

Vancouver Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

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The Story of the Vancouver Post Office

April Speaker: Jim Bain

Residents around Hastings Mill — the beginnings of Vancouver — had a long way to go for postal services. They had to hike through wilderness to get to what is today New Brighton Park on the south shore of Burrard Inlet and west of the Second Narrows Bridge.

Maximilian Michaud started offering postal services in July 1869 in his Brighton Hotel, which would eventually be renamed the Hastings Hotel.

Five years later in 1874, mailing a letter became much easier when a postal outlet was opened in Captain Edward Stamp's Hastings Mill store. The store was at the north end of Dunlevy Street near Gastown. (The building, the city's oldest, was moved to the north end of Alma Street in 1930 and is still there today as a museum).

The history of mail service in Vancouver is an intriguing story and the subject of this month's talk.

Our speaker is Jim Bain, a 40-year employee of Canada Post who began his career in 1968. He has worked as a supervisor, shift manager and divisional manager. For the past three years he has been the Manager of Employee Communications.

Jim will take us through the colourful and sometimes tumultuous history of the Vancouver Post Office from its earliest days to its future plans.

Learn what happened to the Post Office in the Great Fire. When did the Post Office open its own building? How was mail handled before the Canadian Pacific Railway arrived?

When were street letterboxes introduced? When did the Post Office start delivering the mail instead of having recipients pick it up?

Between 1891 and 1910, the post office experienced expansion, growing with the young city of Vancouver. The Vancouver Main Post Office moved several times until 1910, when it finally settled for over four decades at the corner of Hastings and Granville, the location of today's Sinclair Centre. During those years, the building was the scene of several incidents of civil disobedience resulting in the occupation of the Post Office.

In the fall of 1958 the Main Post Office was relocated to 349 West Georgia Street, complete with a helicopter pad on the roof to speed mail service to and from the Vancouver Airport. A tunnel under the building was built to convey mail on belts to the railway station on Cordova Street.

In the 1960s and 70s, the mechanization program began to replace manual sorting of mail and now in 2008, there are plans to move the Post Office out of downtown.

Be sure to attend this month's talk to learn the whole fascinating story of Vancouver's Post Office.



Jim Bain

Next Meeting: Thursday, April 24 at 7:30 pm at the Vancouver Museum

PREZNOTES

The *City Reflections* film project is almost finished and is being readied for its public debut May 22nd. The project has taken three years of volunteer effort from conception to final post-production.

City Reflections is based on a 1907 film, the earliest known surviving footage of Vancouver. Attaching a camera to the front of a streetcar, Seattle-based cameraman William Harbeck filmed street scenes in the Vancouver of 1907.

The surviving six minutes of film was discovered in the early 1990s in the collection of an Australian film buff. At the time, it was thought to be scenes of Hobart, Tasmania.

After the scenes were correctly identified, Library and Archives Canada undertook the huge job of restoring the precious film.

In November 2004, the CBC's Colin Preston introduced the segment to a VHS audience. Our Chuck Davis pointed out that the film's centenary three years later (in 2007) would be an opportunity not to be missed by the VHS.

As a result, Wes Knapp began pulling in experts for a committee, which would become known as *City Reflections*, to oversee plans for the coming 100th anniversary of the film's production date.

It was decided that the various scenes and buildings featured in the silent film would be identified and that the film would be re-shot — but 100 years later.

There was much work to be done and the committee of nine put in long hours to get this project done.

First, we have to thank Wes Knapp for chairing the costly project and securing sponsors for it. Colin Preston made available a clean copy of the film on DVD. John Atkin, Andrew Martin and Chuck Davis did much of the research. Mary-Lou Storey acted as production manager. Ernst Schneider and Jason Vanderhill contributed technical expertise and graphic design. John Atkin and Jim McGraw worked on the script. Jim did the storyboard and directed. Paul Flucke oversaw the finances.

