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Demolishing history

Sacramento is changing and preservationists are outnumbered

The Wong Family Benevolent Association on Broadway at 17th Street has looked about the same for the last 50 years. Like many other buildings in Sacramento, all that is about to change. There will be a total remodel, add-on retail space, renovation of the upper apartments and a very short move for the association. I worked with the developers on the project, but I'm sad to see anything that has stayed the same that long change.

How does this connect to preservation of Sacramento history?

At least the Wong building will still be around a while longer, unlike two out of the three historic Tower Records buildings on Broadway. Most developers simply don't care about our local history, hell-bent into making Sacramento into another L.A. or San Francisco. Many residents don't, either, considering some are part of the massive influx from the Bay area. You don't hear much about the many neighborhoods full of natives or longtime residents who *do* care about Sacramento's history.

But one of the main reasons why Sacramento is great is that it was a small town for years, that it isn't completely homogenized yet.

Some preservation advocates were caught off guard when the two red brick Tower buildings were suddenly demolished. Why? I wasn't surprised. Sacramento is currently undergoing a massive change.

Every time developers build downtown—and all the way south to Broadway and beyond—they won't build anything one story anymore. Look around. Across the street from the demolished Tower buildings is a two-story Chipotle and retail building. Down by 5th and Broadway is a massive storage building higher than the elevated freeway. We never had these kind of high-rise buildings on Broadway in the last 50 years. Look at the giant monolith looming over everything else on Folsom Boulevard near the light rail station. All these were built very recently.

You can't really blame the changes on Sacramento preservationists not having their act



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together or not doing enough. These groups are small, outnumbered and exponentially outfunded by developers who are biased against Sacramento history by their very nature.

If you ask almost anyone who's lived on Broadway for 15 years or often much less, they will tell you that the Tower buildings were among the best-known spots in all of Sacramento. Tower Records was integral enough that it could easily be argued it was part of what makes this city. And now part of Sacramento is gone. How is property owner Jon Gianulias qualified to determine if the Tower buildings were historical or not? Isn't there an inherent bias as a developer to try and make that decision? My bet is that he knew full well it was a landmark to most of Sacramento and its citizens.

That makes the demolition even worse.

Nobody is proud of this or excited about what will come next, other than some developers. I have talked to plenty of people on Broadway, and not one expressed excitement about what will be put in place of the Tower buildings.

When *Lady Bird* director Greta Gerwig put Sacramento on the national map, I wonder if she realized that she was not just making a good film, but making a historical record of a town that will soon cease to exist as we knew it. □

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