

Vancouver Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

ISSN 0042 - 2487

Vol. 46 No. 3

November 2006

Old Theatre District History and Restorations

November Speakers: John Atkin and Peter Fairchild

On Hastings Street just off Main, behind a rather unassuming façade, is a jewel box of a space that is not only Vancouver's oldest surviving theatre, but also the oldest Pantages Theatre in North America. Erected in 1907, it was only the second purpose-built theatre constructed by Alexander Pantages of a chain that would number over 150 theatres. After many name changes and some alterations the theatre has been empty

and neglected for an alarmingly long time, but there may be hope yet for the old house.

At the November meeting, John Atkin will present the fascinating history of the Pantages Theatre and the surrounding theatre district, which included the Princess, Empress, Avenue, Columbia and Imperial theatres. Peter Fairchild will bring us up to date on the latest efforts to save the Pantages theatre.



LEFT:
John Atkin;
BELOW:
Peter Fairchild.



John is an author (*Vancouver Walks* and *SkyTrain Explorer*;) who also conducts a variety of walking tours throughout Vancouver. He previously spoke at the VHS on the history of Kitsilano.

Peter is the Chair of the Pantages Theatre Arts Society and Treasurer of the Community Arts Council.

LEFT: The Pantages Theatre, exterior and interior detailing.

Next Meeting: Thursday, November 23, at 7:30 pm in the Vancouver Museum

Lost Time Capsule is Found!

(with a little help from the VHS)

1936: It's Vancouver's Jubilee Year, and David Spencer's Department Store on Hastings decides to celebrate by putting together a time capsule: a cedar chest filled with news of the day, photos, letters and other mementos, to be opened fifty years hence at the city's Centennial.

1986: The Centennial Year arrives—but where is the precious chest? The *Vancouver Sun* announces that it has disappeared and no one knows its whereabouts!

2006: Strike up the band! The lost treasure has been found -- and its temporary custodian is our very own VHS, the Vancouver Historical Society.

How this happened is a story almost as intriguing as the contents of the capsule itself. It began last month when, visiting my son in Green Bay, Wisconsin, I borrowed his computer to check the email that comes to our VHS website. One message was from an Ontario man named Jim Breckenridge. He had some historical items he thought we might like to have, and could bring them to Vancouver on a forthcoming visit. Were we interested? Yes! I replied, and forwarded the correspondence to Bruce Watson.

Bruce contacted Breckenridge to arrange a meeting, and on Nov. 5 the two of us met with Jim and his wife at their hotel (just across the street from what used to be Spencers!). As Jim handed us the treasures, piece by piece, the story unfolded.

In 1973, while Jim was a secondary school history teacher in Ontario, he and his wife visited Vancouver. At the time, Eatons, which had owned Spencers since 1948, was vacat-

ing the premises and auctioning off the old fixtures. Jim and his wife browsed the sale, and for \$15 (his wife says it was \$25), he walked out with a large carton (no cedar box) of interesting old stuff.

In 1986, Jim was surprised to learn that Vancouver wanted back goods it had sold him thirteen years before. He contacted the Vancouver Museum, which expressed interest in seeing the materials, but that wasn't feasible at the time. This year, with another Vancouver visit in view, Jim decided to contact the VHS. We're glad he did!

By November 7, when the VHS Executive met, Bruce had inventoried (5 pages!) the lode now in our custody, and Exec discussed the next steps. Bruce and Wayne Norton are setting up a meeting, hopefully to be held at the SFU centre in the Spencers building, at which several still-sealed packages will be opened before the Executive, representatives of the Vancouver Museum and the City Archives, and invited members of the press. Soon, we trust, the *Vancouver Sun*, will announce that, after twenty years missing, the precious time capsule has been found.

The final step will be finding a permanent home (probably the Museum or Archives) where the capsule contents will be safe yet accessible to the public. Somewhere along the line, we'll try to have a special showing for VHS members. We'll keep you posted on that. Meanwhile, if you hear of other missing time capsules, please let us know.

Paul Flucke, President
604-732-7742; paulflucke@shaw.ca

Looking Ahead...

Just an early announcement that the annual Incorporation Day Luncheon will be held on Sunday April 1, 2007 at the University Golf Club, 5185 University Boulevard at 12:00 noon. And no...this is not an April fool's joke!

Tickets for the Luncheon for members and friends will be \$30.00 each and they will be on sale starting in February. In upcoming newsletters, we will have more information about the Luncheon program, which is now being finalized. We hope to see you all there!

