

Vancouver Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

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Images of Vancouver Through Time

Speaker: Jason Vanderhill

How we see ourselves may not be the same as how we want others to see us and even how others actually see us.

We may see ourselves living in idyllic surroundings of lush growth, gardens and clean streets, in a climate modified by ocean waters which is here exclusively for our pleasure. We are boastfully aware that the city in part is guarded by mountains which, while being easy to climb and protectors of Arctic outflows can be ominous and dangerous for the uninitiated.

While a mid-1930s Gerry McGeer saw Vancouver as a “city of gorgeous lights”, a mid-century municipal candidate saw False Creek as “nothing more than a filthy ditch.” At the same time a Malcolm Lowry who never held back, observed “Everyone [in Vancouver] is fast asleep and when you prick them, a Union Jack flows out of the hole.”

Contrast that with a June 20, 2013 *New York Times* article on Vancouver which gushed, “Where else can you find an international brand of exoticism that rivals Hong Kong, Nordic-style order and a limitless array of shops, restaurants and top-notch accommodations...”

In the early years, two groups, the Vancouver Improvement Company

(VIC) and the CPR were competing to create favourable images. Vancouver’s second Mayor, David Oppenheimer and his VIC, so successfully cultivated the image of a city with endless opportunity, it allowed him to create in-



One of the many images to be shown by Jason Vanderhill.

Photo: Jason Vanderhill Collection

frastructure and bring in industry. The CPR on the other hand, anxious to sell off its overly rich gift of 6000+ acres given as inducement to extend its railway line, developed an image of a city with great sophistication by bringing

world class talent in to perform at its downtown opera house. It worked and, coincidentally, when much of their allotment had been sold off, they closed the opera house.

During the Kondike Gold Rush, Vancouver was promoted as the gateway to the Yukon. During WWI, a carefully cultivated image of loyalty to and supplicant support for the British Empire blinkered Vancouverites to the presence and contributions of non-Brits. That attitude continued post war into the 1920s and the image of an endlessly prosperous city brought about the development of such buildings as the iconic Marine Building and Commodore Ballroom at the end of that decade. The realistic image in the 1930s as a refuge with a mild climate unlike the rest of Canada brought in large numbers of unemployed who set up their hobo villages.

Developers continued to present their vision of the city through Expo 86 the Olympics.

Speaker Jason Vanderhill, an internet promoter of Vancouver through the *Vancouver is Awesome* site, has for years gathered a variety of images which reflect the complexity of the city.

Bruce M. Watson

Next Meeting: 7:30 p.m., Thursday, March 27, 2014 at Museum of Vancouver

President's Notes

As we approach the celebration of Vancouver's 128th year as a city we might pause to reflect on a Vancouver Historical Society custom, the ringing of the bell of the *Robert Kerr* at our Incorporation Day luncheons. We might also think about the man who made it a VHS tradition, Leonard McCann.

Incorporation Day began in June 1965 not as a luncheon but as a banquet, the first of which was hosted by the University Women's Club at Hycroft Manor on June 12, 1965. The guest of honour that night, before more than 150 members and guests, was Dr. W. Kaye Lamb, Canada's Dominion Archivist. Our current membership secretary, Elizabeth Hawkins, who in recent times organized ten Incorporation Day luncheons, is Dr. Lamb's daughter.

Annual dinners continued, most often at the Stanley Park Pavilion, from 1965 until May 1979 when two changes were introduced: the dinner was transformed into a luncheon, and "the splendid resonance of a ship's bell sounded the start of the more formal proceedings." This was likely the bell's first appearance at a VHS gathering, though we cannot be certain. Society president (from 1978-83) and Maritime Museum curator Leonard McCann told the luncheon crowd at the newly refurbished Brock House that it was from the *Robert Kerr*, a wooden sailing barque that had served as a refuge for hundreds of people fleeing the Great Fire of Vancouver in June 1886. As Esther Birney recounted, "how vividly the clang of this bell brought to its hearers the excitement of re-lived history."

Since then, Len McCann has rung the *Robert Kerr*'s bell 35 times and has been one of our most active members. I remember especially Len's November 1996 talk on the *Greenhill Park* disaster, caused in March 1945 when a Vancouver-built freighter carrying explosive materials blew up at its Burrard Street dock threatening many and killing eight. But it is through the ringing of the bell that Len McCann created a Society tradition, and through the ringing of the bell that we will remember the important contribution that this kind and generous man has made to our Society. Thank you, Len.

Bob McDonald, President
bobmcdonald@vancouver-historical-society.ca

Looking to Add to Our Resource List

On occasion, the Vancouver Historical Society is asked to recommend speakers, writers, researchers or historical tour guides for coming events or projects. The person's work might be part of a project, the central feature of an event, or a component of a larger program.

While the Society cannot recommend one person over another, we would like to have a list of people along with their experience and qualifications as a resource available to anyone asking.

The organizers of the event or project would themselves then be responsible for looking over the list, screening potential speakers, writers, researchers or guides, contacting them and making arrangements for remunerations, honorariums or other conditions.

While there are many talented and qualified speakers, writers, researchers and guides specializing in the history of Greater Vancouver and area, this list would only include Vancouver Historical Society members.

If you are interested, we ask you to submit the following information to: info@vancouver-historical-society.ca with the subject line "Resource List."

