

LABOUR AND BREAD

Arthur Allen

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COLLECTED WRITINGS OF

ARTHUR ALLEN

ARCHITECT, CRAFTSMAN, WRITER

On The Architectural Ornament of

Buildings in Vancouver, B.C.

1886 to 1939

Preface, and Map of Walking Tours

Introduction rev. July 2015

Labour and Bread, rev. July 2015

The Temple Banks, rev. Aug 2015

The Caduceus and the Rhea Sisters

Folk and Fairy Tales in Architecture

The Goddess of the Vogue

Calliope, Orpheus, and Eurydice

Pegasus and the Bat

Hermes and the Turkeys

Poseidon and the Pelican

Acknowledgments including

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Bibliography

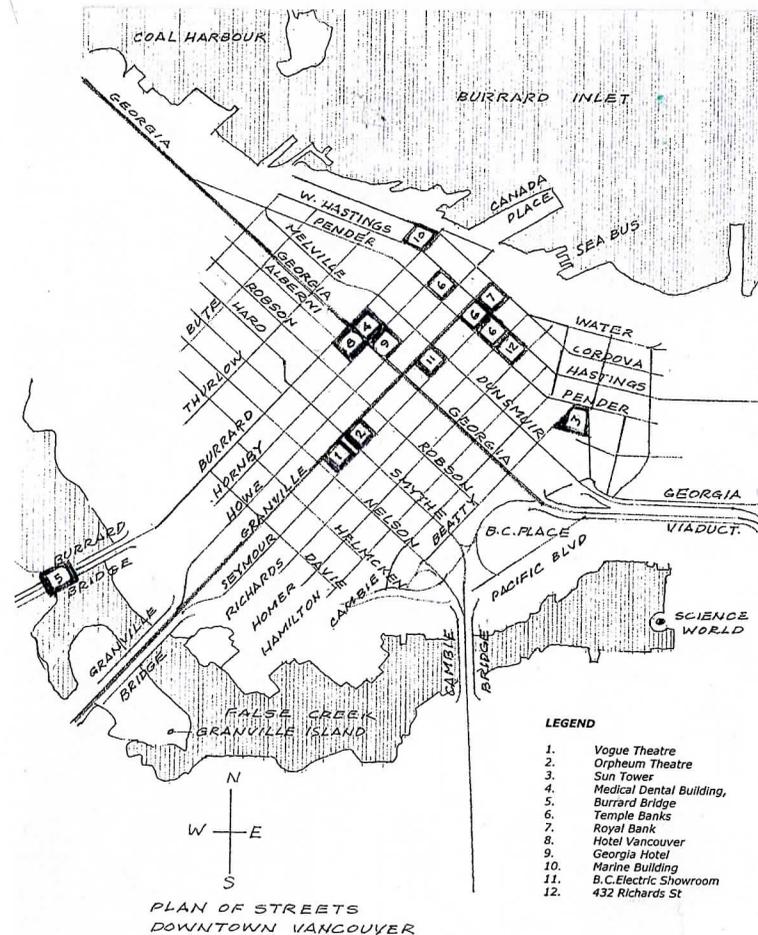
Essays listed were written in the 1980s unless noted

LABOUR AND BREAD

PREFACE

In these commentaries on the ornament of buildings, I maintain that architecture is not an art that can pretend to be free of social and ethical conditions of building operations. I am firmly convinced that architects, their admiring patrons, and the general public pay too much attention to matters of the appearance of buildings, including the visual attractions of ornament. The word "functional", for instance, normally refers to buildings lacking that appeal and makes no reference to performance of operations required of a building.

The art of architectural ornamentation will always be a delightful subject, interesting for its form and color and the play of light and shade on building surfaces. But there is more; the history of ornament, including anthropological papers, mythological and medieval studies, and articles on the superstitious origin of ornaments, offer a great deal to think about in relation to the functions and the relevance of architecture in social development and communication. In and on the older buildings of Vancouver, there is a good deal of symbolic commercial promotion behind the design of buildings and ornaments. On walking tours I ask my guests to keep all of these things in mind, to ignore the pride of form of imposing buildings, and to look carefully for details that sometimes qualify or dispute the messages of strength intended by important architects and their patrons



Street Map, Downtown Vancouver.

LABOUR AND BREAD INTRODUCTION

Arthur Allen

July 2015

My attention was riveted by the golden ornament on the ceiling, but it was my turn at the teller's wicket, so I stepped forward and completed a small transaction. Then I stepped back, and looked up again. The ornament was a circular gold medallion, 24 feet above the floor of the hall. It showed a low relief image of a harvester cutting grain with a hand-scythe. Around the medallion, an inscription read; **"NO LABOUR, NO BREAD"**

I was on a routine visit to the branch of the Royal Bank of Canada, at the corner of Hastings and Granville Streets, in Vancouver. It was 1982; the construction industry and my nearby architectural office were in recession. My bank statement still showed black ink, but there was no work pressing, so I tarried, and for the first time took a good look at the interior of the banking hall.

The lion of the Royal Bank, the old one with a prominent tongue and holding the globe of the world in his arms, was prominently placed in the apse at the far end of the hall. The ceiling was gorgeous, with

crossing beams and purlins decorated with exotic paper trim, and possibly some al-fresco painting on plaster. At the intersection of each beam and purlin there were gold medallions, each approximately 16 inches in diameter. On the high ceiling it was hard to tell, but they appeared to be gilded with gold leaf. There were 24 medallions on the ceiling, with six different messages and images, each one repeated four times.



I was fascinated, read all the inscriptions, and examined the images. In the soft light in the upper space, that took some time. Several other customers followed my gaze, curious about my posture and

concentration. Bank staff appeared to be unconcerned. Then I left the bank, muttering about hard labour and low fees, and spent the afternoon looking for ornaments on and in buildings in the vicinity.

In 1957 I had graduated from the School of Architecture of UBC and had worked steadily in Edmonton, Regina and Vancouver. Until 1982 I had ignored ornaments in study and practice. My working practice continued until 2002, with interest, but no application of ornamentation. The harvest medallion got my attention, and I have been looking for ornaments, photographing and writing about them, ever since.

These and other yet to be self-published essays trace my steps, since 1982, on the streets of Vancouver and in the libraries and archives of the city, recording my search for the mythology and meaning of architectural ornament. In the 1980s, they were the basis of walking tours and lectures with Michael Lytton and David Conn, operating from the Hotel Vancouver under the Department of Continuing Education at UBC. Since 1998 I have continued that work as architectural instructor for Humanities 101, initially operating from Carnegie Centre, and lately from UBC. In 2010, I joined the tour guide team for the Orpheum Theatre organized by the B.C. Entertainment Hall of Fame.

Throughout these pages, I use the words “ornament”, “decoration”, “charm”, and “cosmetic”, with the

following explanations. In the twentieth century all four of these words were used to refer to superficial, or non-functional, value. This was especially true in architecture where all non-essential elements of building design were forbidden by the doctrines of the Modern Movement. Many influential thinkers of that era held that ornamentation of buildings was an “unethical”, even an “immoral” practice. Adolf Loos, Austrian architect, in 1906, said excitedly that ornamentation was degenerate and criminal. The original sense of the four words was very different;

“Ornament” , (from Latin, *ornare*, to adorn), referred to necessary equipment. For example, the large eyes painted on the prows of Greek fighting ships were not for a pretty effect, but were there because sailors believed they would help the ship see its way through smoke of battle, and through fog on homeward voyages.

“Decoration” , (from Latin, shares a common root, *decus*, with decorum), and refers to seemliness, or proper behaviour. Soldiers are still decorated for valor, appropriate behaviour in battle.

“Charm” , (from Latin, *carmen*, a song or enchantment), retains its original use, referring to magic force, and now also to graceful manners.

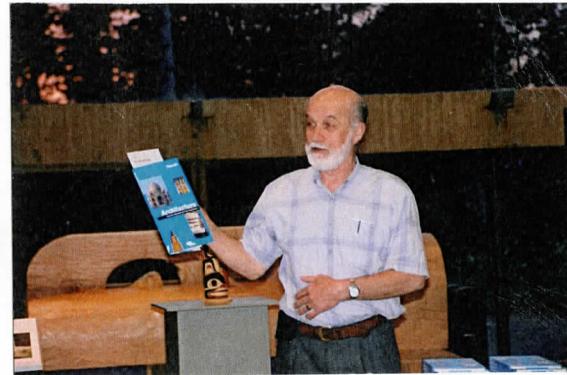
“Cosmetic”, (from Greek, *skilled in adorning*), refers at present to facial make-up, or to non-essential elements of building design.

“Cosmetic frills” were despised by modern architects and frugal clients. ‘Cosmetic’ originally referred to the cosmos, and to objects designed and made in relation to cosmic reality, and to the satisfaction of the Gods.

Vancouver was incorporated as a city in 1886. Its first buildings were very rough wooden structures, but with rapid growth permanent materials soon appeared, with designs and ornamentation derived mainly from North American and European precedents. Some buildings showed faithful imitation of favored historic styles, others took an eclectic approach, mixing styles as the designer and client wished. This situation, with abundant ornamentation on stone-clad buildings with carved ornaments, lasted until World War II. The Modern Movement entered the Vancouver scene in the late 1930s, but its work, and its denial of adornment, did not take over until the post-war building boom that was in full swing by the 1950s.

Did the patrons, architects, and artists who built Vancouver’s early buildings believe in the ancient history, and the power, charm and cosmic value of their ornamental work? Did they really believe, in 1928, that the magnificent head of Poseidon on the Marine Building could still protect that structure from

the sea and from earthquakes? Did they believe that the stone-carved face of Hermes over the north entry to the Hotel Vancouver would protect its traveling guests (as well as thieves)? At times these questions became bothersome, and I realized that I am ambivalent about the art of architectural ornamentation. I have no doubt that my puritanical childhood, reinforced by the constraints of modern architectural training, is the source of my troublesome skepticism. Nonetheless, there is so much folk wisdom, beauty and skillful workmanship in Vancouver’s ornaments that I persist in studying them, in spite of worries that I might be charmed.

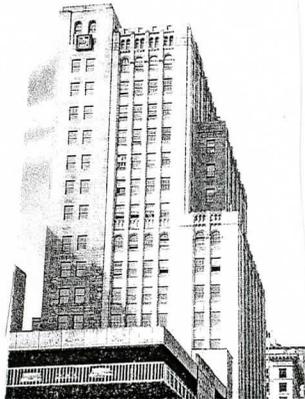


To my students of Hum 101 I say; “Walk on ;..... there is much to see and enjoy, some things to worry about, and much more to understand.”

LABOUR AND BREAD

Arthur Allen, July 2015

On May 8th, 1931, the Royal Bank of Canada opened its doors, and commenced business at its new western headquarters and banking hall at 675 West Hastings Street in Vancouver. The tall, 18 storey building design, by S.G.Davenport, Architect, of Montreal, departed from earlier temple bank precedents. It invited customers through a Romanesque archway, into a banking facility of two storeys in the same style. The exterior and interior ornaments of the building are remarkable for their symbolic interest, and for their very high quality of craftsmanship in stone-carving, gilding, and ornamental paper or painted trim.



RBC 675 West Hastings St. 1931

The exterior form of the structure has an unfortunate asymmetry. According to original plans, the building was to be done in symmetrical form, one half by the bank,

one half by Kostman's Famous Cloak Company. Kostman's finances failed in 1929, and the bank carried on with it's part of the bargain with no modification to the half-finished design.

The entry archway, in carved Haddington Island stone, portrays three figures at the base, or spring-point, of the arch. They include;

- A head of Hermes, (Roman Mercury), Messenger of the Gods, and God of Commerce. He wears a winged helmet.
- A plump mermaid, beside Hermes.
- A peculiar figure, which I think is a lion, with its head seemingly flattened by the weight of the arching stones above.



Capital at Entry Arch

The exterior windows on the west wall, facing Granville Street, present low relief carvings of lions devouring serpents, and of gryphons. In this case the gryphons have the bodies, legs and claws of the lion, and the wings of eagles. There are two different heads shown, with uncertain features in one case.



West Wall, at base of window arches.



The original, massive bronze doors at the Granville entry have been replaced with glass for security (visibility) reasons. They are on display on the stairway to the lower level of the hall.

The presence of a gryphon on a bank building is interesting. That mythical creature, a lion's body with an eagle's talons, wings, and head, seemed out of place until I saw a newspaper advertisement, dated November 9th, 1983, in the *Vancouver Province*. In that issue the Midland Bank of Canada displayed its logo, and claimed to serve with; "THE VISION OF AN EAGLE, THE STRENGTH OF A LION". The gryphon, (or griffin), according to Tripp, protected northern hoards of gold from warlike and greedy neighbors, one-eyed horsemen called Arimaspians. My photo of the gryphon was taken in the City of York, England. We can only believe that the Midland Bank chose the gryphon because it sent a clear signal of the bank's intent to guard the wealth of Northern England.

Gryphon, Midlands Bank,
York, England



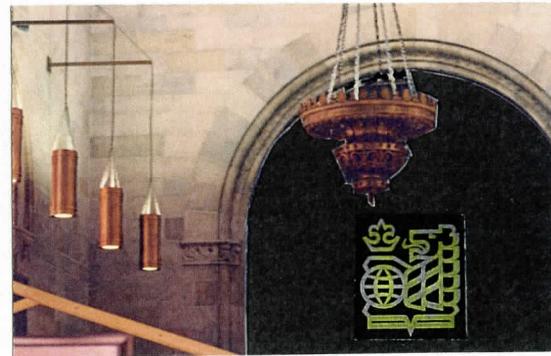
Interior ornamentation of the entry and banking hall is wonderful. It features large bronze chandeliers suspended from a richly colored ceiling of intricate trim.



Ornate columns on each side of the hall create curved and softly lighted alcove ceilings, in side aisles beyond the rows of columns. At the top of each column there is a small painted or papered image of two gnome-like men. They sit beside a large bag, presumably of money. This work may be al-fresco painting, where water-color is applied to damp plaster.



In the 1970s, when I used the services of this branch, the most prominent figure in the banking hall was the yellow plexiglass lion, the logo of the Royal Bank of Canada. It was placed high on the wall of the apse, at the centre of the end wall of the banking space.



