

Vancouver Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

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March 2005

Backstage Vancouver: Entertainment Legends in our City *Speakers: Red Robinson and Greg Potter*



The cultural history of Vancouver is sometimes neglected when we document the buildings, people, and events that comprise our city's history. What an unfortunate oversight that can be, considering the rich legends that surround Vancouver's entertainment mileau.

Now, however, two well-known figures in Vancouver's show business world have documented the cultural and entertainment life of our city in their recently published book *Backstage Vancouver*. Red Robinson and Greg Potter tell some amazing stories about entertainers who either called Vancouver their home or who became frequent visitors to our city. Many of these stories have apparently been protected by industry insiders for several decades. For example, Louis Armstrong was once refused a room at the Hotel Vancouver.

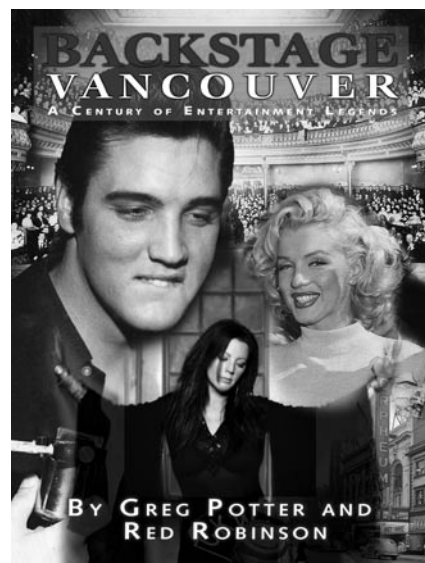
Backstage Vancouver features tales by such well-respected

Vancouver icons as Hugh Pickett and Dal Richards. And Red Robinson reminisces about taking Buddy Holly to the White Spot. What stands out in this beautiful book are the photos of entertainment legends taken in Vancouver. The fascinating stories and historical photos in *Backstage Vancouver* make it doubtful that Vancouver's cultural life will ever again be passed over.

Red Robinson was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1995 and the Canadian Broadcast Hall of Fame in 1997. Greg Potter has covered pop culture for the *Vancouver Sun*, the *Georgia Straight*, and the *Vancouver Courier*.

(Copies of *Backstage Vancouver* will be available for sale at our March 24th meeting.)

LEFT: VPL 82431, Louis Armstrong, guest on CJOR's live broadcast of Teen Theme, 1954.



Thursday, March 24th, 2005, at 7:30 pm in the Vancouver Museum

Preznotes

It came up at our Exec meeting early this month: some VHS members would like to see less 'news' and more 'real history' in the VHS Newsletter. A point worth pondering.

It's not our editor's fault. Kathleen doesn't have much space for 'real history' because the rest of us keep bombarding her with organizational news that simply "must get in." VHS events, advocacy issues, research and publication grants, Historical Fair, Exec vacancies, summer tours — we're a busy organization and member participation is vital. But on the other hand, 'real history' is our core business!

The BC Historical Federation struggled with that issue in changing the name of its journal from *British Columbia Historical News* to *British Columbia History*: headline the history, and tuck the organizational news in a special inside section. A reasonable solution, I think for a province-wide quarterly sold to the general public.

For the VHS, it's a perpetual juggling act. Our smaller, members-only Newsletter will continue to headline vital VHS news. We'll try to print real history, too, but for that the best resources will always be museums, libraries, and archives, plus newspapers (Lisa Smedman in the *Courier*, John Mackie and Stephen Hume in *The Sun*) and, of course, websites like our own Chuck Davis's ever-growing www.vancouverhistory.ca. (An excerpt from Chuck's monthly quiz can be found in this issue.)

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Thank You!

THANK YOU! to the six members who made donations totaling \$225 during January and February. Donations for the year beginning May 1, 2004 now total \$1025.

Welcome New Members

Larry Wong of Vancouver and
John Christopherson of North Vancouver.

