

Community Heritage Roundtable comes to the Jewish community

By Irena
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For the Jewish Free Press

Sometime in January of 2002, I was so angry at the proposed demolition of the historic St. Mary's School that I wrote a letter to the Calgary Herald voicing my support for the protection and restoration of this 1909 landmark. Someone from the community preservation group saw my letter and called me to invite me to join the protests. I still remember shivering, in the -30 degree Celsius weather, with other passionate citizens waving our placards to try to save the brick and sandstone school. A photo of the protest ended up in the Herald. A very unpleasant battle was waged, and lost. St. Mary's School was demolished.

Yet what was so weird is on the same location, a replica of the school was built. (Why did the Calgary Catholic School Board build a replica when they could have restored the original? Why replace a dirty diamond with a shiny cubic zirco-

nia?)

The St. Mary's School battle is often regarded as a watershed moment in the city's heritage community, as heritage issues began to be taken more seriously.

It also changed the course of my life. I'd like to think those Catholic beginnings led to benefits for the Jewish community. That battle planted seeds in my mind for what would eventually lead me to start a project for the inclusion of a historic synagogue at Heritage Park.

Since then the Calgary heritage community has grown and strengthened. A regular staple now is the community heritage roundtable held once every quarter at various locations around the city. With the recent transformation of Temple B'Nai Tikvah, I thought it was the perfect time to bring the roundtable to the Jewish community venue.

Over one hundred people from the Jewish and non-Jewish communities attended the community heritage roundtable on Thursday, November 24 at the Temple



Howard Bell, seen in the distance, a member of the Renovation Team of Temple B'Nai Tikvah, speaking about the adaptive reuse of the church into a synagogue at the Community Heritage Roundtable held on November 24, 2011. Photo courtesy of Samuel Boisvert.

to hear stories on the topic of adaptive reuse.

My fellow event organizer, Cynthia Klaassen president of the Calgary Heritage Initiative explained the concept of adaptive reuse. "Finding new uses for old buildings ensures their ongoing viability and is the best way to ensure our built heritage is maintained and woven into Calgary's urban fabric. Cost is also a consideration, since it's usually less expensive and more environmentally friendly to find a new use for an existing building rather than to raze it and build anew. Heritage buildings offer fertile ground for new businesses to start and to grow because the building is usually already paid for itself and thus rents are less expensive. Moreover, the character and quirks that are frequently part of an older building inspire creativity and new solutions."

Four speakers told adaptive reuse stories about how they have played a role in giving new life to old buildings and with it invigorated their respective communi-

ties.

Howard Bell spoke about the conversion of the Riverview United Church into a synagogue and the eventual renovation of Temple B’Nai Tikvah. Bell took the audience through the story of how the Reform congregation came to occupy its current space in Britannia, a journey that took almost twenty years and one he has been a part of that whole time. He spoke about how the Temple committee tried to engage Moshe Safdie and Jack Diamond, two of Canada’s most prominent architects, but it was through the generosity of prominent Calgary architect, Martin Cohos, that the project gained its creative wings.

A recent recipient of the Alberta Order of Excellence, Cohos used his vision and imagination to transform the Temple into the distinctly Jewish yet whimsical space it is today. He found a solution to re-orient the sanctuary to face Jerusalem, which when a church was facing north. He used the Torah nar-

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Festival of Lights

Israel Museum, Google put Dead Sea scrolls online

The project gives the public access to ultra high-resolution images of the ancient scrolls in a format which is easily searchable, with the magnified text revealing details previously invisible to the naked eye, a museum statement said.

So far, five of the scrolls have been digitised as part of the \$3.5-million project which uses space-age technology to produce the clearest renderings yet of the ancient texts : the Great Isaiah scroll, the Community Rule scroll, the commentary on Habbakuk, the Temple scroll and the War scroll.

By visiting <http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/> web users can view all of the text, as well as a translation tool and other background information on the documents, the museum said.

“We are privileged to house in the Israel Museum’s Shrine of the Book the best preserved and most complete Dead Sea Scrolls ever discovered,” Israel Museum director James Snyder said in a statement, describing them as of “paramount importance” for the world’s monotheistic religions.

“Now, through our partnership with Google, we are able to bring these treasures to the broadest possible public.”

The 900 biblical and other manuscripts, comprising some 30,000 fragments, were discovered between 1947 and 1956 in the Qumran caves above the Dead Sea and photographed in their entirety with infra-red technology in the 1950s.

The parchment and papyrus scrolls contain Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic writing, and include several of the earliest-known texts from the Bible, including the oldest surviving copy of the Ten Commandments.

The oldest of the documents

dates to the third century BC and the most recent to about 70 AD, when Roman troops destroyed the Second Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.

The artefacts are housed at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, where the larger pieces are shown at the dimly lit Shrine of the Book on a rotational basis in order to minimise damage from exposure.

When not on show, they are kept in a dark, climate-controlled storeroom in conditions similar to those in the Qumran caves, where the humidity, temperature and darkness preserved the scrolls for two millennia.



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rative as inspiration to create uniquely Jewish symbols: the seven kippot, representing the six days of creation and the seventh day of rest, and the colourful Jerusalem themed tallit draping from the ceiling to give a feeling of a more intimate dwelling, something more appropriate for a Jewish prayer space.

Shara Rosko from the John Snow House spoke about the transformation of this 1912 home in the Mount Royal neighbourhood into a library and space for artist events. Owned from the mid 20th century until the time of his death by banker-turned-printmaker John Snow (1911-2004), the home was purchased by Calgary philanthropist Jackie Flanagan for the University of Calgary’s Markin-Flanagan Distinguished Writers Program. She then donated the house to The New Gallery.

Reid Henry spoke about the stunning new vision for the 1912 sandstone King Edward School, located in

the community of South Calgary, which will one day be restored to house studio and living spaces for artists.

Private real estate investor and heritage developer, John Kerr, spoke about his latest restoration project, the National Hotel. The 1908 hotel located in Inglewood has a connection to the Jewish community as it was built by Charlie Bell (1874-1935) the uncle of Jacob Bell Barron (1888-1965) who built the Barron Building and Uptown Theatre.

Klaassen added, “We loved having the community heritage roundtable at the Temple. Also, having the event at the space helped us to attract more people from the heritage community because people are always curious to see spaces they may not ordinarily see. Seeing the work Martin Cohos did was really interesting and hearing the story about the Temple transformation was also fascinating.”

The Community Heritage Roundtable committee

is made up of representatives from the Calgary Heritage Initiative, the Calgary Heritage Authority, the Calgary Public Library, Chinook Country Historical Society, the City of Calgary Heritage Planning, the Federation of Calgary Communities, individual community associations and others who are passionate about Calgary’s heritage.

The next community heritage roundtable entitled “Calgary 1912” (it was an important year for Calgary as a lot of civic institutions were started that year, including the Calgary Stampede and the Calgary Public Library), will be held January 25, 2012 at the Memorial Park Library at 1221-2 Street S.W. doors open at 6:30 pm, event between 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm. For more information, visit www.calgaryheritage.com.

(Irena Karshenbaum is a writer, heritage advocate and recently led a project to gift a historic synagogue to Heritage Park. irenak@shaw.ca)

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