

The North Shore's Top 10 Endangered Heritage Sites

September 2007

Welcome to our society's first listing of the North Shore's Top 10 Endangered Heritage Sites. The compilation highlights some of the most significant heritage resources in North and West Vancouver that are threatened by development or economics.

Our project is modeled closely on the efforts of Heritage Vancouver, which has published its Top 10 list for seven years, successfully drawing attention to threatened heritage buildings, districts and neighbourhoods. We thank Heritage Vancouver for their inspiration.

Like Heritage Vancouver, we emphasize built heritage in our efforts. We did not limit our project to specific buildings, but included districts and categories

where appropriate. We also emphasized post-war architecture, one of our area's most important resources, rather than just the older buildings commonly regarded as "heritage."

An initial, longer list was prepared through consultation with North Shore Heritage Preservation Society supporters, then whittled down to the 10 presented here. Thank you to all those involved in the process -- supporters for providing suggestions, board members for writing entries, Maxine Schleger for the photos and, in particular, Amy Usher for coordinating the project from start to finish. If you would like to support our efforts, membership details are at the back of this publication. If



The fate of Ridgeway School is in question

you have any comments on this list or on any other threatened heritage sites, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Peter Miller, President
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The Top 10

I. North Vancouver Schools

North Vancouver's historic elementary schools — including **Lonsdale** (1910), **Ridgeway** (1911) and **Queen Mary** (1914) — represent some of its most important and most loved heritage buildings. Built as grand statements by prominent architects, they bear witness to the rapid economic and social development of North Vancouver in the early years of the twentieth century, and to the importance attached to universal public education at that time. The buildings remain landmarks, and are of sentimental value to the many generations schooled

there, having operated for a century.

The fate of three historic school buildings is currently in question, with Lonsdale closed since 2005, Ridgeway in desperate need of renovation and Queen Mary also awaiting restoration work. The preservation of Ridgeway is overwhelmingly supported by the community, but the provincial government will fund only the cheapest option — demolition — presenting a multimillion-dollar funding gap for restoration. North Vancouver School District plans to demolish the Lonsdale school building and redevelop the site

for a new administration building and housing, but has pledged to use funds raised from density transfers at Lonsdale and Queen Mary for restoration work at Ridgeway and Queen Mary.

Put simply, the price of saving Ridgeway and Queen Mary would be the loss of Lonsdale. Although these proposals moved forward in 2007, they still need to be confirmed.

The heritage community is insisting that Queen Mary and Ridgeway schools be legally protected as a condition for council approval of the development plans.



Lonsdale School is
scheduled for
demolition



Binning House: a vital piece of modern architecture

2. Binning House 2968 Mathers Avenue West Vancouver

Built in 1941 by architects Ned Pratt and Bob Berwick, the Binning House was conceived by B.C. Binning, the sculptor, painter and founder of the school of Fine Arts at UBC. He lived and worked in this house until his death in 1976, and his widow, Jessie, continued as the sole occupant until her death in 2007. The house's fate is now uncertain. B.C. Binning is recognized as one of the leaders of the "modern movement" on the West Coast, and in 2001, this home became the first modern architectural house in Canada to be designated a heritage site.

The home exemplifies small-house design and the seamless integration of art and architecture. In its day, the design of the Binning House and its flat roof were considered so radical that it was almost impossible to obtain a mortgage. Although the domestic accommodation is very simple, the house functions well as both studio and gallery.

Clerestory windows provide generous daylight both to the gallery display wall and to the studio. Binning's murals outside the entrance and on several interior walls proclaim this to be the house of an artist. Few of the walls actually meet at exact right-angles giving a subtle fluidity to the interior spaces.

Municipal heritage designation provides comprehensive constraints to changes to the fabric of this house. However such designation may be rescinded by council at any time. Despite official recognition and designation as a national heritage site, the property could be lost if continued use is not secured.



The Lower Lonsdale shipyards await government funding

3. Lower Lonsdale

The City of North Vancouver is promoting a proposal to site a new National Maritime Centre at the old Burrard Dry Dock industrial site (also known as Wallace Shipyards and Versatile Pacific Shipyards) on the waterfront at the foot of Lonsdale.

The site, established in 1906, has immense heritage value, given its importance to the growth and development of the North Shore and the maritime history of Canada. It is one of the region's foremost industrial heritage sites. Many in the community have expressed concerns about the fate of the site since it closed more than a decade ago, particularly the deterioration of the shipyard buildings. The proposed National Maritime Centre is considered an appropriate use, as it would restore the main heritage buildings, incorporate large and small industrial artifacts, and offer consistency of use as a maritime facility.

