



Heritage Vancouver

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Media release

July 23, 2017

Lights out for the 'Electric House' — demolition forthcoming for the 1922 Townley & Matheson designed show home

The owner of the 'Electric House' at 1550 West 29th Avenue, Vancouver's first showcase home to demonstrate the automated domestic use of electricity throughout a home to the public, has withdrawn their application to partially retain the house with a 9,000 sq-ft addition and 6-car garage, reverting to the original plans of full demolition and a new build.

Since the application was suddenly withdrawn early July, Heritage Vancouver Society attempted to facilitate a last-ditch effort to save the 4,500 sq-ft house through coordinating a move—a very complex task given the number of parties and agencies involved, along with a tight timeline, and costs. After having the home surveyed for moving, and confirmed that it could be, a move of this complexity would take one to two months of coordination, amongst the City, the various utilities, and the temporary removal of stretches of overhead trolley wires on Granville Street—each coming with costs.

Unfortunately a one to two month timeline does not fit into the owner's development timeline, and the **City has already issued an abatement permit**, and once completed, **the demolition permit will be issued**. Deconstruction has already begun as of July 18, 2017.

In 2016, the 'Electric House' was in the media from the original demolition threat. The City enacted for the first time last year an emergency **Heritage Inspection Order**, and subsequently approved **Temporary Heritage Protection**, to give staff time for a heritage assessment. The home was then assessed as an A-listed property for the Vancouver Heritage Register (assessed, not yet approved). Even with an A-listing, the Heritage Register does not offer legal protection, but opens up incentives for retention. If the owner, as in this case, decides not to take up the incentives, they can still proceed with demolition.

If an architectural and culturally identified resource such as the 'Electric House', assessed as an A-listed heritage resource, cannot be saved, the City's built character and heritage resources that aren't legally protected through Heritage Designation throughout the city, are in serious threat. Vancouver's architectural legacy is quickly being eradicated.

This case is a prime example of the lack of tools that the City has to protect character properties under threat—even listed properties on the Vancouver Heritage Register—from owners who are intent on demolition, and the ongoing threat from massive property values, without regard to what resides on the property. The home was previously listed for sale at approximately \$7 million.

Background

Designed in 1922 by noted Vancouver architects **Fred Townley & Robert Matheson**, the architects of Vancouver's City Hall and the Electric Service League of BC, outfitted the home with electrical gadgets and appliances to show the public how a fully automated electric home of the future could operate, the first of its kind in Western Canada.

Closet doors automatically triggered interior lighting upon opening, central lighting control panels, intercom systems, exterior lighting, and where an average home of the early 1920s would have 25-30 electrical outlets, this house contained 197 outlets of all types. It was only a few years prior to 1922 where homes would have any dedicated electrical receptacles, having previously used overhead light sockets to supply power.

Custom built local furniture contained outlets for electrical appliances in the kitchen, dining room, living room, and laundry, furthered a future electrical approach to home living.

Opened to the public in October 1922, guides were available in each of the furnished rooms showcasing the wizardry of an all-electric domestic future. All of the materials used in the house were advertised as being 'Made-in-B.C.', while many of the electrical features were custom made from special designs.

"By building and opening this house for public inspection, the Electric Service League collectively hopes to educate prospective homebuilders to the advantage of having provision made while building for electric conveniences, which can then be installed at very little cost."

Let the City know what you think -

Character Home Review survey questionnaire open until July 31, 2017, or call 3-1-1.

<http://vancouver.ca/home-property-development/heritage-action-plan.aspx>

Heritage Vancouver Society

info@heritagevancouver.org 604-254-9411 (voice/message/text)

Notes:

Heritage Register:

Categorical listing of A, B or C, with no legal protection but flags properties when applications are applied for, and can trigger incentives for retention (bonusing, etc.) that wouldn't normally be available

Heritage Designation:

Legally protected property on title, demolition is not allowed.

Links:

Our Electric House photo gallery on Flickr:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/heritagevancouver/albums/72157667712628206>

May 31, 2016 Mayor's Office release:

Mayor and Council Support Heritage Protection of Electric House

<http://www.mayorofvancouver.ca/news/mayor-and-council-support-heritage-protection-electric-house>

Model Electric Home Being Put Up in Shaughnessy by Local Supply Men

Writeup transcription from May 30, 1922, p11; Vancouver Daily World

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/heritagevancouver/25497490184/in/album-72157667712628206/>

Local firms and craftsmen who contributed to originally building and furnishing the house in 1922:

