



HYCROFT HERITAGE  
PRESERVATION FOUNDATION

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*“Preservation of architecture strengthens the culture of a nation.  
These protected buildings are the landmarks of our lives...their  
preservation gives us an authentic sense of our past.”*

Dr. Shane O’Day  
Canadian Professor of the Year 1988

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## 1. MISSION STATEMENT

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The purpose of the Hycroft Heritage Preservation Foundation (HHPF) is to fund, facilitate, promote and carry out activities and programs which promote the conservation, preservation and maintenance of the heritage building and grounds of Hycroft, located at 1489 McRae Avenue, Vancouver, B.C. Preserving the historic Hycroft property protects and preserves evidence of the city's history, culture and heritage for the education and enjoyment of present and future generations.

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## 2. HHPF – ACTIVITIES

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The Hycroft Heritage Preservation Foundation is a registered charity (Reg. No. 88793 7845 RR0001) which was established in 1991, to preserve and maintain the grounds and buildings of Hycroft, which serves as the home of the University Women Club of Vancouver (UWCV). This property was purchased by the UWCV in 1962 and lovingly restored by member volunteers. Hycroft has since been recognized by the City of Vancouver as a significant part of the community's heritage, and UWCV members are dedicated to serving the community by maintaining this historic site and inviting the public to enjoy it through a variety of events.

The HHPF has assisted in funding restoration of the building, garden structures, sewer and electrical systems through donations from members of the public as well as UWCV members. No support for this restoration is available from any level of government. Through the efforts of the UWCV members and HHPF, Hycroft and its grounds have been preserved for the last 50 years. With the ongoing generous support of the broader community, Hycroft will continue to provide a gracious welcome to the public and a valuable example of Vancouver heritage for many years to come.

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## 3. HHPF – 2010/2011 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Elizabeth Gautschi, Stipulated Director and President  
Dianne Dixon, Stipulated Director and House Chair  
Pat Van Der Flaes, Stipulated Director and Treasurer  
Dawn Longshaw, Stipulated Director and Secretary  
Margaret MacDonald, Heritage Director  
Alice Hurst, Heritage Director  
Mari LaRosa, Heritage Director

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## 4. HYCROFT – A HERITAGE LANDMARK

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Hycroft was built as a home for the McRae family in the early days of Vancouver. Alexander Duncan McRae, a wealthy businessman, came to Vancouver in the 1900s, when the city was only 25 years old. He needed a magnificent home in order to host prominent social leaders of the day.

In keeping with his social aspirations, McRae hired architect Thomas Hooper in 1909 to build his family a 15,000 sq. ft. mansion with 30 rooms and 13 bathrooms in the developing and prestigious Shaughnessy neighbourhood. The house was completed by 1911 at a cost of \$100,000. Mrs. McRae searched for furnishings all over Europe. Those costs surpassed that of the house itself. The building and 5.2 acre property was called Hycroft. The street on which it sat was named McRae Avenue after its celebrated owner.

Hycroft was the social centre of a golden era in Vancouver which ended at the Great Depression. The McRaes hosted parties, dances, famous New Year's Eve Masquerade Balls, sporting and charitable events. Among the many guests were royalty, the titled, prominent businessmen and politicians. However, during the Great Depression the McRaes would only host large events that were for charity. In 1942 Mrs. McRae died and the high society days came to an end. General McRae decided to give his beloved Hycroft estate to the Federal Government for \$1.00. Hycroft then became a Veterans' Hospital, an annex to Shaughnessy Hospital. Thus began the property's second life which lasted until the veterans vacated it in 1960. The house and property sat empty and in a state of deterioration for 2 years.

In 1962, the property was divided to allow an affordable purchase bid to be made by the University Women's Club Vancouver (UWCV). Hycroft was to become their clubhouse. The house, the coach house, the drying yard, most of the gardens, the surrounding walls and a small mews cottage have been maintained by this club ever since.

Historically, architecturally and culturally, there is much to appreciate when visiting Hycroft. Sitting as it is on a hill facing the magnificent north shore mountains, the house is surrounded by a beautiful garden which includes a 100 year old sequoia tree, a copper beech, and 3 cedars atlanticus, all planted by the original owner. An old collection of rhododendrons also exists.

The House itself is a significant architectural achievement, as evidenced in its design, style and ornamentation. When entering the house through its ivy clad Ionic columns, we note the architecture is indicative of the Italianate style, reflecting the American Beaux Arts Movement and its dependence on the Italian Renaissance. The rooms and halls on the main floor are graced with French doors, elegant plasterwork and magnificent fireplaces, in keeping with the house's role as a centre for stylish entertaining. The fixtures and working areas of the house: the shower facilities in the General's bathroom, the servants' quarters, the wine cellar—all are features of great historical interest, shedding light on how life was lived in a great house.

Hycroft is an historic and architectural jewel within our city, province and country. It received a heritage designation from Vancouver City Council in 1974 "for the purpose of preserving evidence of the city's history, culture and heritage for the educational enjoyment of present and future generations." In 1994 the University Women's Club Vancouver accepted a heritage award for their preservation of Hycroft.

