



100-block East Pender Street, 1960. COURTESY CHUNG COLLECTION, UBC LIBRARY AND RARE BOOKS

The Historic Buildings of Vancouver's Chinatown

In 2014, the City of Vancouver announced a three-year, \$2.5 million grant program to provide critical upgrades to Chinatown's historic clan and society buildings. At the time, critics warned that while the funds would maintain the physical buildings, the neighbourhood was still under threat by accelerated gentrification.

Then last year, the National Trust for Canada featured Vancouver's Chinatown on its annual list of Top 10 Endangered Places. The charity blamed relentless development, warning that "without better control on new development and

April Speakers: John Atkin & Tom Wanklin

efforts to sustain local businesses, Chinatown's unique character will be lost."

John Atkin agrees.

"It's easy to look at the society buildings and say, wow, we've saved Pender Street. Done," he says. "But if you lose the vegetable shops and the barbecue shops, then you don't have a living neighbourhood. Pender Street would become a petting zoo for society buildings, but you have nothing else."

Atkin, a civic historian, and DTES

City Planner Tom Wanklin will speak about the rich histories of these buildings and how the societies they housed helped Chinatown survive and prosper in the face of discrimination, disenfranchisement and threats of urban renewal. Built in an era when mutual support was necessary for the city's Chinese immigrants, clan and benevolent societies provided housing, loans and other social supports to a tight-knit bachelor community. They also helped settle disputes and oversaw the return of remains to China when somebody died.

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President's Notes



Three things this month. Firstly, big thanks to everyone who participated in our Incorporation Day luncheon on April 2nd. Our former president and treasurer, Scott Anderson, teamed up again with his wife Amber to coordinate the event; Florence and Alan Sung ran the draw for book prizes and took photos; Duncan MacLeod brought the

Robert Kerr bell from the Maritime Museum and rang it to commemorate the Great Fire of 1886; Mike Harcourt made room in his busy schedule to speak of his many years of public service and his predictions for the future. And, many members came with their guests to make the event a success. Thank you all!

Secondly, we are wondering how we can help members who have difficulty attending lectures at the relatively inaccessible Museum of Vancouver. We obviously feel a kinship with the MoV while recognizing that the nearest bus service is a stiff five-minute walk away and the tariff on the city-owned parking lot is all but a shake-down. Some kind of ride-share or carpool arrangement might be possible to arrange. To begin, can anyone who would be willing to share their car, or who would like a ride, send an email to my address below, or phone and leave a message at our infoline number, 604-827-3622? Depending on the response, we may be able to set up some kind of electronic bulletin board to connect drivers with passengers; alternatively, will someone volunteer to take this on as a project?

And thirdly, the April lecture on the Chinatown family buildings is one of those topics combining our interest in history with the challenges of a fast-growing city. Vancouver's Chinatown is not a theme park due to the persistence of the family and benevolent associations that speak authentically of Chinese-Canadian culture, both today's and of the racist era that ended, at least legally, in 1947. But, as a participant in a recent SFU City Conversation put it, who is it being saved for? There are newer commercial areas dominated by "Chinese businesses" and customers. However, the city's response – to upzone and stimulate a condo boom of new development and new residents – is bleeding the area's architectural and cultural uniqueness. Come, listen, and participate – this is one our programs that has a foot in the past and the other foot squarely in the present.

Michael Kluckner
presidentvhs@gmail.com



Author and photographer Vickie Jensen. PHOTO COURTESY VICKIE JENSEN

Field Trip to Stanley Park's Totem Poles

Stanley Park's totem poles first began attracting visitors and locals in the 1920s. Today they get more than 3.5 million visitors each year. Join author/photographer Vickie Jensen for a guided tour and discover the whys and hows of totem pole carving, the artistic culture of the Northwest Coast peoples, the controversial history of this amazing art form in the park, and the newest additions of Salish art. We'll be meeting at Brockton Point totem poles at 1:00 p.m. To sign up please email info@vancouver-historical-society. If that is not possible, phone Bob McDonald at 604-827-3622.

Saturday, June 24 at 1pm. Meet at Brockton Point

New VHS Members

Carola Ackery Robin Anderson William Stinson
Mary Louise Stathers Joseph Planta

Vancouver Historical Society Executive Board: 2016 - 2017 (ELECTED MAY 26, 2016)

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There are around 100 societies in Chinatown, and roughly half own buildings, 12 of which are over 100 years old. The buildings reflect the architecture of Southern China, where the majority of B.C.'s early Chinese immigrants came from. Their distinguishing architectural features include deeply recessed balconies that recall both the ancestor hall of the clan areas and the residential buildings of Guangdong province. PHOTO COURTESY VPL 41625

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Today, the societies have evolved into social clubs and guardians of community heritage, says Atkin, who co-wrote Chinatown's National Historic Site District application, and is currently President of the Chinese Canadian Historical Society.

