

The Lim Sai Hor Kow Mock Benevolent Association Building Conservation Project

Orville Lim, long-time proponent of the conservation project since 2003 was a key driver, struck and led a committee of volunteers for the Lim Sai Hor Kow Mock Benevolent Association Heritage Building located at 531 Carrall Street in the National Historic Site Vancouver Chinatown.

Weekly design and construction meetings with Orville Lim and his small group of volunteers and the design/project management/constructor team ensured a high level of involvement and on-going interest in the project, from start to finish. Associated granting organizations, including the City of Vancouver, Heritage Society of B.C. and Parks Canada were all kept apprised of the project's progress through reports and site visits.

The building is the oldest of 13 Chinatown Non-profit Society Heritage Buildings, originally constructed for the Chinese Empire Reform Party in 1903.

The project featured the impressive façade, composed of a high wood storefront featuring full height wood columns and a three-part glazed clerestory, 2nd and 3rd storey balconies feature a wood balustrades, columns and a three-part arch on top balcony, and an elaborate projecting sheet metal cornice and pediment that were all lost in past alterations. As well, the rear façade, dating to a 1930s addition was intact, but badly deteriorated. The front and rear facades were authentically restored to their 1903 configuration and appearance, including substantial structural upgrades to brace the front façade and reconstruct deteriorated rear bay framing, extensive wood restoration of the missing storefront, 3rd floor balcony window wall, large arched opening surrounds at the 3rd floor and extensive sheet metal restoration of cornices, pediments, belt-courses and signage.

The thirteen Chinese Association Buildings in the National Historic Site Vancouver Chinatown represent the core of this heritage precinct in terms of cultural, architectural history and urban design. These Associations were the social and cultural backbone of the Chinese community in Vancouver, prior to their being awarded citizenship. Due to the age of many of the various Associations key participants and the dispersal of descendants to the suburbs, these important cultural buildings suffered from a chronic lack of maintenance and capital project renewal. This highlights the importance of the extensive restoration of Lim Sai Hor Kow Mock Benevolent Association building as one of the first full exterior restorations of these buildings and, perhaps, a turning point towards restoration and renewal of the remaining Chinese Association buildings and Vancouver's Chinatown in general.

The conservation project demonstrated that extensive exterior restoration work is achievable and that the restoration of these Chinese Association Buildings are a key and necessary element in maintaining the core heritage character of Vancouver's Chinatown and in propelling this valuable heritage area toward urban renewal. This project made extensive use of wood, B.C. fir to be precise, and as such contributed to the support of one of the province's principal renewable resources. The roof surface rehabilitation included the addition of 4" of tapered rigid insulation, which will improve the building's energy performance. Rehabilitation of heritage buildings, in general, preserves the high levels of embodied energy inherent in their construction.