

Vancouver Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

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On Film: Vancouver at Work and at Play

January Speaker: Colin Preston

Watching films of a bygone Vancouver is particularly interesting because we feel we are almost there. We see the action — people and vehicles moving — everyday scenes that happened years ago on streets that may look familiar, yet have changed.

CBC archivist Colin Preston will take us back to the 1960s this month through several unique films showcasing Vancouverites at work and at play almost 50 years ago.

Anyone living in the Vancouver of the 60s will remember the old Brill buses that used to ply the city's streets. The first film will follow a bus driver through the course of his working day. We'll see scenes of the old Oakridge Transit Centre, scenes along the route and scenes of downtown Vancouver.

The next film follows a waitress through her working day at a busy downtown coffee shop in 1964. This was another in a series of films showing everyday people going about their jobs.

If you remember or have heard of The Cave nightclub, the next film will be of particular interest. It is a 1966 profile of jazz saxophonist Fraser MacPherson. Scenes include him recording at the CBC and rehearsing and performing with entertainer Jack Carter at The Cave.

know — you might even see a familiar face.

Colin has been delighting Vancouver Historical Society audiences for several years with his picks from the CBC film vault. As an enthusiastic historian, Colin appreciates how CBC

Vancouver producers, cameramen, film editors and composers framed stories of the city.

Colin, who holds a Master's Degree from UBC, is responsible for over 250,000 film records. He considers it to be the best historical archive of film footage west of Toronto.

Colin has curated the CBC Vancouver Archival Screening series, "Reeling in the Years," and screened programs for the Vancouver Park Board, the Downtown

Eastside Film Festival, and the Society for American Baseball Research. He was a consultant and contributor to the "Encyclopedia of British Columbia" and is a regular panellist at Moving Image Archive conferences.

Larry Wong with Jim McGraw



Colin Preston at the CBC Archives *Photo: Larry Wong*

The last film is the oldest, dating to 1961 showing a day at the races at Hastings Park. Preparations for a race are shown as are the spectators placing bets and watching the action.

If you or your family lived in Vancouver at the time — you never

Next Meeting: 7:30 PM, Thursday, Jan. 27 at Museum of Vancouver

Preznotes

This year marks the 125th anniversary of the founding of Vancouver. It is also the VHS's 75th birthday. Happy New Year, and welcome to 2011!

We ended last year with some sad news: Chuck Davis passed away in November. A tribute to Chuck can be found elsewhere in this issue. He will be missed.

Despite ending on a low note, the year had many positive developments, including successfully hosting the BC Historical Federation annual conference (many thanks go to Larry Wong for his excellent coordinating of the event), and disbursing several grants in support of projects that will lend greatly to the tapestry of Vancouver's historical community.

The year forward looks to be positively exciting. I've received constructive feedback regarding our ongoing assessment of the state of the Society, and thank everyone who has thus far taken a few moments to express their thoughts and ideas. A few volunteers came forward in response to our expanded efforts to offer a variety of service opportunities, for which I give my sincere thanks – we have so many incredible members, with a plethora of skills!

Speaking of volunteer opportunities, the Society is still looking to recruit a Treasurer, as Paul Flucke intends to step down at the end of this term. If you have a bookkeeping or accounting background (or even balance your chequebook every month!) and are interested in contributing some time and energy to your Society, please send me an email.

Here's wishing everyone a happy and healthy 2011!

Scott Anderson
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Spencer's Christmas Train

In the November newsletter, we mentioned an enquiry that arrived from San Diego. A former Vancouverite wanted to know about the miniature train she used to ride during the Christmas season at Spencer's department store.

Arthur Irving of the **West Coast Railway Association** wrote: "The Spencer's train did indeed exist in Vancouver. It was on the Toyland floor and was partitioned off from the rest of the floor. I recall it being a "cave like" setting, dark and with many figurines along the ride. It probably was 12 inch to 15 inch gauge; you sat right inside the cars. The engine was shaped like an electric locomotive with a big grille on the front, painted silvery gray and red, and lighted. The train was well advertised in the local newspapers during the Christmas season."

If there are any more replies — or better yet, photos of the train — we'll try to print those as well.