- your name and contact information (phone number, email address, mailing address)
- specialty (speaker, writer, researcher, guide, or all that apply)
- area(s) of expertise (architecture, social history, popular history, crime, etc.)
- a short bio (100 words or less) listing your qualifications which could include past experience in the field, educational background if helpful, courses taught if relevant, books or articles published, blogs, events or groups where you were a featured speaker or guide and so on.

We would please ask only those who have had previous experience to respond. Again the Society cannot recommend anyone over another. The list is just a resource for potential engagers of qualified speakers, writers, researchers and guides specializing in local history. It will be up to the engagers to vet the list, choose someone for the engagement and make every other arrangement as well.

Welcome New VHS Members

Cindy Bokitch

Melanie Hardbatt

James and Jane Gray

Peek into the Past

Continued from Back Page

After Robinson's moved across the street, the 1899 vintage building was demolished in 1937-1938 and a new building was constructed using 475 West Hastings as its address. That new building became the longtime home of an F.W. Woolworth Company outlet. Woolworth's opened at that location in 1939 and the building was theirs until 1986.

The building is still there today and interestingly enough, has housed the Mr. Big & Tall menswear shop since Woolworth's left. So for well over 25 years now, another longtime menswear shop has been on the very spot where our Robinson's menswear store photo was taken 96 years ago in 1918.

Vancouver Celebrates in Kodachrome

Author and VHS board member Michael Kluckner will narrate a selection of amateur films from the City of Vancouver Archives of parades and celebrations, beginning with the civic parade on Hastings Street for the 1936 Golden Jubilee and including memorable footage of the visit of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth in 1939 — 75 years ago this May. It concludes with Queen Elizabeth II's very brief visit to her mother's namesake park in 1959. The films are a feast of pretty girls, handsome soldiers in uniform, vintage cars and views of the city as it once was.

It's all part of this year's Incorporation Day Luncheon as the VHS commemorates the April 6, 1886 incorporation of the City of Vancouver 128 years ago. This year's Luncheon will be held on Sunday, April 6th, at 12:30 pm at the University Golf Club, 5185 University Boulevard.

Besides the film presentation, there will be door prizes, the Award of Merit presentation, and as always, a terrific menu. The Luncheon is also a fun opportunity for members and friends to meet others in the community who are interested in the history of Vancouver.

We would like to have a good advance estimate of attendance so please buy your tickets early. Tickets for the Luncheon will be \$35 each and you will be able to buy them at the March monthly meeting, or by mail. For mail orders, please send a cheque to: Vancouver Historical Society, PO Box 3071, Vancouver BC, V6B 3X6, Attn: Luncheon.

Reserve today by buying a ticket. We hope to see you there!

Upcoming Speakers

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 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of every month except June, July, August, December).

Thursday, April 24, 2014

The History of Art and Artists in Vancouver

Speaker: Gary Sim

Since the city's beginnings in 1886, Vancouver has had resident visual artists who have interpreted and presented the city to the rest of the world. While the contemporary artists may be familiar, few are aware of Vancouver surveyor Lauchlin Hamilton's early watercolours, or museum curator William Ferris's painting of Coal Harbour replete with Hawaiian Rancherie. Artist, printmaker, researcher, publisher Gary Sim brings to light the names and works of the artists who called Vancouver their home or who captured it in passing.

Thursday, May 22, 2014

The Art of the Impossible: Dave Barrett and the NDP in Power 1972-1975.

Speaker: Geoff Meggs and Rod Mickleburgh

Dave Barrett's NDP provincial government reign from 1972-1975 has left us with a legacy that has shaped the province ever since, largely through a damn-the-torpedoes three-year legislative blitzkrieg. Many changes from the Agricultural Land Reserve, to ICBC to a Provincial Ambulance service, etc. have given the province a totally new direction. Leading this onslaught was a complex politician, Dave Barrett. City Councillor Geoff Meggs and reporter Rod Mickleburgh will base their talk on their book of the same name.

Please note the above talk (Thursday, May 22nd) is in place of the previously announced talk on the history of the Vancouver Maritime Museum. Due to circumstances beyond our control, the program schedule has had to be changed.



Peek into the Past

with Jim McGraw



Little could anyone in this photo imagine us looking at them 96 years later. After all, they were just at Robinson's Clothing Shop on a March day either working or buying a new suit or coat for the coming spring. During that spring, World War I is very much in the news. The Armistice won't happen for another eight months.

Robinson's was a menswear shop at 441 West Hastings on the north side just east of Richards. The first mention of Robinson's in a city directory is in 1918, the year this photo was taken. Perhaps Stuart Thompson, the photographer, was taking a shot of a new business.

Note the wonderful signs throughout the store above the racks: "I have proved that I save you \$10; I sell odd trousers from \$3.50 and \$5.00; I am the man who took the X out of expense."

While it's mostly men who are either selling or buying, there are four women in the photo probably choosing just the right outfit for their husband or son. A fifth woman at the desk on the left looks to be a cashier or bookkeeper.

The building at 441 West Hastings, which was built in 1899, had earlier housed stationers from 1900-1907, the Montelius Piano House from 1908-1911, a confectioner in 1912, the Brown & Dawson Drug Company from 1913-1914, and an optician and a milliner shared the premises from 1915-1917.

Robinson's was at that location until they moved across the street to 424 West Hastings. The business continued at that new location until 1947 when it became the Bill Smith Ltd. menswear shop.

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Vancouver Historical Society Executive Board: 2013 - 2014 (Elected May 23, 2013)			
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