The ceiling features intersecting structural members, beams and purlins, decorated with friezes of papered or painted trim. At the intersection of each beam and purlin there is a golden, circular medallion, approximately 16 inches in diameter. In total there are 24 medallions. They are not the most obvious ornaments in the building, but they are by far the most interesting. They appear to be gilded in genuine gold leaf, and 24 feet above the floor, in soft light, they are difficult to read and photograph. There are six different medallions, each repeated 4 times on the ceiling. They each portray an image surrounded by a printed inscription;

“Navigation and Trade” a woman, activity uncertain.

“Colonies and Commerce” a sailing ship at sea.

“Speed the Plough” a hand held, single bladed plough.

“Justitia Virtus” the Scales of Justice.

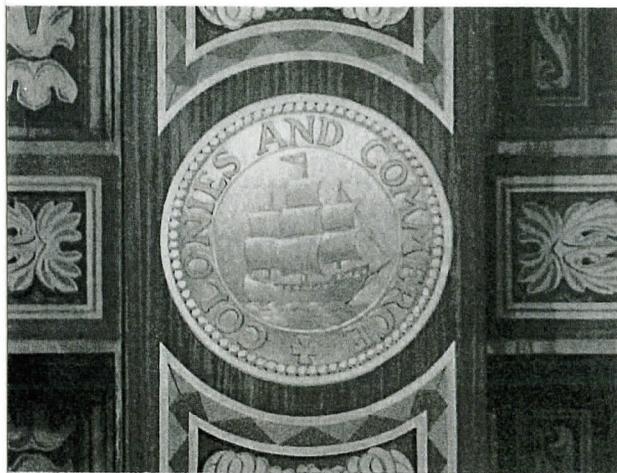
“Success to the Fisheries” a fish, line, and gaff.

“No Labour, No Bread” a harvester with a hand-held scythe.

I had spotted the labour and bread medallion first, and it started me on a search for ornaments in which I still indulge. In this case the meaning of the medallions and their instructions seemed to be clear. I wonder if any visitor noticed them and took their golden messages as optimistically intended ?

One question still intrigues me. The opening of the bank was in 1931, one year after the first long bread lines, hunger marches, food riots, and looting of stores for food in Vancouver. Bankers I have known were proud of their optimism; why then were the inscriptions virtually hidden in a dim, high space ? Was it possible that the architect sensed a double meaning in the words “No Labour, No Bread,” and wanted no part of optimism in face of the harder times to come ?





THE TEMPLE BANKS

Arthur Allen August 2015

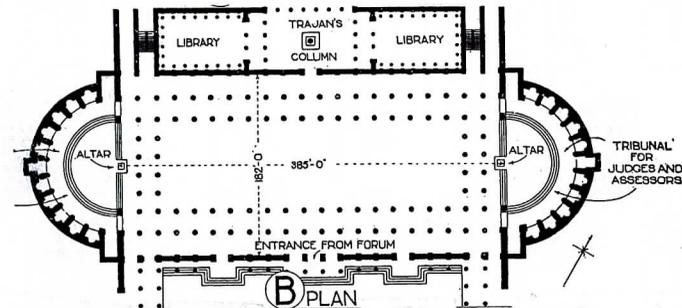
Following study of the ornaments of the Royal Bank Building at Hastings and Granville, in Vancouver, I found a guide booklet referring to the style of the entry arch as Romanesque, and the banking hall on the main floor as a "basilica bank". I knew that high ranking cathedrals of the Roman Catholic Church are called basilicas. I was not aware that the title has been used on any other building type.

"Basilica" comes from Greek, "basilike," (hall), and can refer to a kingly place, (basilike oikia). Its early development describes different structures. In the 5th C B.C., a "Royal Stoa" was operating in Athens, as a tribunal place dealing with religious affairs and crime under the King, Archon, and the Aeries Pagos Council. This suggests that the basilica came from the stoa concept. In contrast, in 565 B.C. an obviously Greek temple form in Paestum was named a basilica, possibly in error.

The basilica, in Etruscan times, is hard to track. I have found no pictures of ruins, possibly due to disappearance of early buildings of clay brick with timber roofs. One debatable site, excavated at Poggio Civitate, does contain evidence from the 6th century B.C., and speculates that it was a king's residence with some signs of business and

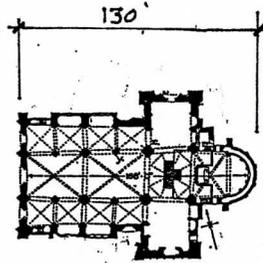
state activity. Its form was a courtyard with colonnades on 3 sides, and a possible throne on the 4th. I speculate that it was a variation on the stoa, and a preliminary to the Etruscan and/or Roman basilica plan.

When the Romans conquered the Etruscans, the basilica appeared in fully enclosed, well-defined form, and was used as a hall of justice and commerce, with no indication of religious activity. The king and throne were replaced by judges, assessors, and a praeter, presiding over Roman affairs. The Basilica of Trajan, in Rome, was large and highly developed, with two apses, Trajan's memorial column, and libraries.

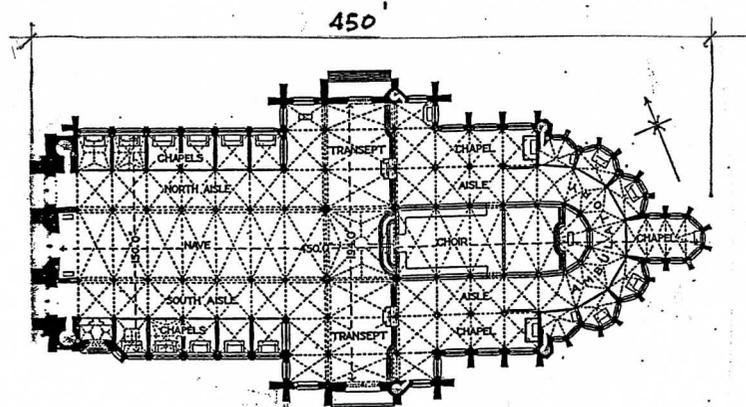


BASILICA OF TRAJAN: ROME

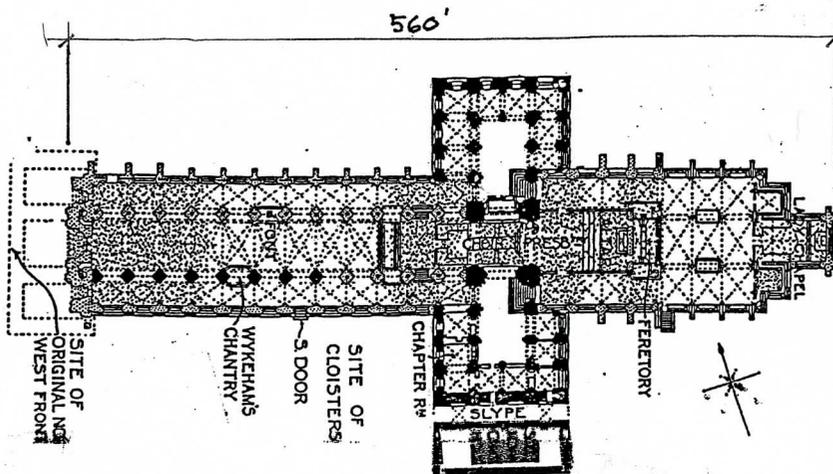




S. Michel, Pavia, 1117 AD



Amiens, 1220 AD



Winchester, 1079-1500 AD

After 312 AD, when Christianity was legitimized by Constantine, confiscated property was returned to the Christian community, and the state began construction of many buildings, initially in support of the shrines of martyrs. The Roman basilica form was used, with easy conversion to church use due to the large size and open plan of spaces provided. In Early Christian rituals, the avenues between rows of columns became ambulatories for circulation of active, celebrating worshippers. The altar in an apse became the symbolic centre of authority of the plan. The Roman basilica plan thus became the generator of later plans for Romanesque, Gothic, and modern cathedrals.

In 1982, when I first began to carefully examine old buildings, I soon came to sense that there is something peculiar about the term "temple bank". I remembered the biblical story of Jesus evicting the money changers from the temple, and I found out that the Christian Church, at the height of its medieval power, forbade the practice of charging interest for the lending of money. With the rise of the powerful family empires of finance of the Renaissance and later centuries, banking institutions defied the religious taboo on money lending, and claimed freedom to carry on that business.

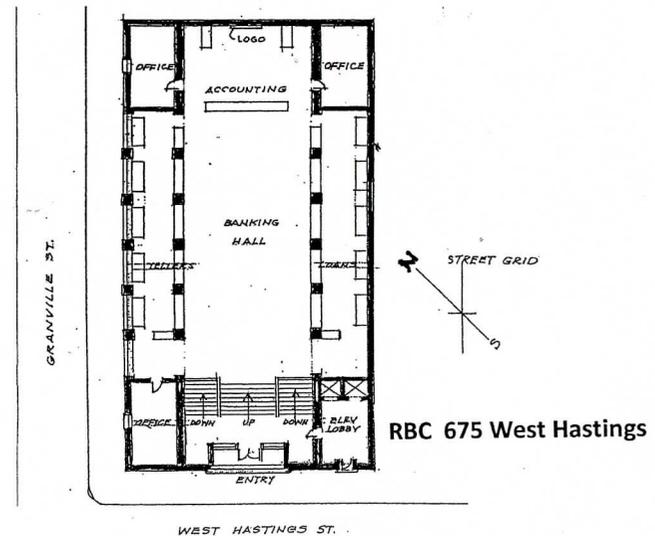
Private financial support for church purposes contributed to the decline of church authority over secular matters, and bankers erected imposing structures for their

operations. In the western world they often planned their buildings with interior halls resembling basilicas and external designs in neo-classical temple form. The result was the operation of financial business in buildings designed to look like those provided for worship in earlier times. The term “temple bank” came from this practice.

In the bank in Vancouver, as shown, the apse contains a reception counter and accountants’ desks, and leads to offices of managers and assistants. The ambulatories became the working space for tellers and other staff, with customers gathering and lining up in the main hall.

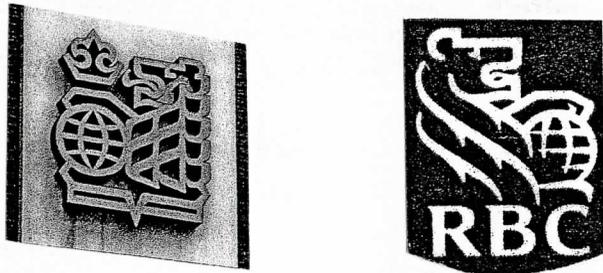
In the historical sequence of the floor plans shown so far, the functions and forms of the basilica show a remarkable continuity. In the design of cathedrals, the basilica plan endured without essential change from Early Christian times through 19 centuries, including long periods of revival architecture. Overall, as royal, religious, or civic places, the hall and colonnades were filled with a sequence of courtiers, worshipers, and with citizens in legal or commercial activities. Apses were occupied by a series of kings, judges, assessors, clerics and elders, and bankers, all seated beneath symbols of their functions and stations. It was the Modern Movement, after 1900, that finally departed from a colonnaded hall and processional aisles between colonnades. In some recent plans of circular or triangular layout, with unusual external form, colonnades and side aisles vanished, and

seating in large blocks provided for worshippers who now remained seated through most of a service. Even there a wide centre aisle, for processions to an altar, is the last vestige of the basilica plan.



Detail design changes to symbols and ornaments were necessary when a new owner re-occupied a building, or constructed a new one. In the Royal Bank in Vancouver, the original insignias of state and church were replaced, high on the wall of the apse, by the logo of the bank. In the 1990s the logo was redesigned, but the one I remember, (and photographed in the 1980s), was the figure shown, the yellow plexiglass stylized figure of a lion, symbolic of strength and justice, and of regal

presence. When the banking hall was renovated in the 1990s, the lion logo was removed from the apse, and the end wall was finished with a false window. At about the same time the bank commissioned a new logo design. The original lion had a large and obvious tongue that seemed to be licking the crown on top of the world. The new design has no crown, and the tongue is politely restrained.



RBC old and new logos

Appropriation and re-use of important buildings or artifacts of vanquished rivals established the Romans as prolific collectors of booty. The practice of looting temples was widely known, and continued by Rome under Constantine when pagan temples were pillaged, and columns and other artifacts were taken for re-use in new Christian Churches. In her book *The Geometry of Love*, Margaret Visser notes that columns of very early churches had been taken from pagan temples, and that by 313 AD Rome was a forest of columns from all over the empire. Christians also competed for valued relics. In

the 17th century four wonderful columns in a small church in Rome, Sant' Agnese fuori le Mura, were threatened because the powerful Aldobrandini family wanted them for their private funeral chapel.

Roman engineering was essential to this effort, and led to surprising feats of relocation of heavy monuments including 500 ton Egyptian obelisks moved to Rome by water. If my memory is correct an entire Athenian building was dismantled by Sulla's army and re-erected in Rome after Athens and its port, Piraeus, were sacked and burned in 87 BC.

After 435 AD, when Theodosius and following emperors banned pagan cults in the Byzantine Empire, many temples were converted to other uses. Under Turkish rule, the Erechtheion was used as a harem. The Parthenon, dedicated to Athena and foremost among Greek Temples, suffered the worst fate. Originally a treasury and a temple, it was converted to a Christian Church, and by the 1460s to a Turkish Mosque. In 1687 it held munitions for Ottoman forces. A Venetian cannonball, possibly by accident, ignited the gunpowder. The building was shattered, with widespread death and destruction in the vicinity.....

Conquerors will loot, destroy, or expropriate and re-use important buildings of the vanquished.



