

Vancouver Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

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Looking Through CBC's Film Archives

February Speaker: Colin Preston

Imagine seeing King George VI and Queen Elizabeth being driven down Georgia Street in 1939 as thousands line the sidewalks and cheer...and all in colour! There will be lots of other scenes that have long since changed. Everything is in motion, showing the hustle and bustle of 60 and 70 years ago. It will be a fascinating peek into Vancouver's

past. Will you recognize the scenes and locations? Will you perhaps recognize someone you know? Join us and find out.

Archivist Colin Preston will be presenting some of these treasures from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's film and video archives. Local television came to Vancouver in 1953 when the CBC opened their original studios at the corner of West Georgia and Bute, but the archives go back much further. There is a variety of footage of Vancouver and its residents, shot by professional film companies and amateurs alike. Some of it covers major events in the city, while others are incredible visual records of ordinary days in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s.

Fortunately, those images have been saved. In 1998, the CBC began an archival program to research, catalogue and preserve the collection, which has grown to over 200,000 items. Besides the early footage, the collection features locally produced original dramas, documentaries, musical performances, and even short news clips going back to 1953.

Colin Preston is the Library Coordinator & Television Archivist for the CBC in Vancouver. He is responsible for the preservation of the Moving Image and Sound collection. Colin, who holds a Master of Library Science from UBC, researches and catalogues the many films and videos in the CBC library collection. He makes frequent presentations about this stunning collection, media preservation and Vancouver and B.C.'s rich audio-visual heritage.

LEFT: Colin Preston exploring the CBC film archives.



Next Meeting: Thursday, February 22 at 7:30 pm in the Vancouver Museum

PREZNOTES

What's Worth a Thousand Words ?

What's worth a thousand words? — a picture, of course. Lovers of history know it's true, and I've been reminded of it several times recently.

Reminder No. 1 was a book I received for Christmas: *Vancouver Remembered* by Michael Kluckner (Whitecap Books, 2006), an elegant volume chronicling the evolution of Vancouver's neighborhood from the 1950's to Expo 86. Illustrated with abundant photos and Kluckner's own watercolors, it's a delight to explore and an irresistible invitation to explore our city.

Reminder No. 2: an engrossing documentary on the Knowledge Network about illustrator Charles William Jefferys (1869-1951), whose sketches and paintings of bygone events brought Canadian history to life for generations of students, and their parents as well. Watching the film, I realized how much history I had learned from Jefferys' art even before I knew his name.

Reminder No. 3: the Vancouver Art Gallery's current exhibition of Fred Herzog's *Vancouver Photographs* (ongoing at the VAG through May 13). In color photos spanning the past fifty years, Herzog captures Vancouver's streets and back lanes, storefronts and people with a keen eye for the unusual amid the ordinary, combining humor and insight with stunning artistry. Don't miss it!

Yes, a picture *is* worth a thousand words. But it's also true that to be understood in its historical context, a picture *needs* a thousand words — or at least a hundred or so. Kluckner's art is enriched by his informed commentary, Jefferys' illustrations by the documentary's narration, Herzog's photos by the thoughtful essays in the exhibition's printed catalog.

Picture *and* word: this is the balance we strive for in our VHS monthly programs, in our newsletter, on our website. How are we doing? Your comments and suggestions are always welcome!

Paul Flucke, President
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Welcome New Members:

Viire Daniels Heather M. Gordon
Elwin Xie

A Tip of the VHS Hat

We couldn't let the month of February go by without a tip of the VHS hat and a chorus of Happy Birthday to long-time member Leonard G. McCann. Len has made so many fine contributions to the maritime history of this region that to list them all would require a special



Len McCann

issue of our newsletter. (Come to think of it, that's not a bad idea!) Len was born February 3, 1927 in Shanghai and has packed an astonishing amount of accomplishments into his 80 years: years of curatorial service to the Vancouver Maritime Museum (where he is now Curator Emeritus), much writing on Pacific maritime history, the presidency of the Vancouver Historical Society itself, work on the restoration of historic vessels, and uncounted kindnesses to information seekers: "Len has helped thousands of people with research," wrote Joan Thornley, Curator of Collections, in 1992. "He is generous to a fault with his time and knowledge, often putting aside his own pressing work to pass on a suggestion to a visiting scholar or to help a neophyte unravel the mysteries of the Lloyd's registers." For a more detailed look at Len's achievements, have a look at www.abcbookworld.com. Happy birthday, sir!

