

2010 Conference Report
MARION DEAN ROSS/PACIFIC NORTHWEST CHAPTER
SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIANS

ANNUAL CONFERENCE
KELOWNA, BRITISH COLUMBIA
OCT. 15-17, 2010

by Elisabeth Walton Potter

The 2010 annual chapter conference was held October 15-17 in Kelowna, a lakeshore city of 120,000 that is the agricultural and recreational hub of British Columbia's scenic Central Okanagan Valley. In brilliant open weather, a congenial group of just over thirty registrants gathered from all parts of the region to hear papers, participate in a panel discussion, and enjoy walking and bus tours organized around the theme, "Small Cities: Balancing Pasts and Futures in the Pacific Northwest." Past chapter president Martin Segger, University of Victoria, co-chaired the conference committee with regional delegate Hal Kalman of Vancouver. Hussein Keshani, University of British Columbia, Okanagan Department of Art History and Visual Culture, directed local arrangements with the support of Lorri Dauncey, Grants Manager for the Central Okanagan Heritage Society, and Larry Foster, President, Heritage B.C. and former Long Range Planning Manager for the City of Kelowna.

Opening Reception and Keynote Address

The conference was formally opened by President Phillip Mead during an afternoon reception in the sunlit forecourt of the Rotary Centre for the Arts, an expanded visual and performing arts facility adapted from the former Growers' Supply warehouse by Hotson Bakker Architects of Vancouver. Please see Grant Hildebrand's accompanying commentary (coming to the blog soon) on the renovated building opened in 2002.

Martin Segger took the podium to acknowledge the support of his co-chair, Harold Kalman, whose consulting firm, Commonwealth Historic Resources Management Ltd., in the late 1990s, helped the City identify new uses for its legacy in historic industrial buildings. City councilor Michele Rule was introduced to welcome conferees on behalf of Kelowna Mayor Sharon Shepherd.

Helen Cain, Planner for the City of Victoria, presented the keynote address. She outlined the comprehensive approach to heritage planning that is underway in the Provincial capital. Ms. Cain described how visioning exercises conducted in the neighborhoods identified community values that, in turn, informed policies incorporated into a theme-based, thirty-year, long-range plan. Ultimately, she said, the aim is to integrate Victoria's heritage planning goals with a sustainability plan for the natural environment.

Walking Tour of the Cultural District

Kelowna's historic tree fruit industry took shape between 1904 and 1914 as thousands of acres of settlement-era ranchland were transformed into irrigated orchards. Sternwheelers of the Canadian Pacific Railway docked at the new east-shore town site to transfer area produce to a spur line at the head of Okanagan Lake. Since the 1970s, local agriculture has been markedly diversified by vineyards.

The city's industrial district, once dense with packing houses, warehouses, and cold storage facilities, fell into decline in the post war era. In the 1960s, an extensive fire destroyed a large part of the precinct, leaving it open to redevelopment. By the turn of the 21st century, the City had begun to acquire parcels occupied by the remaining industrial buildings and was encouraged to find partners to participate in rehabilitating and managing the disused buildings as heritage properties adapted for new uses. Like the evolved agricultural landscape that is Kelowna's backdrop, the old industrial area achieved a new aspect, that of a cultural district.

Personnel of City Planning and Parks agencies and the Kelowna Museum Society guided conferees on a walking tour of the cultural district. Included in the tour were the Okanagan Heritage Museum, the shorefront Stuart Park, the Library and Parkade, and the Art Gallery. The pedestrian-friendly district is liberally provided with public art, the notable example of which is the Art Walk, a grape-vine and mosaic-accented pedestrian way that links the precinct's cultural and civic buildings.

At the end of the tour, conferees were treated to a view of the interior of the newly refurbished City-owned Laurel Packing House of 1917, a model of the public-private partnership concept established by the City and the non-profit Museum Society. With partial public funding, the Museum Society carried out the latest renovation to display the industrial building's character-defining features. The building will be maintained as a rentable community space, and additional revenue will be generated by the retail shops of museum enterprises it houses, the B.C. Orchard Industry Museum and the B.C. Wine Industry Museum.