CBC Hastings and Granville, 1908



CBC 501 Main St. 1918





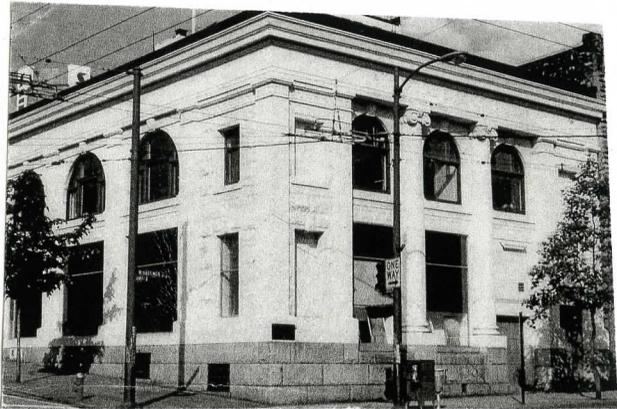
BofM 580 Granville St. 1915



TDBank 580 West Hastings St. 1920



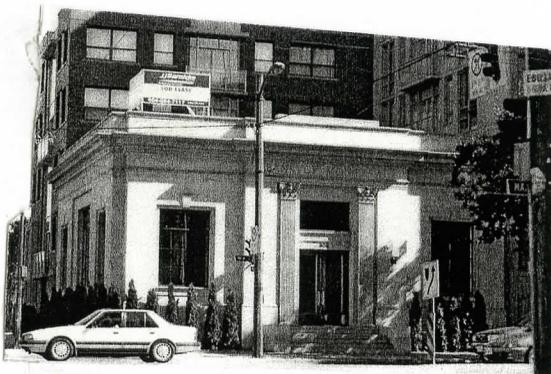
Credit Foncier Mortgage, 850 West Hastings St. 1914



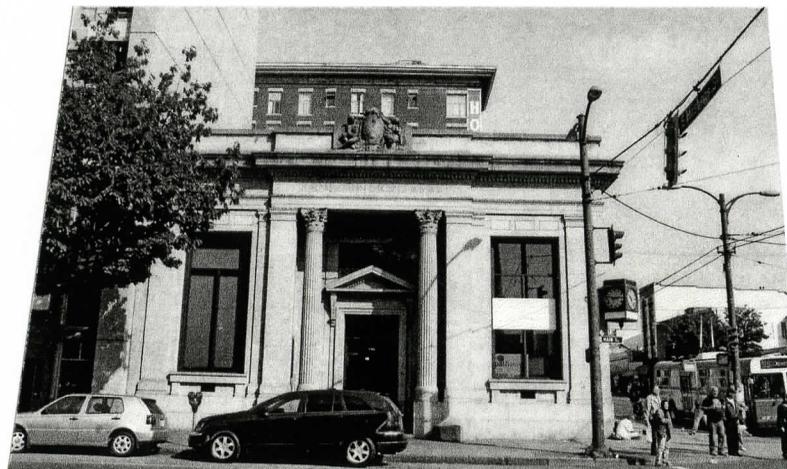
RBC 404 West Hastings St. 1903



B.C. Permanent Loan, 330 W. Pender,



BofM 906 Main St photo 2005



BofM 390 Main St 1930

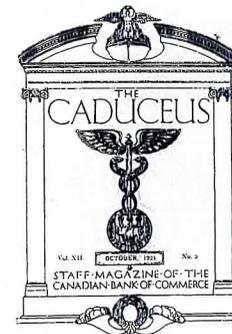
Chronology of bank construction in Vancouver

After 1886, banking institutions of Vancouver erected imposing edifices at important street intersections, and then moved on to repeat the process at new intersections. Branches and regional headquarters, were on or near Hastings Street, distributed from the intersection of Hastings and Main to the corner of Hastings and Granville. Substantial stone buildings of several banks still stand and operate at or near those intersections.

In 1908, the Canadian Bank of Commerce, (since 1961 the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce), constructed its massive temple of business at Hastings and Granville Streets. By 1931, the Bank of Nova Scotia, the Toronto Dominion Bank, the Royal Bank of Canada, the Bank of Montreal, and the Credit Foncier, had followed to that vicinity. After World War II, these buildings were downgraded to the status of branch facilities, and new headquarters for western regional operations were constructed near the intersection of Georgia and Granville Streets, and on Burrard Street, from Hastings to Georgia. These latest buildings are not temple banks, they are high-rise structures that continue the precedent set by the 1931 Royal Bank, and bear no resemblance to the earlier two or three storey temples of finance along Hastings Street.

PS Appropriate to the mythology and wishful thinking of our endless search for health, wealth and happiness, the principle symbol of the temple banks of Vancouver is Hermes, God of Commerce among other things. He is everywhere on buildings of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, and on the Royal Bank at Hastings and Granville. Without him there can be no prosperity.

Between 1920 and 1941, the Bank of Commerce produced a staff magazine titled "The Caduceus". The name comes from the winged shaft with two entwined serpents, a magic rod of Hermes with which he safely guided the dead through the dangers of the underworld. I suspect that when the Canadian Bank of Commerce was incorporated in 1867, the caduceus was intended by the bank as a message to its staff to be careful when guiding clients through the perils of finance in this world.



THE CADUCEUS AND

THE RHEA SISTERS

In 1928-1929 a Medical-Dental Building was constructed at the corner of Georgia and Hornby Streets in Vancouver. It featured statues of three tall nurses, made of terra-cotta, (fired and glazed clay), and wearing nursing uniforms of World War 1. The three sisters stayed in place, guarding the city against evil spirits of disease, until they were removed in 1989, just before the building was demolished by dynamite. They were taken apart and hauled away, then stored at the Vancouver Museum, possibly awaiting re-assembly and a new life in the city.



Arthur Allen 1988

Other ornaments from the building, terra-cotta panels at the entry archway, were also removed, and are now displayed in The Canadian Craft and Design Museum, at 639 Hornby Street, adjacent to the original location of the Medical-Dental Building. They portray a surprising variety of ancient and modern symbols related to health care. There are paired panels showing;

.... a winged horse, above a shaft with a serpent;

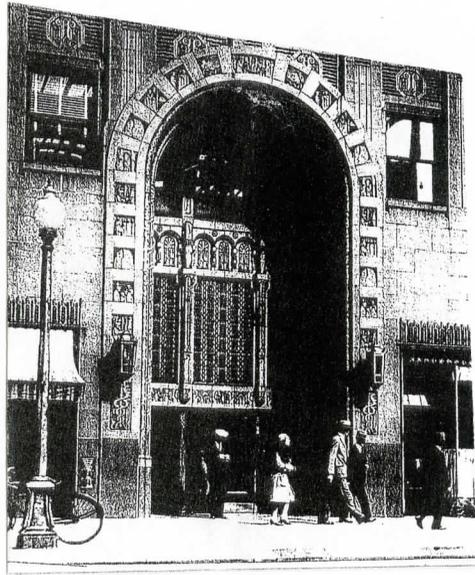
.... two nurses presenting a newborn infant;

.... a preacher, under a cross, beside another shaft and serpent;

... a scholar in a library, under a female statue holding a staff and serpent;

... a keystone panel, top-center of the arch, showing a medical laboratory.

The symbolic prescription was clear - when illness strikes, call on superstition, magic, religion, science, and medicine - in doses as required.



Entry Archway , 1930s VPL 10024

At the bottom of the arched entryway, at eye level on each side of the main doorway, there were two large terra-cotta panels portraying the caduceus, two snakes on a shaft, sometimes said to be the symbol of the medical profession. There appears to be some confusion. Some say the symbol of medicine is a walking stick, with a single twining serpent, called a kerykeion. It is clearly shown by the low relief sculpture of Hippocrates, in painted concrete, on a building at Burrard and 10th Avenue, in Vancouver. Now the offices of the B.C. College of Physicians and Surgeons, I think that building was originally known as the



Ancient Healers ?

Academy of Medicine. Other samples can be seen in various locations, including possibly the largest existing kerykeion, on The Fort Royal Centre, in Victoria.

When I wrote to the Canadian Medical Association about this problem, I was advised that the single serpent on a walking stick is the acknowledged symbol of Hippocrates, of Asklepios, (Aesculapius), before him, and of medicine. The Association also provided me with several articles; from the *CMA Journal*, October 1961 and September 1973; *The Canadian Doctor*, December 1978; *The Massachusetts Physician*, November 1968; and *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, April, 1985. The articles agreed that the caduceus, a winged shaft with two twining snakes, and sometimes with wings, was a wand of Hermes, which he used for protection as he guided the souls of the dead through Hades.

The *JAMA* article particularly, by Dr. Robert Rakel, also notes Hermes' roles as God of Commerce, and as protector of thieves and outlaws, connections which medicine"may well wish to avoid"... According to *The Massachusetts Physician*, use of the caduceus by medical organizations is "blatantly inappropriate",...and....."downright insulting".

By this time my curiosity was very high, and I consulted Tripp's *Meridian Handbook of Classical Mythology*, which verifies the medical



**Hippocrates and
his kerykeion**



**Fort Royal Centre
Victoria, B.C.**

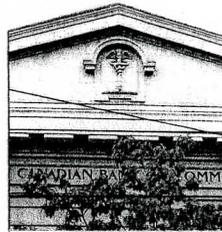
articles cited. The caduceus, a shaft with wings and two twining snakes, is the symbol and the magic wand of Hermes, not of Hippocrates, or of Asklepios. Hermes' caduceus, cast in metal or carved in stone, is well known on early bank buildings in Vancouver where his influence as God of Commerce is appropriate.



**Hermes on a
Royal Bank**

I was now tiring, but still wondering why the serpent is so prominent in symbols of medicine and commerce, and why it appeared so often on the Medical Dental Building. It seemed strange that fearful serpents should be placed as ornaments at the entry to a building wherein we expect to find healing and eventual comfort. I found that the snake was sacred to Apollo, and because it signified wisdom, fertility, learning, longevity, and restoration of health, it seems most appropriate to medicine. Then I went too far; in a few chapters on ancient medicine, there were three intriguing surprises;

1 - In ancient Greece, at healing temples of Asklepios, feverish patients rested on shaded, breezy porches, with large, cool-bodied serpents coiled close beside them. At that time, when epilepsy was known as "the falling sickness", it was believed that an epileptic patient could be cured by



**A Canadian
Bank of Commerce**

snatching the skin from a live snake. Temple staff were said to feed biscuits to serpents, to keep them nearby.

2. - In ancient Rome, according to Aelian, or Pliny, snake bite could be cured by;

.... drinking a mixture of she-goats urine and vinegar;

.... eating a concoction of she-goats dung, boiled in wine;

.... by swallowing the testicles of a hippopotamus under water.

At this point curiosity vanished, and I reminded my doctor of my continued trust in western scientific medical practice.

P.S. Joan McCarter, daughter of J. Y. McCarter, architect of the Medical – Dental Building, once told me that when the medical and dental staff occupied the building in 1928, and began their work, they privately nicknamed the nurses “The Rhea Sisters”, “Pia”, “Dia”, and “Gonna”. The nurses and ornamental terra-cotta on this building were fabricated by Gladding, McBean. Of Lincoln, California. The original three sisters have survived their most recent ordeal. They have been refinished, and have found a new home on the Technology Enterprise Facility III Building, at 6190 Agronomy Road, at the University of British Columbia.

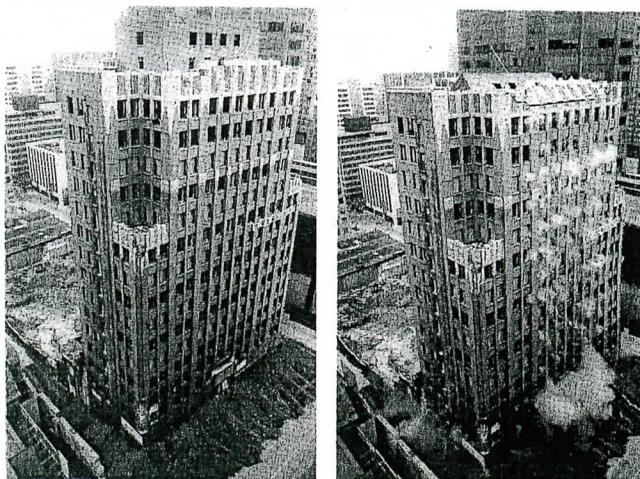
P.P.S. On October 7th, 2005, *The Vancouver Sun* published a photograph of the marble faced clock previously mounted above the elevator doors on the lobby wall of the Medical Dental Building. Hugh Bulmer, of Maynards Fine Art Auctioneers, was quoted, saying;“it is a shame that such buildings have to be lost. Pieces from the old Medical-Dental centre are dotted around the city and can only give us a glimpse of the interesting design of that building”. The variegated orange marble clock face is 36 inches in

diameter and the hands are elegant Art Deco metal work. The clock still works, and its value in 2005 was estimated between five and ten thousand dollars.



One of the Rhea Sisters

Credit for the 1988 – 1989 Campaign to Save the Medical Dental Building goes to Vancouver's Community Arts Council, and to Frank Rutter, Editor of the Vancouver Sun, for his generous support of the cause. Through the spring and summer of 1988 The Sun published many letters to the editor, the majority opposing demolition of the Art Deco building. On Sunday morning, May 28th 1989, 30,000 spectators watched as the building came down. Rooms in the Vancouver Hotel were jammed with people looking on from front row windows. Travis Latham, age 6, sat on his father's shoulders, and said....." Daddy, are we going to blow up part of our world".....

