

Vancouver Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

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Greenpeace, the Inside Story

February Speaker: Rex Weyler

Rex Weyler was a 25-year old Vietnam draft dodger when he arrived in Canada in 1972. He had studied mathematics, history and physics at the Occidental College in Los Angeles and already had a bias against nuclear testing when he came in contact with the Greenpeace organization and learned of their plans to halt French nuclear tests in the South Pacific.

In 1972, however, he was more interested in photography and journalism. He worked at the *North Shore News* and with Greenpeace before becoming a director of Greenpeace foundations. He was the Greenpeace campaign photographer from 1974 to 1979 and the editor and publisher of *Greenpeace Chronicles* from 1975 to 1979.

Rex got to know the social activists who started Greenpeace, and organized its highly successful campaigns against US nuclear testing at Amchitka in 1971 and French testing at Moruroa in the South Pacific in 1972. He was personally involved with the organization in its most productive years, starting with its anti-whaling campaign in 1975.



He was thus in an excellent position to write a history of the organization's fight for the environment and world peace (hence the name Greenpeace) and to explain why this influential organization had its roots in Vancouver.

Late Greenpeace founder and Vancouver journalist Bob Hunter described Rex Weyler's book *Greenpeace: How a Group of Ecologists, Journalists and Visionaries Changed the World* as a masterpiece.

LEFT: Ron Precious and Rex Weyler (right) in 1976; ABOVE: Author Rex Weyler, RIGHT: The cover of Weyler's book.



Next Meeting: Thursday, February 23, 7:30 pm in the Vancouver Museum

PREZNOTES

We Have Mail!

The VHS keeps busy with more than its Fourth Thursday lecture series. We also receive communications from hither and yon. Some are phone calls to our Infoline. Others come as email to our website or snail-mail to our PO box. In every case, we try to respond as helpfully as we can.

Some inquirers are just starting on a personal research project. We refer them to appropriate sources—the Genealogical Society, City Archives, VPL, Maritime Museum, Heritage Vancouver, whatever seems to fit.

Some offer future program possibilities and are referred to program chair Charles Hou. Recent example: email from a man who offers a program based on some 2000 photos taken 1897-1932 by an early Vancouver photographer. Says his father found them in 1946 while cleaning litter from a vacant house. Hmm... Charles is checking it out.

Others queries are more specialized and merit help from one or more of our VHS historians. Recent case: email from a man who says he has photos and papers from his great uncles who were founding fathers of Vancouver. He'll bring them along when he comes here on business. Are we interested? It turns out that Chuck Davis knows the family name and thinks one of the uncles may have had later ties to the VHS! Yes, we're interested! Chuck is following up.

An especially intriguing inquiry came last month by phone from England, followed up by email. A musicologist at York University is researching musical settings of McCrae's "In Flanders Fields." He'll be in Vancouver soon, tracking down the composer of one of the earliest settings, published in Vancouver in 1917 (?). Can we provide some leads? VHS member Andrew Martin, who works in Special Collections at the VPL, went to work on that one and found not just leads but the composer's marriage certificate, which he has now mailed to England.

So that's a taste of "VHS behind the scenes." It's great fun, and it's nice to know we don't just consume history, we also lend a hand to those who are creating it.

Paul Flucke, President
Phone (604) 732-7742

Two VHS Members Create Historical Album

The husband and wife team of Gavin Hainsworth and Katherine Freund-Hainsworth, both VHS members, have written *A New Westminster Album: Glimpses of the City As It Was*.

The 256-page soft-cover book, featuring over 300 black and white photographs, covers the Royal City's festivals, traditions, organizations, people and neighbourhoods.

Gavin and Katherine have pooled their talents on this project. Gavin is a periodical non-fiction writer/journalist and Katherine is a heritage columnist/photojournalist and artist.

Look for *A New Westminster Album: Glimpses of the City As It Was* — published by The Dundurn Group — at bookstores throughout Greater Vancouver.



Rocks, Walks and Talks

This year's Annual B.C. Historical Federation Conference is being held in Kimberly from May 4-6th. The conference is being hosted by the East Kootenay Historical Association, the Sullivan Mine and Railway Historical Society and the Kootenay District Heritage Society.

Besides the fascinating tours in the Conference package, it is also a great opportunity to include an extra day or two to visit historic Fort Steele Heritage Village, the St. Eugene Mission Resort, and the Bull River Fish Hatchery.

For more details about the conference, visit www.bchistory.ca and click on "conference." You can also download the application forms from the website. The early bird discount expires March 15th.

We will have a few copies of the application form and program available at our Feb. 23rd. meeting.

Welcome A New Member

Neil McBurney of Vancouver

Coming Up...

VHS Celebrates 70th Birthday With Music

The annual Incorporation Day Luncheon will be held on Sunday April 9th, 2006 at the University Golf Club, 5185 University Boulevard at 12:00 noon.

This is a very special year for the VHS because we are celebrating our 70th anniversary as a local historical association. Music will be a feature of the program as we learn more about the life of Vancouver composer, Jean Coulthard. Renowned and recognized for the significance of her work, Jean Coulthard's music is played in concert halls and other venues around the world. William Bruneau and David Gordon Duke will speak on their book *Jean Coulthard: A Life in Music*. This presentation will include a vocalist with musical accompaniment.

Tickets for the Luncheon for members and friends are \$30.00 each. You can buy your tickets at the February and 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 to the VHS with your request for tickets.

It Happened in February...

February 9, 1976 H.R. MacMillan, lumber magnate, died.