A Very Special Luncheon This Year

This year marks a special anniversary — Vancouver's 125th birthday — and the VHS will celebrate this special occasion at the VHS Incorporation Day Luncheon.

This year's event will be held on Sunday, April 10th at 12 noon at the University Golf Club, 5185 University Boulevard.

The Luncheon is an annual event commemorating the incorporation of the City of Vancouver, which took place on April 6, 1886.

The food and service are always great and the Luncheon is a good opportunity for members and friends to meet with others who share their interest in history. A special guest — to be announced later — will speak on an aspect of Vancouver history. We will give out this year's VHS Award of Merit to someone who has done exemplary work in promoting Vancouver history. We will also have door prizes.

Tickets for the Luncheon will be \$30.00 each and you will be able to buy them at the January, February and March monthly meetings, or by mail. Details on mail orders will be announced later.

We're looking forward to seeing you there!

Remembering Chuck

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with them in those situations. Not Chuck. He was the way he was...charming, delightfully funny and genuinely interested in everything. We quickly became friends and he talked me into many things including joining the VHS.

Chuck was 14 when he had to leave regular school classes to work. Although he received his high school certification and took some university courses later in life, Chuck was basically self-taught. Always a voracious reader, Chuck often read several books at a time. Not surprisingly, he was terrific at word games like Scrabble and Moot. Chuck could also easily make up limericks on the spot. I remember once at City Hall how delighted a former Mayor's assistant was when Chuck made one up using her name. Chuck would invent word games using the numbers and letters on the license plates of passing cars. Over the years, he created crossword puzzles and a variety of quizzes for newspapers and network radio. Chuck always had an idea for something.

Although he won many awards and accolades — including the George Woodcock Lifetime Achievement Award — Chuck didn't get rich from his books and projects. He just loved doing them. He would at times frustrate his publisher because there was always "just one more great story" that had to be added to a manuscript already well beyond its deadline. But that one more story *was* always great.

Chuck was generous to a fault, sharing information that had taken him long hours of research to find. If someone wanted to know more about Vancouver history, he always took the time to meet with them and try to help. It's not surprising that when the NBC television network was looking for background information on Vancouver prior to the Olympics, they went to Chuck.

Although he was a little embarrassed by it, it is fitting that some years ago he received an entry in the Encyclopedia of British Columbia where he was named "Mr. Vancouver."

Throughout his distinguished career, Chuck was encouraged and supported by Edna, his beloved wife of over 45 years. They had met when Edna worked at CBC television news. Edna loved his wonderful sense of humour. In 1972, they had a daughter Stephanie, who would later create the original look of Chuck's huge Vancouver history website (www.vancouverhistory.ca).

Chuck was a gentle unique soul who did exactly what he enjoyed doing and did it well. We were very lucky to have met someone like him. And Vancouver was very lucky to have had Chuck as her storyteller.

Upcoming Speakers & Events

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 pm on the fourth Thursday of every month except in June, July, August, December). Special events may be held at other times for which there may be a fee.

Thursday, February 24, 2011 - 7:30 pm
Top Ten Endangered Sites in Vancouver
Speaker: Donald Luxton

The top ten list includes two schools, two neighbourhoods, a BC Hydro substation, a theatre, a downtown street and even historic street trees. Hear why the fate of these sites is important to the city.

Thursday, March 24, 2011 - 7:30 pm
The Natural Landscape of Vancouver
Speakers: Bruce Macdonald and Celia Brauer

The amazing original landscape of Vancouver is almost entirely gone today, but our city is so young we have an unusually good record of what has been lost. The list includes towering trees to creeks and streams. But some of the original landscape still exists in small patches. Discover more about them.

Watch this space in future newsletters for the rest of our 2010-2011 speaker series.

Welcome New Members

Kala Caldecott
John Cheslevy

Jean Murray
John Sehmer

Chuck Davis Book Fund

Chuck's last project — *The History of Metropolitan Vancouver* — was just short of being finished when Chuck passed away. His publisher is committed to having the book on bookshelves later this year to mark Vancouver's 125th birthday. To help defray the costs of paying researchers and writers to finish the last chapters, donations can be made to the "Chuck Davis Book Fund" in care of the Vancouver Historical Society. Tax receipts will be issued for donations of \$100 or more.

