

Vancouver Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

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Founding Role of French Canadians in British Columbia

November Speaker: Jean Barman

In common historical memory, French Canadians have been absent from the story of British Columbia. Up until now. For the November VHS meeting, Jean Barman will persuasively reconsider the province from a French Canadian perspective to locate them at the centre of formative events.

Given its geographical position tucked away on the west side of the Rocky Mountains, a distant British Columbia was one of the last parts of North America to come to the attention of outsiders travelling from the east. French Canadians were at the forefront when the Rockies were crossed for furs and prospects at the end of the 18th century. For the next half century French Canadians were the largest group of non-indigenous people in the future province and French was the principal non-indigenous language. This fact has evaded the popular history of the province.

It was French Canadians who facilitated the first non-indigenous overland crossings of British Columbia by Alexander McKenzie and Simon Fraser. It was French Canadians who sustained the subsequent fur economy at Fort Langley, Fort

was divided in 1846, the United States would not get it all as it dearly sought, but the northern half would go to Britain, giving today's Canada its Pacific shoreline and bringing the province of British Columbia into being.



Fort Langley in 1858 Photo: Royal B.C. Museum

Victoria, Fort St. James in the far north, and elsewhere. It was French Canadians who with indigenous women initiated non-wholly indigenous settlement as is evidenced today by the large number of French Canadian names found in First Nations communities. Very importantly, it was French Canadians' hard work that ensured, when the Pacific Northwest

Using examples drawn from individual lives to make larger points, Jean Barman highlights the roles played in past time by everyday people whose stories surface once we move beyond the usual stories written from the perspectives of those in charge. We, as responsible citizens, need to focus far more on the men and women making their supposed feats possible.

Speaker Jean Barman is one of British Columbia's best-known historians. Her latest work is *French Canadians, Furs, and Indigenous Women in the Making of the Pacific Northwest*, published in September 2014 by UBC Press.

Bruce M. Watson

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

President's Notes

This month the Vancouver Historical Society (VHS) is honoured to have as its speaker one of our members, **Jean Barman**. Rightly called “B.C.’s most active historian,” Jean has single-handedly widened the lens through which we see and understand historical experience in British Columbia.

Jean Barman’s career is a model of academic achievement. Raised in northern Minnesota and educated at Harvard, Berkeley, and UBC, Jean has been writing about British Columbia since her first book on private boys schooling in B.C. was published in 1984. In 1991, the first of three editions of Jean’s *The West Beyond the West* — now the standard history of British Columbia — was published. Her “outstanding literary career in British Columbia,” which includes writing or co-authoring eleven books and editing a dozen others, was recognized this spring when she was named as the 21st recipient of the prestigious George Woodcock Lifetime Achievement Award. She is also a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 2003, won the City of Vancouver Book Prize in 2006, and was awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal in 2012. More than this recognition by peers however, what stands out is Jean’s influence as a catalyst for countless literary and historical projects by others and her role as a mentor for dozens of graduate students, especially First Nations women.

Through her career Jean’s writing has increasingly focused on the themes of women in B.C. history and the relationship between Native peoples and newcomers along the Northwest coast, people who through race or gender were not included in early provincial histories. My favourite is her history of Portuguese Joe Silvey, a fisherman and entrepreneur from the Azores who through marriages to two local First Nations women created an extensive Silvey family. Based on family memories, stories gleaned by Vancouver Archivist Major Matthews, and conventional literary sources, *The Remarkable Adventures of Portuguese Joe Silvey* illustrates well Jean’s view that the historian’s task is to turn lives into stories, and to take seriously the stories of people who did not enjoy political and economic privilege. This approach continues to inform her newly published *French Canadians, Furs, and Indigenous Women in the Making of the Pacific Northwest*, which provides the source for this month’s talk.

Bob McDonald, President
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Birks Building Now Gone 40 Years

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demolished in 1949, today only the Hudson’s Bay store remains from that era.

During the last months of the old Birks Building’s life in 1974, photographer and city bus driver Angus McIntyre took several photos of the interior, which he has kindly allowed us to reproduce here. Now retired after 41 years of driving trolleybuses, Angus’ photos of Vancouver in the 1960s and 1970s have been shown at the Baron Gallery in Gastown. To see more Birks photos, visit www.michaelkluckner.com/bciw1birks.html. Angus also took many photos of the Brill trolleybuses he drove. The photos will be featured in a reprint of a small book entitled simply *Brill* available soon through John Atkin (www.johnatkin.com).

While Birks may have displayed some of the most beautiful jewelry in their old Georgia and Granville building, for many Vancouverites the building itself was the jewel.



