

# Vancouver Historical Society

## NEWSLETTER

ISSN 0042 - 2487

Vol. 48 No. 7 April 2009

### History of the Port of Vancouver

*April Speaker: Rory Babin*

In the early summer months of 1791, Captain George Vancouver and his crew first entered Burrard Inlet and determined it to be one of the finest harbours on the continent. Naturally deep,



sheltered from the open ocean, and on the fringe of the resource hinterland of what was to become British Columbia, the Inlet was destined to become a great port. Less than a century later, the City of Vancouver was established, the railroad arrived, and the Port boomed.

From the first export shipment of lumber in 1864 on the *Ellen Lewis* bound for Australia, to the nearly 115 million tonnes of cargo moved last year, the City of Vancouver and the Port have a long and intertwined history. Vancouver

grew as the Port diversified: In addition to bulk and breakbulk cargo, the first cruise ships up to Alaska and across the Pacific docked at Burrard Inlet.

The advent of containers in the 1950s and imported automobiles in the 1970s give Port Metro Vancouver the five business sectors the Port has today.

On January 1, 2008, three regional port authorities (the Fraser River Port Authority, the North Fraser Port Authority and

the Vancouver Port Authority) amalgamated to become Canada's largest and busiest port, trading more than \$53 billion in goods with more than



100 trading economies annually and generating an estimated \$6.3 billion in GDP. Along the way there have been many stories, experiences and colourful characters, including "Gassy Jack" Deighton, to name just one. Our April 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting will offer a dynamic presentation of photographs and stories that describe the history of Port Metro Vancouver.



*April speaker Rory Babin*

Our April speaker, Rory Babin, is a Community Relations Representative with the Port. Along with a keen interest in history, Rory studies Geography and Economics at the University of British Columbia.

*Scott Anderson*

**Next Meeting: Thursday, April 23 at 7:30 pm at the Vancouver Museum**

## PREZNOTES

As Vancouver springs into bloom, two recent newspaper articles have caught my eye; the first was about the declining interest in flower gardens resulting in the closure of garden shows because of poor attendance. The second article was about a newly planned Japanese garden at City Hall.

In spite of densification, which has resulted in the inevitable disappearance of gardens, we keep coming back to our attachment to gardens, which came about as a result of the historical intersection of people, events and climate.

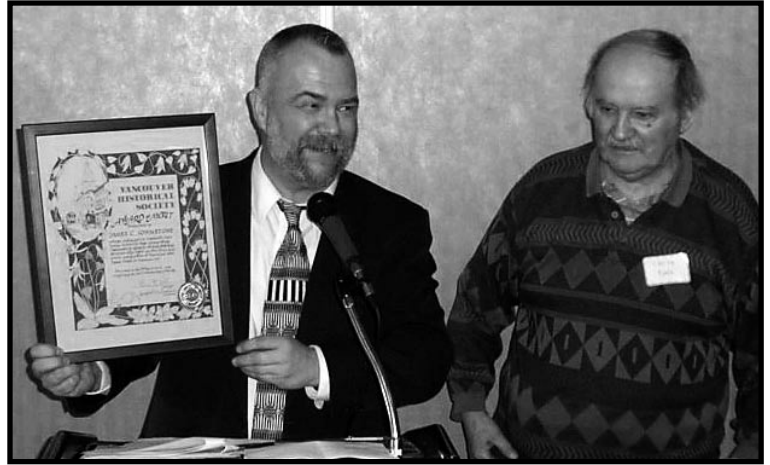
First, those groups like the Scots who immigrated to the City from essentially treeless landscapes, tried to normalize the landscape by sweeping aside all local flora (and no doubt selling the wood at a profit). Secondly, people replaced lost flora with non-native vegetable and flower gardens to create their own sustainable paradise in rough and ready early Vancouver. The Chinese grew vegetables that were unfamiliar to most. The Japanese brought with them not only a huge variety of plants but also considerable skills at constructing gardens. Contemporary events also intervened. A huge variety of non-native plants had become available as eighteenth and nineteenth century English, Scottish and European plant hunters had scoured the earth for new species and hybridized them for temperate climates. The point can be made by comparing the cross-bred rhododendrons and azaleas of the John and Mary Greig Stanley Park garden with the rather timid native varieties. As a result of people, climate and events, Vancouver became a garden city.

