

# Vancouver Historical Society

## NEWSLETTER

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### Hogan's Alley, Black Vancouver and Public Memory

February Speaker: Wayde Compton

Two hundred and sixty years after the Spanish (and subsequently other Europeans) first transported enslaved Africans to the Americas, free Blacks from the 1780s were found working on Maritime fur trade ships on the Pacific Northwest Coast as stewards and cooks. During that brief period in the late eighteenth century, slavery on this part of the continent was largely the purview of the First Nations and Russians.

For the next half a century, few people of African origin participated in the multicultural and multi-ethnic fur-trade fusion legacy of the Pacific Northwest. One exception was fur trade administrator and Colonial Governor, James Douglas whose own exceptional rise was eclipsed with the advent of mid-century Colonial white immigration. However at the same time, while places like Oregon banned Blacks from settling in order to avoid the slavery question, hundreds of resilient Blacks who were settlers and not fugitives from slavery, made their way north where they set down roots.

In the 1860s and coming from a variety of locations, Blacks began settling in what was to be Vancouver.

Longtime students of survival in the Americas, they brought with them a legacy of mixed ethnicities and cultural values, levels of education, entrepreneurship and music — in other words, a healthy vibrancy which the dominant white-focused European society often chose to ignore to its detriment. In the early to mid-twentieth century the closest thing



**Hogan's Alley** Photo: City of Vancouver Archives AM54-S4-: Bu P508.53

the city had to a centralized Black neighbourhood was Hogan's Alley, which allowed the community to create a definable social space denied them in the rest of the city. Its location near the railway station was not accidental as the railway companies were one of the few welcoming employers.

Hogan's Alley was truly a vibrant place which developed its own pantheon of rich characters, two of which were the Hendrixes whose yet to be famous grandson would spend time with them. Entrepreneurs like Rosa Pryor ran the Chicken Inn while Mr. Alexander ran Mother's Tamale and Chicken Parlour. Martin Luther (Soldier) Williams ran a funeral parlour. A Mr. Bartley organized a choir that sang at different theatres and churches whereas the local Black church brought in preachers from the United States. Although Hogan's Alley was considered a party place, its inhabitants considered it a safe place, which speaks volumes as to its shared values.

Hogan's Alley's demise came when it became collateral damage and disappeared under the 1970's effort to modernize the city. However, efforts are being made to memorialize its almost forgotten legacy.

Writer and co-founder of the Hogan's Alley Memorial Project, February speaker Wayde Compton is the Program Director of Simon Fraser University Continuing Studies.

*Bruce M. Watson*

Next Meeting: 7:30 p.m., Thursday, Feb. 26, 2015 at Museum of Vancouver

## President's Notes

An article in the Matthews Collection at the Vancouver City Archives tells the story of a “refined and cultured coloured lady” who in 1941 was denied access to the Crystal Pool on Beach Avenue. The reason, a Parks Board officer stated, is that white people at the pool “just didn’t like [having coloured people in the pool].” The Board responded by allowing persons of colour to swim in the Crystal Pool, but not at the same time as whites. [Matthews Collection, #504-6-7, file 18]

Lodging history tells a similar story. In her book *Burlesque West*, sociologist Becki Ross observes that until the late 1950s, “African American entertainers were refused accommodation at uptown hotels, including the Devonshire, the Hotel Vancouver, and the Georgia. African American tourists and mixed-race couples were also denied hotel rooms.” [Becki L. Ross, *Burlesque West* (2009), 34] Keith Ralston, a longtime VHS member now deceased, once told me that in postwar Vancouver, Black guests were admitted to only two hotels, the American on Main Street and the Stratford on Gore.

The Black community in Vancouver has historically been much smaller than that of other minority groups such as the Chinese and Japanese — numbering from 500 to 700 in the 1940s — but contributed no less to Vancouver’s city-building experience. While its history draws us most readily to examples of discrimination, a closer look also reveals substantial achievement under difficult conditions. One thinks of the challenge that Rosa Pryor faced in keeping her eastside “Chicken Inn” respectable in a tough part of town; or the role the Fountain Chapel on Jackson Avenue, a couple of blocks east of Hogan’s Alley, played as the Black community’s spiritual centre; or the contribution of Black football players to the early history of the BC Lions. Alas, this was also a period when socializing with white girls was enough to have Black athletes placed on waivers and traded. [La Verne Barnes, *The Plastic Orgasm* (1971), 119].

Stories such as these provide the historical context for this month’s talk by Wayde Compton, a Vancouver-born writer and scholar who has taken as his mission the goal of reviving the memories and history of the Black community in British Columbia.

Bob McDonald, President  
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## Amazing Valerie Jerome

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Chicago, and the following year, she joined her brother Harry to represent Canada at the Summer Olympics in Rome.

“After I had been to the Olympics I was invited to eat with everybody,” she says. “We had a little bit of celebrity and somehow our brown skins turned white.”

The City of North Vancouver held a dance in their honour and gave them \$500 each to spend.

Sport made everything bearable, she says.

“When the stopwatch gave you a great time, it didn’t matter what colour you were.”



**Harry and Valerie Jerome at the airport.**

Photo Courtesy of: SFU Special Collections

Harry died from a brain aneurysm in 1982. He was 42.

Valerie went to university, became a teacher and taught in Vancouver for 35 years. She spent three decades as a track and field official. Valerie ran in eight elections for the Green Party, federally, provincially and civically. She did all that without any expectation of being elected, but as a way of getting green ideas out. “Nobody was talking about the environment at all in those days,” she says. Her son, Stuart Parker, led the BC Green Party from 1993 to 2000.