Sunday, April 10

Last Chance Tickets to the

Incorporation Day Luncheon

Our annual Incorporation Day Lunch will be held on Sunday, April 10th, 2005 at the University Golf Club, 5185 University Boulevard at 12 noon. This is your last chance to get tickets for this celebration. Our guest speaker this year is John Mackie, a popular writer with the *Vancouver Sun*. Tickets for members and friends are \$25.00 each, up to March 26th; \$30.00 until March 31st, the absolute deadline. You can still get your tickets at the March 24th VHS meeting, or you can order them from Elizabeth Hawkins, 3626 West 1st Avenue, Vancouver, B.C. V6R 1H2 (tel. 604-737-8045). Please enclose a cheque to the VHS with your request for tickets. We sincerely hope you can join us.



How well do you know our local history?

Excerpts from the March Quiz

From *The History of Metropolitan Vancouver* by Chuck Davis
(www.vancouverhistory.ca)

March 1 This particular ethnic group celebrates St. David's Day today (and not just in Greater Vancouver.) Who are they?

March 2 On March 2, 1954 Canada's first bilingual newspaper was published in Vancouver. It carried stories in English and . . . what other language?

March 6 A street on the west side of Vancouver was named Narvaez Drive on March 6, 1941. Who was Narvaez?

March 9 On March 9, 1870 debate began on the "admission" of British Columbia. Admission to what?

March 10 It was known colloquially as Gastown, but on March 10, 1870 a more formal name was adopted for this townsite that we know today as Vancouver.

March 19 On March 19, 1974 Vancouver city council voted to buy this place. It reopened as a concert hall April 2, 1977. Can you name it?

March 23 He was born March 23, 1924 in Vancouver, ran a retailing empire established by his grandfather in Vancouver in the early 1890s. His nickname was Chunky. What was his family name?

March 26 On March 26, 1898 a new newspaper started. It had started as a Victoria weekly, began this day as a Vancouver daily. It still is, 107 years later! What is it?

March 27 Charles Marega collapsed and died March 27, 1939 after teaching a class at the Vancouver School of Art. Why is he remembered today?

Answers:

March 1 The Welsh; **March 2** Chinese; **March 6** He was a Spanish explorer, the first European to see the site of what is now Vancouver in 1791; **March 9** Canadian Confederation; **March 10** Granville, named for the Colonial Secretary of the time; **March 19** The Orpheum; **March 23** Charles Woodward; **March 26** The Province; **March 27** He was a sculptor, responsible for many works throughout Vancouver.

Our History, Our Heritage

Celebrating Kelowna's 100th Anniversary
Vancouver Historical Federation Conference
May 12 - 15, 2005

The latest issue of *British Columbia News* includes the registration forms and details of the program and pre-conference work shops for the upcoming Vancouver Historical Federation conference. It sounds like a wonderful selection of lectures and outings to celebrate Kelowna's 100th birthday and should be a lot of fun, especially for oenophiles! The deadline for the early bird discount has been extended. You can save \$25 by registering before March 31st. If you need more information or want to share transportation, please contact Barbara Cole at (604)733-2650.



• HERITAGE HOUSE TOUR •

Sunday, June 5, 2005 10am ~5pm



order securely online at
www.vancouverheritagefoundation.org

or by calling 604.264.9642

Tickets \$35.00

including gst & mailing of guidebooks



The Vancouver Heritage Foundation
844 West Hastings St. Vancouver, BC V6C 1C8

Coming Up

Upcoming VHS Speakers

Thursday, April 28, 2005, 7:30 pm
Vancouver Museum

Political Cartoons:

Their History in Canada

with Charles Hou, Educator and recipient of the first Governor-General's award for excellence in teaching history. Invited to be a part of this program are some current editorial cartoonists in Vancouver: Roy Peterson (*Vancouver Sun*), Dan Murphy (*The Province*) and Bob Krieger (*The Province*).

At the Vancouver Museum

Opened March 10, 2005

Mail, Rail, & Retail:

Connecting Canadians

Original artifacts and first person accounts illustrate the impact of the Hudson's Bay company, the Canadian Pacific Railway, and Canada Post; three organizations which were key factors in the development and understanding of our personal history, immigration, and community.