Many in Vancouver's film, television and recording industry also contributed their time, expertise and equipment to the project. The City of Vancouver Film and Special Events Office along with the Vancouver Police Department were also very helpful.

A project of this magnitude costs money and we could not have done this without the generous help of our many sponsors — individuals, institutions and corporations.

You will see more about everyone in next month's newsletter. In the meantime, thank you everyone.

Bruce M. Watson, President VHS

Simon Fraser Story Captivates Luncheon Guests

The April 6 Incorporation Day Lunch was a hit! VHS President Bruce Watson welcomed more than 80 members to the event, marking the 122nd anniversary of the incorporation of Vancouver, held at the University Golf Club.

The traditional ringing of the bell of the *Robert Kerr* was performed by the venerable Len McCann, who told — as he does each year — the story of the *Kerr's* part in the 1886 fire that destroyed Vancouver.

The keynote speaker was Stephen Hume of *The Vancouver Sun*, who spoke on "The Search for Simon Fraser."



Chuck Davis receives Award of Historical Merit from VHS Treasurer Paul Flucke.

Mr. Hume did more than search for Simon Fraser — he *followed* him. Literally. He was at the Fraser homestead in upstate New York on the same day of the year on which Fraser was born. Hume left Lachine at about the same time Fraser's brigade left, and he timed his 2007 trip down the Fraser River to, in his words, "coincide with his (1808) journey so I got a sense of the river as he must have experienced it and even tried to arrive at the sea at precisely the same time he must have."

Hume illustrated his talk with a great variety of photographs taken on that journey, by *Sun* photographers Mark Van Manen, Dusty Mayse, Glen Baglo and Bill Keay. It took him four years to research and write the series, prepared for the *Sun*. He consulted more than 350 books, and covered 20,000 kilometres



Len McCann

by plane, car, canoe, Zodiac, jet boat and shank's mare. One of the highlights of the talk was Hume's frequent meetings with people along the river: First Nations elders, fishermen and others.

The final word count of the Fraser articles in the *Sun* was about 150,000 words. They took 68 pages of the paper to complete, an astonishing total for a single theme. Despite the fact we've named a river after him, and a major street, and a university, not much is known about Simon Fraser. Thanks to the work of Stephen Hume, we're able to fill in many of the blanks. It was a continuously interesting and illuminating talk, and earned warm applause.

Tribute to John Spittle (1924-2008)

John Spittle, past president of the Vancouver Historical Society (1991-94), passed away in North Vancouver on Saturday, March 22, 2008.

Known for his boundless enthusiasm and passion for history, the Birmingham-born Royal Navy veteran was also active in the BC Historical Federation, Historical Map Society of BC, Royal Geographical Society and the North Shore Amateur Radio Club. He was the long-time chair of the Historical Trails and Markers Committee of the BCHF and worked with BCHF and HMSBC members, surveyors and heritage and outdoor groups to research, retrace and promote historical trails in British Columbia. He also researched Royal Engineers like Palmer and Leech, especially the latter's work on Vancouver Island.

We extend our sympathies to his wife, Greta, children and grandchildren.

RIGHT: John Spittle - (Tony Cox Photo)



Lots to Enjoy at BCHF Conference

There are many interesting events planned for this year's British Columbia Historical Federation (BCHF) annual conference. The event is being held in the Royal City — New Westminster, a one-time capital of B.C.

The opening reception on Thursday May 8th is the start of an exciting weekend. On Friday morning speakers will offer talks on themes related to BC's Gold Rush, Fort Langley, and the first capital. Jim Wolf will speak on New Westminster and the VHS' Charles Hou will speak on the Gold Rush and associated trails.

The B.C. Genealogical Society will host a book fair filled with books, new and old, about British Columbia. If you are looking for something special, you might find it there. At noon a bus leaves for Fort Langley and a guided tour of the Fort and other museums in the area. You will also enjoy high tea at St. George's Anglican Church.

