

# Vancouver Historical Society

## NEWSLETTER

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June 2004

## Summer Field Trips

### Tour of the Hasting Mill Museum -Thursday, July 15 - 11:30 AM



Hastings Mill Store

Vancouver Historical Society members will have a chance to visit historic Hastings Mill Museum, Thursday, July 15 at 11:30 a.m. Mrs. Gladys Hepburn, one of the dedicated volunteers from the Native Daughters of B.C., owns and manages this, the oldest building in Vancouver. Mrs. Hepburn will be our guide on this tour.

The address is 1575 Alma St. (at Point Grey Road). Bring a bag lunch and join fellow members for a picnic on the grounds after the tour. This is a fine site to enjoy the magnificent view of Burrard Inlet. For more information contact Barbara Coles at 604-733-2650.

### Hycroft Manor Tour with Beverley New - Sunday, August 22 - 2:00 PM

Please join fellow members of the Vancouver Historical Society on a tour of Hycroft Manor led by Beverley New on Sunday, August 22nd at 2 p.m. We will meet under the port cochere at Hycroft, 1489 McRae Avenue. Beverley New will take us through the grand house and gardens built by A. D. McRae over a period of three years. The McRae family moved into their Shaughnessy Heights home in 1911. Although the home was complete, the landscaping of the property continued for another year.

The McRae family lived in Hycroft until 1942, when they began to spend more time at their other estate, Eaglecrest near Parksville. The McRaes then gifted Hycroft to the federal government as their contribution to the war effort. In 1943 the house opened as a veterans' annex to Shaughnessy Hospital.

In 1960, when the remaining veterans were moved to Shaughnessy Hospital, the estate became vacant. After extensive negotiation with three levels of government, in June 1962, the University Women's Club bought the property and began the restoration of Hycroft, one of the city's most beautiful homes.

Beverley New joined the University Women's Club of Vancouver in 1970. She has served on the Board of Directors in various capacities, including President in 1988-90. She began working with the Archives Committee in 1990, and it is in this capacity that she will be serving as our guide.

Hope to see many of you there.



# Preznotes

Have you been to Storyeum? What did you think of it? Should the rest of us go?

If you've missed the news of its recent opening, "Storyeum" is a "museum of stories" from BC history. The brainchild of Vancouver entrepreneur Danny (Petecetera) Guillame, it's a \$22.5 million "heritage theme park" carved out beneath Gastown in the block bordered by Water, Cordova, Cambie, and Abbott Streets. There, for \$22 (seniors \$19) plus GST, you can see a 70-minute multimedia presentation, with live actors, on elaborate sets, telling the BC story: primal rocks and rivers, First Nations, European exploration and settlement, the Gold Rush, the CPR, the present. (If you're online, check out [www.storyeum.com](http://www.storyeum.com).)

Though it sounds impressive, I confess to some personal skepticism. Like many of you in the VHS, I've spent years digesting scores of books and articles on Vancouver and BC history, many of them written by fellow VHS members. Anything compressed into 70 minutes, no matter how well presented, must leave a good deal out! Would we learn anything new? Would it qualify as a VHS field trip, or have we already "been there, done that"?

On the other hand, it's hard to knock an experience that may provide at least a taste of our local history for the throngs of tourists and newcomers who haven't yet chewed on the real thing. Maybe it's "square one" in a longer journey. So if you take the Storyeum plunge, please let me know what you think. We'll see what emerges.

Meanwhile, on home turf, the new 2004-2005 VHS Executive had its first meeting on June 3. You'll find their names on page 4. We welcome the wealth of experience and ideas brought by new members Wayne Norton and Chuck Davis, and we look forward to an exciting new season starting in September. This is the last VHS Newsletter until then, so take careful note of our July and August field trips.

Have a great summer!

**Paul Flucke, President**  
[paulflucke@shaw.ca](mailto:paulflucke@shaw.ca) 604-732-7742

VHS - 2

## Last Call for Marpole Midden Tour, Sunday, June 20 - 2 p.m.

Join your VHS friends on a tour of the Marpole midden led by Terry Slack this Sunday, June 20 at 2 p.m.

Meet at the parking area of Fraser River Park, located at the south foot of Angus Drive.



### Fernie Centennial

July 30 - August 2, 2004

New executive member Wayne Norton wants all newsletter readers to be aware of the events taking place in Fernie this summer. The city is celebrating its centennial with events during the weekend of July 30th - August 2nd. Details can be found at [www.fernie2004.com](http://www.fernie2004.com). Wayne's grandfather worked in the coal mines near Fernie for fifty years. Stop by and take in the events if you are in Fernie over the long weekend.

### Thank You

to the three VHS members who made donations of \$165 in May — what a great way to start our new fiscal year!

