

Eagle Ford Sign

Hastings Street Burnaby, BC



Conservation Approach

A Brief History of the Richfield Eagle

The Richfield Oil Company of California first used the Eagle in its advertising in the the 1920s with the bird perched on a shield with the slogan "The Gasoline of Power". By the early 1930s while the company struggled in receivership the eagle took a flying position and held the shield in its claws. In 1937, the newly reorganized Richfield Company emerged and unveiled a new and more aggressive eagle.

The company announced that *"Richfield's new Eagle will raise its glorious wings on our station pumps, lube decals, advertising, outdoor boards - in fact, at every point where Richfield's products are displayed and sold. Our dealers' attention is called to the tremendous dramatic power which the new design exemplifies. This great bird, with its keen eye on the future, is poised and ready to take off with one great sweep of his powerful wings. Keen, dominant, alert, this new and modern design harmonizes perfectly with the new spirit of Richfield."*

The Eagle on Hastings Street

Richfield Oil entered the British Columbia market in 1929 and set up a network of independent service station operators to sell the company's products. The service stations operated under their own names but carried the company's branding.

Neon Products Ltd. of Vancouver was contracted to supply the original neon signs that simply spelt out Richfield in neon and it is presumed that they manufactured the Eagle signs as well.

The Burnaby Eagle has its origins with Fred Walsh and his garage at 4161 East Hastings Street. Walsh began his career as a mechanic for Frank Harbick's North Burnaby Garage on Hastings Street in 1926 and by 1933 he had moved east to 4161 East Hastings Street to his own garage, Walsh's Motors. In 1949, Frank McCracken became a part owner of the business and the following year the business changed its name to Eagle Motors Garage and Sales with McCracken as president. By 1956, Eagle Motors was welcomed by the Ford Motor Company as one of their new Ford and Monarch dealers.

It is unclear when the Eagle was erected for Walsh's Motors but photographs in the City of Vancouver Archives show identical signs at local garages in the mid-1940s.

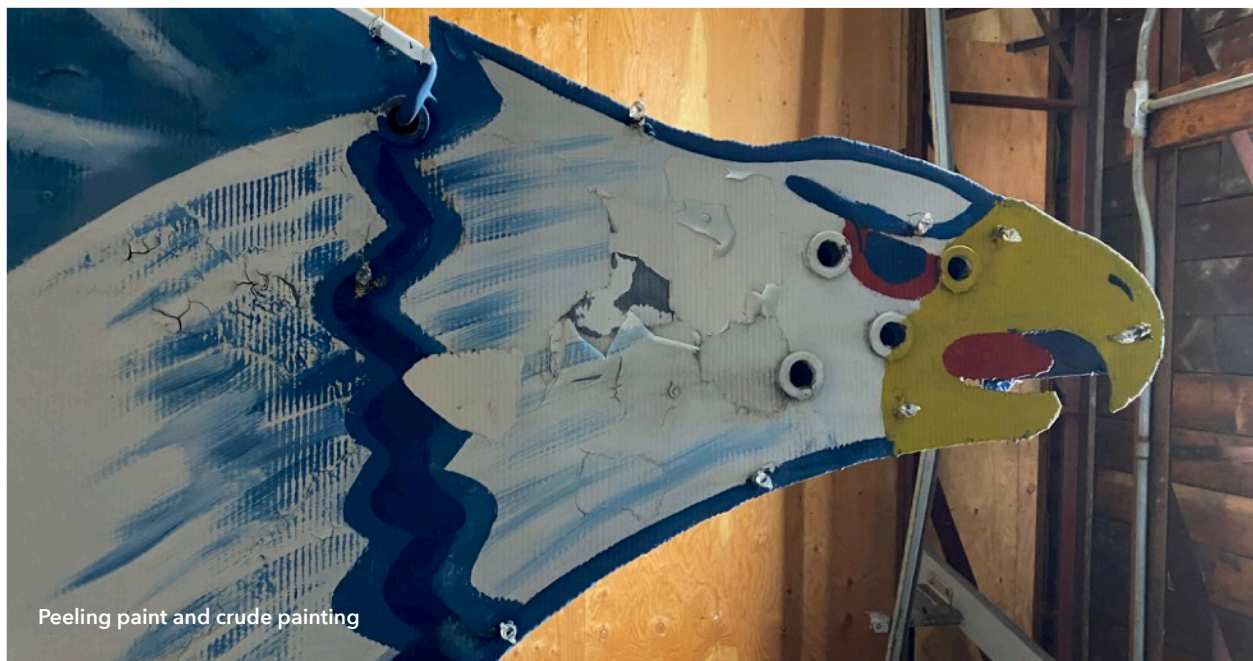
Condition

The Eagle is constructed with sections of corrugated sheet metal screwed to an internal armature. It is in good condition overall considering its age and life outdoors. Initial inspection show some minor corrosion but the exterior metal work is sound for the most part. The wing tips have been bent slightly on one side and there are access covers missing.

