

# Vancouver Historical Society

## NEWSLETTER

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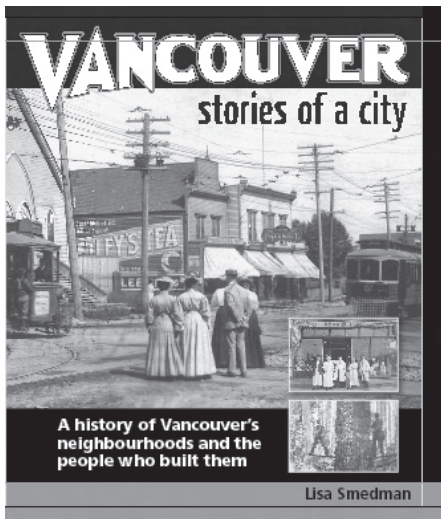
Jan. 2009

### Vancouver's Neighbourhood Stories

*January Speaker: Lisa Smedman*

Members of the Vancouver Historical Society have a special treat in store. On Thursday, January 22 Lisa Smedman — author of the new book *Vancouver: Stories of a City* — will share some of those stories, and the pictures that go with them. Lisa has been a writer for the *Vancouver Courier* for some years, and back in 2005 began writing weekly columns for that paper on the city's neighborhoods.

They were so good they've now been collected and published in book form. The chapter titles give the flavor: Shap-



ing a City; Suburbs in the Wilderness; Holiday in Hastings; Battle for the Beach, and many more.

Lisa says she'll be giving a "virtual walking tour" of the various bits that made up pre-1929 Vancouver. There'll be images of people, buildings, streets, logging camps and more . . . and there'll be intriguing and unfamiliar glimpses into the city's past — like the note on the beautification by the Canadian Pacific Railway of its subdivision, Shaughnessy: "The CPR planted 544 ornamental trees in Shaughnessy Heights. These included tulip trees, cut leaf birch, sugar maple, American elm, magnolia, English Hawthorn, English beech and Oriental plane, a tree native to Persia."

And what the land's condition was like in the 1860s can be deduced from the account of an early Methodist preacher, Ebenezer Robson, who spent one-and-a-half hard hours travelling by horse three miles to preach to workers at Stamp's Mill . . . at the foot of what is today Dunlevy Street. Both he and the horse were injured in a fall. And when he finally got there only six of the 14 millhands turned up to listen to him.

Lisa (whose interest in the history of the city prompted her to join the VHS executive last year) confesses that, before she began her columns, her knowledge of the city's past was scanty. But the more she researched

the more she became enchanted with local history. "Above all," she says,



*Lisa Smedman*

*Photo: Steve Bosch, Vancouver Sun*

"I was captivated by the stories of the people who gave their names to our streets. People who built Vancouver, or who simply lived down the end of the road that wound up bearing their family name."

It's a fascinating history, and she tells it well. This is one VHS meeting you'll definitely want to attend.

*Chuck Davis*

**Next Meeting: Thursday, January 22 at 7:30 pm at the Vancouver Museum**

# PREZNOTES

As the feasting of the holidays is over and as the Vancouver Historical Society rolls into its 73<sup>rd</sup> year of talks, perhaps it is time to reflect on what has gone on in the past almost three quarters of a century.

For the past several decades, after we narrowed our focus to Vancouver, audiences have been treated on a monthly basis to every aspect of this city's history from the saintly to the secular, from the dull and the dour to the daringly brilliant. As Vancouver has always been a rich tapestry of peoples, our topics now reflect this. Topics can range from the history of striptease to Stanley Park to post cards or to Prohibition.

Starting in the 1970s, the VHS began to recognize contributions of individuals and groups trying to preserve Vancouver history. Prizes were given for work on books, charts and oral histories. We also launched into supporting research, which has given us ample rewards.

Our recently produced *City Reflections: 1907-Vancouver-2007* DVD took a different tack from the usual print medium. The result puts us on par with other cities who have done the same. Sales are brisk.

We can now boast second and third generation members of the VHS. For example, Jolene Cummings, who talked to us in October 2004 follows the footsteps of her grandfather, Judge Henry Castillou, who spoke to us twice in 1948. The present Executive Board member, Elizabeth Hawkins, is the daughter of W. Kaye Lamb who founded the BC Historical Society, with the Vancouver Historical Society as a branch in 1936. And so it goes.

