



ROCKLAND NEIGHBOURHOOD ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 5276, Station B, Victoria BC, V8R 6N4

Winter 2013 Newsletter

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Please share a copy of the RNA Newsletter with a neighbour.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

by Janet Simpson

This fall, your board members have been focusing their efforts on several land use issues – nothing really new about that! As many of you know, the City is looking at changes to bylaws regarding things like the height of retaining walls. We may be spared the 10-foot pile of rocks topped by decks and swimming pools that border some of our more tasteful landscaping. However, a 4-foot height limit on retaining walls will not necessarily afford much privacy if it's on the upslope and your privacy fence can be only 6 feet high. The City is also looking at increasing the required amount of "soft landscaping" – which definitely fits in with the Rockland Plan's objective of preserving green space.

We have also had to become knowledgeable about "Panhandle Regulations," as there are plans afoot for several panhandle properties in the neighbourhood. Basically, a panhandle lot means a lot that has less than 10% of its perimeter adjoining a street. In order to protect privacy, there are significant restrictions regarding development on these properties. For example, floor area is limited to 3013 square feet, height is limited to 1 storey, site coverage is

limited to 25%, and walls with windows must be set back 24 feet from the property line. It is always interesting, however, to witness attempts to ignore these regulations – your land use committee is ever vigilant.

I'm sure many of you have seen the amazing restoration work being done on the Italianate house that was moved from the corner of Richmond and Oak Bay Avenue to Pemberton Road, just south of Fort Street. We worry, however, about what will replace it. Abstract Development's first proposal was for a 3-storey 12 unit condominium. Its second was for a 4-storey 24 unit condominium. Its latest is for 5 storeys and 28 units.



House moved from Richmond Road to Pemberton - and restored

WOODLAND GARDEN REPORT

In mid-October, students from Central Middle School came out to help us in the garden again! Shelley Brown from Parks organizes this, and we really appreciate all the help and enthusiasm they bring! This time they did a lot of weeding and cleanup, and they're going to spend a rainy day painting lettering on rocks to help identify the woodland plants.

ANSWERS AND MORE QUESTIONS



When we were digging a hole to plant a new flowering red currant, we discovered an artifact! An old 10-ounce 7up bottle we're willing to auction off to the highest bidder!

JOIN US ON FACEBOOK

To spur interest in the activities of the Rockland Neighbourhood Association and to attract new members, we have established a page on Facebook.

Check out <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Rockland-Neighbourhood-Association/444293285610322> and "Like" us to receive future updates.



On November 6, 2013 Nick Russell, local historian and author, gave a most interesting lecture to Rockland Neighbourhood Association members. The lecture was also open to residents of adjacent communities.

Entitled "A Birds Eye View of Victoria and the Mystery of Annie Ross," this included the results of his research since this remarkable work of art was discovered in the BC archives. The bird's-eye view was amazingly detailed and several buildings can be identified with ease. One quirk of Annie's work was that she did not show the rear view of buildings, preferring to paint the front side, effectively reversing what the eye could see. Not much is known about Annie Ross although it is acknowledged that she was an accomplished artist. The art is 4 x 6 feet and as it is in watercolour, cannot be exposed to light for fear of fading. It would be wonderful if the Archives would produce a copy so that the public could witness it in its full size. The slides do not do it justice.

Nick has undertaken detailed research in the past two years but every time he finds an answer, there are more questions waiting. One example is the newspaper article on her funeral that notes that architect J.C.M. Keith, best known for the design of Christ Church Cathedral, was a pallbearer. How were they connected?

We were also educated on several other bird's-eye views from all over the world, some made from balloons and other modes of transport.

We were thrilled to have a descendant of Annie Ross in attendance.

WANTED DEAD OR ALIVE



WATCH OUT FOR THIS CRITTER ON GARRY OAKS

The insect is a long horn beetle, *Strophiona laeta* which we have been observing on a few Garry Oaks in the city. Members of the family *Cerambycidae* are known to live on dead and dying wood but there are some reports of feeding on living wood. In essence, not much is known about these critters in relation to Garry Oaks.

They are very difficult to notice while a tree is standing but the exit hole in the middle picture with the toonie for size comparison is what one would look for. That and a dead beetle adult or two. Of course once a damaged tree or limb is removed the galleries become very evident along with the borer larvae.

We have not seen many trees yet in the city but we feel that it warrants reporting when observed.

Please contact Brooke Daitl <BDaitl@victoria.ca> if you see any signs of this critter.