Atkin says that if Chinatown is to survive as a cultural landscape, the neighbourhood needs breathing space to transition.

"No one is saying Chinatown can't change and can't evolve, because Chinatown today is vastly different from Chinatown in the 1970s, which is vastly different from Chinatown in the 1950s, which was light years away from Chinatown in the 1930s," he says. "But if you set in motion a rate of change that doesn't allow for the evolution, then you stand to wipe it out and you don't get it back."

While more than half of local food

businesses like green grocers, fishmongers, and butchers have closed in the past six years, according to a study by the Hua Foundation, Atkin notes there are encouraging signs of revitalization.

"We're seeing a younger generation take an interest in societies and in making sure that they don't disappear. Chinatown is also proving to be a draw for some third-generation Chinese entrepreneurs, like Ryan Mah, the great-grandson of famous B.C. grocery store businessman H. Y. Louie."

Mah's restaurant on Main and Keefer is part of a recent wave of businesses injecting new life into the neighbourhood.

"Anyone who thinks we'll get Chinatown of the 1970s back? No," says Atkin. "But if I can walk up the street and go to Dollar Meats, go to Ho Ho, and buy broccoli in the neighbourhood, then Chinatown survives."

— By Madeleine de Trenquallye

Upcoming Speakers

The VHS invites everyone to attend our monthly talks. Admission for non-members is by donation. Talks are held at the Museum of Vancouver, 1100 Chestnut Street (in Vanier Park) at 7:30 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of every month except June, July, August and December.



Thursday May 25, 2017

Morag Maclachlan's Legacy: the untold story of Noel Annance

Speaker: Jean Barman, author/historian

Jean Barman's latest book: *Abenaki Daring: The Life and Writings of Noel Annance, 1792-1869* tells the story of an Indigenous man who was caught between two worlds. He was too indigenous to be accepted in the fur trade, and too highly educated to fit in on his return home in 1834. Noel Annance used his writing skills to show the government the Indigenous people's plight in Canada.

Thursday September 28, 2017

The Japanese-Canadian Internment—75 years on

Speakers: Mary and Tosh Kitigawa

The incarceration of 21,000 Japanese-Canadians in 1942 was a shocking period in Canada's history that directly affected Mary and Tosh Kitigawa. The Kitigawas will discuss the anti-Asian sentiment that led to the forcible removal of Mary's father by the RCMP to work on the road camps. The rest of the family were sent to the horse barns at Hastings Park and later interned at seven different camps.

An Accidental Postcard

By Eve Lazarus

Marsha Fuller was cleaning out a client's attic in Western Maryland when she came across this postcard of a traffic accident featuring a Grandview street car in 1909. She sent a note to the Vancouver Historical Society saying: "Found this while packing up a client's home, and thought you would like to have it."

Marsha's company, Your Mother's Attic, helps the relatives of the newly dead sort out what is often a lifetime of possessions—and she often comes across these types of historical treasures.

Marsha, who is a certified genealogist, told us that the client has no Canadian connections and she has no idea why the family has possessed this Vancouver postcard for the last 100 years or so. She says her most interesting find was an original 1762 land pattern of Pennsylvania. She makes a point of dispatching these artifacts back to where they originated.

According to *Biographies of BC Postcard Photographers*, there was a postcard craze between the turn of last century and the outbreak of war in 1914. One of the most prolific photographers, Philip Timms, apparently did some of his best work on postcards. "I shot up everything in sight and turned them into postcards," he was quoted as saying in the book. "Sold them to stationery and drugstores. They were an advertisement to the world about Vancouver."

Philip Timms was born in 1874, lived at 653 Barnard Street in 1898 (Union Street back then) and died in 1973 at 98 years of age. He photographed everything from street scenes to the Chinatown race riots to horse races and balloon flights. He left a legacy of more than 3,000 glass plate negatives at the Vancouver Public Library.

Want to know more about a postcard? The Vancouver Postcard Club's Annual Show will be held May 28, 2017 at the Hastings Community Centre. For more information see: vancouverpostcardclub.ca.



Grandview streetcar accident circa 1909. POSTCARD COURTESY MARSHA FULLER