

# Vancouver Historical Society

## NEWSLETTER

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### The History of the Italian Community in Vancouver

January Speaker: Ray Culos

The story of Vancouver is one of immigrants from world over.

Ray Culos, born in 1936, is a second generation Italian Canadian. His family lived on Union Street and Ray attended both Strathcona Primary School and Britannia High School. He is a renowned historian and will outline the beginnings of the Italian community known as "Little Italy."

The earliest Italian immigrants to what is today the Lower Mainland, were a very small group from San Francisco attracted by the Fraser River Gold Rush in the 1850s. A larger group came from Eastern Canada in the 1880s with construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway. The first large-scale immigration from Italy was between 1900 and 1914. An even larger wave came after the Second World War.

Original members and descendants of this community have made their mark on Vancouver. Angelo Calori's flatiron-shaped Hotel Europe built almost a century ago still stands in Gastown. Sculptor Carlos Marega's

works include such well-known landmarks as the Joe Fortes Memorial Fountain, George Vancouver statue at City Hall and the Warren Harding Memorial at Stanley Park among others. Umberto Menghi has gained recognition as a restaurateur and author. Angelo Branca was a Canadian amateur middleweight boxing champion who went on to become a distinguished Justice of the B.C. Supreme Court and Court of Appeal. Vancouver-born Frank Iacobucci is another noted jurist who served as a Supreme Court of Canada Justice from 1991 to 2004.

Ray has worked 37 years with the *Vancouver Sun*, the *Province*, and the Southam Newspaper Group, which included management positions in advertising, circulation, marketing and staff training departments. He has contributed to a regular column in *L'Eco d'Italia*, and is a member of the Confraternanza and the Italian Cultural

Centre Society. He has written three books on the Italian community. His first book, *Vancouver's Society of Italians* came out in 1998. Ray was interviewed in the classic oral history book on the East Vancouver, *Opening Doors, Vancouver's East End*. In 2005, he was honoured with the Italian-Canadian of the Award for his contribution to the community.



Historian Ray Culos

Next Meeting: Thursday, January 24 at 7:30 pm at the Vancouver Museum

## PREZNOTES

Several people have asked me why Vancouverites tend to dismiss the city's history so easily? This is hard to pin down but we can guess at some contributing factors.

There is the environment factor. People have come to Vancouver for its sheer physicality and the inviting environment has caused people to think more in the present rather than in the past. Nature (e.g. Stanley Park, the mountains, golf and sailing in January) has become the mantra for a Vancouver-based spirituality. Additionally, the lush vegetation caused by mild weather and copious rainfall has hidden indigenous architecture from view. Further, the rotting effect of rain on wood and limited space on the downtown peninsula has meant that history has to be destroyed in order to be created. Our wonderful environment seems to work against our valuing the city's history.

There is the growth factor. Rather than a slow organic indigenously-rooted growth, Vancouver sprang from a burned out shell to become a modern city overnight. An evolving Gastown ceased when the Montreal dominated banks and CPR created a new downtown. Locals had limited control; for example, the CPR closed its opera house as soon as it had sold the majority of its grant lots. Although many developers stayed, not all of their period buildings did.

There is the social factor. Early Scottish dominance of city institutions skewed Vancouver's view of itself. With British influence so widespread at the onset, we sought and are still seeking ideas and validation of our worth from elsewhere. Further, boom and bust cycles have eclipsed lives, forcing people to move on, often south. The transitional nature of its people does little for Vancouver's history, even today.

Overgeneralizations? Perhaps. But how do you resurrect a city's history, which has been rendered invisible? You make the invisible visible, just as we are doing on a monthly basis. As individuals, you can continue to value our rich and diverse history by actively continuing to spread the word.

*Bruce M. Watson, VHS President*

## VHS Directors in Print

Your VHS officers and directors — some of them at least — not only attend meetings and make decisions. They also make history, and in recent weeks three of them have blossomed forth in print.

VHS vice president **Larry Wong** appears as a major contributor to a delightful new book, *Eating Stories: A Chinese Canadian & Aboriginal Potluck*, published in 2007 by the Chinese Canadian Historical Society. As Margaret Gallagher, familiar to CBC listeners, explains in her Foreword, the book grew out of a series of workshops in which participants shared stories of the traditional meals and dishes they remember from childhood. *Eating Stories* shares the stories, enriched by thirty-seven recipes. Larry Wong contributes reminiscences of his boyhood years in Vancouver's Chinatown and a recipe for his father's Jin Dui — deep fried rice flour balls with flavourful stuffing.

VHS President **Bruce Watson** and VHS member **Jean Barman** have collaborated on *Leaving Paradise: Indigenous Hawaiians in the Pacific Northwest, 1787-1898* (University of Hawaii Press, 2006), which you'll find reviewed in the *BC History*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (delivered to VHS members last fall). Their meticulously researched work moves from the first Hawaiian visitors in the late 1700s to the Hudson Bay Company's contract workers who settled here in the early 1800's to those who came during the mid-century gold rush period and late-century arrivals following the 1898 end of Hawaiian independence. As we enjoy BC's ethnic diversity, Bruce and Jean help us understand and appreciate the Hawaiian contribution to that rich legacy.

To round things out, VHS Director **Lisa Smedman** continues her fascinating series of *Vancouver Courier* cover stories about Vancouver's ethnic communities with "Work and Wine," an account of an early Italian community in the Jan. 4 edition. If you missed it, go to the *Vancouver Courier* site at: [www.canada.com/vancouvercourier/news/archives](http://www.canada.com/vancouvercourier/news/archives) and you will be able to look it up. It's a great introduction to our VHS program on January 24, featuring historian Raymond Culos, whom she quotes in her article.