THE “DON’T CARE” AWARDS

By Helen Edwards (with notes from anonymous RNA members whom we thank for their input)

On September 17, 2013, the *Times Colonist* announced, “a five-bedroom contemporary Rockland house was honoured six times at the 2013 Construction Achievements and Renovations of Excellence Awards.” The residence, named The Dwell on Despard Avenue, won the Project of the Year Award in addition to Gold Awards for Best Outdoor Living Space over \$100,000, Best Contemporary Kitchen 250-300 square feet, Best Master Suite over 500 square feet, Best Media Room and Best Interior – Residential over 5,000 square feet.

The CARE awards are lauded as a “celebration of professionalism, innovative design and sustainability.” The developer’s website describes notes “this astounding new contemporary home has stunning architectural details: floating staircase, great room with roll-away doors that open to deluxe infinity pool and hot tub, heated concrete floors, full home automation, hidden theater room, large roof-top deck complete with wet bar. Over 5000 square feet of luxurious living space and 2000+ square feet of patio/deck areas 5 bedrooms, 6 bathrooms, in-law/nanny areas on a 9000 square foot south facing lot. The home is bright, airy and has cutting-edge design offering innovative modern resort style living.”

Where there once was a vintage single-family dwelling, there are now two residences, including the award-winning Dwell at 1535 Despard. Perhaps the development and real estate communities are celebrating this development, but the Rockland neighbourhood is anything but enthusiastic.

President Janet Simpson sent a letter to the *Times-Colonist*, incidentally one of the sponsors of the CARE awards; it was not printed. When it was submitted to the *Victoria News*, the result was different. The letter appeared in the October 9, 2013 edition as the lead letter on page A9.

In the letter, Janet pointed out “this residence and the ‘semi-detached’ adjoining residence caused significant disruption to the ambiance and streetscape of the neighbourhood.” Neighbours were quick to point out just how much this project did not fit the Rockland neighbourhood. In fact, one RNA member said that the award should be called a “Don’t Care” award. The obvious lack of consideration of neighbourhood sensibilities would back this idea up. That the City has little control over behemoths such as this is lamentable. However, the RNA is encouraged by the ruling that rooftop decks that infringe on neighbours’ privacy are no longer permitted. Unfortunately, it is too late for those



The Dwell on Despard - two cars live here.

affected by this construction.

Another concern with this project was the clearing of mature trees and the green privacy screening. This included some trees bordering on neighbours’ properties. It is the opinion of several neighbours that the contemporary modern design is out of place in this neighbourhood of traditional design styled houses. Also the two houses are placed so close to each other that they overwhelm the lot. Their extreme height dwarfs those beside them and imposes their presence upon them.

A major concern is that the 3rd floor living and deck areas of house look down upon and invade the privacy and private areas of the houses and their yards and gardens beside and behind it. Since the construction of these 2 houses, four residences on Warren Gardens have experienced increased water in their yards. All of them have had to put in additional drainage – at their expense.

This house was built with complete inconsideration to how it and its landscape design would have considerable negative effects upon the immediate neighbours and



Two residences replace one with corresponding loss of greenspace

neighbourhood. There would appear to be a complete lack of and disregard for the more positive action of a consultative process with neighbours, something that should be a requirement in the City of Victoria's approach to new residential construction.

During the months the house was being built, the City of Victoria demonstrated little evidence of supporting and/or defending the interests of the resident neighbours. The builders showed a complete lack of care and disregard for the neighbouring house' boulevards that, while the house was being built, were more or less destroyed making the immediate area looking like a waste land. The only action that eventually remedied the situation was done because of the prodding of the neighbours to get the city to do something. The sloping lie of the land in the rear yard was raised an extraordinary amount allowing those in the new houses to peer down into adjacent properties. Due to the increased elevation and outdoor speakers, residents on both sides of Warren Gardens can hear the music from these houses. In the summers, they have not been able to enjoy their yards. At times, even with the windows closed, the music can be heard inside. These houses have been designed for entertaining. Consequently, they have become party houses in a quiet residential neighbourhood.

As a result of the disruptive nature of this development, neighbouring owners are searching for some quick means to reestablish and recreate the privacy they have lost. In reality, there are no truly quick means and probably the only answer is to plant trees that will grow tall enough to block the imposing views, though they will take time to establish themselves and grow tall enough to do so. This likely will cause an unsatisfactory outcome of having to plant tall types of trees, for example, Lombardy poplars, London plane trees, etc. that truly do get tall enough, to fairly rapidly block the views down from the rather tall imposing new house. In the long run, however, these types of tree are not truly suitable and are inappropriate for the close proximity of the residences in the neighbourhood of the inner city urban environment.

From all that has occurred in the building of this house, it is fairly evident that it was built for speculation, to be sold as it recently has. It would appear that regardless how the building of this house affected its neighbours and the neighbourhood, this was given little consideration by the Planning Department of the City of Victoria.