### Welcome to the Vancouver Historical Society!

Nancy Knickerbocker of North Vancouver  
C. Jane Banfield of Vancouver

# British Columbia Historical Federation Conference

Nanaimo, May 6-8, 2004

The British Columbia Historical Federation 2004 Conference entitled "Beyond Coal" was hosted by the Nanaimo Historical Society at the Dorchester Hotel in Nanaimo. One hundred and five people participated from all over B.C., including over a dozen from the Vancouver Historical Society.

The Conference was preceded by two very popular and free workshops co-ordinated by Melva Dwyer, *Family History* and *Local Archives*, both of which were filled to capacity.

Dr. Jean Barman and author Jan Peterson opened the conference and set the context for this year's theme: "Beyond Coal". Most lectures and discussions throughout the conference built on the theme and described how the district had incorporated the past in its present and future activities.

Some of the lectures offered throughout the two days included: Dr. Imogene Lim discussing the new Nanaimo Chinatown website.

This site explores the Chinese experience in Nanaimo. David Hill-Turner describing the new exhibits in the Nanaimo District Museum, exhibits which reflect the evolution of the community since 1950. Dr. Patrick Dunae informing us of an internet-based resource known as *viHistory.ca*.

This site offers over 100,000 historic records involving Vancouver Island. Dr. Steven Davies discussing *The Canadian Letters and Images Project*, an online archive of letters from Canadian soldiers that

document their war experiences.

Several tours were offered and greatly enjoyed by the participants including: a fascinating tour of Newcastle Island directed by Bill Merrilees, a well known naturalist and author; a walking history tour of Nanaimo; and a bus trip to Milner Gardens.

The AGM, ably chaired by president Jacqueline Gresko, was held on Saturday and included short summaries of activities from various B.C. historical societies, and succinct reports from members of the BCHF executive. The item generating the most discussion was the proposal to change the name of our journal from *British Columbia Historical News* to *British Columbia History*. The motion to change the name was carried 41 to 11. The po-

litical branch of the BCHF forwarded concerns regarding: the demolition of the B.C. Archives, and the problems facing Barkerville and Fort Steele because of the absorption of the B.C. Heritage Fund.

A Book Fair, present in the hotel during the Convention, gave all of us ample reason to stock up our overflowing libraries with more books on B.C. history!

The Conference ended with a wonderful banquet and the distribution of awards and prizes. We were royally entertained by Bob Bossin, a well known Island folk singer. Next years BCHF convention will be hosted by Kelowna. The tentative dates are May 10-14, 2005. Hope to see you all there.

*Barbara Coles, Delegate*

## Sharing moments in time



*VHS Executive member Jack Spibey being interviewed by a student from Windermere Secondary School in Vancouver. Jack is frequently called upon for recollections of early events in Vancouver.*

# Memories of the Empress

Dear Editor:

Mention of Dr. Wallace Chung's acquisition and restoration of the lovely builder's model of the Empress of Asia (VHS Newsletter, Vol.43, No. 7) brings back a memory of my voyage on that great ship 85 years ago, when she was employed as a troopship bringing soldiers back to Canada after the end of the Great War in Europe. I believe that she sailed from England on January 6, 1911, proceeded via the Panama Canal, and I know that she arrived in Victoria on Feb. 5, three days before my 6th birthday.

The Empress was carrying about 2 000 soldiers, a group of nurses, about a dozen married officers and their wives, and seven or eight children. I know that one of the battalions was the Seaforth Highlanders. The black ribbons hanging down from the back of a Seaforth Highlander's cap, especially if he was looking out to sea, proved irresistible to a small boy and I would snatch the cap and tear off until I had reached the safety of my parents' cabin. A couple of visits from soldiers asking for their caps, and the stern paternal admonitions that I relieved, soon put a stop to that game.

We children had our own table for meals, no doubt presided over by a parent or a nurse. I have the impression that the ship rolled quite a bit in bad weather because, at such times, wooden frames were placed on the table to prevent china from

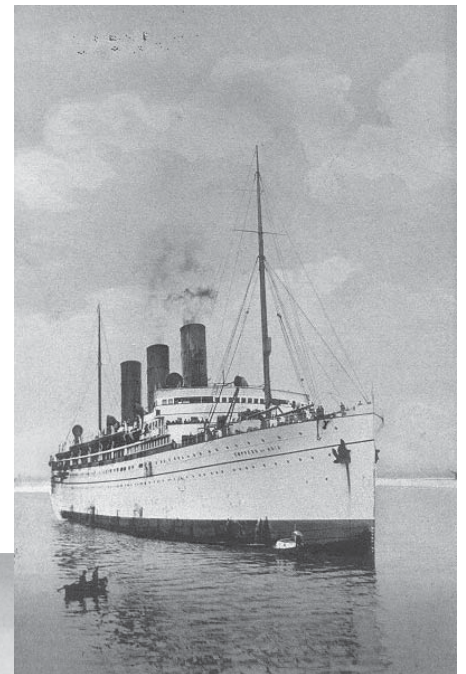
falling off. But I have no recollection of being seasick. (Nor did I suffer from that miserable ailment 40-odd years later in the Battle of the Atlantic.)

