

Miyazaki House project launches in Lillooet, B.C.

Set in the rugged grandeur of the Fraser River canyonlands, the historic goldrush town of Lillooet seems an unlikely location for a priceless Japanese-Canadian heritage site - the beautiful nineteenth century home that served as the office and residence of Dr. Masajiro Miyazaki from the internment days of World War II until ill health forced him to relocate to Kamloops in 1983.

Miyazaki House was originally called Longford House and was built for Lillooet's pioneering Phair family sometime in the late 1800s; the exact date was never recorded. It was an exceptionally fine home in its time and remains so to this day.

The town of Lillooet has a storied past. In 1860 it was the second largest settlement north of San Francisco. and, in addition to its original First Nations inhabitants, was home to a multicultural population of American, Mexican, British, French and Chinese miners. Once the goldrush ran its course, it fell into decline with only the newcomers who turned to agriculture settling permanently. In 1877, Irish immigrant Caspar Phair hiked from Yale to Lillooet to take a job as teacher at the town's one room schoolhouse. The same year, Cerise Armit Eyre, newly graduated from finishing school in England, arrived to join her parents and in 1879 Caspar and Cerise were married. Their oldest son Artie was one of the first white children born in Lillooet and lived in the town until his passing in 1967.

Caspar hired master builder William Duguid to build Longford House for his family in a unique Second Empire Mansard style. During his career, Caspar held a range of official positions including Gold Commissioner. In 1887, Cerise Phair purchased the town's largest general store and the Phairs settled into a prosperous and cultured ifestyle in the midst of an otherwise unrefined frontier town. Predecesed by their second son Bertie, both Phairs passed in 1933 but Artie Phair continued on in Longford House. By all accounts, Artie was a true gentleman, a philosopher, writer and athlete but above all a photographer who documented the landscapes and events of the historic Bridge River country. His love of photography took him to the town of Bridge River (now South Shalalth) where by chance he met Dr.Miyazaki who was interned there with his family.

It is a credit to the character of both men that, on the basis of this one meeting, Artie drafted the petition that allowed the Miyazakis to relocate from the remote community of Bridge River and become the town doctor of Lillooet. Living alone in the family home at the time, he invited the Miyazakis to move in with him and a front room was converted into Dr. Miyazaki's office.

The story of how the home of Lillooet's most prominent citizens came to house an enemy alien during the height of the "yellow peril" years of World War II reflects the beauty and value of friendship, in particular, the friendship between Dr. Miyazaki and Artie

Phair.

This friendship continued during their professional association as doctor and coroner. Some of their wild adventures together are recorded in Dr. Miyazaki's recently re-released autobiography, *My Sixty Years in Canada*.

Artie opted to move to quarters behind the family store but lingering post war restrictions prevented Dr. Miyazaki from purchasing the property outright. An arrangement with the house's legal owner, Artie's son Harold, enabled him to purchase the house with a deposit coupled with an agreement that the balance would be paid when the ban was rescinded.

During his time in Lillooet Dr. Miyazaki contributed greatly to the community including garaging and dispatching its first ambulance service, serving three terms on the town council, founding and being an active member of the Volunteer Fire Department, keeping the town's meteorological records, being active in the Boy Scouts, serving as President of the Historical Society and being a charter member of the Lillooet Elks and. Born into a Buddhist family, Dr. Miyazaki converted to Christianity while a medical student and was devout member of the local United Church.

For his public service, Dr. Miyazaki was awarded many honours including Freeman of Village and the Order of Canada.

In 1983, recurrent kidney problems forced him to move to Kamloops to live with his daughter and his parting gift to the people of Lillooet was the very home he was prohibited from purchasing in 1946.

Miyazaki House remains in the heart of Lillooet but sadly due to other priorities of the District of Lillooet defined by the financial shortfalls of the area's struggling economy, it has fallen into a state of disrepair and disuse. In particular, Dr. Miyazaki's daughter, Betty Inouye, is concerned that leaving it empty and unheated in the wintertime will greatly contribute to its decay.

Fortunately a group of dedicated volunteers led by Lillooet resident Mariko Kage have been spurred to action out of the fear of losing this important heritage site.

In June of 2012, Kage made a passionate plea to the town council to express the group's concern about the deterioration of the house which, although its beautiful grounds are accessible year round, is now only open to the public during the summer months.

Through conversations with longtime area residents she concluded that, "Dr. Miyazaki was living proof that the tragedies and injustices of war and racial strife can be overcome with

goodwill and fellowship and that ultimately all peoples can live in harmony and meaningful existence together.” Kage feels that this is “an important message not only for Canadians but for the whole planet.”

The committee received official recognition from the District of Lillooet in March of 2013 and are poised to fulfill their vision to honour Dr. Miyazaki’s generous gift of the historic Phair residence to District of Lillooet by promoting its restoration and transformation into the town’s multicultural heart.

Currently, the Board is taking inventory of repair items such as refinishing all hardwood floors, replacing roofs and gutters, interior and exterior painting etc. A ‘Visioning Open House’ event on May 30th will engage local residents in a discussion to brainstorm how the Miyazaki House can be best utilized in the future.

Coming up on June 21st, for the second year, a Japanese Canadian Internment Tour is organized by Nichola Ogiwara of NNHMS to visit Lillooet area’s historical internment sites. Participants will be having lunch at the beautiful grounds of the Miyazaki House where Kage will join the group to provide an update on the restoration project.

This newly formed Miyazaki House Society is actively seeking donations and grants to restore the house to its formal glory and fielding suggestions. Some of the revitalization ideas include a Writers in Residence program during the off season months, art gallery, wedding and other special event destination, and a film location.

We are welcoming people across the country to join the society. To contact the society, to access further information, and to find out how you can send donations to support the historic Miyazaki House, please refer to our new upcoming website: www.miyazakihouse.com, or write to: Miyazaki House Society, P.O. Box _____ Lillooet, B.C. V0K 1V0.

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