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## 5. HYCROFT AND ITS FIRST OWNER – HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

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The house and gardens comprising Hycroft are the only visible reminder of an important but largely forgotten Canadian, Alexander Duncan McRae. McRae was a brilliant visionary with exceptional entrepreneurial, organizational and planning skills who played a major role in the development of Vancouver, British Columbia and Canada. From a 50 cents-a-day Ontario farm boy he was a multi-millionaire by the time he arrived in Vancouver in 1907. Alexander McRae was responsible for much of the settlement of Western Canada, particularly Saskatchewan. In B.C. he developed the Peace River district and the Yukon, primarily through mining endeavours.

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In the Lower Mainland he created a lumber company that became the largest in the world at the time. He brought many skilled lumbermen and their families from Quebec, developing Maillardville for their housing as well as communities for the Chinese, Japanese and East Indian workers. His enterprises also included fisheries. A man with a social conscience, he treated his employees and staff well.

McRae was a man ahead of his time. He convinced the Federal Government to dredge the Fraser River from Langley to its mouth for sea-going vessels and to build B.C. infrastructure, primarily roads and railways. He foresaw the value of developing Garibaldi Park and Whistler for the future of B.C. and Canada. In Qualicum, B.C., McRae created a 4,000 acre experimental farm where he bred livestock and developed and grew the finest grains and hay. His accomplishments are among the building blocks of Vancouver, B.C. and Canada's early development and economic future.

McRae was a patriot devoted to the welfare of Canada. He started a new B.C. political party, then later became an MP and finally a Senator. He was made a General in WWI and received numerous awards including an OBE from Britain as well as allegedly an offer of a title. Great Britain also appointed him to create the first British Ministry of Information, extraordinary for a non-British citizen. When ownership of Hycroft was officially transferred to the Federal Government at a ceremony in 1943, General McRae prophetically stated, "there will be fewer structures of this kind in Canada in the future".

Hycroft is an unparalleled and irreplaceable Vancouver landmark. Truly one of a kind, it has been preserved for 100 years. Although Vancouver is a relatively young city, a great many of its heritage buildings and gardens have been destroyed. Hycroft is a visible story of very important architectural, artistic, horticultural, economic, political, social, cultural and charitable history and heritage.

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## 6. THE UNIVERSITY WOMEN'S CLUB OF VANCOUVER

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### 6.1. History of the Club

The University Women's Club was founded in 1907. On, May 11, eight well-educated young women met at the home of Evlyn Farris on Davie Street to promote education for women and girls and to enjoy their mutual friendships as new arrivals in Vancouver. Evlyn was a graduate of Acadia University in Nova Scotia. The others were from universities in Eastern and Central Canada and the U.S. There was no university here in British Columbia. Evlyn became the first president of the UWCV. The objectives of the Club were "the stimulation of intellectual activity and promotion of social intercourse among university women and the practical advancement of art, science, literature and social reform." By the end of the year, the Club had 24 members.

Evlyn Farris was instrumental in the founding of UBC in 1912. At the age of 34, she was one of the first elected members to the UBC senate, the only other woman being from the University Women's Club of Victoria, a club which was also founded by Evlyn Farris

Other early members of the Club included: teacher, Annie Jamieson, from Manitoba, who later became the Club's second president and the first female teacher to have a Vancouver school named after her in 1942, and Helen Gregory MacGill, who came to Canada from Ontario via the USA. She was a journalist, reformer and advocate of women's suffrage. She became the first woman juvenile court judge in Vancouver. A plaque was mounted in the UBC library in her honour and she was recently recognized by Parks Canada as a person of national historic significance in a ceremony held here at Hycroft.

### 6.2. National/International Connections

The University Women's Club of Vancouver joined the Canadian Federation of University Women in 1922 and also became a member of the International Federation of University Women at the same time. CFUW has consultative status at the United Nations and IFUW works with the UN in Vienna, Paris and Geneva.

The Club has hosted the CFUW AGM five times (most recently in 2007, the Club's anniversary year), and the IFUW Triennial meeting in 1980. Representatives from the Club have attended most of the international conferences.

### 6.3. Purchase of Hycroft

In the early days of the Club, meetings were held in the homes of members and later in rented accommodation. However, desiring to have their own clubhouse, members established a Club Quarters Committee in 1954. Members searched for suitable accommodation for their meetings and activities and considered purchasing a lot and building a clubhouse.

The Edwardian mansion, Hycroft, came on the market in 1961. However, the price was unaffordable to the Club at a time when women did not qualify for mortgages. The government agreed to subdivide the property and the Club was able to purchase Hycroft in 1962. The restoration of Hycroft to its original splendour began and was open to members in September of that year. Since that time, members have continued to work to maintain Hycroft.



#### 6.4. Goals of the Club

Members of the University Women's Club of Vancouver promote intellectual activity, an interest in public affairs and education and provide scholarships to two secondary schools and many institutes of higher learning in the lower mainland. The members work to preserve the heritage house and enjoy the fellowship of members from universities around the world.

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### 8. CONTACT INFORMATION

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