Opening April 2005

You Say You Want a Revolution

Groove on Vancouver as the hippie capital of Canada. Visit the hippies' communal house, try on some macrame finery, and listen to great Vancouver bands from the late 1960s. Look for your mom or dad, son or daughter, (or yourself!) in swinging footage of the Stanley Park Be-In and the Retinal Circus nightclub. Follow the action as Vancouverites, both hippie and straight, fought the freeway and saved their neighbourhoods.

The Black Community of Strathcona and Hogan's Alley in Vancouver

February Speaker: Wayde Compton



Reviewed by: Chuck Davis

Another big Vancouver Historical Society crowd at our February meeting enjoyed a talk on the history of the black community in Vancouver, given by Wayde Compton of the Hogan's Alley Memorial Project.

We learned that a couple of the city's black pioneers, Philip and Josephine Sullivan, were here (emigrants from San Francisco) even before incorporation, and that they ran a restaurant and general store. Philip Sullivan fronted a band that played at the restaurant, and was among the signatories on the city's incorporation documents. You can't get much earlier than that!

Then there was Seraphim "Joe" Fortes, the big, gentle man who arrived in Vancouver in 1885, again before incorporation. Joe, a crewman, aged then about 20, arrived aboard the *Robert Kerr* and decided to stay. He gained fame over the years for his efforts (initially volunteered, then paid for by the city) as a lifeguard at English Bay. Mr. Compton remarked on what he felt was a kind of condescension toward Joe Fortes shown in the way he was depicted in the newspapers of the day . . . almost as a kind of "mascot."

Still, the affection for him was real and when Joe died in February 1922 his funeral, at Holy Rosary, was the biggest in the city's history, with crowds of hundreds outside unable to fit within the church. (Incidentally in 1986 the Vancouver Historical Society named Joe the Citizen of the Century. A fine and emotional description of his funeral can be found in Alan Morley's history *Vancouver: Milltown to Metropolis*.)

Over the years an area nicknamed "Hogan's Alley," roughly bounded by Station and Gore Streets, with its axis along Prior, became the social and geographical focus of

Vancouver's black community. No one is quite sure how the "Alley" got that name; possibly it was inspired by an area of the same name in New York City. An account in a Vancouver paper described our Hogan's Alley as a centre of "squalor, promiscuity, and crime," although no reference was made to the colour of its denizens.

One of our more prominent black citizens was Zenora Hendrix (called Nora), whose grandson was the famous rock guitarist Jimi Hendrix. Nora, who was of Cherokee Indian descent and lived to be 100 years old, was married to Ross Hendrix, who worked as a stage hand. Jimi's dad was born in Vancouver and in 1949, Jimi Hendrix, at the age of seven, lived here briefly with his grandmother. (Local singer Eleanor Collins is related to the family, too.)

In 1918 Nora Hendrix was a major influence in the formation of a busy black church here, the Fountain Chapel, which survived her passing by just one year. In a striking illustration of the changing ethnic makeup of East Vancouver, that building is now a Chinese Lutheran Church.

Another influential social group was the True Resolution Masonic Lodge. Then there was a black political group, the Negro Citizens' League, headed at its birth by a railway porter, in a time when virtually all porters were black men. The Negro Citizens' League eventually became the B.C. Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, allied to the well-known American group. Frank Collins, Eleanor Collins' husband, was the president of the B.C. branch.

Today approximately 18,000 black people live in Greater Vancouver, but now they live here and there and everywhere. There is no more Hogan's Alley.

Vancouver Historical Society - Executive, 2004 - 2005 (elected May 27, 2004)

EXECUTIVE:

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Vice President	Wes Knapp
Treasurer (Vacant)	(Paul Flucke pro tem)
Recording Secretary	Judy Maxwell
At Large (Newsletter Mailing)	Barbara Coles
At Large	Imbi Harding
At large	Elizabeth Hawkins
At Large	John (Jack) Spibey
At Large	Wayne Norton
At Large	Chuck Davis

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