What is also upsetting to local residents is that several articles in recent Victoria publications, specifically a recent one in the *Times Colonist* have given a one sided, unbalanced review, raving about the house that has been built, very evidently in support of and promoting it and the

local house construction interests who were responsible for constructing it. There is no mention of the negative effects it has caused in the neighbourhood where it was built and is located.

To quote from Janet's letter: "Given the significant disruption to the ambiance of the neighbourhood and the impact on neighbouring properties, it is ironic to read that thus Rockland residence was honoured six times at the 2013 CARE awards in September." Obviously neighbourhood concerns are not taken into account when determining "professionalism, innovative design and sustainability. Should not retention of mature plantings and a respect for the neighbourhood ambiance also be included in the criteria?"

VICTORIA HERITAGE – GONE

by Helen Edwards



The original owners of the residence at 1535 Despard Avenue were Vernon Blackwell Taylor and his wife Jessie Lenore. The house was built around 1930-1931 as the address shows as "new house" in the 1930 City Directory.

Vernon Taylor was born on May 16, 1903 in Brant County, Ontario to Reginald Taylor and Hannah Atkinson. By 1921, the family had moved to Vancouver, BC. In 1921, he journeyed to Kanessville, Adair, Missouri where he was studying at the American School of Osteopathy. He graduated and soon after (March 1, 1924) married Jessie Lenore Conwell. She was born on August 3, 1902 in Manhattan, Riley, Kansas to Frank Walter Conwell and his wife Tura Hunt. Tura died in 1903, leaving Frank with a young daughter in his care. He married Grace Beatrice Koeberle on December 24, 1905. They had twin daughters, born in 1907 and a daughter in 1915. How Vernon met Jessie is unknown, but they moved to Victoria around 1925 where Vernon established his medical practice at 404-625 Fort Street.

The Taylors lived in various residences around Victoria – Queens Street, Menzies Street, Cook Street and Simcoe Street – before having the house built at 1535 Despard Avenue. It would appear that the medical business was successful as Vernon moved to a larger office on Government Street about the same time as the house was built. The family – they had two children – lived here for many years. At the time of Jessie’s death on November 27, 1983, the couple was living at 3110 Exeter Road. Vernon outlived his wife by nine years, dying on January 28, 1992.

The house was an attractive stucco residence with round-headed windows that let in plenty of light. Set on a large lot, it had a huge garden and was an integral part of the green landscape of the area. There was a Spanish element to the design with a red roof and the white stucco. It fit well into the neighbourhood as it was the same scale as its neighbours.

I was once a guest in this house and remember it as a warm family dwelling with a marvellous garden. The interior featured wood floors and was remarkably intact even 50 years after it was built.

I wonder what the Taylor family would say if they knew what had happened to their family home.

RNA BOARD OF DIRECTORS – 2013-2014

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RNA Email Server List

Would you like to hear more about events in Rockland? Please join the neighbours list through the RNA website at www.rockland.bc.ca.

CAN WE HELP YOU?

Is there a building in Rockland that you would like to know the history of? Do you have an old photo that needs identification? Let me know at heritagelady@gmail.com and I will see what I can find.

ABOUT THIS NEWSLETTER

The Rockland Neighbourhood Association Newsletter is published during the year. It is distributed electronically to all members. Submissions from members on issues of interest are always accepted and photographs are particularly welcome.

Deadlines for the next issue is:

February 15, 2014

All submissions should be sent to Newsletter Editor, Helen Edwards at heritagelady@gmail.com

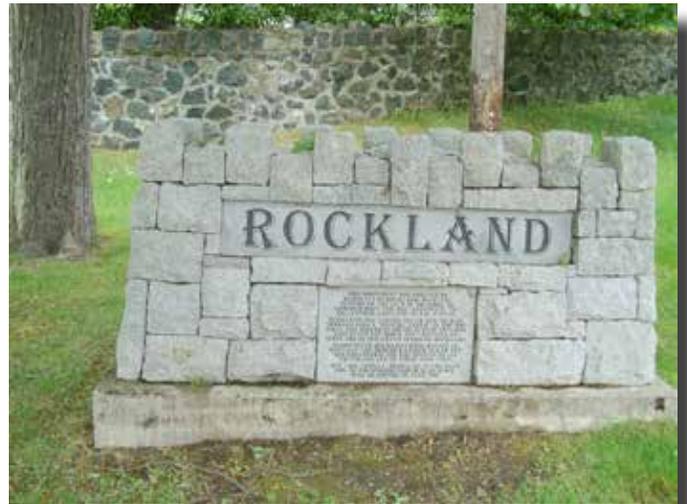


PHOTO CREDITS:

- p.1: Helen Edwards
- p. 2 left: Janet Simpson; right: Helen Edwards
- p. 3: City of Victoria
- p. 4: Helen Edwards
- p. 5: Hallmark Heritage Society Archives
- p. 7: Helen Edwards