Way to Go, Chris!

At our November meeting, VHS member Chris Hay presented an exhibit on his research into the long-lost Stanley Park rock garden built by his great-grandfather, John Montgomery, between 1911 and 1920. After several years of searching, Chris has identified the now-overgrown rockery through much of its original length and his efforts have caught the attention of the media. In recent weeks, his project has been featured on CTV television, CBC Radio 1, and (with pictures!) in the BC section of the January 20th Globe and Mail.

While we await further developments, you may wish to learn more or offer your support. You can phone Chris at 604-939-3402 or e-mail him at chris-hay@shaw.ca.

History Buffs Required

School history projects will once again be presented at the Vancouver Regional Historica Fair, May 4th and 5th at the Vancouver Museum. The VHS will support the Fair with a grant of \$500. We have been asked once again to provide volunteer adjudicators. No experience is necessary — just a passion for history. Please contact Jamie Purves (604-257-8304 or fair@vancouvermaritimemuseum.ca).

Stanley Park on the Menu

This has been tough winter for our fabled Stanley Park and there is a lot of hard work ahead for Vancouver Parks Board staff. Jim Lowden, Parks Board Director of Stanley District, oversees all aspects of the park.

Jim will take time from his busy schedule to speak at the April 1st VHS Incorporation Day Luncheon. He will speak on the evolution of Stanley Park from its beginnings to now, and everything in between. The talk will be illustrated.

The Incorporation Day Luncheon will be held Sunday April 1st, 2007 at the University Golf Club, 5185 University Boulevard at 12 noon.

Tickets for the Luncheon are \$30.00 each. You can buy your tickets at the February or March monthly VHS meetings (the fourth Thursday of the month) or you can order them from Elizabeth Hawkins, 3626 West 1st Avenue, Vancouver, V6R 1H2 (Tel: 604-737-8045). Please enclose a cheque made out to the VHS with your request for tickets.

We're looking forward to seeing you there!

Bravo Vancouver Archives

About 20 VHS members enjoyed a special viewing of the contents of the David Spencer Time Capsule at the Vancouver Archives last month. Everyone donned the requisite white gloves and spent well over an hour carefully examining the many interesting items, which included news of the day, photos, letters and other mementos. This was the last opportunity to see all of the items in a single showing.

Collected by the defunct but fondly remembered Spencer's Department Store in 1936 to mark Vancouver's Jubilee, the items were re-discovered late last year when Ontario history teacher Jim Breckenridge contacted the VHS. Jim, now retired, had bought the items at an auction in 1973. The items were sold when Eaton's — owner of the Spencer's building since 1948 — was vacating the premises more than 30 years ago.

The VHS thanks Sue Bigelow and the archive volunteers who arranged this special evening showing just for our members.

British Columbia Historical Federation Annual Conference

This year's British Columbia Historical Federation conference will be held May 10th to 13th in Victoria. This year, the annual event is sponsored by the Victoria Historical Society and the Old Cemeteries Society. For complete information on workshops, presentations, field trips as well as a conference registration form, visit their 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).

Thursday, February 22, 2007

Vancouver Through the Archives of the CBC Speaker: Colin Preston

Watch scenes of a Vancouver long gone. Enjoy an evening of film treasures selected from the CBC film vaults by broadcast archivist and librarian Colin Preston. CBC local television broadcasting started in 1953 but some of the films being showcased go back to the 1930s and 1940s.

