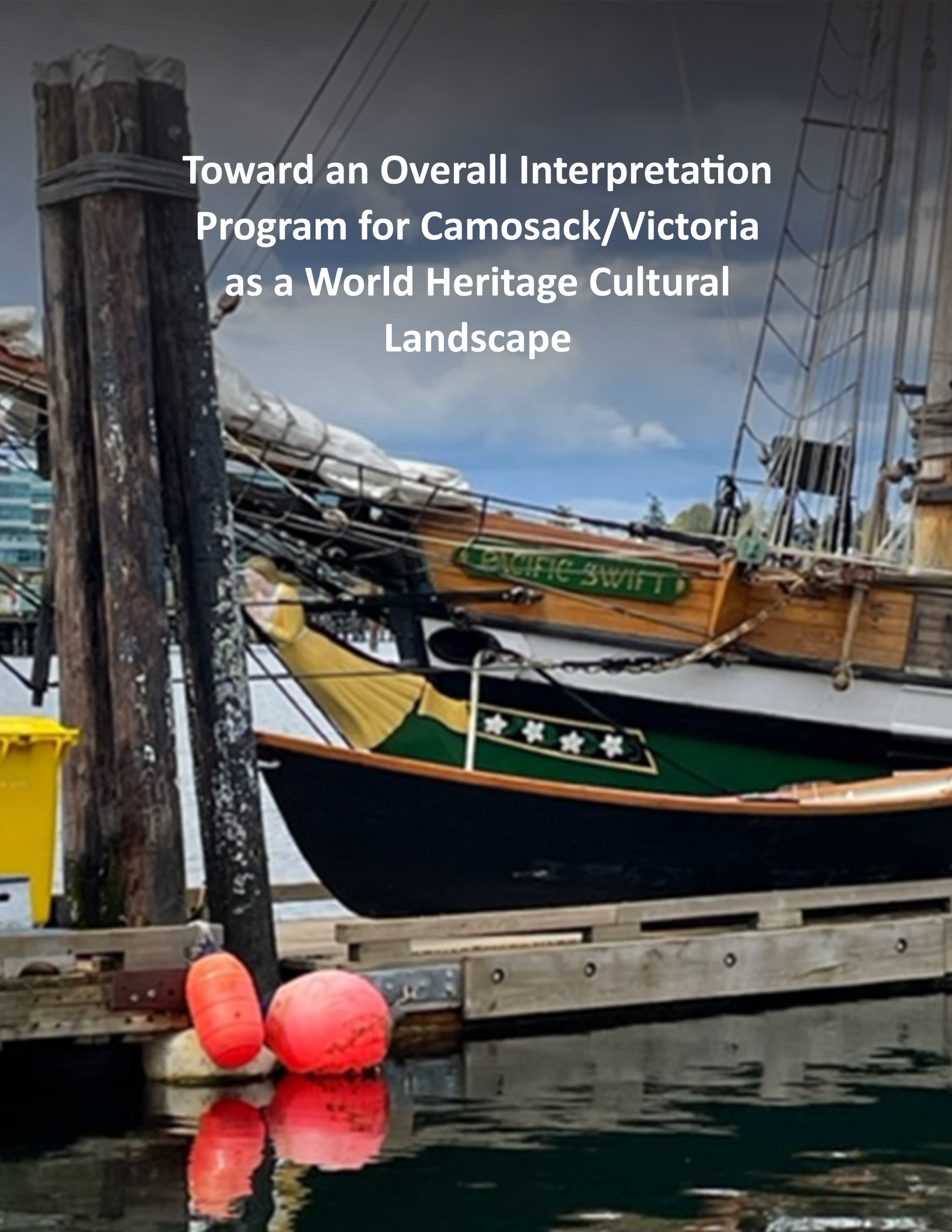


**Toward an Overall Interpretation
Program for Camosack/Victoria
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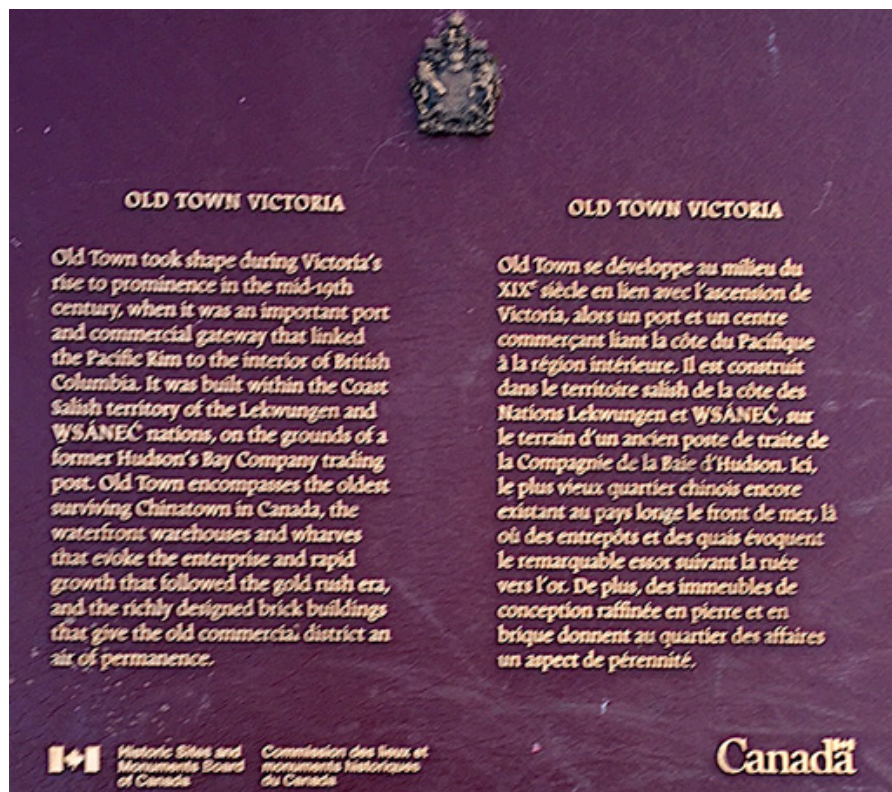


Toward an Overall Interpretation Program for Camosack/Victoria as a World Heritage Cultural Landscape

SITUATION BRIEF # 10

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An Interpretive Master Plan for Old Town was authored by Aldrich Pears and Judy Oberlander in 1993. It was never acted on. But it still contains some good strategies, although perhaps now dated in terms of technology and recent thinking around inclusive cultures.



Although it was envisioned that the Victoria Civic Heritage Trust would play a major role in Old Town interpretation, ultimately it has proven beyond its resources. The lack of a comprehensive interpretation program has long been the biggest deficiency in the City's Heritage Program.

A permanent facility that provides stories, photos, maps, etc. isn't necessarily going to be the answer. While many historic sites have invested heavily in stand-alone Interpretation Centres ongoing operating expenses can be considerable. A more efficient way to achieve the same ends could be by encouraging a reinvigorated Maritime Museum of British Columbia to assume this role. The theme of "Victoria, historic port and trading hub on Indo-Pacific" does fit their remit. In recent years the Royal British Columbia Museums has moved further and further from favouring local Victoria topics and themes in its exhibit programs.



The Songhees Nation is also contemplating investing in an cultural centre to present Indigenous culture and history to the local and visiting public. A Chinese-Canadian museum is already under development for Chinatown.