Remembering Chuck, Vancouver's Storyteller

by Jim McGraw

The City of Vancouver and many of us lost one of our dearest friends this past November. VHS member and Director Chuck Davis passed away Nov. 20th just days after his 75th birthday.

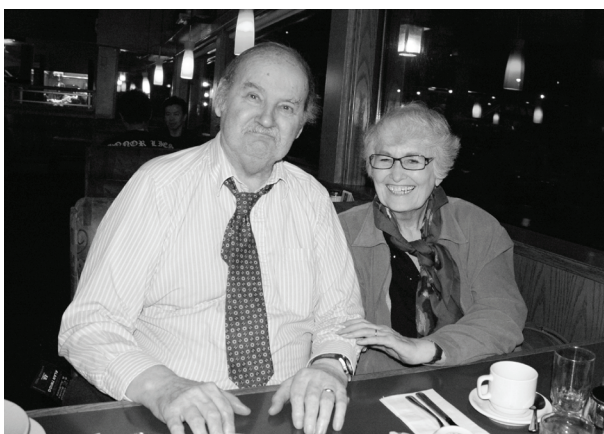
A large, affable man with a hearty laugh, Chuck loved everything about Vancouver: its people, geographic setting, eccentricities, foibles, its sometimes giddy optimism and of course, its history. He wrote about the city — especially its past — in over 15 books, countless newspaper articles, columns and website stories. He was in great demand as a speaker and always brought out the crowds. Chuck could tell a story like no one else. He delighted in unearthing some little known quirky story from Vancouver's past. Then with his wonderful voice in just the right cadence, Chuck would tell the story. No matter how many times you heard it, it always sounded fresh. One of his favourites was when Vancouver officials received their first motorized ambulance in 1909. Beaming with pride, they took it out for a test drive... only to run over and kill a visiting American tourist. He delighted in telling that story to visiting American tour groups...and they loved it every time.

Before he took up full-time writing, Chuck had had a very successful career as a program host in radio and television, much of it in Victoria and Vancouver. He had found his calling while a member of the Canadian Army serving in Germany. Chuck was the first announcer to go on the air at the newly established Radio Canadian Army Europe.

Chuck had joined the army at the age of 17 hoping to see

some of the world. Up to that time, he had held 23 jobs of various descriptions from a railway locomotive wiper to newspaper hawker. Born in Winnipeg, Chuck came to Vancouver as a nine-year-old in 1944 with his father, George. Their early home was a squatter's shack on Burrard Inlet across from the CPR mainline tracks.

Perhaps this was why Chuck always loved the gritty industrial parts of Vancouver. Whenever we drove together, Chuck always wanted me to point him toward a road he hadn't been on especially if it had anything to do with old-time industry. When he was driving, you had to remind him where to turn. Even after all these many years in Vancouver, he admitted he would often get lost. I think it was because he would get so involved with conversations or his surroundings, that he would forget where he was going. The only time all conversation stopped was when his beloved baseball was on the radio.



Chuck and his wife Edna in October 2010

One of his favourite television shows was "Da Vinci's Inquest," a drama set in Vancouver. It was

loosely based on Larry Campbell, a former RCMP officer, coroner, Mayor of Vancouver and now a Senator. At an event, the then-Mayor Campbell greeted Chuck by his first name. He wasn't the only one to do that. There were many others — in politics, business, radio and TV — people from all over Vancouver and beyond. They all knew Chuck and Chuck seemingly knew everyone too.

I met Chuck while filling in on a radio talk show and Chuck was to be the guest. Some guests bring a certain persona

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Vancouver Historical Society Leadership - 2010 - 2011 (Elected May 27, 2010)

EXECUTIVE

President	Scott Anderson
Vice President	Bruce Watson
Treasurer	Paul Flucke
Recording Secretary	Jean Wilson
Director (Memberships)	Elizabeth Hawkins
Director	Jean Mann
Director (Newsletter Editor)	Jim McGraw
Director (Programs)	Larry Wong

APPOINTED POSITIONS

Webmaster	Quasar Data Management
Archivist	Elizabeth Hawkins
Info Line	Barbara Coles

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