



FROM THE ARCHIVES

THE REGENT HOTEL

THE STORY:

This is a story about the legacy of the Regent Hotel. By looking back into the archives while paying attention to the current context of the Downtown Eastside (DTES) and recent events surrounding the Regent, what becomes clear is this story of incredible endurance and resilience on the part of the building as well as the tenants who have dwelled within it---even despite 100 years of concern regarding the hotel's structural conditions.

EVIDENCE at Arbitration, held at the office of Vancouver Trust Corporation, on Monday, the 16th of July, 1918, from 11 a.m. to 12:20 p.m. and from 2:30 p.m. to 5 p.m.

BETWEEN: ART CLEMES, Esquire,
Lessor,

- and -

THE REGENT HOTEL COMPANY
(Messrs. W.S. Ramsay and A.L. McLennan.)

LEASE: Dated July 18th, 1916.

Just a little over 100 years ago, an arbitration was held for the Regent Hotel about rent rates. One main factor in prompting a discussion of changing rents was prohibition, which came into effect in British Columbia in 1916. As a result, the bar in the Regent was no longer able to operate. The bar had been frequented often by the Canadian National Railway "[t]rainmen, brakemen, [and] firemen" (p. 41) who stayed at the hotel. For The Regent Hotel Company, which had been running the building, profits dropped. Through the Arbitration Act, Mr. Art Clemes, who had leased the building to The Regent Hotel Company, wanted to raise the rents. Mr. A. L. McLennan, who managed the building, suggested this was unfair because they struggled to rent rooms and found that business was poor. He answers during the arbitration:

A: We find it very poor. We find business poor and we find it impossible to get a really good rate for our rooms.

The men responsible for building upkeep, Mr. W. S. Ramsay and Mr. A. L. McLennan, both of whom worked for The Regent Hotel Company, considered whether or not there may be ways to draw more renters to the Regent:

Q: Is there any way or means by which the Regent could be improved?

A: No, I have no idea.

Mr. McLennan goes on to explain that they spent \$1500 (approx. \$20,000.00 today) installing linoleum floors for people to dance in the cafe, but the "class of railway people" (p. 41) who stayed at the hotel were accustomed to the bar---and though they were thankful for those railway workers who rented rooms, their views of people remained evidently classist:

A: What we are thankful to get. When i took over the Regent Hotel it was full of dead-beats. We could get the same class of people at the highest for \$2.00 and we charge \$3.

Comments about the hotel's proximity to Chinatown, too, reveal the discrimination and anti-Asian racism of the time. Mr. Ramsay explains:

At the back we have 28 rooms all of which look on China town, where they keep chickens, ducks and all sorts of animals. Not hundreds but thousands. The most disreputable looking place in the city. They had a chimney build on a shack down there, which keeps the place in constant smoke.

He continues:

On the other side we look into a wooden shack which is now occupied by a Chinaman. It is in a very disreputable state. We have a great job keeping out the rats. The average number of rats killed in the Regent is from 150 to 200 a month. They come from China town.

WHY THAT MATTERS:

Acknowledging the 100 years anniversary of this arbitration allows a look into the past to see how the legacy of the Regent has continued until the present day. In addition to glimpsing the type of anti-Asian racism that marked much of twentieth-century Vancouver (and continues today), we gain an important perspective on just how long this SRO has stood, how many people and stories it has housed, and how remarkably durable the building and tenants who lived in it have been.

On June 20, 2018, the Regent was closed. By June 28, 2018, tenants had to move out of the building, and are now dispersed across the city. Since then, the City of Vancouver has moved to expropriate the hotel from the Sahotas. What should happen, if the City is successful in expropriating the building? Might there be a tenant or community vision for how to move forward, if the City is successful? For example, can or should the Regent even be reopened? For whom? And what is the main problem after all---the structural brokenness of the building, or the systemic brokenness of our systems?



City of Vancouver Archives: 1923 AM54-S4-- Hot N37.1 [Hotel Regent, 160 East Hastings Street] - <https://searcharchives.vancouver.ca/hotel-regent-160-east-hastings-street>