The City core has attraction value, both architecturally and historically, and is compact and eminently walkable. It still retains deep potential for the Victoria narrative, both pre and post settlement. The first thing visitors think of when visiting the great cities of Europe is to do a city centre walking tour of its highlights. Why not in Victoria too? How do we make the Old Town historic site top-of-mind for our visitors? And building such a reputation would be an important promotion for the Old Town's prospects as a UNESCO World Heritage site! The Songhees Nation has recently made a significant investment in the infrastructure to develop a local marine-based guided tour program. Hotels could make heritage guided tours part of their vacation room packages.

There is ample room for more heritage guided tour initiatives, both free and fee based. Tours could be complemented with a concise guide book for additional self-guiding. The Visitor Centre could be a point of departure. And the Architectural Institute of British Columbia runs a summer Down Town guided tour series. All these could be expanded and better promoted.

However: guides need to have 'the knowledge'. That means some agency should provide the training, develop learning resources, also test and license its guides. The University of Victoria Continuing Studies which already offers a Diploma in Cultural Resource Management might be such an agency. The tour-guide licence should be extended to pedicabs, Tally-Ho drivers, food tour guides, tour bus drivers, and others.

There has been some success with theatrical guiding, one or two guides per tour, role-playing James Douglas or Amor De Cosmos for instance, and letting these historical characters tell stories from their perspectives! More

such “theatrical” tours could be developed and integrated with other types of tours. Some historical locations such as Chinatown, Wharf Street, Richard Carr’s warehouse, City Hall, Bastion Square could be animated with theatrical interpretation.