We have reaped rewards from our more recently mounted website. Through it, the long lost 1936 David Spencer Time Capsule found its way from Ontario back home to Vancouver. We acted as a conduit and redirected it to the Archives. We still get regular enquiries from all over the world.

Lastly, with membership at an all-time high, and people turning out in record numbers for our speakers, we as members can all collectively pat ourselves on the back after 72 productive years.

*Bruce M. Watson*

## VHS Members Tour Post Office

People seem to love tunnels; maybe they've watched too many WWII movies. There's an underground tunnel that connects the old CP station at Waterfront to the Post Office building at Georgia and Seymour. It was used to move mail from trains to the Post Office back in the 1950s. To judge from their interest, several VHS members would love to go down and reconnoiter. It's probably too late though as, due to safety concerns, the tunnel will soon be filled in.

On November 28th, appreciative VHS members mulled over this and a parcel of other matters (pun intended) at Vancouver's main post office, guests of Fred Danells, former Director of Operations, and his knowledgeable staff. We knew the P.O. building was big but somehow, once inside, it seemed to just get bigger. 1500 people work there, the vast majority on anti-social shifts, to process an average of 1.3 million pieces of mail daily — on wet days significantly fewer. It appears that folks prefer to post letters on dry days so you kind of feel sorry for the P.O. folks in Vancouver as they must be deluged when the rain stops.

Our guide Fred spoke with understandable pride about what to any outsider looks like some vast manufacturing enterprise. On the humongous sorting area on the fourth floor, the 350 post office employees who used to sort mail by hand are these days reduced to a mere handful of problem spotters. Letters whiz almost quicker than the eye can follow through metal channels, each ending up in holding pens corresponding to letter carrier districts after postal codes are scanned by the very latest optical sorting equipment. So yes Ma, the postal code you grumble about having to look up really is important! But don't worry: if you leave off the code or get it wrong, an image of the offending envelope is sent to personnel "upstairs" who re-code it electronically. It's somewhat comforting to the traditionalists among us to notice that foreign letters are still sorted by real live people. Each country of the world has its own named "letter box", often complete with miniature flag.

The present Main Post Office replaced its predecessor - now the Sinclair Centre - exactly 50 years ago. In an age that reveres youth the monster building at Georgia and Seymour would appear to be approaching its sell-by date, but not a bit of it! Fred admitted that politics forces the P.O. to hang out a "for sale" sign but he seemed fairly confident that no one would come up with as convenient a location elsewhere at a price that wouldn't bankrupt the system. It may be that postal central in Vancouver is safe for another 50 years.

*Neil McBurney*

## Incorporation Day Luncheon

The annual Incorporation Day Luncheon will be held on Sunday April 5th, 2009 at the University Golf Club, 5185 University Boulevard at 12 noon.

Tickets for the Luncheon for members and friends will be \$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.

Looking forward to seeing you there!

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## CBC Continues History Website

In 2008, CBC Radio in British Columbia created a special BC 150 website for the province's sesquicentennial. They received very good response, and generated new material that is being shared with the Royal BC Museum.

CBC Radio has decided to keep the project going in 2009 as a BC history website. It will continue to feature personal stories and photographs from listeners, a history quiz, interactive map, blog and various links & resources.

Take a look at it here: [www.cbc.ca/bc/features/150/index.html](http://www.cbc.ca/bc/features/150/index.html)

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## Nelson and Kootenay History Tours

The B.C. Historical Federation's annual conference will be held in Nelson, May 14-17, 2009, with its theme being: History in your Neighbourhood. Several tours have been planned including the SS Moyie, Sandon, Nikkei Internment Centre, heritage tours of Nelson. Enjoy a historical play or Kootenay storytelling and much more.

For more information, contact: Ron or Frances Welwood 250-825-4743 or [webeditor.bchistory.ca](http://webeditor.bchistory.ca).

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## Welcome New Members

Vaughan Evans  
Gerald Mignault  
Lloyd McGregor  
Elizabeth Denton

Deborah Cheslevy  
Donald T. Berg  
Leslie A. Clauson

## Upcoming Speakers & Events

The VHS invites everyone (including non-members) to attend our monthly talks. The talks are free and 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). Special events may be held at other times for which there may be a fee.

