

**A Close Study on the Relationship  
Between the Historical Geography and  
Kerrisdale Architectural Styles**

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## ABSTRACT

Recent years, the rate of character homes in Vancouver rises in alarming pace. Especially, Marpole, Oakridge and Kerrisdale have experienced drastic change in the landscape. Many houses, built before 1940s with a great condition and unique character have been demolished. For example, through Facebook website, Vancouver Vanishes, residences in Kerrisdale express their concerns and mourn the loss of beautiful houses. The creation of Kerrisdale was influenced by many factors such as Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), and people settled in the area. One was that CPR wanted to create a pastoral image of English countryside. Although houses were not as extravagant and luxurious as Shaughnessy area, Kerrisdale was so influenced by the idea CPR pursued. Also between 1910 and 1930, English style houses represented the privilege, high status, creating the anglophile tradition. Secondly, the dominant taste of the British also determined the taste of houses. In the essay, I attempt to raise the important connection between architectural styles and the past pioneer to emphasize houses are more than just buildings. They are a mnemonic of the past and that they are in danger of extinction due to poor management and outdated laws to protect them.

## A CLOSE STUDY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY AND KERRISDALE ARCHITECTURAL STYLES

By the end of the 1980s, city council implemented the Vancouver heritage register to protect historically and architecturally significant structures landscapes, and monuments. For anyone with the mistaken belief that the Heritage Register will help to protect Vancouver's historical landmarks, the issue surrounding the two mock-Tudor 1939 homes is the proof that when an owner has their sights on redevelopment, preservation becomes almost impossible<sup>1</sup>. Although these houses were saved recently by relocating them to other area, ironically it was done with the sacrifice of demolishing another heritage dwelling<sup>2</sup>. More and more older houses are disappearing from the community, which concerns many people in Kerrisdale, and the Vancouver Heritage Foundation (VHF) also shares this same concern. Thus, my goal is to assemble substantial information on how Kerrisdale heritage dwellings contribute to the neighborhood and to lay out the important historical process that contributed in development of the community. In this essay, given that the people who lived there heavily influenced the architecture in the community of Kerrisdale, my research will seek to discover how the historical geography between 1910 to 1930 inspired to create residential houses that are influenced by two distinctive sets of styles – Tudor Revival and Arts and Crafts Movement.

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<sup>1</sup> Kerry Gold, "Effort to save Kerrisdale heritage homes fails, demolition looks certain," The Globe and Mail, Oct. 25, 2013. Mar 15, 2014 <<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/home-and-garden/real-estate/effort-to-save-kerrisdale-heritage-homes-fails-demolition-certain/article15076074/>>

<sup>2</sup> "Vancouver History that was demolished on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014 to make room for "Dorothies," Kerrisdale Neighbour-to-neighbour, Mar. 19, 2014. March 30, 2014 < Kerrisdale Business Association, About the KBA, <<http://www.kerrisdalevillage.com/aboutus/>>.

## History of Kerrisdale and Architectural Style



McCleery Farm House, June 1941<sup>3</sup>

Kerrisdale today which stretches from Blenheim to Angus Street and from West 41<sup>st</sup> Avenue to the north of the Fraser River, is one of 23 mature Vancouver suburban neighborhood, composed of mainly residential dwellings and a commercial centre, located in the heart of it.

The period from 1910 to 1930 is significant in the development of early Kerrisdale. As the business of Stevenston fish canneries grew, the CPR decided to construct a railway, called the ‘Sockeye Special’ from Vancouver to Lulu Island. That was the beginning of the boom in the site, as conveniently the railway went through the centre of what would eventually become Kerrisdale. Ultimately, easier access to the area meant an influx of settlers, developers and investors.

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<sup>3</sup> Major Matthews Collection, “Exterior of McCleery farm house on Marine Drive,” June 1941, Vancouver, photograph by Lawton Wright, City of Vancouver Archives, AM54-S4-: Bu P247

Irish McCleery brothers were Kerrisdale's first settlers who were initially attracted to gold rush at the Fraser River. In 1867, they located themselves near where the McCleery golf course, which is 7188 MacDonald Street, exists. In 1870s, the Magee family settled just below between current Marine Drive and Balaclava.

In 1902, the Johnson family constructed their house where Crofton House now stands, and in 1903, a young Scottish couple, Mr. and Mrs. William MacKinnon, built a home at 2941 West 42<sup>nd</sup> Avenue<sup>4</sup>.

As Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) built the track passing the area, improving its transportation, Kerrisdale was becoming an attractive place to live. In 1905, the name of the community came about when the general manager of B.C. Electric Railway asked one of the earliest settlers, Mrs. Williams MacKinnon to name the train stop at Wilson Road, now 41<sup>st</sup>. she named as 'Kerry's Dale' after her old family house in Scotland. Since then till 1912, the intersection of Wilson Road and West Boulevard became the commercial hub due to the construction of a general store, post office, a hardware store and a real estate office. In 1920, expansion of tracks along Wilson Road to Dunbar Street created more organized and structured transportation system<sup>5</sup>.