But mobile, pop-up street theatre, along the lines of the "living history" scenes as performed at Fort Steele or Barkerville, would work in Old Town, again as long as the locations were carefully selected and prepared, referencing as many local structures as possible.



A program of interpretation for Old Town Victoria must also use the latest technology available in order to make it comprehensive, engaging and, above all, accessible.

The world-over, electronic communication is now the norm. During the past two decades, the print medium, collectively, has been relegated to secondary status, especially among youth and middle-age audiences. While print, be it journalism or public display signage, continues to have a necessary

and key role in communication, individuals now rely on personal electronic communications devices as their preferred means of connection with others, as well as the world at large.

There are a number of examples of historical interpretation through electronic media. YouTube is a major medium. Here are several examples:

History in 3D Ancient Rome

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kveAOZfDA44>

Ancient Rome—Reborn—thanks to virtual reality

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8hqR2O8HiM>

The Virtual Reconstruction of the Linz Synagogue

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WeO2Ps2dmmM>

New Life in Old Buildings: Distillery District, Toronto-Ontario Canada

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MGGctSxRGmo>

Beyond Bytown: Virtual Lecture Series

<https://bytownmuseum.com/beyond-bytown/>

Virtual tour Bellevue National Historic Site

<https://www.pc.gc.ca/en/lhn-nhs/on/bellevue/visit/virtual>

Using electronic media for historic interpretation on site will become increasingly popular. As visitors walk through Old Town Victoria, they see and experience heritage buildings, referring to a program on screen revealing early photographs and other historical aspects of these sites. While we recognize the value and impact of live interpreters, for example, use of electronic interpretation mitigates the cost of personnel, crowd control, security and the vagaries of weather.

Digital media could be combined with quality interpretation signage and panels. A virtual program can address language barriers and scheduling factors. Moreover, virtual interpretation programs have numerous possibilities



in addressing the multiplicity of cultural themes. Hence, Old Town Victoria being one theme area, others such as the Camosack, Songhees and other places of special interest can be brought to life. (See the exemplary interpretive signage program of the Municipality of Saanich <https://www.saanich.ca/EN/main/parks-recreation-community/parks/parks-trails-amenities/amenities/interpretive-signs.html#hist>).

The focus on Old Town, driven in part by the concentration of the residential, commercial and tourist activities, as well as heritage buildings, is however limiting. The Lekwungen site of Camossung - what Douglas and the HBC heard as “Camosack” – encompasses an area well beyond Old Town, a good bus ride or bike ride out into the environs. of the city centre. In fact, it includes the entire Gorge water-way. A site like Point Ellice House - built in 1861 and home to the largest collection of objects connected with the Settler history of Victoria - is also outside of Old Town. It’s highly unlikely walking tours from downtown will make it to Point Ellice House (not to mention that Rock Bay is not at the very walkable neighbourhood). Completing the harbour-walk way, at least to Bay Street should be a strategic priority.



The Victoria story cannot be told in isolation of the wider cultural landscape, the traditional village sites of the Lekwungen speaking people along the shore-line from the upper reaches of the Gorge Waterway, the Inner Harbour and along the shore lines of James Bay, Fairfield, Oak Bay and Saanich, including some of near-shore islands. Also, natural sites such Garry Oak meadowlands which are being restored in community parks bring Victoria's pre-contact natural heritage to life.

Observations

- To connect or coordinate these sites, an historic trail program taking a lesson from Saanich's Gorge-side linear park with serial thematically linked interpretive signage would be helpful. Again, digital technology, can also play an important role.
- The big take-away however, is Victoria's failure to lever its heritage assets by not sufficiently developing the means to engage both local residents and visitors in an intangible heritage that is the raison d'être of its physical assets.
- To ensure minority voices are recognized in the identification and interpretation of local heritage buildings and sites municipal advisory committees need to ensure their composition is reflective of the local community, with a particular priority given to First Nations on whose lands these resources are situated.
- With the distinct possibility of the Royal British Columbia Museum being closed for renewal sometime within the next decade the opportunity to focus on Old Town as a major visitor attraction stands in the offing. A coalition of interests including the City, First Nations, Destination Victoria, the Harbour Authority, local heritage Trusts and Foundations along with museums should reach out to engage local historians, knowledge keepers, and heritage enthusiasts to recreate Old Town and Harbour as a heritage destination.
- On the topic of a digital interpretive assist for Old Town see **Situation Brief #36 Proposal for a Victoria Heritage Geolocational App.**