In Memoriam

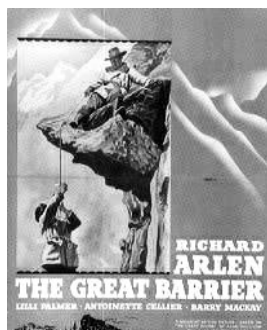
We are sorry to announce the death on October 31st of VHS member John Crosse. John suffered a heart attack while cycling. He was 80-years-old. John had a great interest in history, especially maritime history and the early explorations along the coast. Arrangements are pending for a memorial gathering in early December.

Welcome New Members: Emily Beliveau, Brian & Monica Neudorf

THANK YOU! -- to the three VHS members who donated a total of \$110 during September and October. Remember...donations received by December 31 will be rewarded with a tax receipt and savings on your 2006 tax return.

The Building of the CPR in the Movies

A VHS SPECIAL EVENT



On Tuesday evening, December 12th, at 7:00, the VHS has arranged for a free showing of the 1937 movie, *The Great Barrier*, starring Richard Arlen and Lilli Palmer.

Filmed around Revelstoke almost 70 years ago, the movie shows the Canadian Pacific Railway's difficulties in building a route through the mountains of B.C. The film is dated, of course, and it plays fast and loose with some of the facts, but it's great fun and always interesting.

Our special guest will be 84-year-old Ernie Rebelato, who as a youngster growing up in Revelstoke was an extra in the mob scenes of the movie. Ernie says he earned 75 cents a day for his movie work.

Appropriately, *The Great Barrier* will be shown at the former CPR locomotive roundhouse, all that remains of the old Drake Street railyards. The roundhouse later became part of Expo 86 and today is known as The Roundhouse, a community and performance centre serving the new residential areas in Yaletown and along False Creek.

The Roundhouse is at the corner of Davie and Pacific in Vancouver, accessible by transit on the C21 and C23 routes. It is only five to seven short city blocks east of major bus routes on Seymour and Howe. There is also paid parking available.

Coming up at the VPL

VHS members are invited to this upcoming evening talk at the Vancouver Public Library on the lower level on November 27, 7.30 pm

Jan Hare and VHS member Jean Barman will give an illustrated talk highlighting the roles of women and of Aboriginal people in the missionary movement in British Columbia. Drawing from their new book *Good Intentions Gone Awry*, published by UBC Press, they turn attention to Emma Crosby, wife of well-known British Columbian Methodist missionary Thomas Crosby, and to the coastal peoples who were the objects of conversion.

Upcoming Speakers & Events

The VHS invites everyone (including non-members) to attend our monthly talks. The talks are free. They are held at the Vancouver Museum, 1100 Chestnut Street (close to Vanier Park) at 7:30 pm on the fourth Thursday of every month (unless noted).

Tuesday, December 12, 2006 (Please note: This is a special event at The Performance Centre at the Roundhouse in Yaletown, corner of Davie and Pacific, starting at 7:00 pm)

The Great Barrier: Hollywood's version of the Canadian Pacific Railway building its line through the Rockies

Moderator: Chuck Davis

A special 90-minute treat, this 1937 movie starring Richard Arlen and Lilli Palmer was filmed around Revelstoke. It's Hollywood's attempt to show the CPR's difficulties crossing the Rockies. While not very accurate historically, it *is* good fun to watch. A former resident of Revelstoke who was an extra in the movie, will be our guest. Free.

Thursday, January 25, 2007

100-60-40-10: The Rise & Fall (and Rise Again) of Pacific Vancouver

Speaker: Henry Yu

The year 2007 marks a series of anniversaries of watershed moments in Vancouver's relationship to Canada and the Pacific world. Come and see the changes that took place and nudged Vancouver into its place as a global city.

Thursday, February 22, 2007

Vancouver Through the Archives of the CBC

Speaker: Colin Preston

The CBC film Archives are a treasure trove of insights into the last 50 years of Vancouver History. The CBC radio archives go back even further. Treat yourself to a refresher course in news events, personalities and home-grown drama.

Thursday, March 22, 2007

The History of St. Paul's Hospital

Speaker: TBA

Founded in 1894 by the Sisters of the Charity of Providence, St. Paul's Hospital began as a 25-bed wood framed building. Over the years, with many additions, it has become a major hospital specializing in such things as AIDS treatment. Due to concerns about the older buildings' abilities to withstand earthquake damage, it may be moved from its Burrard Street location.