In 1929, Kerrisdale joined with the city of Vancouver and the municipality of South Vancouver, as they amalgamated with the municipality of Point Grey<sup>6</sup>.

Therefore, if we look at how Kerrisdale came about, the history of the area is closely related to its British heritage. Evidently, the name such as McCleery, MacKanzie, and Kerrisdale, themselves are good examples. In addition, Balaclava Street

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<sup>4</sup> Kerrisdale Business Association, "About the KBA," Kerrisdale Village. March 10, 2013. April 8, 2014 <<http://www.kerrisdalevillage.com/aboutus/>>.

<sup>5</sup> References from "About the KBA"

<sup>6</sup> References from "About the KBA"

commemorates “the Battle of Balaclava, 1854, scene of the famous charge of the Light Brigade<sup>7</sup>.” This is also strongly supported by the composition of the demographics between 1910 and 1930. As indicated in the table below, the growth of British origin was steady throughout that period and dominant.

Table (1): Ethnic Composition Of The City Of Vancouver, 1911-1931.

Year	1911	1921	1931
Totals for the City of Vancouver			
Population	115 652	163 220	246 593
% British	74.6	82.6	77.1
% Chinese <sup>1</sup>	3.2	4.3	8.6
Municipalities (amalgamated in 1929):			
Central Vancouver			
Population	95 206	117 217	n/a
% British	73.4	79.8	n/a
% Chinese	3.6	5.0	n/a
South Vancouver			
Population	16 126	32 267	n/a
% British	84.2	90.0	n/a
% Chinese	1.0	1.7	n/a
Point Grey <sup>2</sup>			
Population	4 320	13 736	n/a
% British	65.2	89.2	n/a
% Chinese	3.4	4.5	n/a

Source : Census of Canada, 1911-1931.

Table 1.1<sup>8</sup>

Maybe not as strongly as Shaughnessy Heights, Kerrisdale was also influenced by the vision that the CPR had for the municipality of Point Grey. And consequently, the company played a key role as to why British origin was dominantly established in the area. The company wanted to create an image of the suburban splendor, drawing back from pastoral theme of the romanticized English countryside. “By way of illustration, the

<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Walker, Street Names of Vancouver. Seattle, USA: Gordon Soules Book Publishers Ltd., 1999. p10.

<sup>8</sup> Niall Charles Majury. “Identity, Place, Power and The ‘Text’: Kerry’s Dale and the “Monster House.” The Faculty of Graduate Studies 1-163 (1990). p43.

Royal Trust Company, acting on behalf of the CPR, sold a vacant lot on Marguerite Street in Kerrisdale to an Elm Catheryne Boyce in 1924, stipulating in the deed of sale that the site could not be resold or subdivided for ten years thence<sup>9</sup>.” For requirements, the house had to be a private dwelling, which should be reviewed for a design by CPR member and also worth at least 1000 dollars. Although that is not the case for every residence, the CPR did grant many lands from the city to meet the vision the company had for its site.



Robert N. Manning <sup>10</sup>

In his personal letter to Vancouver City Archive, Robert N. Manning who was born in Vancouver and grew up in Kerrisdale neighborhood and served with the RCAF in the Second World War recalls memories of the community.

*“I can remember the CPR gardens being a blaze of color in the spring<sup>11</sup>.”*

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<sup>9</sup> Niall Charles Majury. “Identity, Place, Power and The ‘Text’: Kerry’s Dale and the “Monster House.” The Faculty of Graduate Studies 1-163 (1990). p35.

<sup>10</sup> City of Vancouver Archives, Robert Norris Manning fonds, AM 970 598-B-5 folders 6, 7, “correspondence of Robert N. Manning” series, 1925.

<sup>11</sup> Reference to Robert Norris Manning Fonds, Letter to Sue. 15 December, 1988.

*“The bottom part of the picture shows “CPR Water Tower.” I can remember playing on the rusty pipes behind the tower and soiling my clothes when walking home from school. The tower served as a pigeon loft in the 20s<sup>12</sup>. ”*

*“The sun was still u p, and as the maple trees had not reached their full height I could see everything. There were some houses of the interurban tracks, and lots of second growth trees on the horizon, lowing., The foot of Arbutus and 33<sup>rd</sup> was a swamp and full of trees<sup>13</sup>. ”*

His personal letters indicate the special experience he had as a child that in a way shaped by the planning of CPR vision. And that was well enforced when the Point Grey Zoning By-law was finalized in 1928 in city planning. According to the plan for the city of Vancouver B.C., 1928, the effort to recognize the vision of the early pioneer was fully evident. Carrying on the idea of pastoral theme, the municipality of Point Grey made sure that zoning laws will prevent any “encroachment of undesirable types of development<sup>14</sup>” and made sure to implement the ideals held dearly by residents living in the community.

