

Vancouver Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

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Probing the CPR Creation of Vancouver Myth

November Speaker: Frank Leonard

Dr. Leonard's presentation opens with a review of how Major J.S. Matthews, the first city archivist, transformed the formal arrival of the first CPR train in 1887 from a historical sidebar into a central civic myth.

He will examine three specific CPR actions during 1884 to 1889; the initial location of company works far to the west of the present site; the dubious acquisition of the right to expropriate a First Nation reserve along the CPR'S urban right-of-way, and conflict with disappointed investors that almost blocked extension to Vancouver.



CPR Offices and Depot on Cordova at Richards in 1887.

Vancouver City Archives Bu P277

In all three actions, the CPR's attempts to inscribe itself on key spaces within its projected terminus were bitterly

contested. Only through procedural ingenuity, which some have labelled corruption, did the company finally achieve some of its initial goals at the terminus. Yet these miscues have vanished from the accepted story of the origin of Vancouver, the CPR creation myth.

Dr. Leonard will illustrate the talk with a series of PowerPoint photographs and maps, several of which have never been publicly presented.

Members will discover why an inaccurate sketch of Burrard Inlet led the CPR to reject offers of additional land in the modern downtown core in the expectation of acquiring a large tract at Jericho. They will also learn how the company created an impractical plan of a railway yard, stuffed with tracks and shop facilities, to justify the expropriation of Kitsilano Indian Reserve No. 6, which ultimately became the site of the Vancouver Museum.

The presentation draws on material from the CPR Archives in Montreal, provincial and federal government departments, British Colonial Office and Admiralty documents, legal records, and local newspapers. This presentation is part of a broader investigation of the activities of transcontinental

railway companies at Pacific termini and adjacent service communities from Prince Rupert to San Diego.

Dr. Leonard earned both an Honours BA in History and a teacher's certificate at the University of British Columbia. After completing an MA in European and Russian History at the University of Toronto, he obtained a doctorate in Canadian History at York University.



November Speaker: Frank Leonard.

Dr. Leonard teaches at the Department of History at Douglas College in New Westminster. He is the author of *A Thousand Blunders: The Grand Trunk Pacific Railway and Northern British Columbia*, which received a Regional certificate of Merit from the Canadian Historical Association.

Larry Wong

Next Meeting: Thursday, November 27 at 7:30 pm at the Vancouver Museum

PREZNOTES

Volunteers

No volunteer organization can run without a solid core of volunteers, especially an organization like ours, which has grown in a variety of ways over the last few years. Right now, the members of the Executive do most of the volunteer work but, sometimes due to unforeseen circumstances, it is necessary to have someone at hand who can temporarily take over the job of that volunteer. As well, when individuals of the Executive step down after they have done what they can, replacement volunteers will be necessary. In other words, we need a lot more volunteers and expressions of interest than we presently have. Volunteering now would be a good way to test to see if they would like to commit themselves on a longer-term basis; meanwhile, we are quite prepared to mentor you as you test the waters. We ask all members to seriously consider placing their names to fit any of the following categories.

- **Future VHS Board Executive**
- **Future Treasurer**
- **Envelope Stuffer**
- **Information Line Responder**
- **Special Projects Researcher**
- **VHS website entry**
- **Speaker's Committee**
- **Media/Public Relations**
- **Special Projects Committee**
- **Archives assistant**
- **Website Enquiry responder**
- **On-call volunteer**
- **Newsletter editor/distributor**
- **Power Point Assistant**

Thanks for considering this.

Bruce M. Watson

City Reflections DVDs on Sale

Pick up a copy for yourself or as a gift at any monthly VHS talk, or at Videomatica on West Fourth, the Vancouver City Archives, or the Vancouver Public Library's Main Branch downtown.

Unveiling VHS Historical Sign

About 25 people attended the October 7th unveiling of the Devonian Park Historical Sign just off Georgia Street. The sign spoke to the activities that existed in what is now the 18 and 1900 block of Georgia Street. Unknown to most Vancouverites, the lovely green space, which is now the park, once included a settlement of Hawaiians (Kanaka Ranch) in the late 1800s, a giant ice hockey arena and large auditorium as well as a Boeing plant, which was originally built to construct seaplanes.