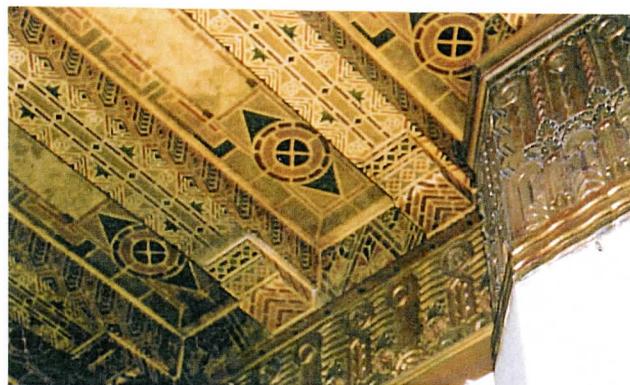


Photos from *Building Renovation*

Vol 5, July – August, 1989



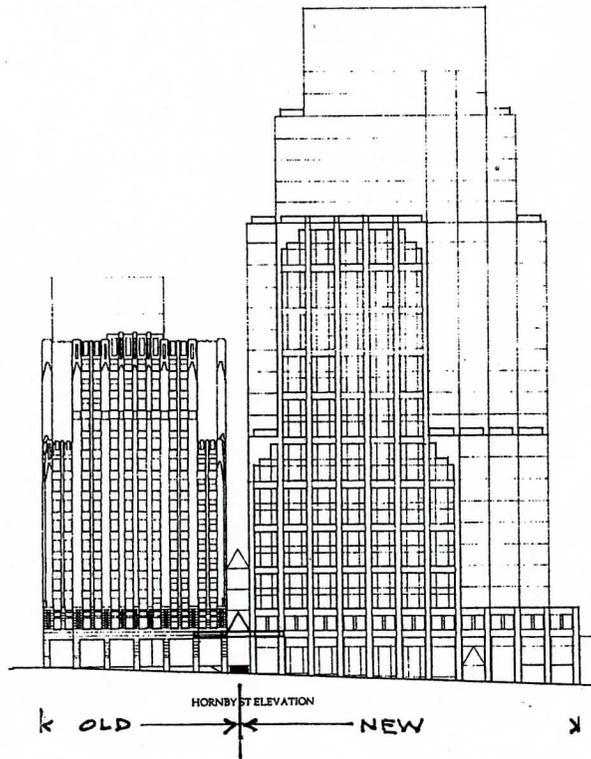
Lobby, Paper Ceiling and Marble Clock



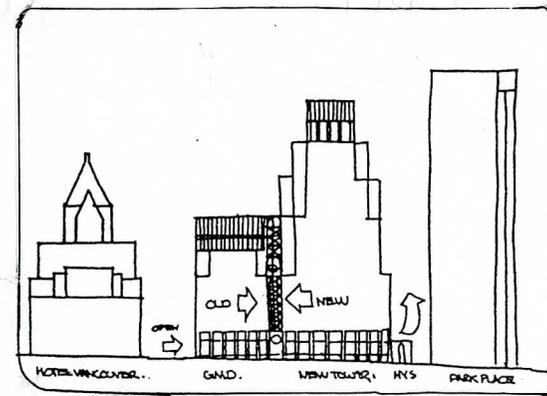
Photos by Arthur Allen

unless noted otherwise

Credit is due to Bob McIlhargey, designer, whose "Winter Garden" proposal offered a collaborative design for the site. McIlhargey designed and drew a scheme that retained the original building, with a new tower placed on Hornby Street, north of the old structure. Modification of the ground and first floors, and entry on Georgia, created a very open and attractive entry and lobby for both buildings. A heritage bonus was available to add extra floors to the new tower for financial benefit.



VIEW FROM HUBBARD STREET TO EXISTING BLDG. AND NEW TOWER AND WINTER GARDEN AT THE CORNER AND RESTAURANT SPACE.



HORNBY STREET ELEVATION/VISUAL CONNECTIONS

Tall tales of the Medical Dental Building

Paul Merrick, architect of a scheme for demolishing the Medical Dental Building, says the building is not pretty or beautiful, and his supporters say his new design is so exciting that the old building must go.

In reply to him and to others stunned by his shiny new design, I suggest that beauty is much more than skin deep, and that the Medical Dental Building's charm rests in part on the fairy tales that can be told about its ornamentation.

For instance, the decorations, including the three terra cotta nurses on the corners and the panels around the arch at the main entrance, include symbols and pictographs of modern scientific medicine, medieval and ancient magic, and Christian belief and faith. This fascinating mixture could indicate that the doctors and dentists who occupied the building in 1929, or the artists they engaged, put tongue in cheek and advised the sick that they should try science, prayer, and magic in suitable proportions.

And does anyone know that at the entrance the caduceus, a rod with two snakes entwined on the shaft, is a symbolic mistake? A shaft with twin serpents is a symbol of Hermes, or Mercury, gods of commerce, not of healing or charity.

LETTERS

Write: The Editor, The Vancouver Sun,
2250 Granville Street, Vancouver, B.C. V6H 3G2.

I wondered if the snakes were placed at the door to advertise that the doctors within possessed some new cure for snakebite. If so, the 1929 doctors were up against stiff competition from ancient medical wisdom noted by Pliny, which held that snake bite could be cured by swallowing the testicles of a hippopotamus under water. My research to date has not uncovered any documented testimonials to that cure.

Hippocrates, 460-377 B.C., father of modern medicine, was the first man to proclaim that epilepsy was not caused by demonic possession but was a medically treatable illness. He lived at a time when people believed that epilepsy (otherwise known as the falling sickness) could

be cured by snatching the skin from a live snake. Snakes were said to leave their skins to their epileptic pursuers. I have heard that Hippocrates fed biscuits to snakes near his clinic on the island of Cos to keep them near in case his patients doubted his newfangled ideas.

In conclusion:

The diagnosis: The Medical Dental Building in Vancouver is suffering from epilepsy, the falling sickness.

The cure: Remove the caduceus of commerce from the entrance, and instal a caduceus of the healing arts.

ARTHUR ALLEN
Architect

6040 Marine Drive
West Vancouver

Credits for their letters go to Dr. J. S. Bhopal, and to John Atkin, John R. Stuart, and John Davis, members or supporters of the campaign to save the building

CITY HAS ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

The Sun, 11 May 1988

To suggest that the design of the tower proposed for the Medical-Dental Building site is so stunning that it will override any reason for saving the medical building, as Gordon Price reportedly said (Alderman Likes New Tower, *Sun*, April 23), reveals a surprising lack of understanding of the significance of old building conservation.

The issue is not whether the new building is "better" than the old one. The point is that the old one has been there all this time, and forms an important part of our collective civic memory. A city without a past suffers amnesia, and Vancouver is fast becoming a world-class centre for architectural Alzheimer's disease.

John Davis

WELL WORTH THE PAPER THEY'RE PAINTED ON

The Sun, 16 May 1988

In Karen Krangle's article "Rival Campaigns Fight Over building" (*Sun*, May 4) Bill Rooney, vice-president of the Shon Group, was quoted as saying that "the art deco designs on the Marine Building's lobby ceiling are tile, while those above the lobby in the medical building are painted paper."

On the basis of this evidence, the reader was left to conclude that the Medical-Dental Building designs must therefore be of lesser artistic merit.

With all due respect to Mr. Rooney, it might be recalled that many artists have become known to their admirers on the basis of works of art on paper. They include Germany's Albrecht Durer, England's William Hogarth, Spain's Pablo Picasso, and, of course, Canada's Robert Bateman and Toni Onley.

It might also be noted that somewhat more than half of the 3,000 or so works in the Vancouver Art Gallery are works on paper. This includes drawings and prints on paper from all over the world.

The ceiling of the Medical-Dental Building lobby is in remarkably good condition, by the way.

John R. Stuart

SNAKE HAS LINKS WITH MEDICINE

The Sun, 19 May 1988

Architect Arthur Allen suggests (Letters, May 9th) that the caduceus of Mercury - the messenger of the Roman Gods and the divine patron of all communicators - is wrongly placed at the entrance of the Vancouver Medical-Dental Building,

is a symbolic mistake and has nothing to do with doctors.

I disagree. Doctors spend at least 50 per cent of their time talking with their patients and the very word doctor is derived from the Latin *docere* - to teach - an activity that depends on good communication.

Anyway, the snake has long been associated with medicine. Sumerian remains (approximately 2,300 BC) depict the god of healing, Ningishzida, with a double-headed snake; the limbless reptile's shedding of skin symbolized renewal and regeneration.

While the single snake on the staff of Aesculapius (the Greek God of healing) is the official insignia of the American Medical Association and of the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, the caduceus of Mercury, with its double intertwined snakes, is also a symbol of the medical profession, and is the emblem of the Medical Corps of the U. S. Army.

What have snakes to do with modern medicine? Very little, except that Malayan pit vipers are milked at a snake farm in Germany and the venom is commercially available in Canada for the treatment of blood clots.

Dr. J. S. Bhopal

VARIOUS SNAKES IN MYTHIC GRASS

The Sun, 06 June 1988

I am grateful for publication of my letter about the serpents of the Medical-Dental Building (Letters May 9th) and for Dr. J. S. Bhopal's reply (Letters May 19th), in which he tells about the two-headed serpent of Ningish-zida and modern uses of pit viper venom.. That seems little removed from the Greek myth of Asclepius (Aesculapius) , who discovered a life-restoring herb when he observed a snake placing a herb in a dead companion's mouth.

The use of the twin-snake caduceus (something with wings on the shaft) by medical institutions is very debatable. Hermes, or Mercury, is not favored by some doctors as a patron of medical art and science.

Dr Robert E. Rakel of Iowa City, in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, April 26, 1985, states; . . ."His (Hermes's) image adorns graves, and he is said to conduct departed souls to Hades – a role physicians should rightfully shun" And "The cunning and draftiness of Hermes also made him the protector of thieves and outlaws, an association medicine may well wish to avoid."

We may well wonder why the twin-snake caduceus with wings was for many years placed on early buildings

of the old Canadian Bank of Commerce, such as the one at Main and Pender. Readers may also wish to muse about the large head of Hermes over the Georgia Street entrance to the Hotel Vancouver.

Finally (at least for this week), I note that the City of Vancouver itself has removed the caduceus of Hermes from its coat of arms, and replaced it with a Kwakiutl totem pole. I hope that this is a good omen for the threatened Medical-Dental Building, and that city officials will not evaluate future prospects for that building solely on the advice of the God of Commerce.

Arthur Allen

SALVAGING OUR PAST FOR THE FUTURE

The Sun, 14 June 1988

In the unhappy event that the Medical-Dental Building is demolished, the Shon Group says that the caryatids of nurses will be relocated or copied and placed on the new tower.

Following that example, I suggest that the conical green roof of the new building, borrowed from the present Vancouver Hotel, be replaced by a roof garden and trellis copied from photographs of the second Hotel Vancouver, demolished in the early 1950s. Also,

the huge heads of moose and bison from the top of the earlier hotel could be placed on the Shon Tower's walls. They were much too large for a hunting lodge or rumpus room, and presumably now rest in peace in a city dump. The new heads should be white illuminated plastic, so that nightly they would give us a ghostly reminder of lost Vancouver, a city that, some say, has no history.

This idea has endless possibilities. The nine caryatids, voluptuous half-dressed women of the old Sun Tower would be very sexy additions to Paul Merrick's design, softening the image of the starchy nurses.

Nothing, however, could be more useful than the dome and lantern of the Sun Tower when its time comes. That lantern was once brilliantly lighted, and the dome boasted, in large illuminated letters, that it was indeed the sun, a beacon to all who would seek the truth. Placed on top of the Shon Tower, perpetually shining, it would announce that Beauty and Justice also prevail in the city.

Arthur Allen

DOOMING OF BUILDING A SAD DAY FOR THE TOWN

The Sun, 20 July 1988

It is disappointing indeed to see that the fate of the Georgia Medical-

Dental Building has been decided and that it will be destroyed. It was far more disappointing, in fact disgusting, to witness the manner in which the building was condemned.

Even the late hour at which the item came in front of city council for debate cannot excuse the infantile behavior displayed by its members.

We presumably elect these people to make informed choices for our city and its citizens. The delegations that appeared before council were well informed and passionate. I had the impression that council would consider the points of view presented and a reasoned debate would follow. Well, the scene that evolved put to rest that idea.

It would be much easier to accept the fate of the Georgia Medical-Dental Building if there had been a good strong discussion of the merits of the existing building, the new scheme, a discussion of architecture, the way buildings work and relate to the street and city, or even a reasonable discussion on heritage matters. But no.

Because some aldermen had their teeth pulled there they felt that was reason enough to approve the destruction of this landmark without further ado. Only Alderman Libby Davies approached the issue seriously.

To treat it as a joke did a disservice to the 2,000- plus people who took the time to show their concern by writing letters, signing petitions and showing up at council.

Once again the city as a whole loses when this happens. A sad note to all of this is the Cartwright Craft Gallery. By appearing before council to push the developer's case, it has destroyed the largest craft object in the city. Local artists designed and sculpted the terracotta ornaments that adorn the Georgia Medical Dental. There are no machines involved in the process of production with terracotta. It is all handcrafted. Oh well.

One day the town of Vancouver may mature into a city. From the nonsense displayed on this issue, it seems that may take some time.

John Atkin.

HOW TO COOL IT, ASCLEPIAN-STYLE *The Sun*, 21 December 1988

The news that there is disagreement between Mayor Gordon Campbell and the Shon Group concerning preservation of my favorite ornaments (the serpents of the Medical-Dental building) is very welcome (Council Accepts Guarantee, *Sun*, Dec 18). I am delighted to see the mayor and Alderman Gordon Price publicly

defending a few old and cracked panels of terracotta.

However, the possibility that the clay panels, and the famous nurses will be smashed in the struggle leads me to hope that tempers will stay below fever pitch. I therefore suggest an Asclepian remedy.

At the Temple of Asclepius on the island of Cos, ancient Greeks afflicted with fever would rest in breezy, shaded spaces where large and harmless snakes were taught to snuggle close to the sufferers, their cool bodies providing a primitive cold compress.

The city council chambers, although breezy, will not do for this treatment. The entry lobby of the Medical-Dental Building (modified according to Bob McIlhargey's Winter Garden design) is the only suitable place this side of Cos.

Arthur Allen.

An earthquake might be just the thing for that ugly old Medical-Dental Building over on Georgia Street. There's m accounting for some people's taste, though, for they see that horrible pile of brick as beautiful, and want it to stay forever, complete with its ice-cream drippings on the corners, and gargoyles no one ever looks at. Down with it.

Doug Collins, Columnist.

SOME ARE DEAD TO THE PAST.

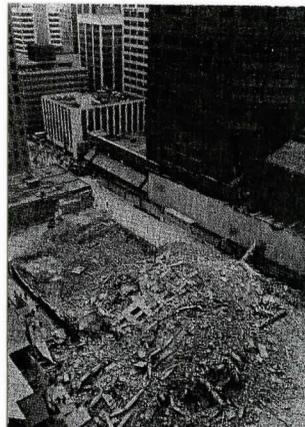
The Sun. 29 May 1989

On May 17 CBC Radio News broadcast Alderman Jonathan Baker's words urging speedy demolition of the Medical-Dental building on the grounds that the building is old and ugly, that its ornaments are junk, and that people with a fondness for old buildings are indulging in architectural necrophilia.

The idea that love of historic buildings is a form of love of the dead is quite offensive to those who enjoy the history and memory of their community. At first I was tempted to ignore the alderman's remark. On reflection, Mr. Baker's words do have a somber eloquence, and in their own way will help to keep Old Vancouver alive by keeping the heritage issue simmering.

I therefore wish to suggest that for his remark the alderman should be committed to solitary hard labour, using nothing but a five-pound hand-held wrecking ball to finish the demolition of the Medical-Dental Building.