Architects; *Townley & Matheson*

Brick; *Evans, Coleman & Evans Ltd.*

Cement; *BC Cement Co., Ltd., Victoria*

Cottonwood Panelling; *Laminated Materials Col. Ltd., New West*

Draperies; *David Spencer Ltd.*

Electrical Wiring; *D. J. Metcalf*

Fireplaces; *Polychrome Cement, Brick & Tile Co. Ltd.*

Furniture; *Restmore Manufacturing Co., Ltd.*

Gravel; *Vancouver Contractors Supply Co., Ltd.*

Hardware; *J. A. Flett Ltd.*

Hardwood Floors; *BC Hardwood Floor Co., Ltd.*

Heating; *Gurney Foundry Co. Ltd.*

Heating & Plumbing Installations; *Barr & Anderson Ltd.*

Lime; *Pacific Lime Co. Ltd.*

Lumber; *Vancouver Lumber Co. Ltd.*

Marquees; *Edward Lipsett*

Ornamental Plaster & Stucco Work; *Rush & Read*

Paint; *National Paint Co., Ltd.*

Painting; *H. Howland*

Sand; *Champion & White Ltd.*

Plumbing and Fixtures; *Crane Ltd.*

Satin Walnut Finish; *J. Fyfe Smith Co., Ltd.*

Shingles; *Albert Cotton Shingle Mills, Canada Shingle Co., Hastings Shingle Manufacturing Co., Huntting-Merritt Lumber Co., Joseph Chew Shingle Co.*

Silk Lamp Shades; *The Misses McClung*

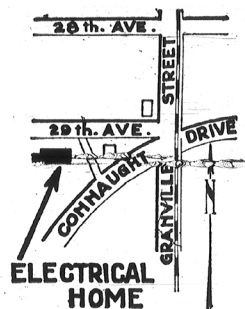
Hand-painted Lamp Shades; *Mrs. I. F. Letts*

Tiling; *Wm. N. O'Neil Co.*

YOU are cordially invited to visit The ELECTRICAL HOME

1550 TWENTY-NINTH AVENUE WEST
Two doors west of Granville Street, Shaughnessy Heights

Open Wednesday, October 11, at 2 p.m.,
and daily except Sunday, from 1 to 10 p.m.,
to and including Saturday, October 28, 1922



Take Shaughnessy
or Kerrisdale cars

The Electrical Home is a fully furnished and finished, ready-for-occupancy house, wired for electrical service such as labor-saving devices and decorative as well as practical illumination.

It is a practical and not a fanciful suggestion of how any house may be made convenient and beautiful by the proper and by no means expensive arrangement of its electrical installation.

Visitors to the home will be shown around in small groups and the features pointed out. There will be no advertising, no soliciting for orders, no requests to buy anything. The Electrical Home is purely an educational move to suggest how a house may be wired. The house is a model of construction, equipping and decorating.

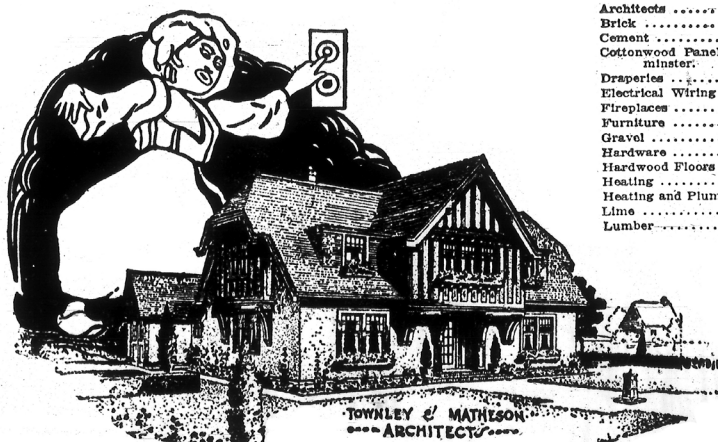
It is suggested that you come in the afternoon, if possible, in order to avoid the crowd in the evening.

ADMISSION FREE

Children admitted only when accompanied by parent or guardian.

Electrical Service League of B. C.

A co-operative, non-profit making organization of electrical firms in the interests of electrical development. Through the co-operation of the following material firms and craftsmen:



Architects	Townley & Matheson
Brick	Evans, Coleman & Evans Limited
Cement	British Columbia Cement Co. Limited, Victoria
Cottonwood Panelling.....	Laminated Materials Co. Limited, New Westminster
Draperies	David Spencer Limited
Electrical Wiring.....	D. J. Metcalf
Fireplaces	Polychrome Cement, Brick & Tile Co. Limited
Furniture	Restmore Manufacturing Company Limited
Gravel	Vancouver Contractors Supply Co. Limited
Hardware	J. A. Flett Limited
Hardwood Floors	B.C. Hardwood Floor Co. Limited
Heating	Gurney Foundry Co. Limited
Heating and Plumbing Installations.....	Barr & Anderson Limited
Lime	Pacific Lime Co. Limited
Lumber	Vancouver Lumber Co. Limited
Marquees	Edward Lipsett
Ornamental Plaster and Stucco Work, Rush & Reed	
Paint	National Paint Co. Limited
Painting	H. Howland
Sand	Champion & White Limited
Plumbing and Fixtures.....	Crane Limited
Satin Walnut Finish.....	J. Fyfe Smith Co. Limited
Shingles — Albert Cotton Shingle Mills, Canada	
Shingle Co. Limited, Hastings Shingle Manufacturing Co. Limited, Hastings-Merritt Lumber Co. Limited, Joseph Chew Shingle Co. Limited.	
Silk Lamp Shades	The Misses McClung
Hand-painted Lamp Shades.....	Mrs. I. F. Letts
Tiling	Wm. N. O'Neil Co. Limited