Happy reading!

*Paul Flucke*

## Welcome New Members

John Foulkes  
M. Anne Wyness  
Jean S. Mann

## Donations

THANK YOU! to the five VHS members who made contributions totalling \$250 during November and December. Such gifts are a great help as we expand our program and outreach!

## 2008 New Westminster Conference

This is the Province's 150 anniversary and the British Columbia Historical Federation will be hosting this year's conference in New Westminster from May 8 – 11.

The conference will include workshops and field trips. Several of the field trips being planned are a visit to Fort Langley, high tea at St. George's Anglican Church, lunch at one of New Westminster's historic houses, and a visit to the Royal Westminster Regimental Museum and Irving House.

The conference will be held at the Inn at Westminster Quay. For more information and registration form, please go to [www.bchistory.ca](http://www.bchistory.ca) and click on Conferences. The 2008 Conference promises to be a very exciting event.

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## Helping Hand From Fort Langley

Recently the VHS successfully responded to an urgent request from Montreal's Radio-Canada, which wanted to interview a Simon Fraser expert who was also fluent in French. We found Simon Fraser experts and many fluent French speakers but the problem was marrying the two pre-conditions to facilitate a good interview. Many thanks to Fort Langley's Mike Starr for stepping up and filling the bill.

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## Incorporation Day Luncheon

The annual Incorporation Day Luncheon will be held on Sunday April 6th, 2008 at the University Golf Club, 5185 University Boulevard at 12 noon.

Tickets for the Luncheon for members and friends are \$30.00 each. You can buy your tickets at the January, 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.

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## Kudos to the Hamber Foundation

Many thanks to the Hamber Foundation which has generously agreed to finance half of the design, manufacture and installation of the two historical interpretation signs in Devonian and Stanley Parks. Their support of Vancouver history is most appreciated.

## 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, January 24, 2008, 7:30 pm

### *The History of the Italian Community in Vancouver*

#### **Speaker: Ray Culos**

The acting of Bruno Gerussi, the jurisprudence of Angelo E. Branca, the cuisine of Umberto Menghi and the elegant sculptures of Charles (Carlos) Marega are just but a few contributions of Vancouverites of Italian heritage. Learn more of this community's fascinating story with Ray Culos.

Thursday, February 28, 2008, 7:30 pm

### *Musqueam — First People of Vancouver*

#### **Speaker: Larry Grant**

Discover how the Musqueam people have used and occupied their traditional territory for several thousand years. This territory includes much of what is now Vancouver and the surrounding area. Elder Larry Grant describes the rich history of the Musqueam.

Thursday, March 27, 2008, 7:30 pm

### *Inside the H.Y. Louie Family*

#### **Speaker: Willis Louie**

From humble beginnings as wholesale grocers in Chinatown, the Louie family went on to own Independent Groceries Alliance (IGA) and eventually also London Drugs. The evening promises to be an intriguing glimpse into one family's history, which is very much tied to that of Vancouver.

Thursday, April 24, 2008, 7:30 pm

### *History of the Vancouver Post Office*

#### **Speaker: Jim Bain**

From 1869 when postmaster Maximilian Michaud first cancelled outgoing letters at his Burrard Inlet post office to the mail sorting machinery of today's giant Vancouver Mail Processing Plant, the local post office has gone through many changes. A former Divisional Manager sorts through its colourful history.

# How and why Vancouver became a Haven for Penny Stock Crooks

*November Speaker: David Baines*

When Vancouver Sun business columnist David Baines was asked by one member of the enthusiastic audience why Vancouver had become a haven for penny stock crooks, he replied almost flippantly, “the weather.” By this, he meant that the easy lifestyle and benevolent climate also attracted those who wished to avoid hardships and take shortcuts to acquiring wealth. Of course the story, one part of BC’s laissez-faire business practices, was much more complex and eagerly absorbed by the overflow audience.

David first reviewed the history of the stock market in Vancouver from its well-intentioned 1907 beginnings on Pender Street when its president, C. D. Rand, warned that several applications for dubious stocks were turned down and would continue to be. This well-meaning gesture was not to last. Over the decades and particularly from the mining boom starting in the 1950s, glorious promises of wealth from such people as “the thief,” “the butcher” and “the undertaker” were made but these promises came to nothing,

giving Vancouver the reputation as the scam capital. While some were humorous (such as the promises of pearls the size of bowling balls, giant rabbits and King Solomon mines), more disquieting has been the inability of the British Columbia Securities Commission to prosecute and punish this fraud perhaps preferring, with a wink and a nudge, to view it as a reallocation of wealth.

New regulatory changes were put in place with a promise to clean up the system but even though the Vancouver Stock Exchange closed in 1990, Vancouver remains a base of operations. Now in a different location, the TSX Venture Exchange, similar right down

to how the index is calculated, is used in part by locally based scam artists employing the Internet and over-the-counter markets in the U.S. to continue their operations.

Supplementing the talk was an exhibit provided by VHS Executive member Scott Anderson (a former VSE trade floor boardmarker), which included photographs, several magnetic stock “tickers” that had been in use on the boards during its operation, and the front page of the *Vancouver Sun*’s business section written by David Baines, about the Trade Floor’s closure.

Once again this proves that the laissez-faire speculation of an earlier B.C. coupled with a simple thing like the weather, shows how complex history can be, permanently imprinting itself on a city like Vancouver. Many thanks to David Baines for a great talk.

*Bruce Watson*

**LEFT: VHS Director Scott Anderson, left, and David Baines**



## Vancouver Historical Society - Leadership, 2007 - 2008 (elected May 24, 2007)

### EXECUTIVE:

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

### APPOINTED POSITIONS

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

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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