Arthur Allen



Sunday, May 28th, 1989

THINGS HAPPENED WITH A BANG FOLLOWING DELAY

The Sun, 29 May 1989. (Partial copy)

By *Sun* columnists Dan Gawthrop and Wendy McLellan.

For a moment Sunday, it looked as though Cleveland Wrecking Co's demolition of the Georgia Medical-Dental building was going to be a dud. "Fire, damn it, fire." blasting contractor Jim Redyke shouted after the 10-second countdown.

It was another few seconds, and a full 45 minutes after the scheduled morning blast before the signal light flared on the detonator and Cleveland vice-president Donald Fenning pushed the red button.

"There's always a natural fascination with this sort of thing," Fenning said after the blast. "Everyone's got a bit of the wrecker in them."

Richard Loisel, sipping a coffee: "I really wanted to see this. I slept in and missed the one back home in Regina."

Travis Latham, 6, witnessing his first building blast from his father's shoulders wondered aloud as the countdown began: "Are we going to blow up part of our world?"

City police were surprised by the turnout, an estimated 30,000

May 29th, 2014 will be the 25th anniversary of the demolition of the Medical-Dental Building, and a day on which to ponder the future of heritage preservation of many buildings of old Vancouver.

There was no question that repairing and strengthening the old building would be costly, and that placing the new tower on Hornby Street would have lowered its prestige-rental equation compared to a Georgia Street frontage. The rental issue was addressed by the heritage bonus available, which would have given the developer more rental floor space, making the Winter Garden concept financially viable. The City Planning Office, to its credit, gave due consideration to that option.

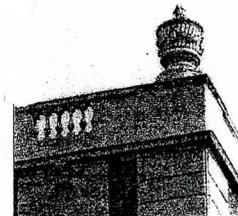
The Medical Dental Building was destroyed because the ideology of real estate declared that no building offering space at less than prime rental value can presume to occupy land that can produce higher rent. The real estate dogma behind that argument holds that land must be developed to its highest and best use, as defined by financial criteria alone, regardless of any other historical or social factors. Pride of location, and a perceived need to be "up to date" add to the imperative in these cases. As long as those factors remain in effect, many old buildings are at risk. As soon as the value of land decrees that a site occupied by an old

structure can produce more revenue, buildings will be threatened, and some will come down.

There will be exceptions. Some churches and political and civic monuments have the power to stay in place, as at Christ Church Cathedral and the Courthouse/Art Gallery Complex at Robson Square.

To conclude my own thoughts on this anniversary, I like to think of the old Georgia Hotel, just one block east of the Medical-Dental site. The original 1927 hotel has been refurbished, and a new tower stands behind. It seems that at least that developer saw the wisdom of the Winter Garden scheme rejected at the Medical Dental site.

My own fond memories of the Georgia have nothing to do with heritage conservation, or the large, mysterious pots on its roof. In the early 1950s it boasted a popular basement pub, for men only. 2014 is the 61st anniversary of my first visits to that happy place. I still wonder about those pots?



FOLK AND FAIRY TALES IN

ARCHITECTURE

Arthur Allen 1982

This article was first published in The Canadian Architect, June/July, 1983, Vol 28, No 6 & 7 and is re-printed with consent of the publisher.

Calgary, first city of my early memories, was then a small city filled with the sights, sounds and smells of the last years of the draught horse era. I remember the dust on my uncle's farm south of Calgary, and the crackling radio with Wilf Carter and William Aberhart, each in his own way telling the people that the dust would go away and that every dark cloud does have a silver lining.

On occasional visits to the city we were amazed by the buildings - they must have been at least six storeys high - and we would ride the street rail cars on the lookout for draught horses. We would marvel at the noise in the downtown canyons; the screech and clank of tram wheels, the shouts of drivers, the creak of leather and thudding rhythm of trotting horses, their sweat and snorting breath steaming in the cold air of winter. Calgary's

streets were perfumed in those days by the horses' ammoniac exhaust and droppings, "horse buns" we giggled, enjoying fantasies of dried and sugar-glazed buns, decorated and presented to our Sunday school teacher at the next picnic!

In the summer heat, the aroma was much too much, but in winter the buns reminded us of warm, soft earth and flowers. At thirty degrees below zero, they were quick frozen, to be chipped loose at the next thaw and removed by the shovel brigade. I seem to remember a man with a large scoop shovel behind every horse.

Calgary is now a city of glass, steel, concrete, and is a .." dark and windy place." (1) Its buildings show endless mullions of curtain wall grid patterns and acres of plain concrete slabs. More than other cities, Calgary shows the impact of too much architecture, erected in great haste, in a town too small to take it. The fact that it is Modern architecture is secondary. I think it would be too much in any style.

Calgary, like Houston, is an interesting test case for the Modern movement. The effects of hasty development, the quality of individual buildings, and particularly the relationships between new and existing structures can be examined in both cities. It seems that neither city is held in high regard by architectural

writers at this time. In spite of their newness, and regardless of differences in the quality of building design in Calgary and Houston, both cities raise fears about the glass, steel, concrete, electronic and unnatural cities that have been idealized in our time. Both cities of course enjoy wild popularity among developers and realtors. Calgary issued building permits valued at \$ 2.1 billion in the first 11 months of 1981, Houston 2.7 billion. (2) Per capita, the development of Calgary far outpaced all other North American cities. Houston is four times larger than Calgary.

If architects now agree that the bold new forms and spaces of modern design have failed aesthetically, I think they would also agree that the rhetoric of the Modern movement was an even greater failure. Bruno Taut, among others in the early 20th century, promised that beauty would inevitably follow design if it were based upon ideas of utility, simplicity and efficiency. They also promised that their work would make the world a *better* place !

If everything is founded on sound efficiency, this efficiency itself, or rather its utility will form its own aesthetic law. A building must be beautiful when seen from outside if it reflects all these qualities The architect who achieves this task becomes a creator of an ethical and

social character; the people who use the building for any purpose, will, through the structure of the house, be brought to a better behavior in their mutual dealings and relationship with each other. Thus, architecture becomes the creator of new social observances." (3)

I would not like to relinquish the idea that architects should participate in movements for social reform, but I hope that we are pardoned for such zealous enthusiasm. In retrospect, Modern ambitions were preposterous; to think that we have failed in a lone bid to improve the behaviour of Calgarians in spite of the fact that we have built them a beautiful (ie efficient) city.

Because many architects now agree that Calgary's downtown spaces have not been improved by the rush of new building under the Modern movement, it seems likely that a rescue will be attempted by the new and growing Post Modern movement in architecture. This counter-revolutionary idea will seek to change downtown Calgary by designing in a new "language" of architecture whereby old architectural elements - arches, columns, capitals, lintels, pediments, moldings, decorative motifs - will be used to satisfy formal demands of the moment. These elements in combination will be referred to as "quotations" from the history

books of architecture, and their reuse will be attempted without reference to the social content of the original design.

Post-Modern influence will undoubtedly be welcomed by many people, particularly because it will support preservation of remaining historic areas and buildings in Calgary. It may also be more popular than Modern architecture was in its early days because the Post-Modern idea confirms architecture's submission to *public criticism* of Modern design.

Post-Modern attempts to divorce old architectural elements from their original social contexts are very intriguing:

It is clear that the nature referred to in these recent designs is no more nor less than the nature of the city itself, emptied of specific social content from any particular time and allowed to speak simply of its own *formal* condition." (4)

In some places time has erased meaning (particularly the magic and superstitious content) from old symbols, but I suppose that memories of ancient meanings may still exert influence. Imagine, for instance, that an active Post-Modern mind proposes to bring new life to sterile downtown Calgary by

applying miles and miles of press-on-plastic moldings, in Greek Key or Egg and Dart low relief, to the horizontal and vertical mullions of Calgary's curtain walls and to the edges of all those plain concrete slabs. The Egg and Dart, after all, is a very old and well-known decorative molding. As a highly respected symbol of fertility, the egg would surely do well in the fight against sterility. To make it effective, however, the Post Modernists must convince themselves and Calgarians that the signs and symbols used still have meaning and potency.

I do not believe that design can separate the nature of a city from its social content, and suggest instead an antidote for the rhetoric of Post-Modern architecture that will immortalize a part of Calgary's history and my own perfumed memories. *I propose a new molding where the egg and the dart will be replaced by the horse bun and the scoop shovel.* I will call it the "Bun and Shovel" molding, its endless rhythm and repetition signifying architecture's habit of bringing on new movements with exotic rhetoric.

I am particularly interested in the Post-Modern movement because I suspect that it may revive interest in archaic, magic charms along with its old forms and motifs. If Calgarians could regress to a state of medieval miracle hunger, possibly their

urban troubles could be dissipated by symbolic incantations and spells, to be cast by Post-Modern variations on local themes, using a horseshoe motif. It is more likely, in my opinion, that a revival of symbolic imagery in building design and art work will lead, in our time and place, to a revival of the endless and sometime bitter debates that attend vague symbolic communication. For example, it would be fun to compare a hypothetical group of Post-Modern architects, artists and critics with a group of medieval masons, artists and clerics; each group reviewing its own works and interpreting the symbols presented to view. The Post-Modern writers would speak of building design as the "writing" of an architectural text; and they would conceive of the viewing of a building elevation as the "reading" of a page from the designer's book. John Ruskin, representing the medieval group, would disavow "The idea of reading a building as we would Milton or Dante...(6), but would "listen" attentively and at great length to the "Sermons in Stone" which may be found on Gothic buildings, and which to Ruskin indicated the solidarity and high quality of medieval societies.

Some scholars feel that Ruskin was overenthusiastic in his assessment. In a

discussion of animal symbolism, G.G.Coulton tells the following delightful story of medieval variety in the interpretation of a well-known pagan and Christian symbol, the peacock:

The peacock and peahen, in Berchorius, show, if possible, more plainly than the hedgehog, how fluctuating and arbitrary were the preachers' methods of exposition, even in the late fourteenth century. (Reductorium Morale lib. VII c. 62 [pp. 21 ff].) According to this learned monk, the peacock typifies (1) The avaricious man (flesh hard to cook and slow to decay). (2) The devil (serpentine neck and head, fiendish voice). (3) The envious man (he envies peahen's eggs and breaks them). (4) The envious and secretive preacher, who does not publish his sermons. (5) Devil again. (6) Peahen is emblem of Religion (with her 12 eggs). Peacock stands for the persecuting worldlings. (7) The proud man. (8) The perfect Religious. (9) The vain man. For the peacock's cries in the night come from wounded vanity; he wakes up in the darkness, believes that he has lost his beauty, and makes night hideous with his complaints. (10) The just man (whose voice terrifies devils, just as peacock's voice terrifies serpents). (11) Pride (for he climbs tree; this predicts rain, which symbolizes ill fortune). (12)

Lust, since the usual proportion is that of one cock to five hens; on the other hand, the preacher may interpret this as charity. (13) The good prelate (protects his hens from the fox). (14) The worldling (who recognizes his own and loves his own). (15) Transitory beauty, with attendant sin and shame. (16) Good men; for we know from Augustine that the peacock's flesh never putrefies, however long it be kept; thus he symbolizes the incorruptibility of real goodness. Yet, in spite of all these sixteen elaborate moralizations, we know as a matter of fact that the peacock came into Christian art through pagan artistic tradition, in which it symbolized immortality, either because of its periodical renewal of its splendid feathers or because of that belief, shared by St. Augustine, in the incorruptibility of its flesh." (7)

I am not completely against variety of interpretation, and therefore urge post-Modern designers to consider animal symbolism in their future work in Calgary. The most popular symbols for a cow town are the horse and bull. Both are deeply embedded in the mythology of mankind, and will provide much material for future architects and scholars. Symbolic material available for the confusion and entertainment of architects and the public

will be greatly enriched by the lovely wild rose, Alberta's provincial flower. As a widespread symbol of love, respect and courage (signified by the colour red), the rose could also occupy a lively group of Post-Modern architects and theorists on the following qualities; reverence, innocence, purity, humility and silence (signified by the extremely rare wild white rose in Alberta); friendship and sociability (signified by pale red roses, the predominant strain in Alberta); war (of the Roses); unity and armistice; (as in the superimposed red and white roses of the Tudor Rose); joy, gladness and freedom (as in the yellow rose of Texas and found by some people in Alberta); pain and anger (from the prickly shaft of the love flower); rejuvenation (the surprise of new green leaves springing from the dust); and finally, eloquence (the rose, like the rich oratory of many diverse movements, is known to flourish in the heat and compost of naturally fertilized Western Canadian prairie gardens).

I realize that it is not nice to mock the beliefs and values of other people, but I have no such reservation about sentimental or romantic indulgence in those beliefs. At this time I am quite stimulated by symbolic communication, with many more questions than answers in my mind. I am intrigued by the mystery that surrounds signs and symbols, and am very interested in moral

and political uses of symbolic devices in building design. For this article I am specifically interested in questions on symbolism in relation to time and memory.

For many years I have been bothered by the idea that architects spend their restless energies (I assume everyone has them) on matters of technical change and in endless battles of style. When it comes to social change, most architects I have known are conservative. I suggest that this is true not because architects are weak, insensitive or unusually peaceful, but because we are so slow in our work. This is not an insult. The design and construction of symbols in architectural form does require a great deal of time and patience. As a result, architects always work for established authority. No rebel movement has the time, or the money, to commission architectural symbols for its cause until it becomes a new establishment. Writers especially, with occasional painters, sculptors, and other artists, are in the vanguard of social change. Architects are asked in after the struggle, and are expected to enshrine and stabilize the movement, casting spells of longevity with their new (or old) symbols and monuments.

I wonder if the Post-Modern movement will survive in fast cultures. I wonder who it will serve, and wonder if it will keep up in an age

of instant communication, instant cities and instant mythology. Will it declare that architecture is timeless, functioning in slow-motion display of its symbols regardless of current social issues, or will it develop new symbols from old ones, bridging time periods and providing reassuring continuity in aesthetic and social terms? As we watch the development of Post Modern architecture in Canada, I hope that Calgary's citizens and architects will respond with interest and with genial irreverence, to revivals of ancient wisdom from the East. I expect that they will applaud at times, and will respond occasionally with "Calgarisms", a local speech form, usually plain, not always sensible or kind, and often loaded with earthy protest and humour.