The Annual General Meeting is being held on Saturday morning. Lunch will be held at the restored Victorian mansion, Galbraith House. The afternoon offers a choice of three walking tours: the waterfront, the Museum of the Royal Westminster Regiment, or a tour of the historic Queens Park neighborhood.

The awards reception and banquet will be held on Saturday evening at the Inn at Westminster Quay.

For information and registration, phone Brenda Smith (604-466-2636) or Ron Hyde (604-277-2627) or check the website at www.bchistory.ca.

Upcoming Speakers & Events

The VHS invites everyone (including non-members) to attend our monthly talks. The talks are free. They are held at the Vancouver Museum, 1100 Chestnut Street (close to Vanier Park) at 7:30 pm on the fourth Thursday of every month (unless noted). Special events may be held at other times for which there may be a fee.

Thursday, May 22, 2008, 7:00 pm
(Please note earlier start time)

Annual General Meeting

Our annual meeting where we talk about the VHS — where we've been and where we're going. The election of the VHS Executive will also be held. Right after the AGM, the City Reflections: 1907 — Vancouver — 2007 video will be screened publicly for the first time. The video will be shown in the 200-seat auditorium theatre. VHS members attending the AGM will have first choice of available seats.

Welcome New Members

Paul Dixon

Donna Peerless

Thank You...

... to the 14 VHS members who made donations totalling \$790 during January, February and March. Special gifts like these help us expand our program and help you reduce your taxes!

Historica Fair at the Vancouver Museum

Don't miss this chance to see the best Vancouver history student projects on display at the Vancouver Museum on Friday May 2nd during the day. This is also a chance to speak to the students about their projects and why they chose them.

Selected Vancouver projects then go on to B.C. and Canadian Historica Fairs. For more information or to volunteer as an adjudicator, phone Jane Lougheed, Education Department, Vancouver Museum, 604-736-4431.

This is an annual event, supported by VHS.

Inside the H. Y. Louie Family

March Speaker: Willis Louie

Willis Louie told an overflow enthusiastic audience that teamwork and allowing each person to reach his full potential has been the secret to success for Vancouver's Louie family. After H. Y. Louie arrived in Vancouver in 1896 and starting from a base of a few hectares of Vancouver farmland, the 11 Louie children and their descendants have blossomed in many ways.



Willis treated the audience to many family pictures of his siblings, particularly the boys playing soccer and basketball, something which came naturally to the athletic Louies. As members of a variety of Vancouver school teams as well as the Chinese Athletic Soccer Team, which won the Spalding trophy, they were often

city soccer champions. Willis himself played with the UBC Thunderbirds along with future mayor Art Phillips and stock exchange director, Don Hudson, and proudly displayed his Big Block awards.

One of Willis' brothers, Tong (1914-1998) built on the family company base using his UBC agronomy degree to not only acquire other food retailing companies, such as IGA, but also the very successful London Drugs. Quiet philanthropy and an Order of Canada were just two small aspects of his life.

Another brother, Quan, a UBC and Chinese Athletic soccer star, joined the RCAF and was seconded to the RAF Bomber Command flying raids over Germany from Tolthorpe in York, England. Quan was killed when his bomber was hit by flak.

Willis spent some time retracing Quan's path, going to such places as the Tolthorpe air station and the famed Betty's Restaurant in York which became de facto headquarters for RAF- RCAF. Quan now has a lake behind the Vancouver watershed named after him.

Two other brothers also entered the military. Ernie Louie parachuted into Malaya with the Force 136 Tideway Operations. Ed Louie, who studied at the University of California, was drafted into the US Army.

Willis, whose hobby is fishing with his family, retired from his family insurance business which is now run by his son.

The meeting ended appropriately when a member in the audience pointed out how the Louie private jet was used to transport four extremely rare yellow frogs to the West Coast for breeding purposes. This was just another example of the H.Y. Louie family giving back to the community.



Willis Louie

Bruce Watson

Vancouver Historical Society - Leadership, 2007 - 2008 (elected May 24, 2007)

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