Also S. L. Howe addresses:

*“The importance of the municipality which we have the honor to represent, as the first Council, would be hard to overestimate, lying, as it does, alongside the great City of Vancouver, which is destined to become the Liverpool of Canada and the metropolis of the Canadian Pacific Coast for all time to come, and whose fast-growing population will soon overflow her boundaries and quickly convert this municipality into a thickly-settled and most beautiful residential district<sup>15</sup>. ”*

*“During the succeeding years, and until 1922, the various Councils insistently held to the idea that they were put into office to carry into effect the ideals held by the*

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<sup>12</sup> Reference to Robert Norris Manning Fonds, Letter to Sue. 15 December, 1988.

<sup>13</sup> Reference to Robert Norris Manning Fonds, Letter to Mrs. Baptie. 15 April, 1988.

<sup>14</sup> Harland Bartholomew. A Plan for the City of Vancouver British Columbia 1928. British Columbia: Vancouver City Council, 1928.

<sup>15</sup> Reference to Harland Bartholomew, p300.



*residents that Point Grey was to be developed essentially as “a first-class residential district” for the growing and progressive adjoining city<sup>16</sup>.*”

Again, Liverpool indicates the referencing to the ideal pastoral theme, derived and influenced by Britain. Before was only a vision, now that idea was incorporated into city planning to create beautiful residences that are desirable and this is the base of the community, Kerrisdale. It is the sense of identity to people living in the area.

“First, it went beyond preference to consider other important connotative meaning – perceived status and friendliness. While preference is important, the public also makes other inferences about personal identity, social status, and friendliness from building styles<sup>17</sup>.” The Architectural style is not just about the physical design but a representation of social and moral order. It represents the identity of an individual in the society.

Despite minor differences in appearances, the variety of Vancouver’s architecture was limited, ranging approximately twelve distinctive styles. Often fluctuation of price and shift of fashion determined the stylistic preferences of builders, and buyers. Therefore, particular parts of neighborhoods are formed in a way because they were built when they were. The structure of homes embodies more meanings; they reveal something about people’s aspirations and taste, and furthermore, indicate the substantial framework of how the city grew. Before 1910, the majority of houses resembled a simple one-storey cabin, which was built to accommodate the working family. They are often built with easily accessible and inexpensive lumber. Then, come the more elaborate style houses with two or two and a half stories. They display more sharp-angled roofs, embellished gables, and shingles with patterns. These houses are slightly bigger in size and a little

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<sup>16</sup> Reference to Harland Bartholomew, p300.

<sup>17</sup> Jack L. Nasar, “Symbolic Meanings of House Styles,” Environment and Behavior 21 (1989): 239.

more elaborately decorated than the cabin, to accommodate the middle-class. Typically custom-built structures by architects were visibly clustered in the wealthier parts of the neighborhood, Shaughnessy Heights. Inspired by a late Victorian style, houses included luxurious elements such as gables, verandahs, polychromatic shingles, and well-embellished ornaments to create the complex façade. “Since most of the single-detached homes in Kerrisdale were built over the relatively short period between 1920 and the Great Depression of the 1930s, the residential landscape displayed an impressive degree of coherence in form and styles. Kerrisdale originally developed amidst the spirit of early 20<sup>th</sup> century boosterism, characterized by a growth ethic and belief in progress<sup>18</sup>.”

Apart from Shaughnessy Heights, Kerrisdale is another neighborhood influenced by the CPR’s vision of suburban splendor. In comparison, the size of Kerrisdale is a little more modest. But Kerrisdale also enjoyed beautiful and intricate houses that are built by renowned architects or carpenters. Thus, Kerrisdale represents the unique mix of architectural styles.

In the late nineteenth century, leading designer in Britain and United States started to question and challenge the success of machinery and its industry. It called for architectural nostalgia. It was to reminisce on the glory of old ways. For example, Tudors, Spanish colonials with red rooftops and symmetrical Georgian styles in Kerrisdale are offspring of that movement. In England, William Morris, a textile designer, inspired the Arts and Crafts movement, which called for again a return to natural materials and the replication of pre-industrial textures and forms. The most closely related architect with its style is Samuel Maclure, whose stylistic choice was

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<sup>18</sup> Niall Charles Majury p49.

basically either Arts and Crafts or Tudor. Often architects used easily accessible materials such as wood shingles, and trims to resemble more of country cottage<sup>19</sup>.