Notes;

1. Trevor Boddy, "Sky High in Calgary", *The Canadian Architect*, April 1981, p.26
2. "Mushrooming Calgary Sets a Record." *Alberta Report*, December 18th, 1981, p.19
3. Bruno Taut, "Modern Architecture." *The Studio Limited*, London, 1929, p.29
4. Anthony Vidler, editorial, "The Third Typology." *Oppositions*, Winter 1976-77, p.25
5. Ivor Indyk, "Literary Theory and Architectural Practice" a note on Agrest and Gandelsona's "On Practice", *International Architect*, No 1, Vol 1, Issue 1, 1979.
6. John Ruskin, "The Nature of Gothic." *George Allen*, London, 1892.
7. G.G.Coulton, "Medieval Faith and Symbolism." *Harper Torchbooks*, New York, 1958, Appendix 18, p. iii

THE GODDESS OF THE VOGUE

Arthur Allen 1985



Diana, an ancient Italic goddess of fertility, and patroness of wild things and of birth, was a very complex character. Her Greek counterpart, Artemis, was equally contradictory in some of her traits and roles. Artemis was well known as goddess of the moon, and of the hunt, but she was also famous for fierce defense of her virginity, and for jealous protection of her honored status. Several would-be

lovers, including a few rapists, paid with their lives for their presumption, and any man who boasted that he was a better hunter than Artemis would be required to make a very costly sacrifice in her name.

It is interesting that Artemis carried out the seemingly conflicting roles of patroness of unmarried girls and guardian of chastity, while at the same time she was a fertility goddess of childbirth. Both Diana and Artemis were known by several names, and capable of varied roles in their mythical world. Other names of convenience for Artemis included Cynthia, Delia, Hecate, Luna, Phoebe, and Selene. Diana was also known as Hecate, or Diana of the Crossroads, because she presided over all places where three roads meet.

For my purposes I generally use Greek names in these short stories, but I will refer to Diana, the main ornamental feature of the Vogue Theatre, at 918 Granville Street, because she was locally well known by that name. Diana is a twelve foot figure of a goddess, (now in deteriorating sheet metal) above the main sign of the theatre. The following accounts of the story of the Vogue and its patron goddess come mainly from newspaper articles by Valerie Casselton, (*Vancouver Province*, 11th October 1981), and Les Wedman, (*Vancouver Sun*, 5th Sept, 1969), and from

other observations by David Mah, on City of Vancouver Heritage Inventory forms, in his notes titled *Theatre Row*.

In 1937, Harry Reiffel, a Vancouver distiller with a passionate love of vaudeville entertainment, opened the Vogue theatre on Granville Street, and installed a full-bodied nude figure of Diana above the marquee. The goddess at that time was clad only in genuine gold leaf, but gold paint was used later for economy. Floodlit from below she was gorgeous. A new building was later erected for the theatre and opened in 1941, with Dal Richards' orchestra and Juliette performing for the gala affair. Vaudeville by this time was gone, and the building was leased to the Odeon Theatre chain, for operation as a moving picture theatre. The interior was plush, the service was personal and warm, and the Vogue was a very popular place. Granville Street in the 1940s was notable for its neon lights, and was inhabited by Damon Runyon characters; Doc Francis, Gyp the Blood, the Duchess, Canadian and American service men, and Zoot-Suiters. A seat in the balcony cost 48 cents. Throughout the 1940s, some Vancouver citizens had objected to the original nude figure, but Reiffel argued the issue at city council, and won his case.



Neon on Granville

According to David Mah, in the mid 1960s Odeon Theatres undertook renovations to the building, and found that the supporting framework of Diana had rusted. Odeon sent her to the scrap heap, but when Harry Reiffel heard of it, he screamed that his ...“sexy madonna”... had vanished, and that his theatre without her would be“like a Jersey cow without horns”.... In April, 1968, a new Diana was placed above the marquee. It was commissioned by Reiffel, sketched by Lew Parry, and made of sheet metal by Bud Graves. Graves received \$500.00 for his work, and the new

statue cost \$ 5,000.00 Al Jenkins, Odeon's manager, said; "What a landlord, try to get a dime out of him. But five thousand bucks for a statue !..... Reiffel retorted; "she's beautiful and worth it." ...



The Vogue was billed as the most up-to-date theatre in Canada or the United States. It seated 1368 people in"a refrigerator cooled interior '.....It's projection room was compared with the engine room of an ocean liner; it boasted acoustic wool under cascades of peach tapestry; and there were five special hearing sets for the deaf. The exterior and interior designs of the 1941 Vogue Theatre were done in the Art Moderne style current in the 1930s, with a few Art Deco touches. The entry lobby featured a low relief mural, with a medieval knight, an ancient warrior, a North American Indian, and a cowboy, all dressed and ready for battle.



Like most movie houses, the theatre hit hard times and was eventually put up for sale in the 1980s. Theatre and music groups formed "The Vogue Committee", and sought assistance from the City of Vancouver. Restoration under new owner Hugh Harrison, as a music and live theatre venue in the 1990s, made the Vogue into a success story for music and the theatrical arts, and for heritage restoration.

Following up on my fascination with mythological characters and symbols on the older buildings of Vancouver, I was soon intrigued by the use of an ancient goddess as an ornament on a vaudeville- cum- movie house in the twentieth century. It is clear that Hermes, as God of Commerce, is appropriate to financial buildings in the city, and that Poseidon, God of the Sea, belongs on the Marine Building. But why

place the Goddess of the Moon and the Hunt, and of Virginity, on a theatre building ? I was especially curious about Harry Reiffel's obvious knowledge of the classics. He called the goddess..."my sexy madonna"a clear reference to her precious virginity. What he meant by comparing her to the horns of a Jersey cow is mystifying. Did Reiffel know of an ancient connection between Diana and the arts of entertainment ? For some time I wondered, and then I re-read Tripp's *Meridian Handbook of Classical Mythology*, and added Zimmerman's *Dictionary of Classical Mythology*. Tracking down the varied names and roles of Diana and Artemis, and of Trivia, Hecate, and other characters, I think I have a plausible connection between these divinities and the theatre business in Vancouver.

Among the tasks assigned to Diana was attendance on the light of the moon. According to Zimmerman, Trivia was a Roman goddess, who was also called Hecate, or Diana of the Crossways. The name Trivia was identified with Diana because in that role she presided over all places where three roads met. Under the name Hecate, Trivia was responsible for; "the darkness and terror of the night. She haunted crossroads, graveyards, and was the goddess of sorcery and witchcraft, wandered about at night, and was seen

only by the barking dogs who told of her appearance".The Romans particularly made this connection between Diana and the dangers of the night.

In apparent contradiction, but useful for my purposes, Diana was also responsible for "the moonlight splendor of the night" At that point I smiled, suspecting that Harry Reiffel as a young man had found that the back row of a dim and softly lit theatre, in the company of a nice young woman, was an early and very pleasant crossroads in his life. If so, he would remember that on that night Hecate was nowhere to be seen, and no barking dogs could be heard. He might also have sworn to someday put up a statue to honor his companion of the theatre.



Art Deco Detail

CALLIOPE, ORPHEUS, AND EURIDYCE

Arthur Allen approx..1985



"Elvis Presley" on the Marquee

Since 1998, as an architectural tour guide and lecturer for Humanities 101 classes in Vancouver's Downtown East Side, I conduct an annual walking tour along Hastings, Georgia, Pender and other old streets, and look up for architectural ornaments on old buildings. The tour is followed by two informal lectures at the University of British Columbia, one on ornamentation, and one on general architectural matters.



Hum 101 Class 2005

Each spring, after classes conclude, we visit the Orpheum Theatre, at Smythe and Seymour Streets, and tour the interior spaces. Along with a history of the building and its Vaudeville and Silent Movie origins, and a review of its wonderful restoration in the 1970s, we look for ornaments. The style of the interior, by architect Marcus B. Priteca, is officially said to be Spanish Renaissance (some say Middle Hollywood.) I prefer to call it a Mediterranean Salad, baroque in spirit. I like the word "baroque" because it relates to misshapen, even weird forms that were derided by critics until the mid 19th century in Europe. I mean no insult with this idea; vaudeville- cum- movie palaces break all the rules of serious architecture. They are really stage sets on a grand scale, some designed to suit a wide range of public, cultural events, but generally to provide seats for low cost entertainment.

Priteca was imaginative, going his own way with many details. Some ornaments, for instance, feature Canadian provincial coats of arms that lack precise and authentic detail. There are several nicely detailed ornaments which appear to be fleurs-de-lis, but which left me wondering about Priteca's intentions. What could that flower have to do with the Spanish Baroque? When I consulted Rob Watt, then director of the

Vancouver Museum, he advised me that it was the fleur-de-lis of Florence, the symbol carried by Catherine de' Medici when she married, became Queen of France, and moved to her new home in Paris.



The Fleur de Lis of Florence

In spite of its glamour, I am uneasy about one aspect of the design of the grand theatre. It started business in 1927 as an auditorium for vaudeville performers, with an eye to movie performances just coming into existence in the 1920s. When we tour the building I am reminded of a movie house in the 1930s in a small town in Alberta, when I was badly frightened by the Wicked Witch of the East, (in The Wizard of Oz), and ran from the theatre in panic. I am no longer afraid of the dark, but in the Orpheum I remind students that the ornate and wonderful walls and ceilings are in reality a stage set constructed of thin plaster shells. It

is all an illusion of solidity and permanence, reminding me that in the dark hall patrons are like the occupants of Plato's underground cavern. In that cave, Plato cautioned his students about the false impressions deceptively presented in the flickering light of the shadowy space. In other writings he announced that artists, especially poets, would not be allowed to enter his new Republic, which would be informed and governed by rational thought, not mythology. I caution my class on these problems, and ask them to think carefully, then we continue.

The centrepiece of ornament in the Orpheum Theatre is the allegorical mural, painted by Tony Heinsbergen in the interior domed space at the centre of the high auditorium ceiling. It is not the original finish of that surface, but was painted during the 1973-1977 restoration project designed and managed by Paul Merrick and Ron Nelson, architects, then with the firm of Thompson, Berwick, Pratt, and Partners, in Vancouver, and joint managers of the project. The mural shows figures of musicians, some heavenly images, a large female portrait, the players and conductor of a mythical Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, and portraits of winged cherubs. Several other figures are present, but the ones of most interest to me are the figures of a warrior, a musician, and a tiger. The warrior is reclining on a bed with his sword laid by, the tiger stands quietly beside him, and the young man is playing an unusual stringed instrument.



Italianate Ceiling, Lobby



Music has charms to soothe the savage breast, to soften rocks, or bend a knotted oak. 1697, William Congreve

I called Paul Merrick, he remembered the project as a pleasant one. The following notes were given by one of his daughters during a tour in 2013;

- the conductor is not Kazuyoshi Akiyama, conductor of the VSO in the 1970's. It is Ron Nelson, Architect, administrator of the project.
- the couple east of the conductor are Mr. and Mrs Merrick. The green purse spilling gold records her fondness for shopping.
- the winged cherubs are the Merricks' three children.
- the large female portrait in the mural is Calliope, Muse of Music, just west of the conductor..
- the tiger is Tony Heinsbergen's diminutive wife; she was 4'-9" tall, and he called her "my little tiger". Tony was approximately 5'-6" tall.
- Paul did not remember whether Heinsbergen named the warrior.
- The mural was painted on panels in Heinsbergen's Shop in Los Angeles, Then put in place by paper hangers from a high scaffold.

Most guests feel that the warrior is biblical King Saul, (note the sword at his right hand), with his son David the attending musician. I prefer to think that the musician is Orpheus, a legendary music-maker of Greek mythology, and namesake of the Orpheum Theatre. Thereby hangs a tale.

Ron Nelson, Architect

Calliope

Paul and Mrs Merrick,

Gabriel ?

3 Merrick Children

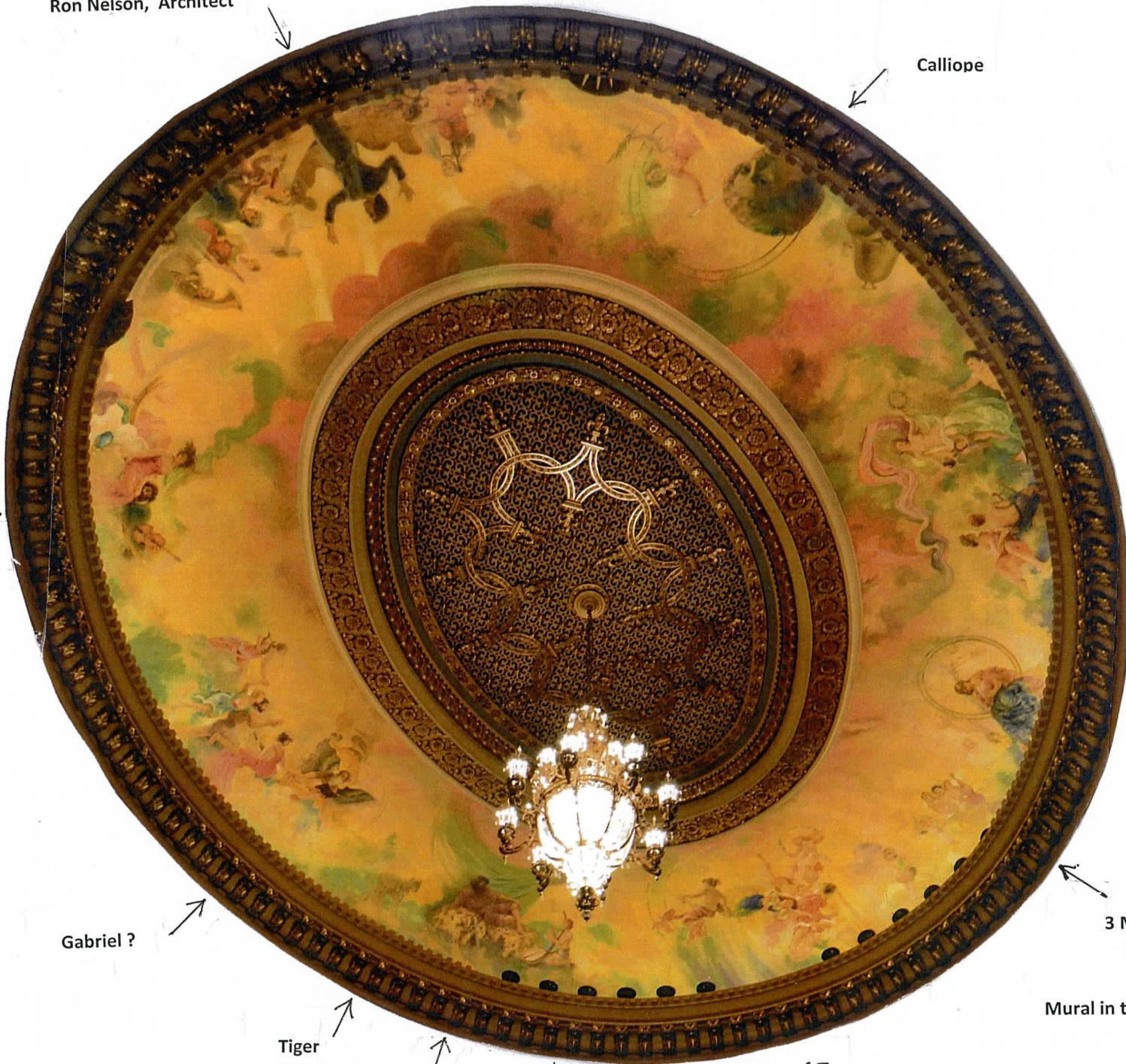
Mural in the Dome

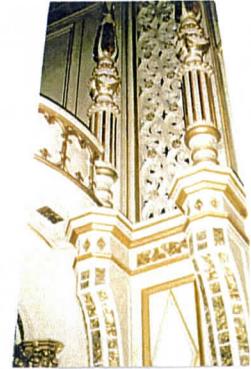
Tiger

Warrior

Orpheus

45





A Mediterranean Salad of Eclectic Design



Taken from Edward Tripp's *Meridian Handbook of Classical Mythology*, I repeat this short story to the class;