Birks interior in 1974

Both photos courtesy of: Angus McIntyre



VHS Christmas Book Fair

The Vancouver Historical Society (VHS) is proud to count many authors among its members. You will have a chance to meet some of them and to add some of their books to your collection at a VHS Christmas Book Fair being held just prior to the November 27th talk with historian and author Jean Barman.

Besides Jean Barman, some of the other writers participating will be Aaron Chapman, Cynthia and Charles Hou, Michael Kluckner, Eve Lazarus, Bruce MacDonald, Jo Pleshakov, Lisa Smith and Jason Vanderhill. Their books reflect a wide variety of historical interests.

The sale starts at 6:30 p.m. and finishes at 7:30 p.m. followed by the regular VHS meeting and Jean's talk. It's a great opportunity to meet our authors and buy books for yourself or for someone on your Christmas gift list.

Opinions on Digital Newsletters

The recent postal rate increase has greatly affected the cost of mailing our nine newsletters per year to members. As other societies and groups have done, we are looking at making the newsletters available in a digital (PDF) format. The newsletter would look the same but would be emailed to you. It could then be printed out at home if you choose. Paper copies would still be sent to members who choose to receive them in the traditional printed format.

We would like to hear your opinions. If you would be interested in receiving the newsletters via email, please send your thoughts and opinions to **membership@vancouver-historical-society.ca**. If the email address (where you would like the newsletter sent) is other than the one you used to send the email, please include that as well. The VHS never releases email addresses or any other personal information to third parties.

A Very Big Thank You

Thank you to the anonymous and very generous Vancouver Historical Society member who recently donated \$1,000 to the Society. The money will be used to help offset the costs of the Society's ongoing series of monthly talks.

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, January 22, 2015

Mr. Roedde's Neighbourhood: Vancouver's West End, 1891-1913

Speaker: Chris Stocker

Neighbourhoods are defined by their location within a city, the people who live there and their occupations, and the architecture with which they choose to identify and express themselves. Using Barclay Street's Roedde House as a focal point, Chris Stocker will look at a section of the West End as a microcosm or example of how neighbourhoods are formed. He will examine the area around Roedde House in terms of the people who lived there, their work and positions within the city, how long they stayed and the impact they had on forming the character of the area.

Thursday, February 26, 2015

Hogan's Alley, Black Vancouver and Public Memory

Speaker: Wayde Compton

Black people have been in Vancouver since its earliest days, but the closest thing the city had to a centralized black neighbourhood was in what is now Strathcona in the early to mid-twentieth century. Professor Compton will discuss details of the community, its prominent individuals, social conditions, collective actions, and important institutions, with an eye to the recent memorialization work being done to link the community, and specifically its legacy at Hogan's Alley, to the present.

Welcome New Members

Geoff Meggs

Colleen Miller

Peek into the Past

with Jim McGraw



Looking to the corner of Georgia (in the foreground) and Granville in 1946, the Birks Building dominates the southeast corner. The famous clock is seen above the near parked car in the left of the photo. A segment of the Vancouver Block is to the right of the Birks Building while just a corner of the old Hotel Vancouver is on the far right in the photo. The Strand Theatre seen on Georgia beyond Birks would also be torn down in 1974.

Photo: Don Coltman, photographer, City of Vancouver Archives CVA 586-4399

An item on artist/author (and VHS Vice-President) Michael Kluckner’s website reminded me that 40 years have passed since demolition of the much-loved Birks Building at Granville and Georgia. By this time 40 years ago in November 1974, the elegant building was mostly rubble with the last wall coming down in January 1975.

When Birks announced their building would be torn down and replaced by a new modern tower, there were protests but the demolition would go ahead. As Michael points out, the movement to preserve and adapt heritage buildings to other uses in Vancouver was galvanized by this event.

Henry Birks & Sons of Montreal opened their first store in Vancouver in 1913 after buying out George Trorey’s jewelry store on the northeast corner of Hastings and Granville. The sale included keeping George as manager along with his famous sidewalk clock, which would soon become known as the Birks clock.

Birks moved to their new location in 1914, taking the clock with them for installation on the sidewalk there. “Meet you under the Birks clock” became a well-used phrase by Vancouverites. (The clock today is back at Hastings and Granville but this time on the southeast corner in front of Birks’ current downtown location.)

The Birks building solidified the Georgia-Granville intersection’s reputation as the centre of Vancouver. It had been the intersection where the Canadian Pacific built their first Hotel Vancouver. The Hudson’s Bay department store soon followed with a new store. Both the Hudson’s Bay and Hotel Vancouver were soon replaced by even grander versions. With the old Hotel Vancouver

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Vancouver Historical Society Executive Board: 2014 - 2015 (Elected May 22, 2014)

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APPOINTED POSITIONS

- | | |
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| Archivist | Alexandra Allen |
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