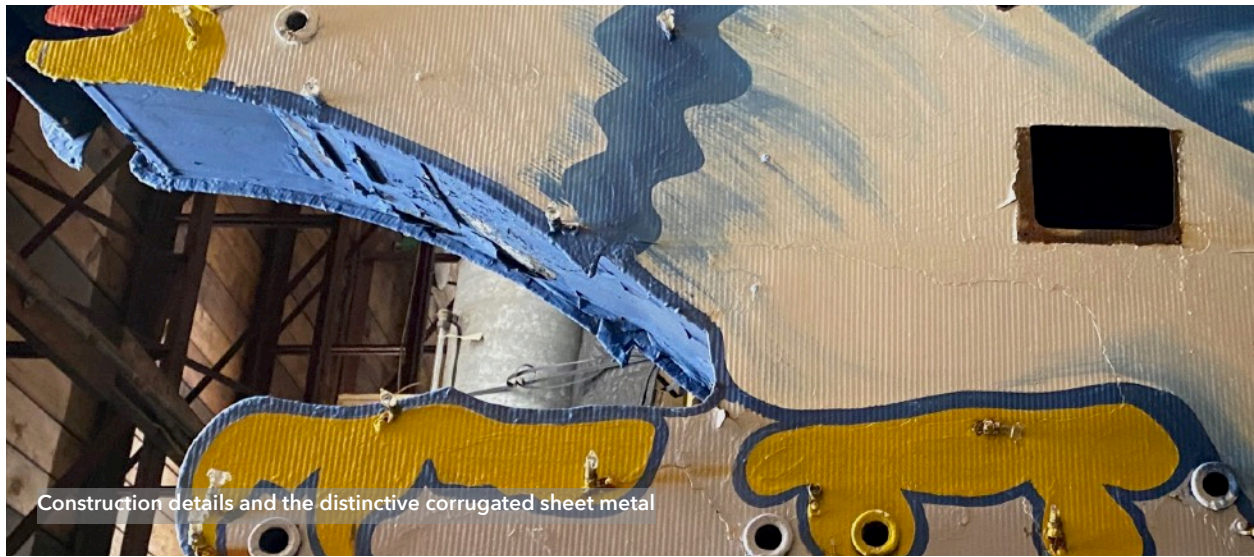
Paint chips show multiple layers of paint applied over the years. The painted image is a key distinction that the Vancouver Richfield signs have over their American counter parts where surviving examples of the Eagle are porcelain enamel. The porcelain creates a smooth surface and there is no variation in the representation of the eagle.

Historic photos of the Vancouver and Burnaby Eagle signs show slight variations in the paint work and with the regular maintenance and touch ups by the sign company crews the Burnaby Eagle has evolved over the years. The distinctive design of the feathers in the wings and the breast have been obscured and the head certainly isn't portraying the "*keen, dominant, alert*" stance the original designer intended.

The majority of the neon tubes are missing but most of insulators remain in place.



Peeling paint and crude painting



Construction details and the distinctive corrugated sheet metal



Minor damage to the wing tips can be seen.

Conservation Approach

The overall conservation approach is restoration which would include new paint work, necessary repair and stabilization of the existing metalwork and new neon tubes.

Documentation: Before work begins the sign's current condition should be carefully documented. As well, for the history of its manufacture, care should be taken to uncover and document any surviving sign company labels. One label is painted over on the base of the sign under the feet and archive photos of other local Richfield signs show the original sign company placed a painted label on the outward face of the wings just under the vent cover.

For the archive record some larger paint chips should be retained.

The overall Conservation Approach for the Eagle is to return it to a look that would better reflect its oil company heritage. The City of Vancouver Archives have good photographs of



The Richfield Eagles shown in 1946 at Downey's Garage (left) and the Vernon Garage on Commercial Drive. The Vernon Garage Eagle stands on a blue and yellow base which can be seen in photos of the Burnaby Eagle.

The red circle shows the location of the sign company's painted label

two Richfield Eagles dating from the 1940s and these should serve as the model for the repainting of the Eagle. While both signs are very similar differences can be seen between the two signs. The Vernon Garage Eagle stands on the same base as the Burnaby Eagle the details found on this version should be used as the model for the repaint.

Photo references from surviving examples of the Eagle in museums and archival material will assist in determining the correct colour and placement of the neon.

For the metal work, repair as much as possible and replace pieces only when absolutely necessary. Brackets and other pieces attached to hang the sign should be left in place. The photos above show how the bracket on the wings was used for the roof mounted sign where the Vernon Garage sign is supported on a pole and the brackets at the base and wing are not utilized.



An example of a porcelain enamel sign showing the flatness and lack of detail of the design versus the hand painted version.



One of the earliest images of the Burnaby Eagle from the *Vancouver Province* in 1966 showing the body of the bird in white and still perched on the Richfield base.

Frank McCracken is shown receiving an award from the Ford Motor Company