Public gardens followed suit. John Montgomery created a nearly mile-long rock garden in Stanley Park between 1911-1920. Other gardens, including the Queen Elizabeth and Van Dusen gardens carried on this tradition.

So, as Vancouver blooms once again, remember that the elements of its various peoples, events and climate have made it that way. Vancouver is a product of its past.

*Bruce M. Watson, President*

## Awards Presented at VHS Luncheon



*VHS Director Chuck Davis (above right) with VHS Award of Merit recipient, house historian James Johnstone.*

*VHS Treasurer Paul Flucke (below right) presents VHS Award of Merit to Henry Ewert, historical chronicler of the one-time B.C. Electric Railway Company. Presentations were made during the well-attended April 5th Incorporation Day Luncheon.*



---

## Last Chance for Nelson and Kootenay History Tours

The B.C. Historical Federation's annual conference will be held in Nelson, May 14-17, 2009, with its theme being: History in your Neighbourhood. Several tours have been planned including the SS Moyie, Sandon, Nikkei Interment Centre, heritage tours of Nelson. Enjoy a historical play or Kootenay storytelling and much more.

For more information, contact: Ron or Frances Welwood 250-825-4743 or webeditor bchistory.ca.

---

## Welcome New Members

Yih-Fan Wang  
Melvin Rippel

Richard Toporoski

## City Reflections Proceeds Support VHS Grants

The successful completion of our four-year *City Reflections* project has brought a welcome infusion of dollars to the VHS — \$7,800 in surplus project funds and over \$14,000 from the sale of *City Reflections* DVDs. This has enabled us to make two important grants in recent weeks.

A grant of \$6,050 to the Vancouver Public Library will be used by the Special Collections Department to digitize 354 glass plate negatives from the Dominion Photograph Company, 1914-1926. The work is now underway, and the photos are being added to the Library's collection of online photos.

The other grant, announced at our recent Incorporation Day Luncheon, provides \$10,000 to the City Archives of Vancouver to digitize the seven volumes of James Skitt Matthews' *Early Vancouver*, an irreplaceable source of information about our city's past. When completed, the entire work will be accessible to the public online, in searchable format.

The *City Reflections* main feature ends with the memorable words, "To Be Continued ...". In an unexpected way, these grants are an important part of that continuation!

*Paul Flucke, VHS Treasurer*

---

## City Reflections Project Wins Two Awards

The *City Reflections* DVD project along with its teacher resource guide has won two awards just weeks apart. First came notification that the project had won the City of Vancouver Heritage Award of Honour, the top award. Then the VHS was advised that the project had also won the B.C. Historical Federation Award of Merit. Both awards will be presented at a future date.

---

## Visit to Jewish Museum a Success



*VHS members visit the Jewish Museum and Archives on March 29th. Former VHS President Cyril Leonoff spoke on his latest book, *The Rise of Jewish Life and Religion in British Columbia: 1858-1948*. The event was a great success.*

## Upcoming Speakers & Events

The VHS invites everyone (including non-members) to attend our monthly talks. The talks are free and 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 28, 2009

### **The History of the Archdiocese of Vancouver – The Contribution of Maritimers**

**Speaker: Jacqueline Gresko**

Pioneer French and Irish priests founded missions, parishes and schools in the late-nineteenth century. First Nations, Canadians, Americans, Europeans and Asians contributed to traditions of faith and service in the city. The twentieth century Archbishops from the Maritimes – Neil McNeil, Timothy Casey and William Mark Duke – gave new direction to Vancouver's Roman Catholic community promoting the building of various Catholic institutions.