Thursday, April 26, 2007

Comrade Dad: A Father and a Vancouver Bookstore

Speaker: Karin Lee

Filmmaker Karin Lee will show and speak about her film *Comrade Dad*, the story of her father who ran the China Arts and Crafts bookstore. This quintessentially Vancouver story is about ideology and family and what it was like to live in Chinatown in the fifties and sixties before Canada recognized China.

The rest of this season's program will be announced in future newsletters.

The Beginnings of Simon Fraser University

November 2nd Speaker: Hugh Johnston

Professor Emeritus Hugh Johnston, who taught history at Simon Fraser University for 37 years, and was the president of the Vancouver Historical Society from 1986 to 1989, knows his stuff! His plan at the VHS's November 2 meeting to show members a big collection of photographs highlighting the university's 41 years was thwarted when the Society's new projector wouldn't "talk" to the Vancouver Museum's computer. And that's because scheduling conflicts put us into the museum's auditorium, rather than our usual venue, the Joyce Walley room—where we know how stuff works.

Undaunted, Professor Johnston proceeded to give us a continuously interesting off-the-cuff history of SFU's creation, speaking without notes, and providing lots of color—much of it connected to the people associated with the university.

Including Simon Fraser himself. "Luckily," Professor Johnston said, "he had a first name. Because the original name for the institution was to have been just Fraser University." But then someone said, "Do you really want sports crowds shouting 'F.U.' at games?" And so it became SFU.

In the 1960s sentiment was building toward another university in British Columbia. UBC was seen by many as elitist, shown by a recommendation from one cynical observer as long ago as the 1930s that the province should "kill it." The people who sent their kids there, he said, could afford to send them overseas. Adding to the difficulty was the attitude of Premier W.A.C. Bennett, who didn't like universities. He wasn't a university grad himself and, besides, he'd been heckled more than once while visiting UBC.

But Bennett asked John B. Macdonald (president of UBC from 1962 to 1967) to study the subject. In 1963 Macdonald issued his Report on Higher Education in British Columbia. That laid the groundwork for the establishment of SFU and the University of Victoria (which had been a UBC satellite called Victoria College) and the province's network of community colleges.

Within 28 days of the Macdonald Report's appearance, Bennett said, "We're doing it!" He had his eye on those community colleges, Professor Johnston said. They would make local voters happy!

Now, who to get to preside over the creation of the second university on the mainland? Bennett picked up the phone and called Dr. Gordon Shrum, the head of BC Hydro (a post to which he had been named by Bennett). He couldn't have made a better choice: Shrum was a doer. "Make decisions!" he once told his son. "Fifty per cent of the time you'll be right. The other fifty per cent at least you're doing something!"

Bennett told Shrum he had two-and-a-half years to build the university from scratch, an impossible goal. Shrum did it, starting in March 1963 and seeing the university open in September, 1965.

He insisted from the first on a British Columbia architect. Chosen, as everyone now knows, was the team of Arthur Erickson and Geoffrey Massey. He said the university would award sports scholarships. He chose the university's first president, Ian McTaggart-Cowan. He planned for 2,000 students and 100 faculty. He opted for the trimester system, under which the university would be active year-round. He hired the first 12 heads of the university's departments. And he served as the first chancellor.

Time intervened just as Professor Johnston got to the point where Simon Fraser began to catch the radical fever that had seen American universities turn into academic battlegrounds, with students insisting the university should be run by its students and faculty. In fact, Professor Johnston's 2005 book on the turbulent first 10 years of SFU's life is titled *Radical Campus*.

VHS has invited Hugh Johnston (centre) back in the future to tell us the rest of the story!



Vancouver Historical Society - Leadership, 2005 - 2006 (elected May 25, 2006)

EXECUTIVE:

President	Paul Flucke	Director	Chuck Davis
Vice President (Programs)	Bruce Watson	Director (Membership)	Elizabeth Hawkins
Treasurer (Vacant)	Paul Flucke (pro tem)	Director (Newsletter Editor)	Jim McGraw
Secretary (Historica Fair)	Sidney Madden	Director (Research Service)	Wayne Norton
Director (Newsletter Mailing)	Barbara Coles	Director	Larry Wong

OTHERS:

Webmaster	Quasar Design and Data Management Inc.
Info Line	Nancy Stubbs
Archivist	Elizabeth Walker

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 Submissions: jmcgraw@vancouver-historical-society.ca