Various people were thanked for their contributions: Jean Barman (research), Larry Wong and Blythe Rogers (research), Spencer Herbert (concept introduction to the Park Board), the Hamber Foundation (funding), Jennifer Pantel (AldrichPears, designers) and last but not least, Jim Lowden and Yuna Flewin of the Park Board for overseeing the whole project.

Lynn (Nahanee) Widdows spoke for the Kanaka Ranch descendants citing stories from their family oral tradition while her brother William Nahanee gave a First Nations chant honouring the aboriginal wives of the Hawaiians.

Jon Mikel Thor, Paul Falcon and Greig Bowlsby of the Vancouver Millionaires Club spoke about the historical importance of the Denman Arena, which not only rivaled Madison Square Gardens but, under the Patrick Brothers, scored many firsts which are now part of the hockey culture. It housed the only team to win the Stanley Cup for Vancouver.

All VHS members are urged to take in our sign in Devonian Park as well as the one we scripted at Hallelujah Point in Stanley Park.

Bruce M. Watson

Edgar Wickberg 1927-2008

We note, with regret, the obituary of a well-known VHS member that appeared recently in the *Vancouver Sun*. Edgar Wickberg, who taught Modern Chinese History at UBC for over 20 years, died in Vancouver on October 29 2008. During his long and distinguished career, Edgar authored books and other publications about the history of Global Chinese, especially Chinese in the Philippines and Canada. In addition, he was the founding President of the Chinese Canadian Historical Society of British Columbia, which was so much a part of his life in his later years. We extend our sympathy to his wife Ellen and all of his family members at this time.

Elizabeth Walker

Post Office Behind the Scenes Tour

On Saturday November 29th, the Vancouver-Fraser Heritage Club will be hosting a guided walking tour of the downtown Post Office facility for members of the VHS.

The tour will begin at 10:00am in front of the Post Office building on Georgia Street between Hamilton and Homer Streets, across from the library main branch. This will be a terrific opportunity to delve into the facility, its operations and the history of postal service in Vancouver. After the tour, a special "Coffee and Q&A" session will give us the opportunity to mingle and chat with "posties" with a wide range of experience, including some that worked at the previous Post Office (now the Sinclair Centre).

Please remember to wear comfortable walking shoes. This tour is expected to last approximately 2-2.5 hours, including about an hour for the coffee session. Many operating areas are not wheelchair-accessible, but the VFHC has generously offered to tailor-make a separate limited-mobility tour around capabilities, if necessary. Please indicate this requirement when signing up. Aside from walking, escalators and a few stairs will be included to see the entire facility.

Members who are interested in participating are asked to sign up by registering at the Membership Table during the Thursday November 27th monthly meeting. If you are unable to attend the meeting, please call the Info Line to leave your name and phone number (604-878-9140), or e-mail the Info Line (info@vancouver-historical-society.ca), before Thursday November 27th.

Scott Anderson

Book Award Nomination

Congratulations to VHS member Eve Lazarus, whose *At Home With History: The Untold Secrets of Greater Vancouver's Heritage Homes* (Anvil Press, Vancouver) was selected as one of four finalists for the 2008 City of Vancouver Book Award.

The City of Vancouver Book Award is presented annually to authors of books in any genre that demonstrate excellence and enhance our understanding of Vancouver's rich history and culture, as chosen by an independent jury. This year marked the 20th anniversary of the award.

The winner of the \$2000 award was *Hope in Shadows*, a collection of powerful photographs and personal stories that document the lives of residents of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside.

Scott Anderson

Upcoming Speakers & Events

The VHS invites everyone (including non-members) to attend our monthly talks. The talks are free and 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). Special events may be held at other times for which there may be a fee.

Thursday, January 22, 2009, 7:30 pm

Illustrated Tour of Pre-1929 "Vancouver"

Speaker: Lisa Smedman

Eight decades ago, on Jan. 1, 1929, the municipalities of South Vancouver and Point Grey amalgamated with the City of Vancouver to form the Vancouver we know today. Lisa Smedman takes us on an illustrated tour of what were originally the separate entities of Hastings Townsite and District Lot 301. Learn how the original boundaries made their mark on the landscape of today and about the pioneers who shaped this city. Born and raised in Vancouver, Lisa Smedman has been a journalist for 24 years, the last decade with the *Vancouver Courier*.