We stopped in Panama for a few days, I suppose to take on supplies and fuel, and here I have a very precise memory of an incident. The Americans in Panama were most hospitable, and my parents and I were invited to lunch with a couple at their house - there may have been others present. We were sitting on the verandah, which was fully protected by fly-screens all the way around; when suddenly my father slapped one bare hand with the other. "What was that?" asked someone. "Oh, just a mosquito," answered my father. "A MOSQUITO!" almost shouted our host. He jumped up, rushed into the house and telephoned. I remember the urgency in his voice. Within 20 minutes two men in white coats arrived - government officials; they asked questions, gave the fly-screens a most thorough inspection,

and probably did some kind of antiseptic spraying as well. I learned much later in life, it had only been 10 years since US surgeon-general Gorgan had put an end to yellow fever and malaria by destroying or rigidly controlling the breeding grounds of the deadly mosquito in the Isthmus of Panama.

One last vivid scene remains: As the Empress of Asia entered Victoria Harbour, she was met by cheering crowds on every wharf, hill, rooftop, and from every window, giving their veterans the warmest welcome possible.

*Derek Lukin Johnston*



# Vancouver Historical Society

## Fall Speaker Season Taking Shape

Planning is underway for the 2004-05 fall and winter Speakers' Series. Following on the success of our past season in which we saw several well-attended and lively sessions, our new season also promises to be thought-provoking and stimulating. Here is what is unfolding for the fall:

**September 23:** Greg Dickenson, from the Canadian Broadcast Corporation, will provide a fascinating analysis of Billy Miner's exploits. This September marks the 100th anniversary of Canada's first train robbery committed by Billy Miner on September 10, 1904. The award-winning Canadian movie, *The Grey Fox*, immortalized Miner and underscores Miner's connection to BC. Mr. Dickinson will explain Miner's connection to Vancouver.

**October 21:** October is Women's History Month and our speaker, Jolene Cumming (to be confirmed), will delve into the lives of both the famous and the forgotten women who were part of Vancouver's past. The extraordinary lives and remarkable experiences of women in our city's past will make for an absorbing evening. To be confirmed.

**November 25:** CBC archivist Colin Prescott will assemble a few early films of Vancouver, providing us with images and insights into a much younger and vibrant city. Some of the early film footage has become well-known and attempts are underway to transfer the films to DVD for wider distribution. Other sources of early Vancouver films are also being invited to this event in November in the hope that VHS can spark a new interest in historical Vancouver films.

Mark your calendar now for our Speakers' Series this fall. More information and details will be available in September. Thank you for joining us at our sessions so far this year. We look forward to seeing you in the fall.

Wes Knapp  
Program Director



# Vancouver in View

MAY SPEAKER: Gordon Price

Reviewed by: Imbi Harding

The VHS guest speaker for May, Gordon Price, presented assembled members and guests a shortened version of his course at UBC, entitled *Vancouver and Its Times*.

He began by asking, "Why does a place look like it does?" The first planners were surveyors, the Royal Engineers who laid out the grids. "The surveyors laid out the palette on which everyone else gets to paint forever after," stated Price. The West End of Vancouver was laid out like the City of Liverpool, with a grid of lots, 33 feet wide by 130 feet deep. In 1913 Park Commissioners started buying up the houses along English Bay to create parks.

Mr. Price spoke also about the streetcars as vehicles of development, in conjunction with real estate speculation. The early streetcar routes determined development of the neighbourhoods we have today.

The era of Scientific Planning resulted in a major traffic street plan for Vancouver created by Harland Bartholomew between 1927 and 1929. Price claimed that engineers were the most highly funded and influ-

ential bureaucrats until 1980. The 1956 Zoning and Development By-law rezoned all the West End to create the forest of towers that is there today.

By 1972, people power prevented Gastown and Chinatown from being demolished to facilitate the construction of a proposed waterfront freeway and Project 2000. Of that plan, only Granville Square was ever constructed. This 'Counter Revolution' was inspired by the writings of Jane Jacobs and Ray Spaxman. Both reflected a concern with "neighbourliness." At this time, False Creek was transformed from an industrial sewer to Granville Island and model housing projects on both the south and north shores.

Gordon Price concluded that the future is put together piece by piece from the first surveys of the Royal Engineers, the plans of Bartholomew, the ideas of the 'Counter Revolutionaries,' and the planners of today. This thought-provoking talk was enhanced by a most impressive Power Point presentation.



## Vancouver Historical Society - Executive, 2003 - 2004 (elected May 27, 2004)

### EXECUTIVE:

President	Paul Flucke
Vice President	Wes Knapp
Treasurer -Vacant	(Paul Flucke pro tem)
Recording Secretary	Ellen L. Ramsay
At Large (Newsletter mailing)	Barbara Coles
At Large	Imbi Harding
At Large (Membership)	Elizabeth Hawkins
At Large	John (Jack) Spibey
At Large	Chuck Davis
At Large	Wayne Norton

### OTHERS:

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