Why, one might ask, is a historian born and raised in Quebec, who has written extensively about Quebec history, giving a talk to the Vancouver Historical Society on British Columbia’s Bowen Island? The answer tells an interesting story about the life histories of Canadians born during the postwar baby boom. A colleague at UBC was fond of referring to Canadians born after the Second World War as the “lucky generation.” Jack Little was one of them.

Born in Quebec’s Eastern Townships of Scots Irish stock, the Little family traces its North American history to the migration of more than 5,300 state-assisted British settlers to the northern fringe of Lower Canada’s Eastern townships between 1829 and 1832. Among the settlers was Jack’s Irish-born great-great grandfather, a Protestant from the Irish county of Armagh drawn to the new world by the lure of available land. Jack spent his first ten years on the family farm but by the late 1950s, when his parents sold their hillside farm, most of the descendants of the first settlers had left the area. Jack moved to nearby Thetford Mines where his father worked in an asbestos mine. After graduating from the local high school, he studied History at Bishop’s University, the University of New Brunswick, and the University of Ottawa, completing a doctorate in Quebec history at Ottawa in 1977. Jack was hired by SFU in 1976 where he taught Quebec and Canadian history in the History Department for 39 years, retiring in 2015.

Jack’s earliest publications were two books on French-Canadian and Highland Scots colonization of the Eastern Townships in the latter half of the 19th century, examining the role of the state as well as nationalism, ethnicity, religion, and the family. He then moved back in time to examine the post-Loyalist American population, with a particular focus on religion, the changing role of the state at the local level, and politics, including the War of 1812 and the Rebellion of 1837.
The VHS thanks multi-media artist Christian Nicolay for his generous donation of $175, a portion of the proceeds from a recent art show at his Vancouver studio. Christian’s studio is inside an old warehouse on the Fraser River, once part of the Celtic Shipyards. “This is a very special place full of an amazing and rich history,” he says. “All of my former industrial studio spaces in Vancouver have been demolished and gentrified over the years. I believe in the sharing and preservation of Vancouver’s history.” Thank you Christian, for helping us to do just that.

Bowen Island has been in the Vancouver legend for more than a century, and our November speaker, Dr. Jack Little, can tell the story of this most democratic of paradises that had just a sprinkling of exclusivity and privilege, such as the Rogers compound. The “democracy” included the booze cruises and company picnics at Snug Cove, all orchestrated by Union Steamships.

There are three places left in Metro Vancouver that have cottages which speak to that era: Hollyburn Ridge, Belcarra Park near Port Moody, and the Davies Orchard at Bowen. There are just a few of the Bowen cottages left, and local preservationists are trying to convince Metro Parks to conserve them.

* * *

Since May 2016 and the untimely passing of Jim McGraw, Eve Lazarus has skilfully edited this newsletter, combining it with her passion to increase our social-media presence and draw in new, young audiences for our programs.

Eve joined the board the same time I did, in 2012, and served as vice-president before taking over the newsletter. She has coordinated and edited the story assignments, writing many of the front and back page stories herself. Her work with layout artist Kellan Higgins (who doubles as VHS Secretary) has given us an award-winning publication – the BC Historical Society Best News and Media Award for 2017. This is her last issue.

Eve is a former journalist, a mom of grown-up kids, and the author of 6 1/3 books (the one-third being a profile of artist Frank Molnar in the “Unheralded Artists of BC” series). Her specialty is local crime of the lethal variety, and her latest book, the just-released Murder by Milkshake, promises to be the best read yet.

We thank her for her service to the VHS and wish her well as she assumes a more flexible schedule with travel, family time, and, we hope, more books! Jessica Quan will be taking over the newsletter in January.

Michael Kluckner
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New VHS Members
Carola Ackery
Marie Ash
Rawle M. Barrack
Sharen Fuchs
Catherine Prowse
Jemima Stein
Penny Street
Louise Tucker
Michael Murgatroyd
& Susan Mawhood

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38. More recently he has shifted his focus from the Eastern Townships to research a 19th-century Quebec seigneur and politician, Sir Henri-Gustave Joly de Lotbinière, a “patrician politician” appointed by Sir Wilfrid Laurier in 1900 as British Columbia’s seventh Lieutenant-Governor, and a man who embraced progressive ideas about forest management. Jack’s interests then moved towards cultural history, with a number of articles on travel narratives, tourism, and the 19th-century Canadian landscape, recently collected as Fashioning the Canadian Landscape. His co-authored history of 20th century Quebec marked a shift back to political history, including a study of the role of political picnics in late 19th century Ontario.

One of the continuities in Jack Little’s work as a historian is his interest in local places, an approach to history that emphasizes small units and how particular settings shape people’s lives. His extensive work on the Eastern Townships, which grew out of his own family’s experience, exemplified this interest in micro-history. More recently, Jack has been writing about another local place, Bowen Island, the history of which was first explored by Vancouver Historical Society member Irene Howard in the 1970s. After writing about the island’s tourist economy, Jack as a Bowen Islander and board member of the Bowen Island Museum and Archives and the Bowen Island’s Eco-Alliance joined the movement to stem development pressures in the region. From this interest emerged his latest book, the soon-to-be-published At the Wilderness Edge: The Rise of the Anti-Development Movement on Canada’s West Coast, which explores development challenges from the 1960s to early 1980s at the entrance to Stanley Park, at Squamish, on Bowen and Gambier Islands, and on Hollyburn Ridge.
Frits Jacobsen studied at the Free Academy of Fine Arts in the Hague before arriving in Canada in 1959. He was a devout Christian and moved to Vancouver in 1968. I met him in East Vancouver a few years before his death in 2015 and was able to show him a photograph of the door to his studio at 522 Shanghai Alley taken in 1974. His studio was next door, just above the Sam Kee Building. Both buildings are still there.

The photo reminded Frits of his hostility towards the postal code movement, though when I showed it to him, he shrugged it off as rather comical.

In December 1979, Vancouver Magazine ran a feature titled “Now you see them” by Ian Bateson and featuring some of Vancouver’s threatened heritage buildings. The drawings that accompanied the article were not credited but I was able to confirm with Frits that he drew them.

The Englesea Lodge, at the entrance to Stanley Park, and the last remaining building on the shoreline of Beach Avenue, was the first to go. It was destroyed in a suspicious fire in 1981.

In 1979, the Manhattan Apartments at 784 Thurlow Street was also under threat, but fortunately has managed to survive. Built in 1908 for industrialist W.L. Tait, the Manhattan was one of the city’s first apartment blocks and served as a model for many that came after. The building contains attractive stained-glass windows designed by A.P. Bogardus and made in Vancouver. Three of the windows overlook the ornate, pilastered main entrance to the building, although the two smaller ones that sat above both the main and Robson Street entrances are missing. Hopefully, they have been stored somewhere and not destroyed by vandals.

The VanMag article included Jacobsen’s drawing of the Orillia, a mixed-use structure at Robson and Seymour Streets, and demolished in 1985 to make way for a new tower.

Heritage Hall on Main Street and East 15th Avenue rounds out the article. At the time, it had stood empty and neglected for two years and was in serious jeopardy. Thankfully, this was one battle that the heritage advocates won, and the hall survives to this day.

Frits was a remarkable artist and a true Vancouver character. If you happen to be going through the MCC thrift store in Surrey, you might just find his drawing of the missing Birks Building.