The City needs the federal and provincial governments to provide about \$90 million toward the cost, and their commitment depends partly on a new detailed business plan for long-term operations. If the funds are not forthcoming, the heritage buildings remain legally protected -- but alternative plans for their preservation are uncertain.

With the rapid residential development of Lower Lonsdale, many in the community express concerns about the fate of other, lower-profile buildings, and argue that the municipality should balance new construction with preservation of the commercial area's remaining heritage character.

4. Hollyburn Ski Lodge

The Hollyburn Heritage Society has been campaigning for the past decade for the restoration of Hollyburn Ski Lodge, a haven for skiers and hikers since 1927. After 80 years of snowfall, rain, summer heat, and lively activities, the lodge is showing its age, and there are concerns it may have to shut down in the next few years if major work is not conducted soon. In 2006, a study funded by the District of West Vancouver and conducted by Donald Luxton & Associates determined that restoration of the lodge is feasible. In fall 2006, Cypress Mountain took interim steps to reinforce the foundation.

From the 1920s to the 1950s, a number of commercial ski lodges were built on the North Shore Mountains; all except Hollyburn Ski Lodge were eventually destroyed by fire or dismantled. The lodge is our last significant, tangible link to the North Shore mountains' rich ski history. It also continues to support a community of about 110 cabins on Hollyburn, which themselves form an important part of the area's heritage.

Based on Hollyburn Ski Lodge's connection with the early development of competitive and recreational skiing on the Pacific Coast, the Hollyburn Heritage Society is calling for the province to restore the lodge as a 2010 Winter Olympics legacy project. Many community groups and committees support restoration of the lodge.



Hollyburn Ski Lodge in 1942

5. British Properties Company Cottage, 742 Keith Road, West Vancouver

It was in the British Properties "company cottage" in 1939 that King George VI and Queen Elizabeth had tea after officially opening the Lions Gate Bridge, with the queen famously asking if she could buy a home in the area, and describing it as "the place to live." Although modest in appearance, the 1935 building — also known as the "VIP shack" — was of clear importance to the history of West Vancouver, as the first building and sales office in the British Properties. It was designed by local architect William Bow.

In 1946, having been deemed too modest for its original neighbourhood, the house was moved to 742 Keith Road where it became a private residence. That area is now being developed by Millennium Properties. The British Properties company cottage was demolished in June 2007 — while this list was being compiled — making it another lost piece of West Vancouver heritage.

6. Post-and-Beam Homes

For three post-war decades, from 1945-75, the North Shore was at the centre of residential design in Canada, with houses winning national and international acclaim. West and North Vancouver attracted a host of cutting-edge architects looking to break with past tradition and forge a new modern style, including B.C. Binning, Ned Pratt, Robert Berwick, Ron Thom, Fred Hollingsworth, and, perhaps most notably, Arthur Erickson.

They developed a unique movement known as the West Coast Style or Post-and-Beam. The design philosophy spread in the 1950s and 1960s, as it was adapted for hundreds of

North Shore buildings by design-build firms such as Lewis Construction.

The architects' buildings were characterized by bold, geometric and open-plan designs; the use of natural materials; and adaptation of challenging sites with spectacular views. Acclaimed as masterpieces of design in their day, hundreds of these buildings still exist — yet there is limited awareness of their important contribution to contemporary architecture. With the soaring cost of land on the North Shore, some of these modest yet quintessentially West Coast homes have been demolished to allow for construction of much larger homes, and many more may be threatened with development.

The Post-and-Beam design represented a new approach to residential planning and design, where form and function were identified as one. Floor plans were designed to reflect life patterns and focused on the integration of a building and the landscape surrounding it. The design was in response to consumer demand for more light and eliminated the need for bearing walls, allowing for open interior spaces. It also permitted economical construction on the rugged hillsides of the North Shore.

7. Grand Boulevard North Vancouver

Developed in 1906 by the North Vancouver Land and Improvement Company, the Grand Boulevard area was designed to be an opulent residential development, with building restrictions on the wide lots surrounding the boulevard. The central boulevard was designated as parkland, although the centre of the boulevard park became the main corridor for the streetcars going from Lower Lons-

dale to Lynn Valley in 1908. Today, the Grand Boulevard area is still known for its openness, with the park as its central point. The residences on the boulevard and adjacent streets are now a mixture of old "grand dames" and 1950s bungalows. While many of the houses in this neighbourhood are on municipal heritage lists, very few are protected. In the last five years, there has been a flurry of building activity, with more modest buildings knocked down and replaced with large, new houses, often removing established trees and shrubs and favouring maximum size over contextual sensitivity. Some local residents and heritage advocates believe that insensitive development activity threatens the character and openness of the area, and its historic value. Grand Boulevard is recognized as a Heritage Character Area by the City of North Vancouver; another such area, Ottawa Gardens, is being upgraded to a designated heritage area with special design guidelines.

