever seen. It contains a vast amount of Seattle-area history. It's eminently readable, detailed, easy on the eyes and free. And it gives its visitors a place to tell their own stories.

HistoryLink is the first encyclopedia of community history written and designed expressly for the Internet. It is a model that Vancouver could easily follow, and should. It would be a priceless resource. HistoryLink's content expands daily, with an average of two new "essays" (articles) a day. It now has more than 3,000 essays online — enough, says president and

see page three **The Future**

HERITAGE
Vancouver
PRESENTS



NEW DATE FOR CROFTON HOUSE TOUR
Thursday, May 29 at 7 p.m.
Meet on the patio of the Old Residence,
Crofton House School, 3200 West 41st.
Ave., at Blenheim Street.

Admission is \$5 for Heritage Vancouver members, \$10 for non-members.

Heritage Vancouver's Crofton House tour has been changed to May 29. This will be a rare opportunity to visit an architectural gem and a little-known testament to Vancouver's social history.

Western Canada's oldest private school, Crofton House began in 1898 as a four-student class in the billiard room of a private residence. It has blossomed into an independent school for 670 girls that's ranked among the best learning facilities in the country.

The school has been located on the historic Cromie estate since 1942. This 10-acre site includes Kerrisdale's oldest surviving residence. Rated as an "A" structure on the City of Vancouver heritage registry, the Old Residence was built by Richard Byron Johnson around 1909. Just one of its features is the Heritage Dining Room ceiling, decorated by Charles Marega, Vancouver's best-known early sculptor.

For over a century Crofton House School has represented the vision of its founder, Dr. Jessie Gordon, an educational pioneer who created a progressive and inspiring learning environment for young women. Crofton House archivist Victoria Blinkhorn will guide us through the buildings and history of this unique Vancouver landmark.

Heritage Vancouver events for June and July were being finalized at press time. Check out www.heritagevancouver.org for late-breaking news.



REPORT CARD

Good news

Clark House
(Formerly at 243 East Fifth Ave.)

Likely the oldest home in Vancouver, Clark House has been saved — but not at its original location.

Long vacant and a target for vandals, the house languished on property owned by the Native Education Centre. The neighbourhood, Mount Pleasant, was Vancouver's first outside the downtown core. Assessment records and city directories dating to 1888 show Clark House was one of only a few homes south of False Creek that year.

The house changed remarkably little over the years. As indicated in last year's Top 10 list, the former owner was unable to retain the building. Demolition seemed almost certain. Fortunately the house was purchased and, although this isn't the best solution, it will be moved to another Mount Pleasant property at 130 West 10 Ave. There it will see new life as an infill residential dwelling among the other restored homes of the Davis Block.

The house has been dismantled and is now in storage awaiting development approval.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

May 30-31 Heritage Society of B.C.
Annual Conference.
www.islandnet.com/~hsbc/

June 15 Connaught Heights walking tour with Archie Miller. Free. 3 p.m.
(604) 527-4640 for start location.

June 28 How to Look at Neighbourhoods. Vancouver Museum. 10 a.m. Members free, non-members \$5.

July 6 Grave Markers — How to Read Them and Their Stories. Cemetery tour with Archie Miller. Free. Fraser Cemetery, 100 Richmond St., New West., 3 p.m.

July 16 A Look At Cemeteries. Illustrated talk on graveyards in B.C. ghost towns, by Archie Miller. Free. New West. Public Library, 716 6 Ave. 7:30 p.m.

ONGOING EVENTS

Walking Tours with John Atkin. The historian and heritage advocate has a schedule too lengthy to list here. Does anyone know Vancouver better? www.johnatkin.com

Building a Province: Early Architects of B.C. An exhibit based on Donald Luxton's book Building the West. AIBC, #100, 440 Cambie St. Mon.-Fri. (604) 683-8588.

Roedde House Museum, 1415 Barclay St. Guided tours through an 1893 house. Wed.-Fri., 2-4 p.m. \$4 adults, \$3 seniors, under 12 free. Phone (604) 684-7040 to confirm or inquire about special tea-and-tour events. Afterwards, walk along Barclay Heritage Square, site of nine houses built between 1890 and 1908.

Irving House, 302 Royal Ave., New West. Guided tours through an 1865 home. Tues.-Sun. and holiday Mondays, 11 to 5 p.m. By donation. The adjacent New Westminster Museum is open the same hours.

Walking tours of Westminster Quay. Until Aug. 2003. (604) 521-8401.

Downtown Historic Railway takes passengers between the Science Centre and Granville Island. Weekends and holidays from 12:30-4:30 p.m. (604) 665-3903.

Lower Lonsdale Lookabout walking tours in North Vancouver Weekends, July-Aug. Free. (604) 987-5618.

from cover **The Future**

executive director Walt Crowley, to make a 5,000-page book. The essays are crisp, brief and informative. And is heritage an important element? Go to the site and type “landmarks” into its search box: you’ll get 160 entries. Visitors to the site can contribute their own articles! If a Seattle resident has a story that HistoryLink staff believe will interest their readers, they will post it on the site (after any necessary editing). One interesting item there now was written by the 12-year-old grandson of one of the founders of the now-vanished Seattle department store, Frederick & Nelson.

