

Vancouver Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

ISSN 0042 - 2487

March 2011

Vol. 50 No. 6

The Natural Landscape of Vancouver

March Speakers: Bruce Macdonald & Celia Brauer

For several millennia, the First Nations peoples in the Vancouver area were able to harvest a rich bounty from the landscape without altering it significantly. For them, when the tide went out, “the table was set.” On land, when the salmon were returning up the many rain-fed streams, they were caught and smoked for future consumption. Trout and eels were also part of this bounty. Giant cedars were peeled for the fibrous bark or cut down for canoes and houses.

Arriving outsiders, particularly Europeans, saw every element of the area as potential for commercial harvest and thus critical to their survival. Hence, the old-growth forest

with some of the largest trees in the world was harvested. Essentially denuded of its original flora, the area was reconfigured with imported plants. The landscape also changed. The area of Stanley Park, an island at high tide was joined up; the adjoining tidal estuary was dammed and renamed Lost Lagoon. False Creek, considered a nuisance by people such as Van Horne, was quickly industrialized and much of it was filled in by 1916.

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. That amazing record will be revealed to the VHS at the March 24th



Bruce Macdonald on a walking tour.

Photo: Gina Hetland



1880s Vancouver from Bruce Macdonald's book *Vancouver: A Visual History*.

Smoke from sawdust burners covered the city in soot. Fish-bearing streams within the eventual city of Vancouver were utilized by the early settlers, but eventually fished out and filled in. The Fraser River's estuary which once provided a feeding ground for 200 species of migrating birds on the Pacific Flyway became a shadow of its past.

meeting by Celia Brauer and Bruce Macdonald.

Celia Brauer, a cofounder of the False Creek Watershed Society and advocate for Pacific wild salmon, has produced a wall chart which celebrates the lost natural history of Vancouver. It is based on a major book project sponsored by the Vancouver Historical Society, Bruce Macdonald's, *Vancouver: A Visual History*. Bruce Macdonald received the VHS Award of Merit in 1993 for his book.

Bruce M. Watson

Next Meeting: 7:30 PM, Thursday, March 24 at Museum of Vancouver

Preznotes

Last month I wrote about volunteerism, as one of the means to engage in our Society's activities.

I thought this month I'd touch on another avenue: we always welcome feedback. Our Society relies on stories and ideas. Your thoughtful comments, collegial criticism, and kind encouragement allow us to assess our programming for what works best and adjust course, if needed.

Any member that so wishes is encouraged to e-mail me, or to contact an executive member, to let us know what you think, what ideas you have, or suggestions you might make. While we may not be able to implement your ideas, I can assure you all feedback is considered carefully.

At one time our speaker series ranged in topic from fully-provincial to federal in scope, such as *Alaska and the Alaska Highway* (1942) or the *Frog Lake Massacre of 1885* (1945). As the *Vancouver Historical Society*, a decision was made some time ago to limit our topics to within the municipal boundaries of Vancouver. I completely understand this logic – our city has so many fascinating stories to draw from I can't imagine ever suffering a poverty of choice!

That said, one of our members reminded me of our more "free-ranging" years, and wondered if an expansion in topic choice might be of interest to the wider membership.

So I put the question to you: do you think our present rationale is reasonable, or would a presentation or two of a slightly more expansive scope be of interest?

Scott Anderson, VHS President
sanderson@vancouver-historical-society.ca

Welcome New Members

Kellan B. Higgins
M. Havelock Rolfe

Diana Whistler

2011 Luncheon Speaker Announced

In its 125 years, the City of Vancouver has seen many events start that have gone on to become lasting traditions. Think of the Pacific National Exhibition, the Polar Bear Swim at English Bay, the Dragon Boat Festival at False Creek.

Another annual tradition has been the Vancouver Historical Society's luncheon celebrating the incorporation of the City of Vancouver. The City was incorporated 125 years ago on April 6, 1886. Besides the good food and camaraderie at the luncheon, the Society will be handing out the VHS Award of Merit to someone who has done exemplary work in promoting or preserving Vancouver history.

The luncheon also features a keynote presenter who will speak on an aspect of Vancouver history. This year, the VHS is pleased to present Christopher Gaze, who has also started an event in Vancouver that has become a much-loved summertime tradition — Bard on the Beach.

Born in England, Christopher trained at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School before going on to perform in Britain, the United States and Canada. He moved to Canada in 1975 spending three seasons at the Shaw Festival. He made the move to Vancouver in 1983 and founded Bard on the Beach in 1990. This award-winning performer is also the host of the Vancouver Symphony's *Tea & Trumpets* series as well as their annual Christmas concerts.

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

As usual, we will have door prizes.

Tickets for the Luncheon are \$30.00 each and this is your last chance to buy them at the March monthly meeting, or by mail. Mail orders can be sent to Incorporation Day Luncheon, #606-3362 Wesbrook Mall, Vancouver, BC, V6S 0A7. Please allow 10 business days for mail orders.