The theme of return to nature further developed into more spacious and more embellished styles. The Tudor Revival appealed to people as a house with harmony and peace. Surrounded by trees, and beautiful gardens, the house blended naturally into the landscape, removing itself from the industrial setting. In Vancouver, many local architects incorporated English models and local materials, such as timber to build spacious and unique houses for affluent customers. These structures were mostly evident in the northern part of Point Grey, and Shaughnessy area. Often, architects attempted to combine various styles from different period of English architecture into a single dwelling, which made them unique as a style, influenced globally, but initiated locally.

The architecture style is called Builder's style, which was popular between 1920 and 1935, mostly evident in Kerrisdale area. A distinct design element was a sharp-angled roof with one or two gables on the front as the entrance. More importantly, the volume of the house represented its owner's success and stability of the establishment and accomplishment in the society. Especially, at this time British origin styles indicated symbol of privilege, high status, creating the anglophile tradition<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> "Vancouver & Its Region" 1992 edited by Graeme Wynn and Timothy Oke. I referenced the specific part of the article which discusses the history of general architectural style in Vancouver

<sup>20</sup> Also came from Vancouver & Its Region 1992

## Two Architectural Styles



Tudor Revival Style<sup>21</sup>



Arts and Crafts Movement<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> "Tudor Revival 1910-1939." House Styles Vancouver Heritage Foundation

<sup>22</sup> "Arts and Crafts 1910-1930." House Styles Vancouver Heritage Foundation

## **Challenge Ahead**

Currently many people in the community share the concern with rapidly disappearing heritage dwellings, some perfectly kept in good condition. Facebook Groups such as Vancouver Vanishes and Vancouver Then, mourn for the loss of heritage and its related history. Kerrisdale has been an easier target for developers, because the city's zoning dates back to 1922, when Point Grey was a separate municipality. The city's zoning has not been updated since. In general, lots in Vancouver are supposed to be 25 feet wide; however, many lots in Point Grey are 33 and 66 feet wide. As a result, from a developer's and investor's perspective, many single-detached dwellings in Kerrisdale become the subject of redevelopment for more profit. Even if people are aware of and intent on protecting them, the ineffective policy could possibly diminish that effort. For example, the Vancouver Heritage Registry dates back to 1983. The registry itself is too outdated and many buildings are left out from the register. For example, even the study of the list on the registry is not complete because there are a lot of blank spaces and these lists should include more details of the each dwellings and each site. The Vancouver Heritage registry needs an extensive revision. The definition of heritage changes over time, and incorporating that change is needed. Not only that, but the voice in the registry also should be stronger. In some parts of it, the wording is general and does not specify too much on what the historical or architectural significances. One other suggestion for policy is to increase demolishing fee for pre-1940 houses to discourage people from demolishing these dwellings. Now a fourth attempt in revising the registry through Vancouver Action Plan is currently under its way. However, there is no promise; similar to other attempts, the effort can be futile.

Furthermore, the biggest challenge is to define and clarify what can be called heritage building. For example, the Vancouver Heritage registry defines it as buildings that are built before 1940, and they have either or both historical and architectural significance to the site. Additionally, the Vancouver Heritage Foundation identifies a heritage home as “not necessarily defined by its age but more by its heritage value and/or heritage character<sup>23</sup>.” According to the National Standards & Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada, heritage value is the aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual importance or significance for past, present, or future generations. As stated, the definition is general and depending on its site, and neighborhood, the heritage buildings could mean differently and to protect them with the law is quite difficult. Not only that, the recent in order to save two mock-Tudor dwellings in Kerrisdale, necessitated that another heritage residential dwelling had to be sacrificed. Then, the question becomes how could we decide which one is more significant when it represents vastly different things to each community?

## **Conclusion**

Thus, social geography between 1910 and 1930 helped to mold the early and current Kerrisdale, into one of the characteristic neighborhood in the city. “Without a doubt, buildings are accepted by communities and imbued with emotions and the appreciation of people. They are included in the identity of a people, city or place<sup>24</sup>.”

Most importantly, this idea extends to historical buildings, offering a lively and interesting character to a neighborhood. They are a mnemonic of the past. These

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<sup>23</sup> From the website Vancouver Heritage Foundation, <<http://www.vancouverheritagefoundation.org/learn-with-us/heritage-information/>>

<sup>24</sup> Response of Martha Thorne in interview by Vikas Shah, 12 June 2012

buildings embody a chronology of the past; they remind us what the people and the community have gone through. Having visual traces of its past can help people in the community to feel more connected to a place. They have a particular appeal that new buildings do not bring to the table. It is to create a sense of completeness in the community and its own identity that people can classify as. But the demolition of many heritage dwellings threatened that ideal held dearly by residents and past pioneers. To them, the sense of the community and its unique identity are dwindling. And these concerns are shown through contemporary Facebook groups such as Vancouver Vanishes, and many other community meetings held in the Kerrisdale community centre. Proper care of heritage buildings should be done through a thorough examination of each of them and also with effective policy and an updated version of already existing policies.

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