8. West Vancouver Municipal Buildings

Municipal Hall: Located at 750 17th Street, the current West Vancouver Municipal Hall was officially opened on November 20, 1964. It stands on the site of the original municipal hall, which was built in 1912 on property purchased from West Vancouver pioneer developer John Lawson for \$1. The current "modernist" style building was designed by the architectural firm of Toby, Russell & Buckwell.

In the *West Vancouver Survey of Significant Architecture 1945-1975*, the building is described as "typical of its period, with a 'lozenge' shaped motif repeated throughout the building on precast wall panels and etched



British Properties Company Cottage: now demolished



A Post and Beam residence



A typical Grand Boulevard house

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West Vancouver Municipal Hall: a modern classic



The Silk Purse Gallery: cultural icon

The North Shore Heritage Preservation Society was created in 2005 to promote the restoration and preservation of heritage and distinctive buildings in North and West Vancouver, by raising awareness in the community.

It is registered as a not-for-profit society in British Columbia (# S-49292) and as a charity (83070 2478 RR0001). Annual membership fees are: Individual \$20, Family \$30, Senior/Student \$15, Corporate \$100, Life \$200. To join, please send a cheque to the society's address, or visit www.northshoreheritage.org/membership for a membership form.

into the entrance-way glass. The sloped edges of the floor panels lend the structure a dynamic profile." The building is set on a large, open, landscaped corner property that shows off the architecture to advantage. The Municipal Hall building could be lost if the municipality decided to pursue a recent proposal to rebuild major municipal buildings in one location near the entrance to West Vancouver.

Police Station: Located at 1330 Marine Drive near Ambleside Park, the West Vancouver "Public Safety" building was officially opened on July 9, 1954. Architects for the building were Sharp and Thompson, Berwick, Pratt of Vancouver. With its bands of clerestory windows, the building retains significance as an attractive example of modernist architecture in the service of a growing municipality in the mid-twentieth century. The building is potentially threatened by municipal proposals to relocate the police station in order to build a new municipal hall near the site, or to use the site for some other purpose under the Ambleside Revitalization Plan.

9. Gleneagles Clubhouse Gleneagles Golf Course West Vancouver

Built in 1952-3 the Great Hall was the clubhouse for the original Gleneagles Golf Club before West Vancouver municipality bought the golf course in 1958. The hall has

acted as a reception venue for several generations of West Vancouver families, accommodating weddings, luncheon meetings and other community celebrations.

The modest log building used a technique developed by a British Columbia company called Pan-Abode. Most of its buildings are residential but this project proved the ability of Pan-Abode construction to create a large-span assembly hall. The heritage qualities of the building stem not so much from its architecture as from its important place in the community. It provided one of the largest public meeting spaces available in West Vancouver.

In 2007 the clubhouse was threatened with demolition by development plans. However, after pressure from local residents and heritage groups, West Vancouver Council agreed to make funds available for its restoration. Until these plans proceed, there remain concerns that the clubhouse's future could still be in jeopardy.

10. Silk Purse Gallery 1570 Argyle Avenue West Vancouver

Located on a waterfront lot, the original cottage was built at the water's edge in 1925 and was similar in construction to lakeside cottages of the time. A small, two-story addition was built in the 1970s when the cottage became a year-round

residence. The original cottage remains essentially unchanged, with charming mullioned windows and a wooden porch facing directly onto the beach and the water. In 1991, the property was sold to the District of West Vancouver and became the home of the West Vancouver Arts Council, which operates the Silk Purse as an intimate art exhibition and performance venue supported, in part, by grants.

The cottage has a colourful history that is well documented in newspaper stories and in flyers distributed by the arts council. Today, art and photography exhibits, poetry readings, classical and jazz concerts, puppet shows, workshops, and community meetings are held in the cottage's "living room."

The Silk Purse is an important cultural icon for West Vancouver. As one of the few remaining examples of a genuine summer cottage, it serves as a reminder of the district's early history as "cottage country" -- a summer vacation destination, accessible only by passenger ferry. The Silk Purse is potentially threatened by development associated with the municipality's Ambleside Revitalization Plan and the municipality's long-standing plan to extend the West Vancouver sea walk from east of Lawson Park to Ambleside Park. Direct access from the Silk Purse to the water could be cut off, undermining the beachside cottage atmosphere.