Orpheus was a minstrel of Thrace, born of King Oeagrus, (or possibly Apollo), and the Muse Calliope, who gave her son the gift of music. He performed with such musical skill that he charmed all who heard him play. It was said that trees would come to his command, giving shade, and that savage beasts and warriors would be calm while he performed. Orpheus loved and married the Naiad nymph, Eurydice, and was deeply saddened when she died from snakebite, a misfortune that befell her while she was fleeing an amorous seducer named Aristaeus. Orpheus attempted to bring Eurydice back from the dead, entered the underworld at Taenarum, descended a long stairway, and played his lyre with such feeling that even the cold hearts of Hades and Persephone were softened. They agreed to let Eurydice go, on condition that Orpheus not look at her until they reached home. Orpheus led the way back up the stairway, and at the top, in panic lest she was not following, he looked back and she disappeared forever.

Disconsolate and wandering, Orpheus soon met his death when he encountered some Ciconian women, (maenads), who were throwing a wild and raging party on a mountain. They fell upon him, tore him to pieces, and scattered his remains about the mountain. Tripp says that the women may have been inflamed by

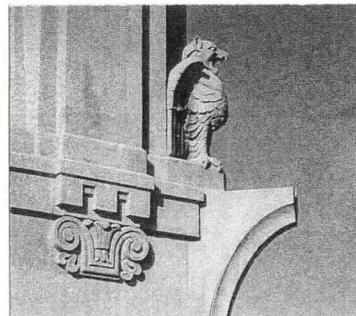
Dionysius, who was offended that Orpheus had failed to sacrifice properly; that they may have been annoyed that Orpheus was faithful to Eurydice even after her death when he became the first man to love boys; or that each woman wanted him for herself. In any case the Muses collected and buried Orpheus' scattered body, and the head and possibly the lyre floated down the river Hebrus and out to sea, washing up on the island of Lesbos. There the Lesbians took pity, buried the head and the lyre, and were rewarded for their kindness by the gift of music.

From early times music and magic have been closely related in Greek art and culture. Is the magic power of music still alive ? In 400 BC, I presume that no one would attend a concert unless Calliope and Orpheus were in the house. Is it still within their power to fill 2700 seats in a crowded space, pick our pockets, and lift the dome as we cheer, and beat our hands, paying noisy respects to the composer, musicians, and conductor ?

Pegasus, carved in stone high on the walls of Toronto's Royal York Hotel, looks sad. His eyes are wistful, downcast, gazing into a void. The eagle below seems to be angry at the CN Tower. Look closer. The bird has blunt fangs, and big round ears. It's a bat! Why is it screaming? Is the tower really that offensive; or were Pegasus and the bat promised perches on the world's tallest minaret?

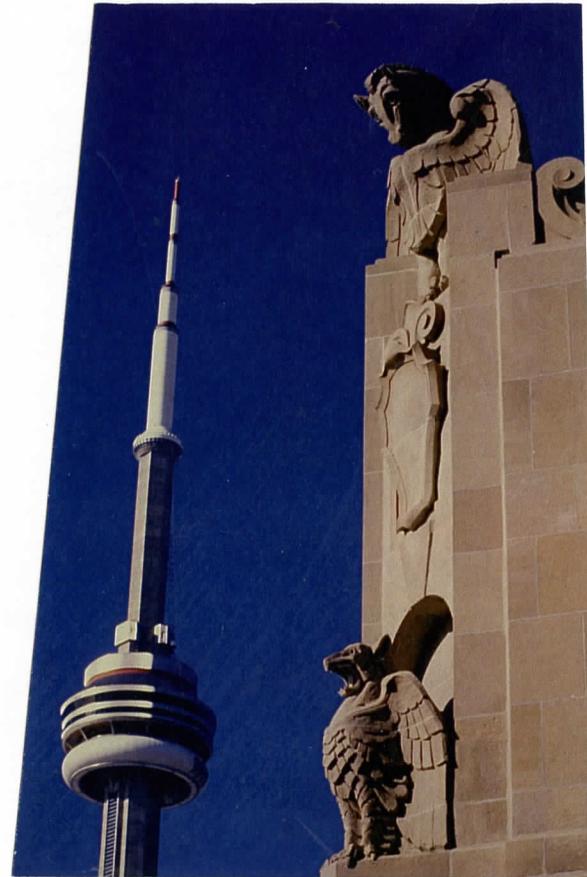
Maybe this bird was the legendary bat out of hell, a visitor to Toronto in 1929 that wants us to know that after a good night's sleep in the new hotel, he or she did not want to go home.

To hell and back is a long trip in search of meaning. Why turn over every stone ornament looking for truth on the backside? Possibly the hotel manager and the architect ignored the stone carver who kept his mouth shut, and his tongue in his cheek, while at his work.



PEGASUS AND THE BAT

Arthur Allen 1992



The **UNICORN AND THE PHOENIX** are carved in limestone on the walls of the Bessborough Hotel,(the 'Bess') in Saskatoon. The stone is Tyndall limestone, from Gillis Quarries in Manitoba. In Saskatoon the daily newspaper is called The Star-Phoenix, and a dry land Canadian Navy Training Station is called HMCS Unicorn.



BACCHUS, Roman God of wine, revelry and gorging overlooks the North Saskatchewan River from a wide patio at The MacDonald Hotel, in Edmonton. It is equipped with dining tables in fine weather. The main wall above the patio is stone clad, with tall stone clad columns topped with capitals that show Ionic origins. Bacchus, Dionysius in Greece, appears to be barffing.



HERMES AND THE TURKEYS

Arthur Allen 1983

Hermes, (Mercury when in Rome) , was a very busy god. In his winged helmet and sandals he was best known as the herald and messenger of the gods. He was also god of manual skill, commerce, trade and navigation, and oratory and eloquence; possibly a commercial salesman in those capacities. Hermes was a guide appointed to assist dead souls in their journey through the underworld, and on rare occasions, back again. For protection on those journeys, (after he had reached manhood) he carried the caduceus, a herald's wand given to him by his father, Zeus. When Hermes placed the wand between two fighting snakes, they made peace, and twined themselves up the shaft.

In Vancouver, the carved head of Hermes above the main entry to the Fairmont Hotel Vancouver surprised me at first, because I could see no connection between Hermes' work and the hotel business. My question was answered when I read that he also guided travelers through this world, and was responsible for their safety on all journeys.



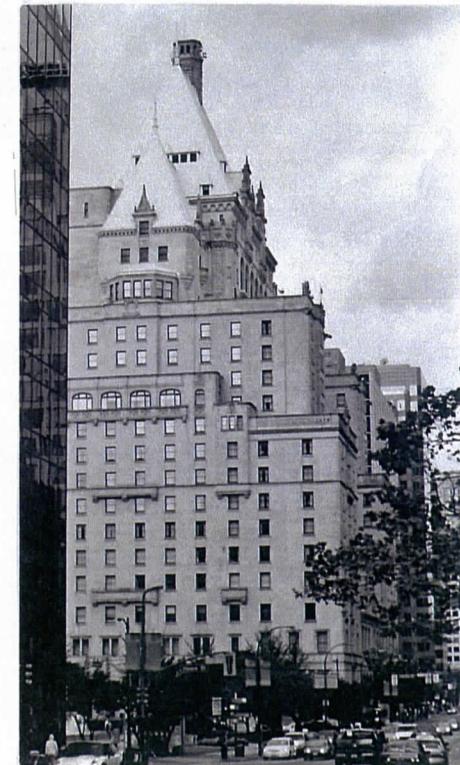
Hotel Vancouver # 2 1916



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Hotel Vancouver # 1 1888



Hotel Vancouver # 3 1939

The present Vancouver Hotel, at Georgia and Burrard Streets, is the third large railway hotel in the city. The first was an undistinguished building, at the corner of Georgia and Granville. The second was a large and magnificent Italianate structure at the same location. It had been used as a repatriation centre for returning soldiers after World War 2, and had been demolished shortly before I first came to Vancouver in 1953. Hotel # 2 was notable for ornament, including larger-than-life heads of moose and bison high on the walls. It also featured trellised roof gardens, and a lavish main floor lobby, known as "Peacock Alley", where citizens would gather to watch promenading celebrities and other notable guests.



Peacock Alley

Since 1399, the green chateau roof of the hotel has been a notable feature in Vancouver. Close-up the bulky building is not graceful, and its uniformly stone-grey walls do not show the extent of carved ornamentation with clarity. In spite of that fact, the hotel is remarkable for the variety and very high quality of its stone-carved ornaments.



Photo 1970s

Based on the ancient principle that all openings in the building envelope must be protected against entry of evil spirits. Ornaments of magic intent can be found at entry doorways, windows, chimneys; at corners and cornices; and at balconies and other projections high on the walls. Chimney pots and balconies show some intricate carved stonework of geometric pattern. Windows and arches display a wide variety of mythical and natural figures; gryphons, human faces, dragons, aboriginal chieftains, flying horses (Pegasus), and a variety of floral and geometric friezes and moldings. Animal and mythical creatures, and hybrids of the two, are prominent at upper corners and cornices of the building. Grizzly bears, cougars, winged goats, and rams, project from corners and below cornices. They look like gargoyles, but they do not spill water, and are related to grotesques of medieval invention.



Grotesques

The east entry has no ornamentation, an unusual fact for this building. The main north entry, on Georgia Street, is guarded by Hermes, god of travelers. In that same location there is a large coat of arms of British Columbia, and a panorama of steamships, lighthouses, and railway trains, depicting the transport enterprise that created the hotel. Farther west on the north wall there is a coat of arms of the City of Vancouver, flanked by what appear to be two dragons. The arms do not show a totem pole, which replaced the Caduceus in 1969. The City motto was also revised, to read; "By Sea, Land, and Air We Prosper".



Ornaments on the Hotel Vancouver were hand-carved by two crews of traveling artisans, one from Turkey, one from Scotland. I like to think that they got along well, and that the excellence of the work shows that mutual respect, and possibly genial competition, prevailed in the stone-yard. For example, there are two striking male faces on the north wall, not far above sidewalk level. One is smiling and the other has a magnificent mustache. I am convinced that they are portraits, or self-portraits, of the master-carvers, one Turkish, one Scottish.



Scot and Turk Carvers ?



With all the mythological and natural interest of the hotel ornaments, and the obvious dexterity of the carvers, there appears to be one symbolic error, or at least a mystery, in the ornamental pantheon of the Vancouver Hotel. Above the west entry, on Burrard Street, there are two panels depicting domestic turkeys, nicely carved in stone, not in roasted flesh. I thought at first that they were ruffed grouse.

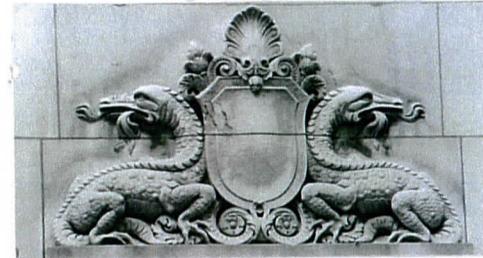
However, they appear to be eating corn, and with their combs and wattles below their beaks they are definitely turkeys, and out of place among the natural and mythical creatures on the walls of the hotel.



I know of no ancient symbolism connected with these barnyard birds, and wonder if the architect, and/or a capricious stone-carver, put tongue-in-cheek and teased the gods with frivolous ornaments. One friend believes that they are a deliberate mistake, placed by tradition on the right-hand side, (the dexter side), of the building to show the gods that man does not presume to make perfect buildings. If that is correct, I still wonder why turkeys were chosen ? I do know that the national bird of France is the rooster, and that in 1784 Benjamin Franklin nominated the turkey as an emblem appropriate to an industrious and business-like America.

At first reading, I believed that the God of Travelers would be essential to taking care of any hotel business, in ancient Greece and in our own time. Unfortunately curiosity ruined that nice idea; further reading has revealed that Hermes, like some other classical characters, enjoyed a conflict of interest in his work; he was also assigned to taking care of thieves.

