

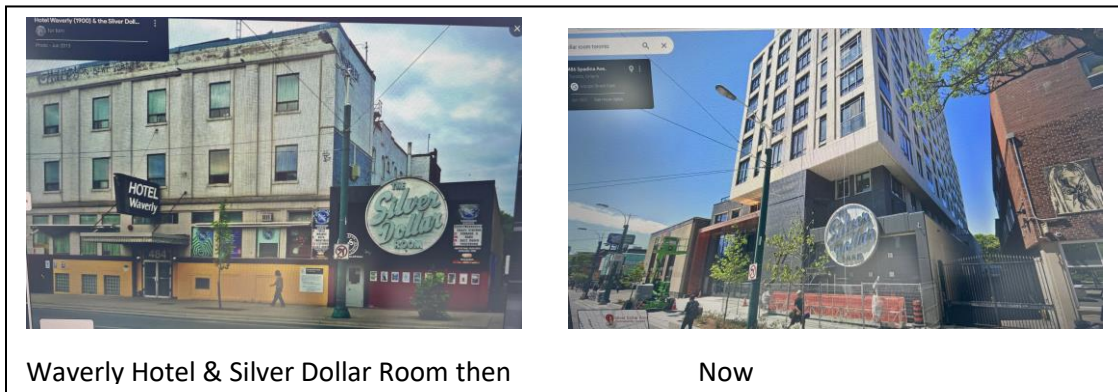
## Heritage BC/Royal Roads Webinar

### Diverse Views on Decolonizing & Reimagining Heritage Policy in BC

May 23, 2024 1 -4:40 pm – Report by G. Davison

Moderated by Deniz Unsal & Jasmindra Jawanda, Royal Roads

Dr. Sara Ross, a Dalhousie law professor, gave the first talk, entitled “Cultural Rights, Law, Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Urban Context.” She provided background on the international context for preserving cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible. She went through the various international conventions defining these terms and provided examples of how such preservation has worked on the ground. She pointed to Australia’s Burra Charter (2013)<sup>i</sup> and the United Nations Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2011), which has been ratified but not yet implemented in several countries, including Canada. While cultural heritage is a provincial responsibility, laws that govern it are different from one province to another, yet all were established by colonial societies with hegemonic frameworks. She referenced the Canadian Register of Historic Places<sup>ii</sup> which has a guide to “Standards and Guidelines for the Conservation of Historic Places in Canada”, and UNESCO’s UN Recommendations on Historic Urban Landscapes which provided action items and a toolkit for dealing with tangible and intangible heritage.<sup>iii</sup> Sara talked about the counterhegemonic use of hegemonic legal tools. The example she provided was a case study of the Silver Dollar Room, a pub next to the Waverly Hotel in Toronto that played an important part in that city’s blues and jazz scene. When someone wanted to demolish the hotel and bar and put up a high rise, the Silver Dollar Room was saved because of its cultural significance (though this location is now closed and a new one opened nearby during construction).



There followed a community panel, with topics brought up ranging from intergenerational equity, community land trusts, bylaw vigilantes trying to shut down places like the Silver Dollar Room, the politics of street renaming, and the use of municipal incentives for property owners to preserve heritage.

The next session was led by Jamila Douhaibi, who is Executive Director of the BC Black History Awareness Society based in Victoria. Her talk was titled “BC Black History: Resilience Amid Racism”, and she took us through a timeline of BC Black history.<sup>iv</sup> One of Jamila’s comments stuck with me: “We live on stolen spaces in a stolen land. In school, there was nothing about Black history.” The society has its first paid position in 30 years.

The next session was led by Satwinder Kaur Bains, Director of the South Asian Studies Institute at the University of the Fraser Valley.<sup>v</sup> Her talk was titled “Community Engaged Heritage Praxis – A Response by Racialized Canadians.” Though Sikhs had been in the Fraser Valley for over 100 years, there was nothing about them in any of the heritage sites. Through the Gur Temple in Abbotsford, established in 1911 and designated as a National Historic Site<sup>vi</sup> in 2002, the society she works with aims to educate Canadians about the history of South Asians in BC, a bottom-up approach to heritage. There was a decided anti-colonial bias which seemed to be encouraging attendees to bypass established “mainstream” entities and work only with the grass roots. I commented that the Prince George Heritage Commission was not ignoring racialized or intangible heritage, that volunteers can only do so much, and encouraged attendees to get involved with “mainstream” bodies to influence their heritage activities.

The keynote speaker of the day was the last one, Professor Amareswar Galla, distinguished chair of the UNESCO Inclusive Museums and Sustainable Heritage Development, based at Annat University in India. He has done a lot of work around the world, including Canada and Australia. His talk was to be on “Museums as Sites for Safeguarding Intangible heritage”, but instead he took us through a lifetime of heritage work on decolonizing heritage. A UNESCO study found that 93% of world heritage sites were in seven “white” countries. A recent book he edited, World Heritage: Benefits Beyond Borders (Cambridge University Press, 2012), includes 129 languages from contributors and descriptions of heritage sites by locals, eg. Angkor Wat by the Khmer, and reconnection & reconciliation in Jasper National Park. In Australia, he helped develop the Burra Charter and guidelines for curricula, bringing indigenous stories into the mainstream. In Canada, he has worked with the National Galley, the Canadian Museum of Civilization and the Art Gallery of Ontario. He took us through international convention after international convention, starting in 1954 in The Hague and culminating in the 2001 UN’s universal declaration of cultural diversity, which, though aspirational, sets out a standard for heritage organizations and governments to reach for.

**Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) Approach**

**7 key “action” items**

**Traditional alongside innovative tools modified to account for the local context:**

1. Undertake a full assessment of the city’s natural, cultural and human resources;
2. Use participatory planning and stakeholder consultations to decide on conservation aims and actions;
3. Assess the vulnerability of urban heritage to socio-economic pressures and impacts of climate change;
4. Integrate urban heritage values and their vulnerability status into a wider framework of city development;
5. Prioritize policies and actions for conservation and development, including good stewardship;
6. Establish the appropriate (public-private) partnerships and local management frameworks;
7. Develop mechanisms for the coordination of the various activities between different actors.

It was an interesting afternoon, and the folks at Royal Roads are hoping to produce a digital version of the day’s presentations. I’ll pass that on once it’s available.

<sup>i</sup> <https://australia.icomos.org/publications/burra-charter-practice-notes/>

<sup>ii</sup> [historicplaces.ca](https://historicplaces.ca)

<sup>iii</sup> <https://whc.unesco.org/en/hul/#resources>

<sup>iv</sup> See <https://bcblackhistory.ca/bc-black-history-timeline-publication/>.

<sup>v</sup> <https://ufv.ca/sasi/>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://canadiansikhheritage.ca/gur-sikh-temple/>