Please Note Program Change

Due to unforeseen circumstances, the talk on the history of St. Paul's Hospital has been replaced by another topic on March 22nd.

Thursday, March 22, 2007

The Shake, Rattle and Pole: Vancouver's Striptease Past

Speaker: Becki Ross

Post-war Vancouver was a city rich in clubs and entertainment personalities. During this period, institutions such as the Penthouse, Isy's and the Harlem Nocturne headlined dazzling female performers with stage names like Chesty Morgan, Big Fanny Annie and Choo Choo Williams. These dancers and others helped stoke Vancouver's reputation as being "home of the hottest nightclubs north of San Francisco."

Thursday, April 26, 2007

Comrade Dad: A Father and a Vancouver Bookstore

Speaker: Karin Lee

Filmmaker Karin Lee will show and speak about her film *Comrade Dad*, the story of her father who ran the China Arts and Crafts bookstore. This quintessentially Vancouver story is about ideology and family and what it was like to live in Chinatown in the fifties and sixties before Canada recognized China.

2007: A Year of Anniversaries

January Speaker: Professor Henry Yu

The year 2007 is a rich source of important anniversaries for local Chinese. Each event was important . . . but not just to the Chinese. They were important for all of us.

- It's the 100th anniversary of the 1907 anti-Oriental riots in Vancouver — when white mobs invaded Chinatown and Japantown.
- It's the 60th anniversary of the 1947 quashing of many legislated anti-Asian measures.
- It's the 40th anniversary of 1967's major reforms in Canada's immigration policies.
- And it's the 10th anniversary of the 1997 handover of Hong Kong to China.

At its January 25th public meeting, a good crowd of VHS members and visitors were treated to a lively and informed talk about these events by Dr. Henry Yu of UBC. He got our attention quickly with his contention that the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway, with the backing of the Canadian government, was not to unify the country and bring B.C. into Confederation. Instead, the main reason for the railway was to open up trade routes to China and other countries across the Pacific. So China was affecting our history importantly more than a century ago.

It was Chinese — more than 15,000 of them — who did most of the hard physical labor of building the western reaches of that railway. And it was silk from China that made up much of the value of those early runs, silk so valuable that other trains were shunted onto sidings to let the silk trains through.

We learned that the 1907 Vancouver riot had been inspired by an anti-Punjabi Sikh riot in Bellingham, Washington! (On September 4 that year a mob of about 500 white men assaulted boarding houses and mills, and forcefully expelled the Sikh

workers.) The Vancouver riots happened three days later. We also learned that, despite the belief on the part of the racist mobs that the Chinese were taking their jobs, the reverse was true: the Chinese were already here, had been here before the rioters. The aim of the mob was to get them out of the jobs they already had.

Improvements were slow, and it was not until 1947 that Chinese-Canadians were given the right to vote in federal elections. (And it wasn't until two years later that they voted in provincial elections.) The Canada Citizenship Act, said Dr. Yu, was a "watershed moment," with the overturn of the 1923 Chinese Exclusion Act, the 1885 Chinese Head Tax and the 1908 Continuous Journey Act.

1967, said Dr. Yu, "marked the rise of a new sense of Canada as a nation willing to embrace a wide array of different peoples." Canada's centennial seemed an appropriate time — if rather delayed — to finally recognize the multicultural makeup of the country, and to make it easier for new migrants to come and families to reunite. Now a point system — based on merit rather than the color of one's skin — became the law of the land.

And, finally, the looming 1997 return to Chinese control of Hong Kong resulted in the years prior to the handover of new waves of Chinese, many encouraged by Canadian federal immigration policy designed to attract wealthy migrants. That influx of Asian entrepreneurs and investors forever altered the ethnic and economic makeup of the area.

Chuck Davis

RIGHT: Professor Henry Yu



Vancouver Historical Society - Leadership, 2005 - 2006 (elected May 25, 2006)

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