Is HistoryLink popular? It had 228,000 hits in 1998, its first year, zoomed up to 2.9 million the next year, to 5.4 million by 2000, to 9.3 million in 2001, and reached about 15 million in 2002. The site is visited by thousands of students during the school year. Vancouver and its environs, like Seattle, have a thousand tales (and a thousand tellers) that could find a home on the Net. A fast example: the Pemberton Building at the southeast corner of Hastings and Howe. The ground floor of this handsome old structure was once the office of real estate entrepreneur Alvo von Alvensleben, who flourished in Vancouver around 1909 to 1914. Alvensleben came to Vancouver at age 25 in 1904 with \$4 in his pocket. In five years he was a millionaire. In 1914, while he was in Germany raising more money, the First World War broke out and Canada refused him re-entry as an enemy alien. He moved to Seattle to keep an eye on his B.C. holdings, but that proved unlucky. When the U.S. entered the war in 1917, Alvensleben was arrested as an enemy alien (and suspected spy) and interned in Utah for three years. Occupying what was once his office today: Cartier’s, the jewellers.

Crowley estimates he spends about half his time raising funds to keep the

project going, a task made a little easier these days by the great numbers the site racks up. The site’s office is in Seattle’s Joshua Green Building, a heritage structure. The owners give HistoryLink an annual grant that just happens to cover its rent. Half of its funding comes from corporate sources, the other half from a variety of government sources. For example, it receives an annual retainer from Seattle City Light, a municipally owned utility, to keep beefing up the company’s historical data (75 articles to date), and it’s happy to accept corporate sponsorship for articles. HistoryLink retains editorial control. “Still,” says Crowley, “I would have to say that local governments and public agencies such as Seattle City Light have been quicker than corporations to recognize the value of the Web as a historical medium to help educate citizens... At the beginning, by the way, we made a pledge to other local historical groups that we would not go to their traditional sources of funding.” HistoryLink’s annual budget is about US\$350,000, but that’s going up because the site recently expanded to cover Washington state. Once teachers and others outside Seattle realized the quality of the site’s content, they began clamoring for HistoryLink to cover all of Washington. The same thing would happen up here: today Vancouver, tomorrow B.C.!

The corporate entity that includes HistoryLink is called History Ink, a non-profit organization. Among its other ventures, History Ink publishes books generated by the site’s content. One is a timeline of Seattle, a year-to-year chronicle of that city’s nearly 150 years. The book is based on dates in the essays on the HistoryLink site, making it, they think, the first printed community history compiled and adapted from Internet content. Again, this would be an easy thing to do up here, and would include all of Vancouver’s suburbs.

Another advantage to putting mate-

rial like this on the Net is that changes and corrections can be made instantly. So that the opening date for the first Hotel Vancouver, for example, would show that it was 1888, not — as many, including me, have written — 1887. The latter, incorrect date has the hotel already open when the first CPR train arrived, when in fact the building was still was under construction.

HistoryLink works with other media: One series of 17 historically themed articles that first appeared in the Seattle Times (circulation 300,000) proved so popular it was reproduced on the site. And it works the other way: HistoryLink articles pop up in other places. Crowley says their best resource for information is the astonishing mass of data on index cards — information not online — compiled over the decades by Seattle Public Library staff. The Vancouver Public Library has an exactly comparable resource, an astonishingly rich trove of material. Anyone who has checked out, for example, VPL’s Vancouver Building Registry, has an idea of what’s available.

There are many, many other attractions on the HistoryLink site, like slide shows and cybertours, but I recommend you visit to make your own selection.

Somewhere in Greater Vancouver we have someone willing to put up money to help launch this exciting concept. (Seattle started with a \$10,000 gift from a local history buff.) Vancouver deserves its own HistoryLink. It could be up and running before year’s end. A fine launch date could be Sept. 7, the birthdate of the late city archivist, Major J.S. Matthews. What a fine legacy a Vancouver.HistoryLink would be.

Chuck Davis is a Vancouver writer and broadcaster who has written extensively on the city’s history for 30 years. He has just started a three-year project: a major new history of metropolitan Vancouver.

WORDS FROM THE PRESIDENT

Heritage the highlight of landmark publication

Dear Members,

The month of May has seen an important development in the heritage community. Heritage Vancouver member at large Donald Luxton has spent years working on his latest publication, *Building the West: The Early Architects of British Columbia*. This massive volume chronicles the lives of hundreds of architects who worked in Vancouver prior to 1938.

Through 560 pages the book explores not only the early architects of the province, but also the architecture with which they are associated. From the Bastion in Nanaimo to the modernist post office in downtown Vancouver, and from Francis Rattenbury to Sharp & Thompson, this book leaves no stone unturned in its examination of our built past. *Building the West* made its bookstore debut on May 15 and is sure to be a reference for everyone interested in B.C.'s built environment.

Heritage Vancouver is also pleased to announce that Jennifer Pecho has taken charge as director of programming. She will be helping the board develop its programs over the summer. If you want to work with Jennifer you can reach her at jennifer.pecho@shaw.ca or (604) 263-9582. Welcome aboard Jennifer! We all look forward to working with you.



Scott Barrett
President, Heritage Vancouver

What's it to you?

Heritage Vancouver wants to know why you're drawn to our issues. Is it an esthetic appreciation or does architecture convey a sense of history? Is there a nostalgic or personal matter involved? Have you always felt that way? Has there been a growing appreciation over time? Or was there a sudden epiphany when a cherished building met the wrecking ball? Personal accounts like these will be interesting to other Heritage Vancouver members so we'd like to print them in the newsletter. If you'd like to share your story, please send it to g-klein@telus.net. We recommend a limit of about 550 words.



Building the West: The Early Architects of British Columbia.

Heritage Vancouver
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Vancouver BC V6B 3Y3
604.254.9411
www.heritagevancouver.org

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