

Pioneering hospital touched early Vancouverites' lives

Lost gem's discovery its salvation

By Gudrun Will
Staff writer

THE ROLE OF VANCOUVER'S first hospital has inspired a band of volunteers to save it. The Heather Heritage Society formed to prevent demolition of the 1906 core of the Heather Pavilion when its inhabitants move to a new hospital tower.

At one time, the U-shaped landmark at 12th and Heather touched the life of every local. People were born and died in it, and generations of nurses and doctors trained there. Initially called the Fairview Building, it was added on to almost as soon as it was completed. The Georgian granite walls were later obscured by post-Second World War functional additions on all but one side.

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said city heritage planner Jeannette Hlavach. "If you walk along the street there are very few clues. But if you go around the rear it's quite breathtaking."

The original building includes four towers topped by cupolas, two square and two octagonal. A city-commissioned 1992 study by local

architect Richard Henriquez found the granite walls intact, solid and fit for renovation. The building is on the city's 'B' heritage list.

The Vancouver Hospital and Health Sciences Centre (VHHSC) initially planned to create green space by tearing down all structures except for the Centennial Pavilion once the move was complete. Nobody realized that there was a hidden heritage gem until people looked at old photos showing the stately building behind a loop drive and landscaped rose garden, said Marguerite Ford, former city councillor and vice-president of the Heather Heritage Society.

It's up to the society to find an appropriate future use for the building. The Tzu Chi Institute for Complementary and Alternative Medicine has formally expressed interest.

Ford said she'd also like it to house a community gathering space, the archives of the Vancouver General Hospital nursing school, and a hostel for recovering adult patients.

The hospital's move to the new tower is behind schedule due to budget cuts. This puts the Heather Heritage Society in a bind because it has no firm time frame with which to work. City council was expected Tuesday to extend its deadline for proposals—initially set at June 30, 1997—for up to one year after the building is vacated. The VHHSC has agreed to notify the city and the heritage society at least six months in advance of moving out.

Hlavach lauded the heritage society for coming together to rescue the Heather Pavilion. She added the city will help any interested group through the process of taking it over.