*Watch for soon-to-be announced news on our upcoming topics in the 2009-2010 series of talks.*

## Congratulations Chuck Davis!

Long-time VHS Director Chuck Davis has been inducted into the B.C. Entertainment Hall of Fame for his writing.

Chuck has been writing about Vancouver history for more than three decades. He began his career as the first announcer to go on-air at Canada's Armed Forces Radio. He went on to work for a number of radio and television stations including a long stint at the CBC. In the 1970s he took up writing a newspaper column at *The Province* until that paper became a tabloid. He has more than a dozen books to his credit.

Chuck is one of nine other personalities being inducted.

Inaugurated in 1994, the B.C. Entertainment Hall of Fame has almost 300 inductees. Inductees can be seen in the Starwalk along Granville near the Orpheum and the Starwall Gallery in the Orpheum lobby.

# Fighting City Hall over Strathcona

## *Last Month's Speaker: Shirley Chan*

It was another full house for a VHS speaker on Thursday, March 27 when Shirley Chan spoke to us about her late mother, Mary Lee Chan, who was in the forefront of one of the most important movements in Vancouver's history, the fight to save the Strathcona neighbourhood.

That struggle would change forever the way City Hall dealt with its citizens.

It began in 1959 with the announcement that great swaths of Strathcona houses (described as a "blight" on the cityscape) would be demolished to make way for new apartment buildings and a freeway connector. The residents of those houses — the majority of them Chinese — would be able to move to a new development near Boundary Road and the Lougheed Highway.

One block of the neighbourhood was razed in 1959, eight more by 1965. It was when "Phase 3" began in 1968 that Mary Lee Chan stepped up. The demolition plans were frightening and angering the residents, who had not been consulted, and who wanted to stay near Chinatown. Mary Chan, in effect, said "Enough."

Even though she was working at three jobs, she began to knock on doors in the neighbourhood to tell people what

was happening and encourage them to protest. She was soon joined by others. Bessie Lee, another tireless campaigner, joined the cause. Shirley Chan herself, still a young girl, joined the door-knocking army. The neighbourhood tradition of talking to each other across the area's back lanes played a part, too. Mary Lee Chan had the idea to organize

the neighbourhood by appointing "Block Captains" who would be responsible for getting residents out to meetings. What had started as a one-woman campaign soon involved hundreds of people — many of whom had been afraid of City Hall.

In November 1968 they formed SPOTA, the Strathcona Property Owners and Tenants' Association. They organized fundraising events and feted local politicians . . . and then got the support of Paul Hellyer, the federal minister of housing. Hellyer announced a freeze of federal funds for urban

renewal, and the destruction of Strathcona stopped.

There is much more to the story, but it was summed up neatly by Shirley Chan, who said, "Citizens' voices are heard today, the way they weren't in the past."

And it was her Mom who started it all.

*Chuck Davis*



The Annual General Meeting will be held on Thursday, May 28. It's your opportunity to learn what the VHS has been doing for the past year. Elections will also be held at that time for the VHS Leadership.

### Vancouver Historical Society - Leadership, 2008 - 2009 (elected May 22, 2008)

#### EXECUTIVE:

President	Bruce Watson
Vice President (Programs)	Larry Wong
Treasurer	Paul Flucke
Recording Secretary	Jacqueline Gresko
Director	Scott Anderson
Director	Chuck Davis
Director (Membership)	Elizabeth Hawkins
Director (Newsletter Editor)	Jim McGraw
Director	Lisa Smedman

#### APPOINTED POSITIONS

Webmaster	Quasar Design & Data Mgmt.
Archivist	Elizabeth Hawkins
Info Line	Barbara Coles
Newsletter Mailing	Scott Anderson
Webmail	Paul Flucke

#### CONTACT INFORMATION

Vancouver Historical Society Information Line: 604-878-9140  
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 3071 Vancouver, BC, V6B 3X6  
Website: [www.vancouver-historical-society.ca](http://www.vancouver-historical-society.ca)  
Newsletter Submissions: [jmcgraw@vancouver-historical-society.ca](mailto:jmcgraw@vancouver-historical-society.ca)