

From: Bill d'Anthes [REDACTED]
Subject: Fwd: A TALE OF TWO CITIES
Date: 26 August 2019 at 10:45 pm
To:



From: Bill d'Anthes [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, August 26, 2019 9:12:02 PM
To: Wife Mobile Mobile [REDACTED]
Subject: A TALE OF TWO CITIES

What could New York City and Sydney possibly have in common? The harbours are certainly different. Sydney Harbour is clean and sparkling in most areas while New York City is surrounded by coffee brown water everywhere. Sydney has a minuscule population compared to the Big Apple. But there are similarities as well.

In each city there were two developers competing to construct what each believed to be an iconic high-rise building albeit in two different centuries

In New York City in the early 20th century, two famous competing commercial sky-scrapers were built at about the same time (the Empire State Building and the Chrysler Building). These were successors to the Fuller or Flatiron Building as the first so called skyscraper. In Sydney today we have a similar battle between two casino sky-scrapers (Crown and the Star Ritz-Carlton) successors to our first sky-scraper the AWA Building Sydneys first skyscraper now buried in York Street. Then there was Gold Fields House in Alfred Street that disappeared in a puff of smoke last year and the AMP Sydney Cove Building opened some years earlier with great fanfare by Prime Minister Menzies and forming the other side of the "Gateway to Sydney". When I arrived from the U.S. in 1971, the "new" AMP Centre Tower was just rising above the original. This gleaming black tower is even now being wiped off the Circular Quay skyline to be replaced with another AMP iconic building. The original AMP building has been preserved despite rudely raining mosaic tiles on Phillip Street many years ago.

Architectural controversy has long been a feature of Sydney. My first writing assignment in Sydney was to tell the story of the Builders Labourers saving the Rocks from being replaced by a towering Stalinist maze of architectural boredom. At that time contemporary architects and many members of the public were complaining about the brutal Sirius Building that even more people are attempting to preserve today. Other older controversial buildings are still discussed such as Harry Seidler's Blues Point Tower that has always reminded me of the County Jail in Jacksonville Florida. His MLC Centre, yet another sky-scraper, has met with greater appreciation, although it too had many early critics. The spider-like Sydney Tower or whatever it's called this week could have starred in War of the Worlds. Visitors to Sydney are totally confused by Sydney Square being so obviously round. (Perhaps Harry hadn't studied shapes that closely so early in his career.)

Then there is the upended stale loaf of bread that is the UTS Tower Building on Broadway (originally built for the NSW Institute of Technology). The building was struck by industrial lightning so many times while it was being built that it became the most expensive public building after the Sydney Opera House until the Westmead Hospital took that honour away. As a prisoner of "the Tower" for more than 20 years (closely guarding my two of the very few floor-to-ceiling windows in the building) I well remember thinking how lucky I was to be looking out at a full frontal view of the dismal stack at the Carlton United Brewery. This artistic brick chimney now adorns Central Park. Many citizens were grateful that the UTS Tower cost so much and took so long to build that plans to construct a string of them up George Street were abandoned.

What of the Anthony Horderns Building once the largest Department Store in Sydney occupying a full city block with 21 hectares of retail space. The building was long abandoned before being torn down and replaced by World Square. There are too many missed and missing theatres and cinemas in Sydney over the years to mention here, but a few such as Hoyts on George Street are dressed in Ronald McDonald's colours or disrespected in other ways. The reported 5M cost of preserving facades of the UTS Markets Building in Haymarket and other such developers tokens at least provide the public with some memory of what was there before. Then Frank Gehry crumpled a paper bag to come up with a new building for the Dairy Farmers block next door.

Many still remember our monorail lost forever to a couple of nondescript unit blocks in the ever expanding Haymarket. The public also lost Laurie Brereton's gift to NSW, the original award winning Darling Harbour. It was replaced by a new version with even more buildings but fewer refreshing water features with its back now fully turned away from the most densely populated area of Australia Ultimo and Pymont including the soon to depart Powerhouse and Harry's final public contribution to architecture the Ian Thorpe Aquatic Centre. The area has also been gifted with an even narrower road spine than previous and no more busses. One of the redeeming architectural features of new Darling Harbour is the spectacular timber tornado of the new library building. The loss of the monorail, instead of turning it into more than a toy and sending it clockwise around Barangaroo and the city to augment the over-crowded Light Rail is regretted by many. This would have been particularly welcomed by under transported Ultimo and Pymont.

Always remember that the industrial markets building once threatened with demolition later became our greatly loved and cherished Queen Victoria Building, even though it and other famous public buildings such as the Land Department Building, the now shrouded Education Department Building and GPO are now controlled by overseas interests. I should also mention a couple of famous buildings that are losing or have lost or their reasons for standing namely the highly controversial dispossession of the Powerhouse Museum and the void left in the Maritime Museum when Australia II sailed to a new home to Western Australia.

I note that the world did not end because of any of the above events and actions. Not yet anyway. In fact building two or more tall and distinctive buildings that may or may not become our future iconic buildings need not be earth shattering either as long as this time we don't forget to provide public transport infrastructure that includes a metro station, a viable bus and light rail service and most importantly, natural space. We can learn from New York's mistakes in the 20th century by not over doing the high-rise. Leave a lot of open space around big buildings so we can see and enjoy them (or curse them from a safe distance). Both the Empire State and Chrysler Buildings are almost unidentifiable to first time visitors at ground level. There are too many tall buildings around them. Embrace the Singapore Compromise with a little Australian leavening. That means we can build some tall buildings surrounded by green open space with some interesting infrastructure and great public transport.

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