Thursday, February 26, 2009

### **Saving the Hollow Tree**

**Speaker: Meg Stanley**

The Hollow Tree has been a Stanley park icon for over 120 years. At least 1,000 years old, and 58 feet in circumference, the tree has been the subject of countless souvenir photos. Deemed a hazard, the tree looked like it might come down. With the backing of a report by arborists, heritage consultants and engineers, the tree might be saved. Hear the story from Hal Kalman who is the principal of Commonwealth Historic Resource Management Ltd. in Vancouver and Lorne Whitehead who is a UBC professor, physicist and engineer.

Thursday, March 26, 2009

### **Mary Chan: The Woman who Fought City Hall and Won**

**Speaker: Shirley Chan**

Designated a "slum area" in 1968, the city's oldest neighbourhood — Strathcona — looked like it might succumb to the wrecker's ball in the name of urban renewal. That is until Strathcona resident Mary Chan formed a community group and fought back. Watch "Mother Tongue," the story of how Mary Chan fought for her neighbourhood. Her daughter, Shirley will speak. Shirley Chan is currently the CEO of Building Opportunities with Business in the downtown Eastside.

Jacqueline Gresko will be speaking in May on the history of the Archdiocese of Vancouver. Watch for details on that presentation as well as our April speaker and topic in future newsletters.

# The CPR's Land Deals in Vancouver

*November's Speaker: Dr. Frank Leonard*

In a brief talk to members of the VHS on November 27, Dr. Frank Leonard of the History Department at Douglas College threw new light on the convoluted negotiations between the Canadian Pacific Railway and assorted levels of government over the lands the railway would receive in return for extending its line to Vancouver.

We're familiar with the original choice by the CPR of Port Moody for its terminus, and how furious land speculators there were with the railway when it opted to go beyond Port Moody to Coal Harbour, but Dr. Leonard showed that there was a complicated tangle of activity behind even that seemingly simple decision. The railway's first choice for its terminus (after it had decided to bypass Port Moody) was English Bay, rather than Coal Harbour, because its location on the latter would put it between tracts of land it did not

own, and could therefore not exploit.

"To preserve the company's freedom of action on English Bay," Dr. Leonard said, "[CPR president William] Van Horne spurned an offer of half the land in the properties adjoining the Granville tract. That he rejected the immediate donation to a cash-starved company of additional real estate on Coal Harbour demonstrates his belief that English Bay would become the focus of the company's terminal works and, ultimately, the city."

As everyone knows, the railway *did* end up on Coal Harbour, but the machinations that led to that result are too detailed to do justice in this short report. Dr. Leonard tells us the results of his research will be published later this year.

*Chuck Davis*

## A Vancouver Moment from July 18, 1915

One of the great Vancouver stories occurred July 18, 1915 when former US President Teddy Roosevelt and his wife Edith visited Vancouver on holiday. They could stay for only an hour before catching a boat to Seattle. The Vancouver Board of Trade decided to put on a big reception for Roosevelt and his wife at the CPR station. Unwisely, they didn't invite Mayor L.D. Taylor. (The Board didn't like him.) Taylor heard of the Board's plan and quietly arranged to have a car and driver waiting at the station. Then he drove to an earlier stop on the line (Port Coquitlam), and boarded the Roosevelts' train. He greeted the Roosevelts, introduced himself and chatted amiably with them as they came into Vancouver. The train stopped at the station, the Board of Trade party surged forward . . . and Mayor Taylor

stepped down onto the platform. He introduced the Roosevelts to the open-mouthed Board members, then whisked the former U.S. president and his wife off for a fast drive around Stanley Park before their boat left. The story is told in Daniel Francis' lively book *L.D.: Mayor Louis Taylor and the Rise of Vancouver*.

Taylor's cleverness did not, alas, help him in the mayoralty election later that same year. He would lose to Malcolm Peter McBeath, an alderman in Vancouver from 1912-14. But, no matter: L.D. would get back in again. And again. And again.

*Chuck Davis*

### Vancouver Historical Society - Leadership, 2008 - 2009 (elected May 22, 2008)

#### EXECUTIVE:

President	Bruce Watson
Vice President (Programs)	Larry Wong
Treasurer	Paul Flucke
Recording Secretary	Jacqueline Gresko
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

Vancouver Historical Society Information Line: 604-878-9140  
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 3071 Vancouver, BC, V6B 3X6  
Website: [www.vancouver-historical-society.ca](http://www.vancouver-historical-society.ca)  
Newsletter Submissions: [jmcgraw@vancouver-historical-society.ca](mailto:jmcgraw@vancouver-historical-society.ca)