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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY'S STUDENT NEWSPAPER

THE FORGOTTEN QUARTER

A special on Vancouver's lost Black neighbourhood

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The former African Methodist Episcopal Fountain Chapel as seen from what remains of Hogan's Alley.

Photos by gna kresina / THE PEAK

Remembering Hogan's Alley

By Maggie Tkalcic



Today Hogan's Alley ends at Gore Avenue, where, ironically, there is current construction. Notice the onramp to the Georgia Street Viaduct in the distance.

Black History Month brings to mind thoughts of Martin Luther King, the American civil rights moment, slavery, and so many other things surrounding American-based Black History. When asked if Canada has an extensive Black History Canadian, historians scratch their heads in confusion. Though Canada's history is very broad, and quite intriguing, little is known about Canadian Black History. With Black History Month coming to a close, and a month of Black History research done, the dawn of a new sense of knowledge has come forward. Yet Vancouverites know very little about the Black History right in their own backyard.

Hogan's Alley was Vancouver's first, and unfortunately last, neighbourhood with a large concentration of African-Canadian people. Hogan's Alley, which is also known as "Park Lane," was destroyed in the 1970s because of a planned interurban highway that would run through Strathcona. Chinatown and the Georgia Street Viaduct have now subsumed the area. The construction of the Georgia Viaduct, in fact, was what led to the obliteration of Hogan's Alley. The building of

the freeway was halted due to the Strathcona community, but the construction nevertheless made its mark in changing the history of the area. Hogan's Alley, once home to numerous African-Canadian families, businesses, and the first African-America church — the African Methodist Episcopal Fountain Chapel — was essentially wiped off the map. Currently this area has practically no remnants of its past.

When Hogan's Alley was obliterated and the population dispersed, the culture left with it, as did any aspect of historical understanding.

SFU creative writing professor Wayne Compton is a member of the Hogan's Alley Memorial Project, which was constructed in 2002 with the goal of preserving the memory of this once-culturally rich neighbourhood. Compton suggests that the reason Hogan's Alley does not receive much mention is that no one kept a history of the community for posterity. Hogan's Alley was a poor area and essentially no academics came out of the community.

The important fact to remember is, as opposed to Native populations or Chinese populations in this area at the same time, the African-Canadian population was

small. The percentage of people in the area is what made it look like a larger demographic.

The African-Canadian population of Vancouver, however, has essentially stayed the same. Using demographic analysis, Compton says that there is still a fairly substantial Black population in the Lower Mainland — around 18,000 people — but we don't see these numbers because they are spaced out throughout the Lower Mainland. Mount Pleasant is probably the closest thing to Hogan's Alley in Vancouver today, as demographically, there are more African-Canadians in the area.

Hogan's Alley is an important part of Black History in British Columbia, and as the end of Black History Month approaches it is important to remember that Canada's history is also a cultural one. Our population is fairly unaware of the histories of the areas in which we live, and unfortunately cultural richness has become very dispersed. As Compton so rightly stated, with the dislocation of Hogan's Alley, it was as if the African-Canadian society was given an order to be as far from each other as they could, while still staying in the Lower Mainland.

"People are inclined to speak in a derogatory way about Hogan's Alley. One or two murders took place in Hogan's Alley, but you could go down through there alone at night and no one would ever touch you. There was a bootlegging joint in the middle of that block I used to go to sometimes . . . But there was nothing about Hogan's Alley, Hogan's Alley was a nice place."
 — Angelo Branca

"There was nothing but parties in Hogan's Alley — night time, anytime, and Sundays all day. You could go by at 6 or 7 o'clock in the morning, and you could hear jukeboxes going, you hear somebody hammering the piano, playing the guitar, or hear some fighting, or see some fighting, screams, and everybody carrying on."
 — Austin Phillips

"So all of the sisters and brothers and everyone, we commence getting busy then to start to having entertainments and bazaars and suppers and everything we could have, to raise the money to buy this church."
 — Nora Hendrix, on starting the African Methodist Episcopal Fountain Chapel

"It was just like a village, just the same. You went out the back door, you stood on the back verandah, and somebody'd wave at you, over there. Even if you didn't know them, you'd wave back. And when you walked down the street, you nodded your head. Sometimes you said, 'Hello,' or you just nodded your head and smiled and kept going. That's the way we lived."
 — Dorothy Nealy, on what it was like to live in Hogan's Alley

All quotes from *Opening Doors: Vancouver's East End*, Compiled and Edited by Daphne Marlatt and Carole Itter