Thursday, February 26, 2009

Saving the Hollow Tree

Speaker: Meg Stanley

The Hollow Tree has been a Stanley park icon for over 120 years. At least 1,000 years old, and 58 feet in circumference, the tree has been the subject of countless souvenir photos. Deemed a hazard, the tree looked like it might come down. With the backing of a report by arborists, heritage consultants and engineers, the tree might be saved. Hear the story from Meg Stanley who works for the Commonwealth Historic Resource Management Ltd. as a historian.

Thursday, March 26, 2009

Mary Chan:

The Woman who Fought City Hall and Won

Speaker: Shirley Chan

Designated a "slum area" in 1968, the city's oldest neighbourhood — Strathcona — looked like it might succumb to the wrecker's ball in the name of urban renewal. That is until Strathcona resident Mary Chan formed a community group and fought back. Watch "Mother Tongue," the story of how Mary Chan fought for her neighbourhood. Her daughter, Shirley will speak. Shirley Chan is currently the CEO of Building Opportunities with Business in the Downtown Eastside.

Watch for more coming events in future newsletters.

Vancouver's Counter-Cultural Music Scene

Last Month's Speaker: Scott Beadle

While this last page is usually written by Chuck Davis, this month we have a guest columnist in Neil McBurney. Born in 1940, Neil has been a VHS member for two years. He was one of the researchers on the City Reflections DVD project. Although not a professional historian, Neil developed an interest in local history while teaching English as a Second Language overseas. He is particularly interested in the entertainment venues of Vancouver.

Editor

The venue was the same as usual but somehow this particular evening was a bit different. The ranks of the usual VHS members were swelled by a greater percentage of visitors than usual, many of whom represented a slightly different demographic than is the norm at VHS meetings. The evening's topic pretty well guaranteed it would be like that. And it was a fascinating evening from start to finish. Those of us not already in the know learned from a remarkably well-informed Scott Beadle that not only was Vancouver on the cutting edge of punk rock, our city was in the same league as London, New York and San Francisco in creating and sustaining this genre's existence, particularly during the period from around 1977 to 1982. Musicians with names that contained "shithead" and "rampage" were held in high esteem, and bands such as DOA and The Subhumans were household names on the international punk scene.

Scott Beadle has a musicologist's breadth of knowledge of Vancouver's counter-cultural music scene, dating back as he explained to an enthusiasm he felt for the music in his early teens in the city's suburbs. We were treated to part of his collection of archival material, including photos of the

bands, the venues they played (some perhaps most, like the Smilin' Buddha, now no longer in existence) and a very evocative collection of advertising posters for local punk performances. Many in the audience, judging by the degree of audience enthusiasm and participation, had been part of the crowd at many of these shows; there was also at least one well-known former punk guitarist on hand whose name and face figured prominently in the documentary material we were shown by the speaker. Living history indeed!



Scott Beadle

In fact what made this meeting particularly good fun was the presence of the people for whom Vancouver's counter-cultural music scene had been part of their formative years. They were not at all reluctant to assist the speaker in filling in the detail of those years as they experienced and remembered it; thus Scott's presentation was a sort of "work in progress" as audience members confirmed, amended and even rejected his recollection of events, places and people. It became apparent that it required an encyclopedic memory and/or file system to merely keep track of punk musicians who were forever leaving one band to join another or to form one of their own.

Scott Beadle presented a perhaps less generally well-known aspect of Vancouver history, thus extending the scope and interest of the Society's activities. I think this is an excellent way to ensure the continued relevance of VHS events to people who might not initially be drawn to anything labeled "history".

Neil McBurney

Vancouver Historical Society - Leadership, 2008 - 2009 (elected May 22, 2008)

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Webmaster	Quasar Data Mgmt.
Archivist	Elizabeth Hawkins
Info Line	Barbara Coles
Newsletter Mailing	Scott Anderson
Webmail	Paul Flucke

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