February 15, 1965 The new Canadian flag was hoisted at 6 a.m. at Vancouver city hall. Because of the time differential, this was the first appearance of the flag in Canada after its official proclamation.

February 1, 1969 The Nine O'Clock Gun in Stanley Park (above) was "kidnapped" by UBC Engineering students, who returned the 1,500-pound cannon for a "ransom" which was given to the Children's Hospital.

February 1, 2, 1952 Louis Armstrong and the All-Stars appeared in the auditorium of Kitsilano High School.

February 7, 1946 The great American bass Paul Robeson performed at the Orpheum today, and 3,000 fans in the sold-out theatre kept him coming back for more and more.

February 22, 1936 The Seaforth Highlanders Regimental Band was formed in Vancouver.

February 14, 1916 The first trans-Canada telephone call—it was between Vancouver and Montreal—was placed. The circuit ran 6,763 kilometres through Buffalo, Chicago, Omaha, Salt Lake City and Portland, Oregon. Not until 1932 was a telephone line for an all-Canada connection completed.

Courtesy of Chuck Davis. Visit Chuck's History of Metropolitan Vancouver website at: www.vancouverhistory.ca

Upcoming VHS Speakers Winter/Spring 2006

The VHS invites everyone (including non-members) to attend our monthly talks. Admission is free. Talks are held at the Vancouver Museum, 1100 Chestnut Street (close to Vanier Park), at 7:30 pm on the 4th Thursday of every month.

- Thursday, February 23, 7:30 pm
Greenpeace, The Inside Story – Rex Weyler



- Thursday, March 23, 7:30 pm
Whose park is it anyway? Race and remembrance in Stanley Park - Jean Barman

Jean Barman will speak about her book on a few First Nations families who lived near Brockton Point in Stanley Park until they are forced to move.



- Sunday, April 9, 12:00 noon
Jean Coulthard: A Life in Music – William Bruneau and David Gordon Duke

(Incorporation Day Lunch to be held at the University Golf Club, 5185 University Boulevard.)

For more details, see top left of this page.



- Thursday, April 27, 7:30 pm
Railroading a Renegade: Great Northern Ousts John Hendry – Frank Leonard



- Thursday, May 25, 7:30 pm
The Dunbar History Project – Helen Spiegelman

January Speaker - Douglas L. Hamilton

Sobering Dilemma

The topic at the VHS's public meeting on January 26—prohibition—was a popular one, if the number of people who showed up and the many questions asked of the speaker are an indication.

Douglas L. Hamilton has written a book titled *Sobering Dilemma*, a solid and very readable account of prohibition in British Columbia, an experiment in social control that didn't work here any better than it has elsewhere.

"The decision," Dr. Jean Barman writes in the introduction to the book, "whether or not to have a drink containing alcohol was in past time made by others on our behalf. It was not we who responded 'yes' or 'no,' but rather self-designated moral arbiters acting in our supposed best interests. They were determined to control our access to beer, wine and spirits."

As was the case last month, the talk—because of time strictures—could only hint at the richness of material in the speaker's book. Whole chapters are devoted to subjects that Mr. Hamilton could only touch on briefly, and some of them—like that given to the prohibition of sales of alcohol to the province's native population—are fascinating glimpses of little-known aspects of the province's history. Our First Nations were the first to have prohibition imposed on them, and that happened long before the rest of us were denied access

Mr. Hamilton built his talk around photographs from the book, the very first one indicating that banning booze in B.C. might not be an easy task. A shot taken around 1865, it shows a casual group of men playing cards, with several bottles of spirituous liquors close at hand. One of the men is Frederick Seymour, the lieutenant-governor of the province. And the picture was taken in his official residence in New Westminster.

Prohibition—the most well-known official version, that is—began in B.C. on October 1, 1917 and was repealed June 15, 1921. The winning side in the 1917 vote (the "drys") won by a razor-thin majority, even after a concerted attempt by the "wets" to tinker

with the vote of B.C. soldiers fighting in the First World War in Europe. The chicanery that went on with the soldiers' votes—in which Premier Richard McBride, a 'wet,' was complicit—make for a grimly comic interlude in our past. A familiar name in Vancouver's past is Victor Odlum. He was commanding officer of the Seventh Battalion who came, Mr. Hamilton writes, "from a missionary background and despised alcohol. But his popularity dropped to 'minus zero' in the front-line opinion polls when he tried to withhold the rum ration, and his superiors were finally forced to overrule him."

Temperance had started early in the province. Not long after the population zoomed up in the late 1850s with the discovery of gold on the Fraser a provincial police force was organized, and hot on their heels came the church "preaching the need for personal conversion, strict observation of the Sabbath, and the complete elimination of alcohol."

Admittedly, booze was a problem. "By 1880, there was one licensed bar for every thirteen people in New Westminster . . . In early Vancouver, saloons outnumbered other stores, and the competition forced bar owners to push their product aggressively."

But the sometimes absurd lengths "wet" British Columbians went to to have a drink during the three years and eight months prohibition was in force made it obvious the cure was more insidious than the disease. (There are some funny passages in the book telling of the ruses thirsty folks devised to smuggle, brew or otherwise come into possession of a drink.)

"Some intoxicants can be a terrible evil," Mr. Hamilton writes. "Addicts become enslaved, fall ill, and die in misery, a burden on society. No one wants to encourage such deadly habits. But using the law to forbid the use of intoxicants is worse . . . heavy-handed attempts to ban the use of these substances will inevitably fail, bringing grief to both the government and the individual."

Chuck Davis

Vancouver Historical Society - Leadership, 2005 - 2006 (elected May 26, 2005)

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