BCHF's Online History Bookstore

The B.C. Historical Federation's new Website Book Store now features 21 books on many aspects of B.C.'s exciting and colourful history. Most books are self-published by different historical societies around the province. Check out the selection at www.bchistory.ca/publications/store/index.html then view the Book Store inventory. Books can be purchased online through the Federation's Paypal link.

Placing A Vacation Photo

Continued from Page 4

Incidentally, the Trocadero Cafe was the scene of a 1936 sit-down strike by waitresses who were fighting for unionization, better pay and working conditions. Many of the customers supported the waitresses.

John felt the photo might have been taken somewhere in the West End. He also thought the sign might in fact be an advertisement for the Trocadero, and not its actual premises. John then found a similar photo on the internet showing the sightseeing streetcar in front of *Marett & Reid, Druggists* at 1216 Denman near Davie. Sure enough, it was the same building!

I checked my track diagrams for that area and they also matched!

We then started looking for other photos of that corner, which would show the building. We found several, all showing the large advertising sign. The mystery was solved.

Ian of course, was delighted we were able to find the exact location. He later discovered the photo was taken during his grandparents' epic early 1920s voyage through North America including stops in Vancouver, Lake Louise, the Grand Canyon, Niagara Falls, New York and Atlantic City.

So why is the dentist at the controls? This was a spot where the car took a short break during its tour. The motorman probably just allowed the Australian visitors to stand at the controls for a unique souvenir vacation photo.



A later photo of the same two-storey building seen behind the B.C. Electric Railway Company repair truck on Denman near Davie.

Photo: City of Vancouver Archives A06484

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, April 28, 2011 - 7:30 pm

The Cucumber Tree

Speaker: Bob Ross

A retired City of Vancouver Traffic Engineer, Bob's family has longtime connections with Vancouver. Cambie Street is named for his great-grandfather, Henry Cambie the CPR surveyor. Bob's book *The Cucumber Tree* is a charming look back at growing up in the Kitsilano of the 1940s and 1950s.

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

VHS Member Writes About History and Heritage Homes

There are many fascinating websites for anyone interested in exploring history. One of our VHS members, Eve Lazarus, has one about local history you might want to explore.

Eve is a Vancouver freelance writer with a passion for history and heritage houses. She is the author of *At Home with History: the secrets of Greater Vancouver's heritage houses*. Eve, a member of the North Vancouver District Heritage Commission, believes a house has a genealogy, much like a person, and comes alive through the human interest stories and mysteries that took place inside its walls.

She writes a blog at www.blog.evelazarus.com to promote the idea that a social history is every bit as important as architectural merit in saving our older homes from demolition and writes about everything from research techniques to stories about the people who lived in various houses to buildings at risk in British Columbia.

Placing a 1920s Family Vacation Photo

by Jim McGraw

A wonderful old vacation photo was sent to us by Ian Sutton of Australia. It shows his maternal grandparents, Alfred and Ellen Seller aboard one of Vancouver's open sightseeing streetcars.

What makes it particularly intriguing is that it is not one of the many souvenir photos sold to passengers after the ride. This one shows Ian's grandfather — a dentist — at the controls with his wife proudly standing behind him!

Ian didn't have details but assumed the photo was taken on West Hastings Street between Cambie and Abbott with the Trocadero Cafe in the background, its address prominently displayed.

We agreed the photo was taken in the warmer months after January 1, 1922. On that date, traffic in B.C. switched over to driving on the right hand side of the road. The parked cars in the photo are all parked on the appropriate side of the street.

Upon closer examination though, I didn't feel the location was right. Hastings Street had double tracks for the streetcars at that location, not single track as in the photo. The Trocadero also seemed to be on the wrong side of the

street. The restaurant was on the south side so the slight curve seen behind the streetcar would have been going in the other direction. The building's construction was also suspicious. All of the buildings at that location are more substantial and built of brick and stone.

I contacted historian John Atkin and also Andrew Martin of the Vancouver Library's Special Collections Department.



Family photo showing Alfred and Ellen Seller of Australia posing at the controls of Vancouver's sightseeing streetcar in the early 1920s.

Andrew checked old city directories and phone books and wrote the following: "The first mention of the Trocadero was in 1915 at 156 W. Hastings. At that time it was being called the Trocadero Grill. They called it a grill until 1918 when they started to call it the Trocadero Cafe. I did not find it listed as the Bakery and Cafe, although it was sometimes mentioned in the listing. The

Trocadero Cafe did have a second location from about November 1930 until sometime in 1933. That location was at 921 Granville St. After 1933 the second location stops being listed. I had a look through some of our newer telephone books. The Trocadero Cafe is listed up until the 1960s (and maybe beyond that) at 156 W. Hastings."

Continued top left on Page 3

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

EXECUTIVE

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

APPOINTED POSITIONS

Webmaster	Quasar Data Management
Archivist	Elizabeth Hawkins
Info Line	Barbara Coles

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
Newsletter Editor: jmcgraw@vancouver-historical-society.ca