Scholarly Papers and Panel Discussion

The University of British Columbia's Okanagan campus, opened in 2005 on the North Kelowna site initially developed by Okanagan University College, was the setting of Saturday's program sponsored by the Faculty of Creative and Critical Studies. Presenters of scholarly papers included Thaisa Way, whose topic was Seattle's Gas Works Park as an example of containing the memory of industrial sites in the urban landscape; Patience Stuart, who spoke on adaptive reuse of Portland's industrial warehouses; and Lynette Felber, who discussed vernacular and bungalow housing for rural school teachers in the West. Wendy McClure described Sandpoint, Idaho as a case study for preserving historic railroad towns in the era of modern tourism. Bryan Orthel presented "Memory in the Pasture," the story of a central open space in Lexington, Kentucky to which the community has attached cultural significance. Ms. Stuart and Mr. Orthel were recipients of the Chapter's Wendell Lovett Awards, travel stipends given to younger scholars whose research papers have been selected for presentation at the annual conference.

Following a buffet luncheon and the annual general Chapter meeting in the Arts Building Atrium, conferees toured the concrete and glass Arts and Science II, one of the buildings recently erected by UBC as part of an ongoing campus expansion. The new energy-efficient, low-maintenance campus facilities are heated and cooled on a controlled geothermal cycle. The Arts and Science Building has been recognized for long-term environmental sustainability. Willy Toubert, staff engineer with Stuart Olsen Construction Co., led conferees through the mechanical room and explained how radiant heat stored in the insulated pre-cast concrete wall panels is balanced by cool air drawn from wind towers.

In the afternoon, Larry Foster, President, Heritage B.C., moderated a panel discussion on balancing heritage values with long range planning. Panelists included Helen Cain, Planner, City of Victoria; Lorri Dauncey, Central Okanagan Heritage Society; and Robert Hobson, Planner, City of Kelowna.. The panel was rounded out by Signe Bagh, City of Kelowna; Gordon Hartley, Architect; and Chad Paul, representing

West Bank First Nations. The panelists' opening statements, representing a variety of perspectives, drew spirited participation from the audience during the concluding question and answer period.

Sunday Bus Tour of Heritage Sites

Cheered by the dawn of another fine-weather day, conferees set off Sunday morning from the Delta Grand Okanagan Hotel by motor coach. Tour guide Peter Chataway, local architect and preservationist, provided an engaging narrative about the original Kelowna settlement area on the modern city's southern outskirts. The group visited the Gothic Revival-style Benvoulin Church of 1892 for which a discrete and compatible annex had been added recently to accommodate social functions.

The compelling story of Father Charles Marie Pandosy, O.M.I. (Oblates of Mary Immaculate), who was dispatched from Washington Territory to establish a Roman Catholic mission in 1859, was revealed at the Pandosy Mission Provincial Heritage Site. Several of the mission's original log buildings, including the chapel, brothers' house, and mission barn, stand on the site maintained by the Okanagan Historical Society. Once encompassing as many as 2,000 acres of ranch and farm land, the Pandosy Mission represents the beginning of European settlement and the foundation of agriculture in the Central Okanagan Valley.

The coach crossed the Okanagan Lake Floating Bridge to West Kelowna for three additional stops. At the Gellatly Nut Farm, a Regional Park maintained as a working orchard by the non-profit Gellatly Nut Farm Society, conferees inspected several historic log buildings undergoing restoration and sampled the walnuts, hazelnuts, and chestnuts available for sale at the site. The farm, established around 1905, is a fixture of present-day agri-tourism, as are the Quail's Gate Winery and Mission Hill Winery. The latter is known for its impressive estate house and panoramic view of the valley from a hilltop site. At Quail's Gate Winery, conferees were treated to a plated luncheon in the sunny dining room of Old Vines, the winery's restaurant, where the friendly sommelier poured an excellent 2008 Chardonnay and an estate Pinot Noir. The ambiance, fine fare, and geniality that characterized the luncheon made an especially pleasurable finale to the rewarding 2010 annual conference.