Gryphons



Dragons

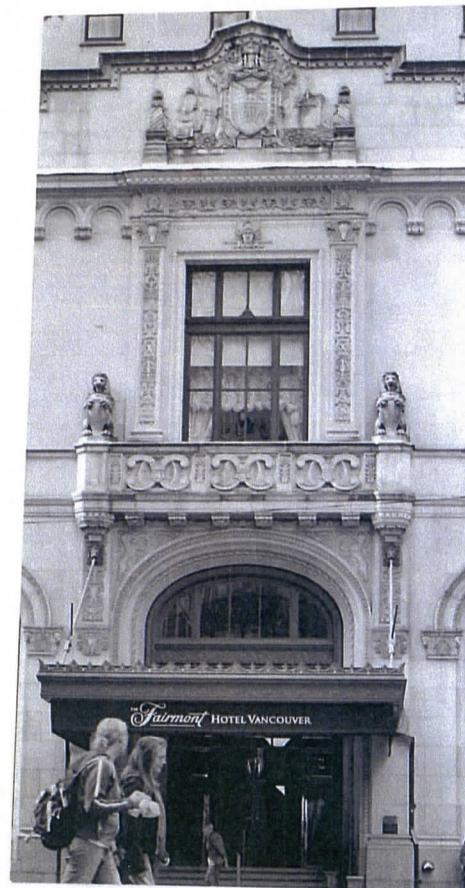


Winged Horses

Hotel #3 was built from 1928 to 1939 as a joint venture of the Canadian National and Canadian Pacific Railway Companies. Its construction was delayed

during the Great Depression, but was rushed to completion in time for the royal visit of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, in 1939. The building was designed by architects Archibald and Schofield, based on the French chateau style of Canadian railway hotels. In 1962 Canadian National bought out Canadian Pacific interests, and contracted management to Hilton Hotels until 1983. Canadian National resumed management until 1988, when Canadian Pacific Hotels took over ownership and operation and began partial restoration, renovations, and cleaning of exterior stone walls

I conclude with a note of thanks to the Vancouver Hotel; it is an interesting place. In 1989, the # 3 Hotel celebrated its 50th anniversary. I was privileged to conduct architectural tours of the building for guests, visitors, staff, and media. I was made an honorary member of the hotel staff, and enjoyed talking with long-time personnel who had stories of their own to tell. Staff were intrigued by the turkeys, but were silent on their origins. Carving was usually done in a stacked and littered stone yard; it's tempting to think about a smiling carver in a back corner, at work with tongue protruding, or in his cheek.



The "Roof", nightclub,
and Lobby, 1940s +-



POSEIDON AND THE PELICAN

Arthur Allen 1984



East Elevation

In 1984, when I began architectural lectures and walking tours from the Hotel Vancouver, classes were organized by the Department of Continuing Education of the University of British Columbia. I was sharing this work with Michael Lytton and David Conn, who spoke on heritage conservation and industrial architecture respectively.

In our Sunday morning meetings one woman in the class spoke with such authority that we quickly invited her to be our assistant instructor, which she was pleased to do. Her name was Joan McCarter, and I conferred with her on architectural matters in Vancouver. She was the daughter of J. Y. McCarter, partner in the original firm, McCarter and Nairne, Architects and Engineers. Joan had a personal and wide knowledge of her father's career and she was of great assistance with tales of personalities and the business of architecture prior to 1950. That was before I became an architect, and found interest in its history.

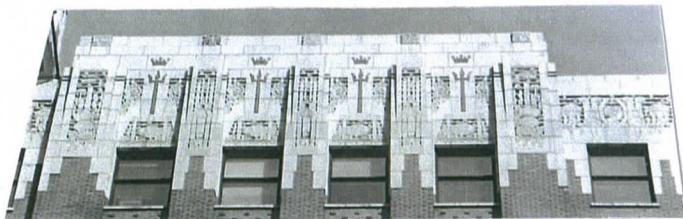
The architecture of McCarter and Nairne, one of the longest-lasting and highly productive firms of British Columbia, will need a book of its own to do it justice. My present interest in its work centres on the Medical Dental Building, (now demolished), and the Marine Building, both well-known and popular works of Art Deco architecture. The firm's 1936 Annex to the Post Office, at Granville and Hastings, is also delightful in Art Deco form and detail. McCarter and Nairne also designed the B.C. Electric Showroom, (later known as Jermaine's Store), at Granville and Dunsmuir.

Vancouver's Marine Building is widely known as an excellent example of the Art Deco style, a brilliant, short-lived movement in architecture and design that appeared at the "Exposition des Arts Decoratifs", in Paris, in 1925. In North America, Art Deco made a very strong impression in Florida and California, and it left a

few examples of its spirit in Canada. McCarter and Nairne set up their practice in Vancouver in 1920, continued work until 1983, and according to Don Luxton, heritage wizard, were strongly influenced by the Art Deco movement. Joan McCarter tells me that her father did not go to Paris in 1925, but was immediately attracted to the new style.

By 1927-28 McCarter and Nairne were designing and building the Medical Dental and Marine Buildings. Each had generous elements of ancient symbolic ornament, and at the Marine Building there are several decorative motifs based on marine life native to British Columbia. According to Joan, the success of her father's firm in decorative work was based on the talents of two exceptional designer/draftsmen, "Doc" Watson, and "Cheerio" Young, both long time employees of the firm.

I do not propose a complete listing and description of the many ornaments of the Marine Building. I recommend a visit on a sunny day, to examine the exterior walls and the entry lobby, a stunning and unusual space. The ornaments of greatest interest to me are;



Poseidon

High on three corners of the upper tower of the building, at the 17th floor, there are heads of Poseidon, god of the sea and fresh waters, of earthquakes, and of horses. In the McCarter, Nairne offices, these ornamental heads were always referred to as "King Neptune", but I generally follow Greek terminology. Poseidon was a rough tempered god, his displeasure would be disastrous to marine enterprise, and to buildings. His golden trident appears often on the building.



Poseidon

The Pelican The large bird at the north-east corner of the 10th floor, according to Joan McCarter, is a pelican, not a thunderbird. A symbol of protection in medieval times, the pelican was said to be such a good mother that she would peck her breast if necessary, and feed the young with her own blood. The pelican is the emblem of the Canada Life Assurance Company. In 1985, the annual report of that company advised employees to emulate the spirit of the pelican in dealing with clients. Throughout its life the Marine Building has provided office space for numerous marine insurance companies. I believe that in 1928, Poseidon and the pelican were deliberately selected as symbols appropriate to marine enterprise, especially insurance



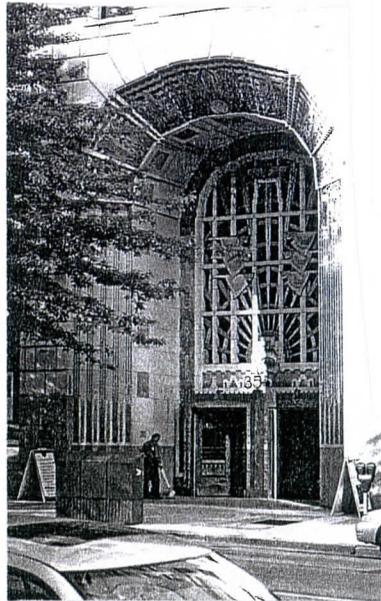
Pelican



Marine Life Delicate ornament appears in bands, at parapets, and at the entry archway. Figures include sea-ferns, (some in fiddlehead form common to Art Deco work), sea horses, various sea plants, wave-line symbols, Canada geese in flight, ospreys, and small flat fish (sunfish) from a lake near Victoria. Small bronze creatures from the signs of the Zodiac appear on trim at the entry doors, and a flight of geese flies into the rays of the sun above the doorways.



Pictographs A pictorial history of transportation is illustrated by glazed panels in the arching form of the main entry vault. The ships of Captains Cook, Vancouver and Quadra; the first coastal steamer (the Beaver of the Hudson's Bay Company); railway locomotives, dirigibles, and early airplanes are all included.



Entry Arch

Entry Lobby

The lobby features bronze trim at the original revolving doors, and wonderfully ornate bronze doors at elevators. Elevator cabs are finished with protected marquetry, exotic wood veneers in Art Deco design. All woods used were found within the British Empire. Walls of the lobby are of glazed brown tile, some depicting Norse ships at sea. The floor of the lobby, originally of battleship linoleum and redone in terrazzo, shows the signs of the Zodiac

The lobby is a two storey space, with an open mezzanine floor and a black iron ornamental railing. The high space is lighted from the prows of sailing ships, cast and projected from the walls near the ceiling. The projections, the tapering walls, and the beautifully ornamented and colored ceiling leave the impression of the captain's quarters in a high galleon. A leaded glass false window fills the far end of the lobby, opposite the entry.

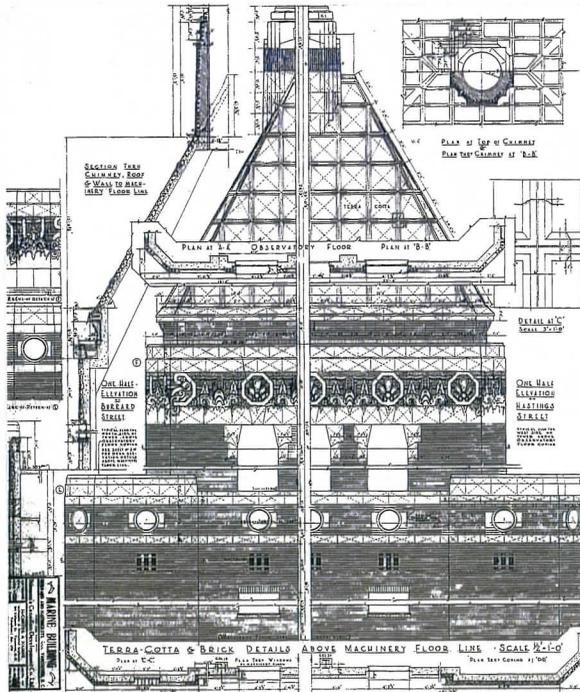


Lobby and Elevator Doors

The Marine Building is clad in textured brown brick, with all figures, panels, and friezes made of softly colored terra-cotta; molded clay, fired and glazed like pottery, and anchored in place with hidden steel ties. The ornaments were sketched by Doc Watson and Cheerio Young, and sculpted, fired, and glazed in California by a firm, Gladding, McBean. That firm is still at work, (in Lincoln, California), and produces mainly clay pipe and fittings. Its art and ornament division continues to work, and is indispensable to the preservation of terra-cotta installations, a favorite of the Art Deco movement. In 2005 Gladding, McBean were working on repairs to Louis Sullivan's Carson, Pirie, Scott Building, in Chicago.



Reflections



When Joan McCarter and I first discussed the Marine Building, Joan challenged me to find a mistake in the lobby design. I looked hard, but gave in; Joan grinned and told me of one glazed wall tile, on the north wall. It was a typical brown tile, showing a Viking ship upside down, and placed according to ancient custom to appease the Gods by avoiding the creation of a perfect building. Joan said, “trump that”! A short time later I did, and asked if she could find a highly inappropriate ornament in the lobby, a symbol of piracy, not of honest marine commerce. It is the skull and crossed bones of the Jolly Roger. To my knowledge Joan and I are the only people who know of its location.

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City of Vancouver Archives

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Stone Carver

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Province of Alberta began the heritage restoration of McDougall School, in downtown Calgary. The work was initiated by Peter Lougheed, then premier of the province. Lougheed had attended school at McDougall, and as a contribution to heritage conservation promoted the restoration of the building and adaptation to use as office and display space for provincial government agencies.

The building remains a significant landmark of Calgary's architectural history. It is an attractive example of eclectic design, with excellent traditional stone detailing and carved ornament. The columns and capitals show neo-classical influence, but are not exact replicas of Greek or Roman work. Arches are round, and with carvings at the spring points, show a Romanesque touch. The original stone was local sandstone, from quarries west of Calgary, that was widely used on the city's early buildings.

I became curious when I read about the replacement of carved capitals on the external columns of the building. In spite of Calgarians' pride about their clean air, there has been for many years an acid rain problem in Calgary. Natural gas, although it does burn cleanly compared to coal and oil leaves some acidic residue on buildings and ornaments, which attacks and erodes the stone under wet conditions. Deterioration is slow in Calgary's dry climate, but in time the damage is done. Sandstone is not the most durable building stone, and the delicate features of the original capitals had been eroded and washed away.

Replacement of the capitals was contracted to an experienced stone carver, Tony Rogac, originally from Wales and trained in the stone-works of England. In the 1980s he came to Canada to see if he could find work and make a permanent home for his wife Linda and 2 daughters. He settled on a grassy hillside near Abbotsford, B.C., and there undertook the carving of new stone capitals and other ornaments for the McDougall School project. When I heard of his work and intentions, I visited him in Abbotsford, and talked with him on a number of visits while the work was in progress. I knew about stone detailing and construction in general, but Tony provided a brief education in the art of stone carving.

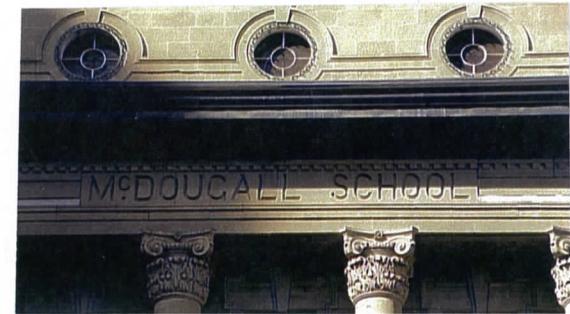
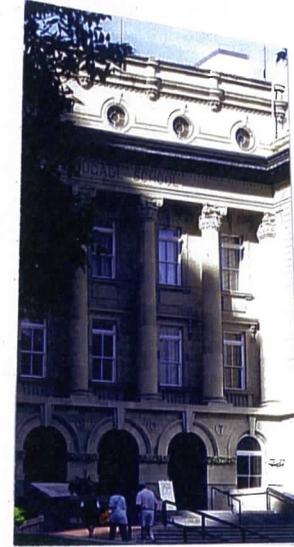
Some of the rough cutting of stone blocks was done with machine tools, but the final shaping was all hand work. I watched him patiently chipping and shaping the stone, and marveled at his skill in this ancient craft. The precise measurement and repetition of the complex, interweaving floral symbols of the capitals was most impressive. When the capitals and a few other stone objects were finished, they were shipped to Calgary and erected on the restored building.

Tony made a success of his career, and became well known in Western Canada and the United States. One of his projects was a tall stone spire for a church in a mid-west state. Tony has recently sold the business, but lives nearby and still works on projects of special interest.

For information on his work, look for Anthony Rogac, stone-carver, Abbotsford, B.C..



New Ornament on McDougall School
Calgary AB Built 1908 Restored 1987



Tony Rogac in his Abbotsford Shop

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