In November 2010, a dozen of her former students gathered in Stanley Park to see a bench dedicated in her honour. It sits in Stanley Park right next to the statue of her brother Harry.

## Luncheon Tickets on Sale

Peter Ladner will be the guest speaker at this year's Incorporation Day Luncheon on Sunday, April 12th at noon. With roots that go back to a pioneer family in Delta, the former City Councillor will speak on the urban food revolution and how local food has come full circle. Citizens, communities and municipalities across North America are working to get more control over their food in response to the growing insecurity of globalized industrialized food supplies. This new priority on "local food" harkens back to the days of the first European settlers and First Nations when all food was local and farmland was plentiful. It promises to be an interesting topic.

The Incorporation Day Luncheon celebrates the 129th anniversary of the incorporation of the City of Vancouver in April 1886. Held at the University Golf Club, the event always features terrific food, an entertaining talk, door prizes and much more. It's a great way to celebrate our interest in the history of Vancouver.

Tickets are available at the February 26th and March 26th talks. Prices are \$35 for members and \$45 for non-members. Tickets are also available by emailing [sanderson@vancouver-historical-society.ca](mailto:sanderson@vancouver-historical-society.ca) or by phoning the Society's **Info-Line** at **604-878-9140**.

Don't miss out. Buy or order your tickets today.

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## Opinions on Digital Newsletters

Are you interested in receiving your newsletter in a digital (PDF) format? The newsletter would look the same but would be emailed to you. It could then be printed out at home if needed. Paper copies would still be sent to members who choose to receive them in the traditional printed format.

If you have already emailed us, your request has been noted (even though a reply was not sent).

If you haven't sent us a comment yet, please send your preference — digital or traditional print — to **membership@vancouver-historical-society.ca**. If the email address (where you would like the newsletter sent) is other than the one you used to send the email, please include that as well. The VHS never releases email addresses or any other personal information to third parties.

We hope to start our digital newsletters as soon as possible.

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## Upcoming Speakers

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

Thursday, March 26, 2015

### **Len Norris & the Vancouver Imagination**

*Speaker: Michael Kluckner*

The *Sun* cartoons of Leonard Matheson Norris (1913–1997), drawn between 1950 and 1988, captivated generations of Vancouverites and, unusual for editorial cartoons, continue to be as relevant and funny today as when he created them. With their "everyman" cast of characters and universal themes of hypocrisy, pomposity and the fate of the downtrodden little guy, they differ from the hard-edged political content of most of Norris's contemporaries. Norris created memorable landscapes of places like "Ambleside and Tiddlycove" and Victoria that have coloured perceptions of them for a half-century.

Thursday, April 23, 2015

### **Bread & Roses: The History of Women in the Vancouver Labour Movement**

*Speaker: Joey Hartman*

Since the earliest days of recorded history in the Vancouver area, women have played important roles as supporters, activists and leaders in the labour movement. This talk introduces key individuals and events since the late 1800s that brought women's issues around work, equality and social concerns to where we are today – and identifies some priorities for the future. Joey Hartman, who has a keen interest in labour and women's history and incorporates these subjects into her work wherever possible, is president of the Vancouver & District Labour Council.

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## Welcome New VHS Members

**Robin Bunton**  
**Jeannie Hounslow**

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# Celebrating Black History Month with Valerie Jerome

by Eve Lazarus

February is Black History Month. The following is an excerpt from Sensational Vancouver's Legendary Women chapter:

Most people have heard of Harry Jerome. His name adorns recreation centres and his statue is in Stanley Park. At one time he was the fastest man alive, setting a total of seven world records. Fewer people remember Valerie, yet she is just as amazing.

Valerie Jerome had just turned seven when she moved with her family from Winnipeg to North Vancouver. She vividly remembers her first day at Ridgeway Elementary.

"It seemed like every kid in the school was lined up with rocks," she says. "I can still remember the feeling of the first rock that hit my back as we ran."

Years later Valerie returned to her old elementary school to talk to the kids about those early days for Black History month.



VALERIE JEROME 1941 - CANADIAN OLYMPIAN  
CELEBRATING HER CAREER AS AN ATHLETE, TEACHER, COACH,  
COMMUNITY ACTIVIST. THIS BENCH IS DEDICATED TO HER.  
HERE BESIDE HER BROTHER HARRY. FRIENDS OF VALERIE.



Valerie Jerome at the ceremony dedicating a bench in her honour.

Photo Courtesy: Valerie Jerome.

She started by pointing to the house on Lyon Place where they lived, and where in 1953, fire broke out during the middle of the night when the sawdust burner caught fire. The family were left out on the street while the neighbours watched from behind their curtains.

"Nobody came out to help us. My mother was pregnant with my youngest sister and we finally got a cab to the Salvation Army Hall on Lonsdale," says Valerie. The

family spent the night on chairs on the sidewalk.

At Sutherland Junior Secondary Valerie worked in the school cafeteria at lunch time, rather than sit alone at a table.

The year she turned 15 everything changed. She set Canadian records at the 1959 Canadian Track and Field National Championships in her running events, broke her

age group record for long jump, and helped her team win the relay. She won bronze at the Pan American games in

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## Vancouver Historical Society Executive Board: 2014 - 2015 (Elected May 22, 2014)

### EXECUTIVE

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Director	Eve Lazarus
Director (Newsletter Editor)	Jim McGraw
Director	Florence Sung
Director (Programs)	Bruce M. Watson

### APPOINTED POSITIONS

Archivist	Alexandra Allen
Info Line	Jeannie Hounslow
Newsletter Mailing	Mary Gavin, Dianne Switzer
Tour Coordinator	Jo Pleshakov

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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